

Correspondence

The role of religiosity in COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy

ABSTRACT

With the surge of COVID-19 cases worldwide, it is essential that vaccination be prioritized to facilitate herd immunity. However, there is vaccine hesitancy reflected in religiosity. This correspondence aims to understand religiosity as a factor that plays a role in vaccination hesitancy. Medical and scientifically sound evidence is influenced by religious beliefs resulting in varied responses toward getting vaccinated such as vaccination hesitancy.

Keywords COVID-19, religiosity, vaccine hesitancy

With the surge of COVID-19 cases worldwide, it is essential that vaccination be prioritized to facilitate herd immunity. However, there appears to be a waning confidence in public on getting vaccinated. A recent study¹ found that even medical students are unwilling to get vaccinated which pose a threat toward attainment of herd immunity. This correspondence aims to understand the religiosity as a factor which plays role in vaccination hesitancy.

Vaccination hesitancy is described as the reluctance toward vaccination.² The concern in vaccination hesitancy is reflected in religiosity; one study found that religious teachings prioritize prayers over medicine, thus resulting in vaccination hesitancy among devotees.³ This is coupled with the lack of appropriate knowledge of the available vaccines, thus making devotees accept alternative approaches such as use of holy water and prayers to treat diseases, fearing vaccination may lead to the death of their children. Other religious beliefs such as in the case of Islam, vaccines with pork derivatives are prohibited.

On the other hand, the Vatican has issued its stance toward vaccination. They remain firm in their admonition toward use of cell lines from aborted fetuses in COVID-19 vaccines. However, based on the Instruction *Dignitas Personae*, such practice is ‘morally’ acceptable if (i) ethically sound vaccines are not available for inoculation, (ii) storage and transport procedures require rigor and are thus difficult or (iii) even

if various vaccines are available, individuals are not given the autonomy to choose their preferred vaccine.⁵ In other religions, such as Buddhism and Judaism, appear to have no central doctrines to on vaccination, thus widely accept vaccination.⁶

Knowledge on the efficacy of vaccination has been established with medical and scientific basis. Evidence shows vaccination help prevent hospitalizations and deaths brought about by COVID-19 infection. Vaccines work by allowing the immune system of the body to recognize, fight and destroy the coronavirus when exposed. The World Health Organization has approved safe and effective use of the following vaccine as of April 2021: AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, Johnson and Johnson, Moderna and Pfizer/BionTech vaccine. Furthermore, when more individuals get inoculated with vaccines and develop immunity, the chances of mobilization of the virus decreases, hence positing herd immunity.⁴ Benefits of vaccination thus therefore outweigh possible, minimal risks such as allergic reactions.

In conclusion, religiosity, coupled with the appropriate knowledge of the efficacy and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines, appears to have an impact in the decision to be inoculated with the vaccine. Medical and scientifically sound evidence are influenced by religious beliefs resulting to varied responses toward getting vaccinated such as vaccination hesitancy.

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Authors' contribution

L.L.G. and J.F.C.Y. did the conceptualization and writing of the original draft. J.F.C.Y. reviewed and edited the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this paper.

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