Harnessing stakeholder engagement through social and behavior change theory to promote community uptake of HPV vaccination: A qualitative study in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Low HPV vaccination uptake remains a key barrier to cervical cancer prevention, especially in underserved Malaysian communities. While technical solutions exist, behavioral and systemic factors often impede vaccine acceptance. This study explores the role of stakeholder engagement—framed within Social and Behavior Change (SBC) theory—in influencing community adoption of HPV vaccination. **Materials and Methods:** A qualitative design was used, involving focus group discussions with 30 purposively selected stakeholders, including government and community leaders and members from Perak, Pahang, and Kedah. Thematic analysis was guided by core SBC constructs: ideation, opportunity, and motivation. **Results:** Four key themes aligned with SBC domains were identified: Leadership Reduced Perceived Risk: Visible leadership, such as district officers publicly receiving the vaccine, built trust and reduced community fears, reinforcing vaccine safety. Accessible Information Increased Knowledge: Clear, targeted messages shared via WhatsApp and social media improved understanding of the vaccine's benefits, contributing to greater acceptance. Strategic Partnerships Expanded Reach: Collaboration between public and private sectors enabled broader and more effective community outreach, improving vaccine access and uptake. Narrative Framing Built Confidence: Pre-vaccination talks addressed doubts and clarified misconceptions, indicating hesitancy stemmed more from a lack of understanding than resistance. **Conclusion:** Grounded in SBC theory, this study underscores the critical role of leadership, information access, and multi-sectoral partnerships in shaping HPV vaccine uptake. Stakeholder-led, culturally tailored strategies can effectively address behavioral barriers and support scalable interventions for improved vaccine coverage in Malaysia and similar contexts.

Keywords: HPV vaccine, stakeholder engagement, behavior change, vaccination, Malaysia