

# Attitudes of parents with children aged 12-18 to COVID-19 vaccines for themselves and their children: vaccine hesitancy in Türkiye

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Dear Editor,

We read with great interest the article entitled "Attitudes of parents with children aged 12-18 to COVID-19 vaccines for themselves and their children" submitted by Şahin et al.<sup>1</sup> We congratulate the authors for their study about COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy. However, we have the following comments and concerns.

In the article, the definition of vaccine hesitancy (VH) was provided, but the definition of vaccine refusal (VR) was not, and the unvaccinated children for other reasons were not considered. Defining these concepts enables a more accurate evaluation of the results. Vaccine refusal and VH are emerging problems all over the world. In a study examining 80 provinces in Türkiye, 8,977 VR cases were detected in 2016 (VR rate 3.5‰) and 14,779 cases in 2017 (VR rate 5.9‰;  $p < 0.001$ ).<sup>2</sup> The data were also reported on a provincial basis. VR rate was very low in İzmir; 1.3 ‰ in 2016 and 1.9 ‰ in 2017. The same study demonstrated that the percentage of family health units with at least one VR case was 14% in the Aegean region in 2016-2017.<sup>2</sup> However, it is known that the percentage of unvaccinated children in our country decreased from 3.2 to 0.9% between 1990 and 2018.<sup>3</sup>

The percentage of participants who refused to participate in the study should be stated in the article. The high percentage of vaccine refusal may be attributed to these individuals. Conditions such as hospitalization or death,

including chronic illness in the child and the severity of infections such as COVID-19, also affect vaccination status. This situation was emphasized in two studies conducted on the experiences of health personnel throughout Türkiye.<sup>2,4</sup> Vaccine refusal is not alone in some cases, but also in the form of denial of health care and other interventions. Since hospital admissions formed the study population, no information could be obtained about these cases.<sup>2,4</sup>

Şahin et al.<sup>1</sup> revealed that concerns about side effects and children not being eager to be vaccinated were the most common causes of COVID-19 vaccine refusal. Since this study was conducted in only one province (İzmir) of Türkiye, the data were limited. Many different factors influence parents' decisions to vaccinate their children. In the national study in Türkiye, the most common reasons for VH were "Concerns about the vaccine content (66.3%), harmfulness (51.2%), and fears about adverse effects (50.0%)".<sup>2</sup> Similarly, lack of information about vaccines, fear of side effects, concerns about vaccine efficacy and safety, the thought that vaccines are harmful, anti-vaccine publications on the internet and social media, belief in natural immunity, and religious beliefs are reported to be the most common reasons for VH and VR in a qualitative study from Türkiye.<sup>2,4,5</sup> In evaluating the study results, it should be considered that the factors that are related to VH and VR in a normal state in the community, would also affect the vaccination rate during the pandemic.

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