

THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT AND THE DECISION TO GET VACCINATED AGAINST HPV AMONG FEMALE AND MALE STUDENTS IN BELGRADE

Stefan Mandić-Rajčević,¹ Vida Jeremić-Stojković,² Mila Paunić,³ Snežana Stojanović Ristić,³ Dejana Vuković,¹ Smiljana Cvjetković,²

¹University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Social Medicine, School of Public Health and Healthcare Management, Belgrade, Serbia

²University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Humanities, Belgrade, Serbia

³Institute for Students' Health, Belgrade, Serbia

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Background: Serbia ranks third in age-standardized incidence rates of cervical cancer cases attributable to HPV, following Montenegro and Romania. Challenges in increasing HPV vaccination coverage include a lack of awareness, concerns about vaccine safety, and general mistrust. The information environment, encompassing all informational processes, services, and entities, plays a critical role in influencing vaccination decisions.

Methods and Objectives: Male and female undergraduate students aged 19–26 from the Institute for the Health Protection of Students of Belgrade were surveyed. Participants included those receiving their second dose of the nonavalent HPV vaccine and those accessing general healthcare services. An online survey, hosted on the secure servers of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, collected data on HPV vaccination status, socio-demographic characteristics, information sources, trust in these sources, perceived information adequacy, and HPV knowledge. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant committees, and statistical analyses were performed using SPSS and R software.

This study aims to evaluate the information sources and trust thereof in male and female undergraduate students.

Results: Six hundred and three students filled the survey completely, including 494 females and 109 males. 78.6% of participants were vaccinated, with females having a higher vaccination rate (82%) compared to males (63.3%). For scientific literature, 43.4% of unvaccinated participants reported “never” using it, compared to 20.0% of vaccinated participants. 26.4% of unvaccinated participants “never” consult their primary physician, against 16.7% of vaccinated individuals ($p = 0.009$). Unvaccinated individuals showed notably lower trust in scientific literature, with 19.4% expressing moderate trust compared to 10.8% of vaccinated participants. Trust in primary physicians was particularly low among the unvaccinated, with 26.4% reporting no trust compared to 16.7% of their vaccinated counterparts.

Conclusions: Unvaccinated individuals are less likely to consult or trust scientific literature, internet portals, family, and primary physicians compared to their vaccinated counterparts.

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