

What Research Says About Parents Who are Against Vaccinating Their Children

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PARENTS AGAINST VACCINATIONS.

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Introduction

Many studies have been conducted on people's refusal of vaccinations and their reasonings behind it. Numerous amounts of parents refuse to vaccinate their children, therefore possibly leading into future epidemics, or unknown diseases. However, many adults have specific personal or religious beliefs on why or why not they should vaccinate their children. Some parents even identify vaccinations as a marker of parental conformity to the "toxic practices of mass industrial society" (Atwell, Smith, & Ward 2018. P. 1621-1626). The majority of people who don't believe in receiving vaccinations are emotionally driven by their "confidence" in their own, but especially their children's well-being (Atwell, Smith, & Ward 2018 P. 1621-1626). Parents who refuse vaccinations make a well-considered decision based on an assessment of the benefits and the risks of vaccination, the child's susceptibility to the potential disease, and the acceptance of responsibility for that decision. (Harmsen, et. al 2013)

Others believe that refusing vaccinations is neglecting their own, and their children's health (Atwell, Smith, & Ward 2018). Considering the circumstances, the majority of parents don't particularly worry about the vaccinations and the side effects. Instead, they are mainly supportive of immunizations for their children and how they will be affected in the future (Gust, et al. 2005). This paper will explain and examine the similarities and differences in research between pro-vaccination and anti-vaccination.

PARENTS AGAINST VACCINATIONS.

Reasons Parents Question

It has been proven that in high income countries improved (regulated) vaccinations have reduced the amount of illnesses (Harmsen, et. al 2013). Despite the success of improvement of health among children, issues of vaccine safety, both factual and fictional, have raised parental skepticism of vaccination safety and the effects of them on children (Stinchfield 2001, p. 143). Furthermore, many parents are questioning the importance of immunizations, thus choosing not to vaccinate their children (Harmsen, et. al 2013). Some of the many reasons parents are refusing or delaying vaccinations for their children, is because they are not fully educated on the subject (Gust, Darling, Kennedy, & Schwartz 2008). Being educated on vaccines and the effects from them will help parents change their minds about delaying or not getting a vaccination for their child. The majority of parents list that the “information or assurances from health care providers” will help them make a better and more ethical choice when it comes to vaccinations (Gust, Darling, Kennedy, & Schwartz 2008. N.P.). Most parents are hesitant about getting their children immunizations because they have little to no knowledge of what foreign bodies will be put into them. This also leads to the confliction of trusting the doctors whom want to provide these vaccinations, whether they are for a current sickness or preventative measures. In addition, these concerns are causing many people to ask their doctors more elicited questions about vaccinations and what they entail (Gust, Darling, Kennedy, & Schwartz 2008). Parents often ask questions about the *importance* of the vaccination that doctors prescribe for their children (Fredrickson, et al. p. 434). In addition, they ask questions about the possible symptoms and diseases following immunizations given to their children (Gust, Darling, Kennedy, & Schwartz 2008). Research has shown that many parents with “concerns end up vaccinating their children after patient

PARENTS AGAINST VACCINATIONS.

education” (Fredrickson, et al. p. 434). From this evidence, doctors should listen “non judgmentally” to each concern, and give them “tailored information” on each question asked (Fredrickson, et al. p. 434).

The Scare of Immune System Deficits

Most of the concern lies under the unscientific reasoning that vaccinations will cause a deficit, or “overload” of a child’s immune system (Hilton, Petticrew, & Hunt 2006). Immune system overload is not proven to be true under any scientific research. Likewise, to date no studies have been published examining how parents conceptualise the notion of ‘immune-overload’ or how they relate this concept to their own children (Hilton, Petticrew, & Hunt 2006. P. 4321-4327). It has been shown that immune systems can not be “overloaded” by vaccinations, if anything, they will boost and improve the system in positive ways to prevent diseases from occurring. Furthermore, doctors believe that some parents are practically making up an excuse to not vaccinate their children by convincing themselves of obtaining an “overloaded” immune system. Furthermore, doctors are researching ways of educating parents about combining vaccinations, to eventually lead parents away from the idea of “immune overload”(Hilton, Petticrew, & Hunt 2006. P. 4321-4327).

