

Qualitative, critical and discursive methodology for exploring ambivalence around the HPV vaccine amongst marginalised groups



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Background

- The Human papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine was introduced internationally to protect against common strands of the sexually transmitted HPV virus implicated in cervical cancer and other HPV-related diseases affecting men and women.
- Preadolescent females are primarily targeted by vaccine campaigns. Some countries have included males e.g. the USA, Canada, Australia and Austria.
- The Scottish national school-based HPV programme targets 12-13 years old girls prior to sexual debut with high uptake.
- Little research has focused on vulnerable groups nor on the methodological issues in researching such groups.
- Qualitative, critical discursive methodologies are underutilised in public health and can provide rich socio-cultural understandings around vaccine ambivalence.
- **Our wider programme of research aims to identify sexual health inequalities and explore personal meanings for the HPV vaccine within a socio-cultural context.**
- This poster presents methodological insights for understandings around the HPV vaccine by **marginalised groups**:
 - Vaccination takes place within particular socio-cultural contexts and is given meaning through language and shared discourses [1].
 - Ethnicity, intellectual disability and gender are neglected in the HPV literature but are conducive to qualitative and discursive approaches.



Methods

Foucauldian discourse analysis [1] informed the design and analysis for a study which focused on young people's (aged 16-26) constructions of the HPV vaccine in Scotland. Young people (n=59) who took part in qualitative focus group discussions were from either a:

- Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) background (n=40)
- Intellectual disability (mild-moderate) (n=19)

We explored common discourses available and identity-constructions these entailed for young people against national public health efforts.

Methodological challenges included recruitment, access and ethical issues. These are seldom reported. Recruitment of these young people was facilitated by an extensive recruitment strategy which utilised participatory methods and engagement with community workers. There were limits with recruiting young women with an intellectual disability.

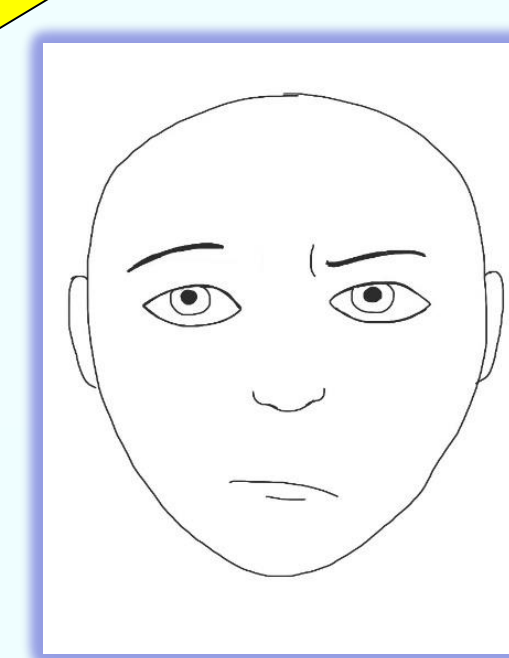


Findings

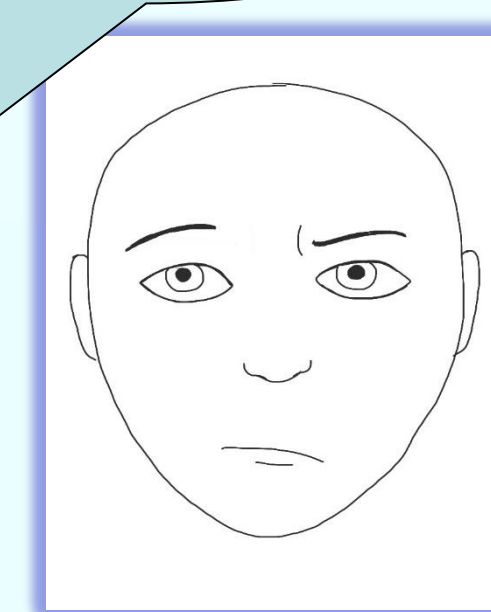
Analysis yielded insights into how marginalisation of vulnerable groups occurs and is co-constructed in discourse. Rather than simple 'pro' or 'anti' vaccination attitudes, young people's accounts showed complex negotiation around HPV vaccination in discussions. There was an overall **sense of ambivalence** surrounding the HPV vaccine from young people's accounts:

Rory: I've not been told the whole lot about it [HPV vaccine]. The last time someone [teacher] did tell me that it's something private and we're not allowed to find out

Bruce: Everyone who has sex is vulnerable in some way



Anita: In our culture you wouldn't have a talk, like in other cultures, in Indian culture it is more taboo to be sexually active at a young age
Shirley: You wouldn't be sexually active until after your married anyway so you shouldn't be needing all this, that's what you think



Young men from an intellectual disability accounted for their exclusion from the HPV vaccine mainly through gender and through intellectual (in)capacity. This meant that they were estranged from the vaccine and public health messages, and at increased risk of infection and transmission.

Young people from some BAME backgrounds challenged western cultural values and norms of sexual debut. Instead they highlighted marriage as a significant life event associated with normative sexuality. There were tensions around vulnerabilities for risk to disease versus protection from risk through cultural practices. This meant some young people remained vulnerable within current vaccine provisions and messages through estrangement from messages framed around western normative cultural practices.

Discussion

Our approach yielded rich, complex data about HPV vaccine ambivalence which is significant in light of illuminating health inequalities inherent within universal vaccination for young people: through **gender, capacity and western cultural norms**. We discuss the implications in view of current public health debates that focus on single-gendered vaccination policies only and recent Scottish government proposals to vaccinate men-who-have-sex-with-men and other at-risk groups. It is important to consider personal meanings of the HPV vaccine within their socio-cultural context and respond meaningfully. These insights should inform national vaccination programmes.

References

1. Willig, C. (2008). Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method. New York: McGraw Hill and Open University.

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