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Human papillomavirus vaccine hesitancy among females (9-14 years) in informal settlements of Mathare, Nairobi County, Kenya

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Background: Human papillomavirus is the main cause of cervical cancer and the leading causes of mortality worldwide. Vaccination against HPV is effective in young girls before their sexual debut yet not the county is yet to achieve the targeted 800,000 girls every year. We sought to understand reasons for vaccine hesitancy in two public health facilities namely; Mathare North Health centre and Huruma Lions Health centre.

Methods: Between April to June 2022 we conducted a cross-sectional study in two health care facilities in Mathare informal settlements. We used mixed methods to understand reasons for vaccine hesitancy among 150 adolescents. Quantitative and qualitative data collected was processed and analyzed by use of SPSS (version 25.0) and Dedoose respectively. Verbatim quotations were also used to capture direct presentation of information in order to avoid losing of meaning and possible exaggerations.

Results: The median age was 12. Majority of the adolescent girls 116((77.3%) had knowledge about the cervical cancer and over half (59.3%) had knowledge about the vaccine. Several (68%) reported not to know anyone who had been vaccinated with only 39% reporting to know people who had been vaccinated.67(44.7%) of the girls had the previous information on the existence of HPV vaccine while the majority 87(55.3%) had no knowledge about the vaccine.89(59.3%) said they feared side effect of the vaccine because their care givers said that the HPV vaccine causes infertility. This statement was in interndem with the feedback from the 20 caregivers that were interviewed where 15(75%) of them were of the opinion that the vaccine would cause infertility among the girls.

Conclusion: There was increased knowledge about cervical cancer with low uptake up take of HPV vaccine. Uptake could be improved by information and sensitization as well as demystifying existing misconceptions about the vaccine. The caregivers were willing to take their children for vaccination as long as they get full information about the vaccine.