Illnesses Formed From Vaccinations

Uncontrolled observational studies in the medical literature claim that certain vaccinations, such as the flu shot and the Hepatitis B vaccine, have led to chronic illnesses. These include: autoimmune diseases, allergic reactions, diabetes, and multiple sclerosis (Offit & Hackett 2003). To further this explanation, allergic reactions are the most occurring event to happen after receiving a vaccination. Allergic diseases might be caused by prevention of early

PARENTS AGAINST VACCINATIONS.

childhood infections (the “hygiene hypothesis”), causing a prolongation of immunoglobulin E-promoting T-helper cell type 2-type responses (Offit & Hackett 2003). The prolongation of the immunoglobulin causes children to have allergic reactions to the vaccination along with other things, due to the body’s deficiency of producing robust (protective antibodies) that fight off infection (Albin & Cunningham-Rundles 2014).

In addition to this, autoimmune diseases are the second most occurring diseases post vaccination. Autoimmune diseases might occur after specific immunizations because proteins on microbial pathogens are similar to human proteins (“molecular mimicry”) and could induce immune responses that damage human cells (Offit & Hackett 2003. N.P.). In simpler words, the body’s immune system will attack other systems in the body instead of attacking a virus or bacteria. This will cause the affected system/systems to break down and work against the body, thus creating illnesses that could result in chronic issues or possibly death. From these possible, but rare, issues, parents are delaying certain vaccinations to protect their children from possible diseases (Offit & Hackett 2003).

Discussion

As previously stated, research by Gust, et al. 2005, and Fredrickson, et al., show us that the percentage of refusal/delay rates are low. However, refusal rates need to be even lower, while acceptance rates should be much higher. As studied in “Childhood Immunization Refusal”, Fredrickson, et al explains the effectiveness of **focus groups** and how they persuade parents to accept vaccinations. The only focus groups that have been tried consists of a group of concerned parents and a few doctors. In these groups, parents are allowed to ask *any* questions, without

PARENTS AGAINST VACCINATIONS.

being judged, involving vaccinations. These groups seemed to work very well, in which they influenced some parents to positively change their thoughts on vaccinations.

To further the improvement of parents accepting vaccinations, more focus groups need to be developed around the world. As of right now, the only focus groups that have been conducted are ones that include professional healthcare workers and parents whose questions are initially unanswered. In addition to this, focus groups need to expand more by adding in parents who are pro-vaccination. Along with the health professionals, these parents will help answer any concerns of the questioning parents. Thus, the concerned parents will be able to relate their issues to other parents. Therefore they will (hopefully) gain more trust from them, rather than just listening to health professionals.

From the formation of these groups, many parents will have the chance to resolve their questions/concerns on vaccinations. If the focus groups work effectively, parents will ask doctors, professionals, and well educated parents specific questions concerning the importance of vaccinations, as well as the possible symptoms and effects they could have on their children. The answers provided from these questions will lessen the chance of refusal to specific vaccinations.

Conclusions and Future Studies

In order for people to completely understand the true reasons why parents are delaying/refusing vaccinations, it is necessary for research to be conducted considering all circumstances. Further research to fill the gaps can include: more explanations/perspectives from different doctors, specific statistics of parents with concerns vs. well educated parents, and more widespread focus groups; containing many people with different viewpoints on vaccinations.

PARENTS AGAINST VACCINATIONS.

Furthermore, more research needs to be done to help parents with their concerns on vaccinations. Whether it is the parents emotional values, the possible side effects of vaccinations, or just people's understanding of medicine in general. To limit the amount of people who are denying vaccinations, doctors need to improve the education behind each vaccination and what the positive outcomes will be. Forming focus groups, containing health professionals and pro-vaccinating parents, is one efficient way to improve education of vaccinations. However, because this is not occurring as it should, parents are refusing to vaccinate their children out of fear of not knowing what will happen post vaccination. Whether it is the development of chronic diseases, allergic reactions, etc. Aside from the side effects of possible diseases and allergic reactions, scientists and doctors are encouraging everyone to, eventually, receive the necessary vaccinations to prevent epidemic outbreaks in our future. In addition, studies have proven that the mass majority of parents *do* vaccinate their children, therefore, the majority of deadly diseases are still being prevented to protect the future generations.

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