Health system enablers to child vaccination in Israel: The empowering example of the Arab Minority in Israel- A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

- The World Health Organization (WHO) Immunization Agenda 2030 has placed equity as a strategic priority for immunization programmes.
- Underserved populations, including socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, cultural or religious minorities, and migrants, achieve substantially lower vaccine uptake compared to the general population.
- Some disadvantaged populations, such as the Arab minority in Israel, do manage to achieve uptake similar or higher than the general population.
- Arab minority in Israel:
  - Over 1.9 million Arabs in Israel
  - Constitute 21% of the total population
  - Despite being a disadvantaged minority population with wide gaps in health indicators, Arabs have higher Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccination rates compared with the general Jewish population.

This study aimed to identify and describe healthcare system enablers to child vaccination, specifically MMR and HPV vaccines in the Arab population in Israel.

Methods

In-depth interviews to collect information about health system enablers to HPV and MMR vaccination were conducted with:

- Health care providers.
- Arab mothers.
- Arab teenage girls.

All interviews were:

- Conducted in Arabic by an Arab researcher.
- Audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis of the transcripts.

Themes were mapped according to the WHO Health Systems Building Block Framework.

Results

We interviewed 21 health professionals (mean age 44 years old and 16 years of experience), 16 mothers (mean age 43 years old) and 16 teenagers (mean age 14 years old).

Several health system enablers were identified.

Service delivery enablers	Health workforce enablers	Health information system enablers	Financial enablers	Leadership/governance enablers
- Accessible and availability of vaccination services - Delivery of vaccines through the school system and mother child clinics - Friendly and welcoming clinic environment - Framing vaccinations as the norm	- Personable characteristics of the health workforce - Health care providers belonging to the same cultural group - High levels of trust towards healthcare professionals - Belief that health professionals most knowledgeable when it comes to vaccination	- Service and health information available in Arabic - Reminders and recalls	- Vaccinations offered at no cost	- Vaccine and health services offered equally to Arab community

"Usually we feel as a minority group that we are treated differently by the State institutions. However, with vaccines I don't feel this…we get the same treatment, regardless of religion or ethnicity. At least here we are treated equally. Maybe it is because there are always Arabs wherever you go for health care."
(mother, 41 years, 3 kids)

"It's safe, and everyone has gotten it. My mother, my grandmother, myself. And it obviously has protected us from getting serious diseases."
(Arab mother, 43 years, 3 kids)

"Jewish parents prefer to be the decision makers. They will tell me- with all due respect to you as a nurse, but I know what is best for my child. I never see this with Arab parents. They tell me, you know what is best when it comes to vaccines for my baby. If you recommend it, I will take it."
(Tipat halav nurse and school nurse, female, 37 years)

Despite high vaccine uptakes, parents and teens had limited knowledge regarding vaccination, particularly HPV.

Conclusions

This research provides important insights in health system enablers regarding HPV and MMR vaccination among the Arab minority in Israel. Such evidence can serve as a basis for interventions and guidance to improve vaccine uptake among other underserved minority communities in Europe. Several recommendations, predominantly those not rooted deeply in culture, may be transferred to other disadvantaged minority groups.

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