

World Health Organization

*The Impact of the Anti-
Vaccination Movement
on Public Health*

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INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization is a special agency of the United Nations in charge of directing and coordinating authority on international health. It works with 194 member states which seek for a healthier future and share commitment to achieve better health for everyone, everywhere. (World Health Organization, 2018). All of these member states work hard everyday to combat multiple diseases and help people, especially mothers and children with low economic resources, survive and thrive by making sure the air they breath, the food they eat and the water they drink is clean enough.

A vaccine is a biological substance that has helped humanity by saving countless lives, reducing illness, and preventing disability or death from diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles, haemophilus influenzae type b disease and epidemic meningococcal A meningitis. Over the past decades, immunization has achieved many significant improvements to health including the eradication of smallpox— an accomplishment that has been called one of humanity's greatest triumphs. (World Health Organization, 2018). Immunization is among the most successful, equitable and cost-effective public health interventions. Vaccinations protect people from specific diseases that can make us very sick or even kill us. (Canadian Public Health Association, 2016)

Vaccines are considered one of the most successful remedies in modern health, these had reduced and in some cases even eliminated some severe infectious diseases. Despite the fact that this cure is prosperous for many people in this world, vaccines have always had their critics and complaints from the public. Skeptics doubt whether the vaccines are worth the risk, causing an anti-vaccination movement and the statements they based their movements on are from poor science and fear-mongering. Unfortunately, for the United Nations, this has become an issue since every time this becomes more vocal and in some cases even hostile (Steven Novella, 2007).

Anti-vaccination movements are objections from large amounts of people which protest against vaccines that are currently mandatory in their countries in order to eradicate some specific contagious diseases. These are driven by cultural beliefs, ideologies, medical exemption laws, non-medical exemption laws, distrust of

the government, distrust of large pharmaceutical companies, denialism and beliefs of huge risk. By all means vaccines are not without risk, none of these include a medical intervention, but for those affected there has been implemented the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, which was established for this type of issues specifically (Steven Novella, 2007).

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

The anti-vaccination movement has been an issue that affects countries all around the world since the 10th century B.C. Smallpox was the first severe and contagious sickness in a forceful way which obligated scientists to search for a quick and effective cure and this led to the first immunizations. In consequence people in the Ancient China rejected the use of these vaccines since they caused a fever and later led to the immunization to smallpox. Citizens at that time started to link science and their religious beliefs and clergy people claimed that smallpox was in some way God's punishment and should not be treated, this caused controversy and later conduct related to the opposition of vaccines. (Anti-Vaccination Movement, 2012)

In 1763, in France, Paris inoculation was introduced by the Italian Doctor Gatti in France. He did not properly quarantine the people he inoculated which risked the health of other Parisians. As a response, the French Parliament restricted further inoculation. Despite this, the inoculation of children grew in popularity with the rise of outbreaks of smallpox across Europe. There was the beginning of a general distrust in medicine and in doctors, consequence of the religious "gossip" about the new cure to the contagious sickness. (Anti-Vaccination Movement, 2012)

The Vaccination act of 1853 ordered mandatory vaccination for infants up to 3 months old. The act also penalized vaccine refusal in hopes of lowering the risk of sickness in the country. After this act was implemented it had immediate resistance and the creation of several organizations were formed, one being the Anti-Vaccination League. Later on the League extended requirement to age 14 and mandated cumulative penalties for non-compliance. (Anti-Vaccination Movement, 2012)

The anti-vaccination movement in America started to happen in the 1879. Several groups were already formed in states such as Illinois, California and

Wisconsin. The anti-vaccinationist, William Tebb visited the United States in the same year and in some way he inspired people in America to start disagreeing to vaccines. Years later, in 1926, Belema Siegfried, a seven-year-old girl, was turned away from school because Belema's parents refused to admit that their daughter was once vaccinated, this information was mandatory for the parents to provide the Institution. Afterward Lous Siegfried was arrested for being a chiropractor, six months later he published a journal called "The Quest" which stated that vaccination was an "inherent poison" introduced into a healthy body. He claimed that his journal would persuade a clean fight against vaccines.

