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How improve acceptability of vaccination against HPV? Focus groups with parents and school staff

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Background

- It has been proven that vaccination is effective against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infections, pre-cancerous and cancerous cervical lesions and genital warts.
- Nevertheless, the HPV vaccine coverage of 23.7% in France is one of the lowest in Europe.
- To understand why the population does not join the movement of vaccination against HPV, we carried out focus groups with parents and with National Education school staff.
- By using group interviews, we aimed to identify knowledge and representations about HPV in both study populations and factors that lead to hesitancy for HPV vaccination.

Methods

- Between March 2020 and March 2021, we used a qualitative study using an inductive approach with a thematic content analysis (TCA) and conducted semi-structured focus groups
- Three focus groups were carried with school staff (n=14) and four focus groups with parents (n=15)
- Each focus group was conducted by two members of the study group, a pairing of a psychologist and a sociologist.
- The focus groups stopped when the participants had no more comments and therefore depended on the number of participants (between 50 minutes and 2 hours)
- A series of meetings were carried out to review, refine and confirm the main themes and sub-themes to finally create a final thematic analysis grid.
- The main themes selected are as follows: (i) Knowledge about human papillomavirus and its vaccine, (ii) Barriers and facilitators of HPV vaccination, (iii) Sources of information about HPV and help the decision-making process, and (iv) The idea of vaccination in middle schools.

Results

- Thematic analysis of focus groups with parents

Main themes	Subtopics	Results	Verbatims	Occurrences
Knowledge about HPV and its vaccine	Misunderstood topic	Lack of knowledge	"I don't feel informed enough to answer".	53
	Barriers	Young age of adolescents	"At 11 they are not concerned! Why now?"; "No, because at that age I don't think they're mature enough."	25
Facilitators		Need for accurate and up-to-date information	"Need to have something quite concrete, that speaks to people who are not from the medical field"	33
Actors	General practitioner / specialist	Main source of information	"It was my gynaecologist who gave me the prescription and I went to my general practitioner for the vaccination."	57
Vaccination in schools	Accepted	Subject to parental consent	"Why not in middle school, if we have the parents' agreement"	8
	Braked	Fear of the parents' reaction	"French parents [are] so upset about schools, [...], they see the school as an enemy".	6

- Thematic analysis of focus groups with school staff

Main themes	Subtopics	Results	Verbatims	Occurrences
Knowledge about HPV and its vaccine	Misunderstood topic	Lack of knowledge	"We have the impression that there is a lack of information"; "I have no information".	102
	Barriers	Young age of adolescents	"I think that the barrier is the age, asking to vaccinate at 11 years old is complicated!"	25
Facilitators		Need for accurate and up-to-date information	"It's not just a campaign for parents [...] we really need to integrate young people."	41
Actors	General practitioner / specialist	Main source of information	"I always refer to [...] the family doctor or the specialist, gynaecologist sometimes also midwife."	52
Vaccination in schools	Accepted	Subject to parental consent	"We had to ask the parents for permission"; "I always say that it is the parents who are legally responsible."	8
	Braked	Lack of human, material and financial resources	"Be careful, the school is not a place of care, so we vaccinate, we [the nurses] are alone, there is no doctor"; "Is it possible to imagine that the rooms are sufficiently sanitized?"	17

Conclusions

- Results of these focus groups provided information on which elements may harm or help HPV vaccination
- On the one hand, parents and school staff indicate barriers to HPV vaccination: distrust on HPV vaccines, absence of preventive care in the healthcare practice, and lack of time of medical profession
- On the second hand, among facilitators are highlighted an accurate and up-to-date information, idea of collective protection, and tools for better training for general practitioners and school nurses.

Highlights

- France has one of the lowest HPV vaccination coverage rates in Europe.
- There is not literature concerning school staff's point of view on HPV issues.
- No studies have been conducted since vaccination was recommended for boys in France.
- The lack of knowledge about HPV is the main factor of low HPV vaccination coverage.
- The medical profession is seen as the main source of information and a valuable aid to decision-making.