

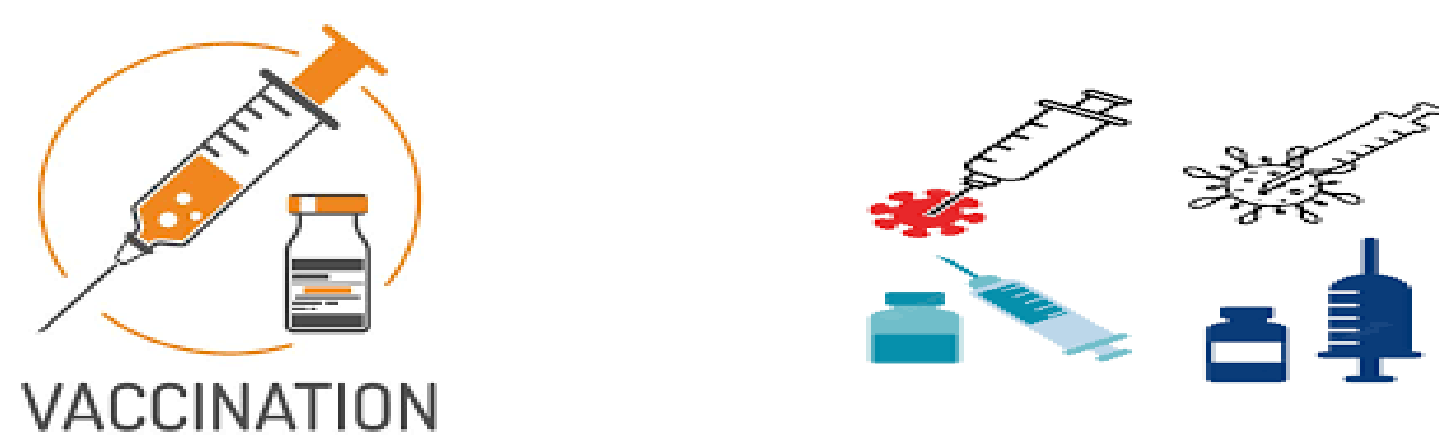
# Infecting Minds: The Past, present, and future of Vaccine hesitancy in South Africa

Kingsley Stephen Orievulu<sup>1</sup>, Sally Frampton<sup>2</sup>, Philippa Matthews<sup>2,3</sup>, & Janet Seeley<sup>1,4</sup>

1. Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI), KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. 2. Oxford University, UK. 3. Francis Crick Institute, UK. 4. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Bloomsbury, London WC1E 7HT, UK.

## 1. Background

- In 2019 the World Health Organisation listed vaccine hesitancy as one of the top ten threats to global health
- Debates about COVID-19 have impacted vaccine uptake despite vaccination being an essential part of the response to that pandemic and other health threats
- Achieving and maintaining vaccine acceptance to manage diseases like tuberculosis (TB), measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), and Hepatitis B (HPB) is essential



VACCINATION

Fig 1 Illustrations of Vaccines

## 2. Aim(s)

To explore how social and contextual factors shape perceptions and attitudes of rural and urban dwellers towards vaccines in South Africa, including the impact of COVID-19 on the uptake of vaccines for TB, Hepatitis B, and measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR)

- Inform current developments in vaccine research at AHRI
- Generate qualitative and historical research on vaccine hesitancy in South Africa, useful to a range of stakeholders
- Explore vaccine uptake within the local context of KwaZulu-Natal
- Focus on the vaccines for TB, Hepatitis B, and MMR, which bring different challenges
- Assess the impact of COVID-19 on vaccine uptake

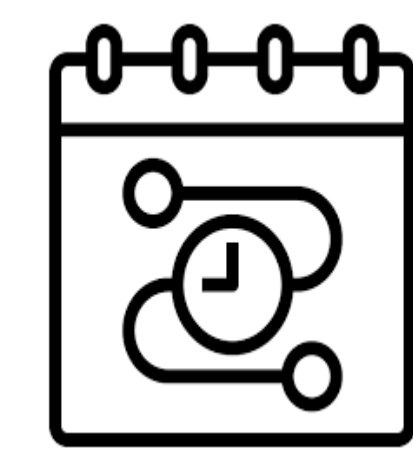
## 3. Methods



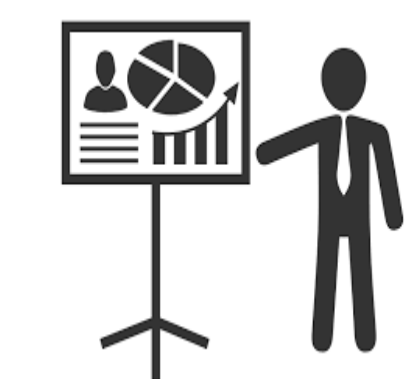
- Study in uMkhanyakude district, northern KZN, and Durban, South Africa



- We conducted **30 telephonic in-depth interviews** and **face-to-face** with two groups of participants ( $\geq 18$  years):
  - 1) 20 individuals in rural uMkhanyakude district, and
  - 2) 10 individuals in the Durban area



- Purposive sampling used to identify willing participants
  - **ordinary citizens,**
  - **traditional leaders and healers, and**
  - **healthcare practitioners, including nurses**



- Fieldwork conducted between August 2022 and Oct/Nov 2022
- Thematic analysis was used to identify cross-cutting themes

## 4. Findings

- Vaccination is popular among older people (male and female); younger populations reported more negative perceptions of, and attitudes toward the COVID-19 vaccine
- Minimal reported impact of religion and culture on vaccine uptake/hesitancy
- Covid-19 vaccine's dual effect
  - Positive consciousness & engagement
  - Relative hesitancy linked to widespread propaganda
- Drivers of vaccine uptake:
  - fear of death,
  - government campaigns, mandates, penalties
  - understanding the importance of vaccines for disease prevention & survival, and
  - securing the health of family members
- Drivers of Hesitancy:
  - Ancestral calling, medical pluralism or myths around the treatment of flu and mumps (such as beating oneself at a specific tree in the morning),
  - Perceived depopulation agenda couched in mistrust and the use of incentives and threats to force people to accept COVID-19 vaccines
  - Perceived insufficient information/awareness creation in the community



## 5. Discussion

Our study shows the heterogeneity of outlooks on and attitudes towards vaccines in general, including the COVID-19 vaccine in South Africa, among different groups. Understanding and perceptions of vaccines are influenced by the context – including the exposure to social media - and the daily interactions between people where concerns and fears may be shared.

- Participants' many and varied viewpoints are insightful for understanding vaccine confidence in South Africa
- Social media is very influential – even for people not directly exposed (some older people) but who are told by others in their family and by friends about messages that are shared
- Exploring the roots of vaccine hesitancy over time in communities occupying different geographical and cultural spaces provides opportunities to understand why vaccines are accepted or rejected