In 1998, people were lining autism to vaccines leading a big controversy. A british doctor released a research paper in which it was speculated that the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine may have caused some sort of chronic intestinal measles infections that in turn damaged the children's brain. In the United States anti-vaccine groups blame thimerosal, a vaccine that contains mercury, for causing autism. Twelve years later vaccine makers eliminated that substance from routinely administered childhood vaccines. (New York Times, 2010)

In the early 2000's a new illness called Measles infected millions of people and it was one of the leading causes of death among young children despite the fact that there was a safe and cost-effective vaccine against it. In 2000 there were no cases existing within the United States, the cases still happening were "imported" by infected patients but outside the U.S. Subsequently, in 2007, something new to anti-vaccinations emerged, "Celebrity antivaxxers", Jenny McCarthy announced to the press that her son was diagnosed with autism and for this she blamed the vaccination. Once again vaccines were blamed to be the trigger of autism.

CURRENT SITUATION

As mentioned before, anti-vaccination movements are mainly driven by cultural beliefs, medical exemption laws, ideologies, non-medical exemption laws, denialism, distrust of the government and so on. These types of movements are currently taking place in the United States and are unleashed right when an effective measure, in this case vaccines, is created. These creations try to convince people that vaccines are not harmful however society continues to revolt, insisting on their beliefs and principles.

These anti-vaccination movements have increased through the years because people in charge of these groupings are responsible for distributing their ideologies through social media and internet. People involved in the movements try to spread their message to many who remain unaware of the risks from their point of view. If not enough people are being convinced then they also use postcards, newspapers, magazines, journals, and pamphlets. What the United States is currently trying to do is return the blow with the same technique, that is to say that they are using the exact same resources in order to create a positive vaccination rhetoric that can reach masses.

Anti-vaccinated people can not only cause a disease to become an epidemic but can also cause the exclusion of children in schools. Currently, children without vaccinations are not being accepted into educational institutions that have a list of required vaccines. In January 2015, the New York State law pointed out that unvaccinated kids can be suspended from school, regardless of the family's religious position on the matter.

On the other hand, countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Malaysia are being misinformed by the anti-vaccination movement websites or announcements and they may inflict more harm than good on Muslim communities. In order to put an end to this issue, health authorities in these countries are imposing strict penalties on parents who refuse to allow their children to be vaccinated. Since social media and the internet are distorting information, health organizations such as WHO, CEPI, and The Global Health Network, need to take care of informing society in the right way encouraging not only the acceptance of vaccines but motivating communities to play an active role in the promotion of vaccination.

UN ACTIONS

Since this problem has been affecting decades, the United Nation decided to make an action plan in May of 2012. The mission outlined in this Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) is straightforward: improve health by extending by 2020 and beyond the full benefits of immunization to all people, regardless of where they are born, who they are, or where they live. The plan seeks to ensure adequate resources, develop supportive health systems and infrastructure, and work with countries to train health workers needed to reach

remote and marginalized populations. The World Health Assembly approved this action plan in order to achieve the Decade of Vaccines vision by delivering universal access to immunization.

The plan also articulates the need for a concerted effort to develop new and improved vaccines and technologies that will help maximize the benefits of immunization around the world for years to come. Overwhelming evidence demonstrates the benefits of immunization as one of the most successful and cost-effective health interventions known. Over the past several decades, immunization has achieved many things, including the eradication of smallpox, an accomplishment that has been called one of humanity's greatest triumphs. Vaccines have saved countless lives, lowered the global incidence of polio by 99 percent and reduced illness, disability and death from diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles, Haemophilus influenzae type b disease, and epidemic meningococcal A meningitis.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Anti-vaccination movements have been affecting the citizens all around the world since travelers have "imported diseases" by infecting patients of measles and other diseases that many years ago were eliminated are starting to return because parents have not vaccinated children due to philosophical or religious beliefs and that makes them to can not protect themselves from being infected.

In order to stop spreading diseases and reduce the mortality rate that is concerning the whole population this committee proposes the following:

- Develop campaigns explaining the importance of vaccines and convince them in more effective ways for national regulatory agencies, health sector coordination committees, and interagency coordination committees to support immunization programs as part of disease control programs and preventive health care.
- Implement social media tools like commercials, videos, posters, tv shows to communicate the importance and the benefits of the application of vaccines and the consequences of not getting vaccinated.

- Engage society organizations to advocate the value and importance of vaccines to local communities and policy-makers and local and global media.
- Create laws that dictates that all citizens must have their vaccination card completed in order to prevent from smallpox outbreaks and eliminate measles and other contagious diseases.
- Create vaccination campaigns where families can receive free vaccines donated by the government.



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