

**Coverage by Spanish media of the vaccination campaigns against human
papillomavirus: benefits or risks?¹**

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to analyze the institutional campaigns about the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine for the prevention of cervix cancer (in girls between 11 and 14 years) from the regional governments in Asturias, Madrid and Valencia, in Spain. The study begins from 2007 until 2013, examining all the events related with these campaigns. We've collected all the elements designed and delivered for the vaccination campaign (pamphlets, diptychs, posters, radio, TV, press, social networks conferences and internet, for example: blogs, institutional pages and scientific sites), and we've studied how was elaborated the discourse that has been transmitted to the susceptible population for being vaccinated (through interviews structured to the responsible of the Public Health Services and technicians of the three regional governments). Likewise, we've compiled the texts published on media (printed, audiovisual and internet) in

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relation with the vaccination campaigns in each one of the autonomous regions and submitting its content to a qualitative analysis. We've analyzed 297 stories about the HPV vaccine from eight newspaper from Spain (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC*, *Las Provincias*, *Levante*, *Nueva España* and *La Voz de Asturias*). In 2009 was the year highest number of piece of news was published. That year two Valencian girls were admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at a public hospital with severe seizures after being vaccinated. The tone of the stories is mostly negative in overall documents. In conclusion, the media have led to uncertainty in the public. Now vaccinated in Spain 50% of girls. The administration has not responded to questions from groups affected by the vaccine.

Introduction

In Spain, the inclusion into official vaccination calendar of the vaccine against the human papillomavirus for girls among 11 and 14 years has generated controversy among social agents, because its application to adolescents has produced some adverse effects, it was covered by media. In 2009, two girls from Valencia were entered at Intensive Care Unit of the Clinic University Hospital, after they took the second dose of Gardasil, the mark of the HPV vaccine. These teens suffered severe seizures and were hospitalized for several months without a clear diagnosis. Even though health institutions have not offered enough information about it, until January 2012, 737 reported adverse effects in Spain, some of them really serious. The Association of Concerned by Papillomavirus Vaccine (AAVP) works for the Spanish Health System removes the vaccinations and demands the government a compensation fund for those affected by the vaccine. In Valencian Community the vaccination process was stopped, in 2009, for several months, while girls were entered, but the vaccination program restarted at Valencian community when the girls left the hospital. Elsewhere in Spain, there was no modification of the official calendar. In September of 2012 died a girl after she was vaccinated with Gardasil in Asturias (North of Spain). As of 1 September 2009, there have been more than 26 million doses distributed in the United States of Garsail, and there have been 15.037 Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) reports following the vaccination (adverse effects including blackouts and swoons). Also after the vaccination the death of

120 girls was registered, although the Federal Drugs Administration did not report a common pattern that may suggest a relation of cause /effect. Institutional Agencies like World Health Organization, Federal Drugs Administration and the European Medicines Agency played a key role in transmitting the importance and the risk/benefits relation of vaccination against the Papillomavirus and the opportunity to introduce a set of interventions to improve the sexual health of youths.

The hypotheses proposed are:

1. Media have introduced uncertainty regarding the vaccine.
2. The media have not generated social debate.
3. The number of vaccinated girls is decreasing every year.
4. The administration is not responding to the doubts of citizens.
5. The institutional campaigns did not obtain advantage of the commercialization of the vaccine to carry out a transmission sexual illness prevention campaign.
6. Scientific debate is being generated about “causality” rather than about the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Methodology

We have selected three autonomous communities for research. Three regions are Asturias, Madrid and Valencia because they will permit us to compare the data obtained and to verify the strengths and weaknesses of each one of the different campaigns. We have built up a set of variables that have allowed us to carry out content analysis on the media. We conducted structured interviews with scientists, doctors, journalists, politicians and citizens affected by secondary effects of vaccination interviews. We have analyzed the daily sessions of the Spanish parliament where there has been controversy about vaccination. We've studied the diptychs of institutional campaigns.

Results

The pieces of news analyzed (297) are aimed primarily risks rather than benefits. The interviews show that there is a controversy. However, there is no social debate. The first graph shows the number of pieces analyzed by year.

Figure 1. Newspapers and years analyzed

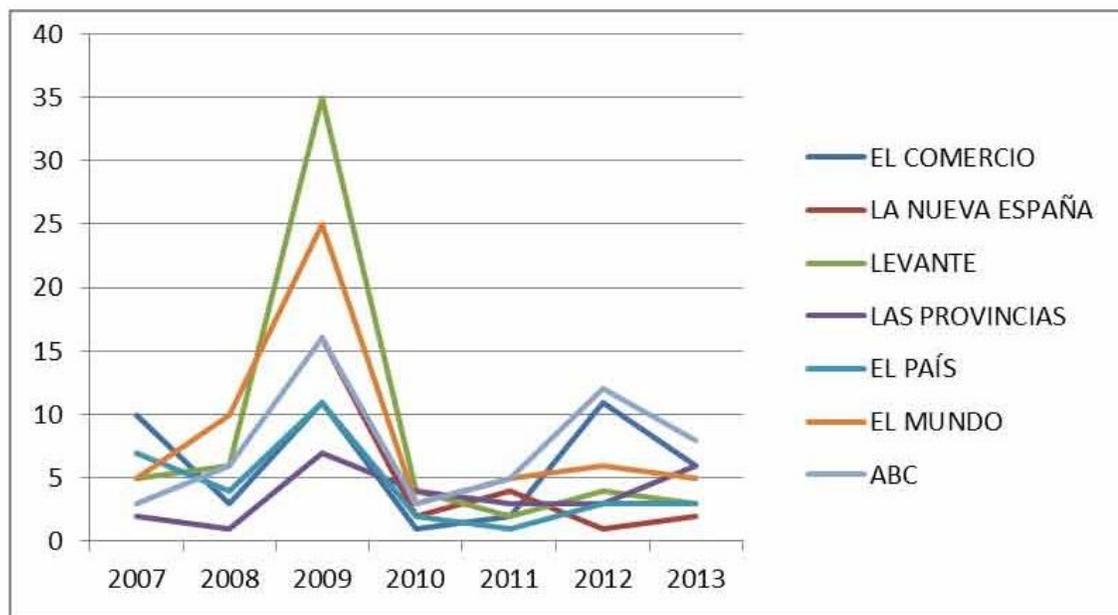


Figure 1(Moreno-Lopera_Figure 1)

In 2009, 121 stories were published on daily newspaper.

Figure 2 Years and Regionals Community

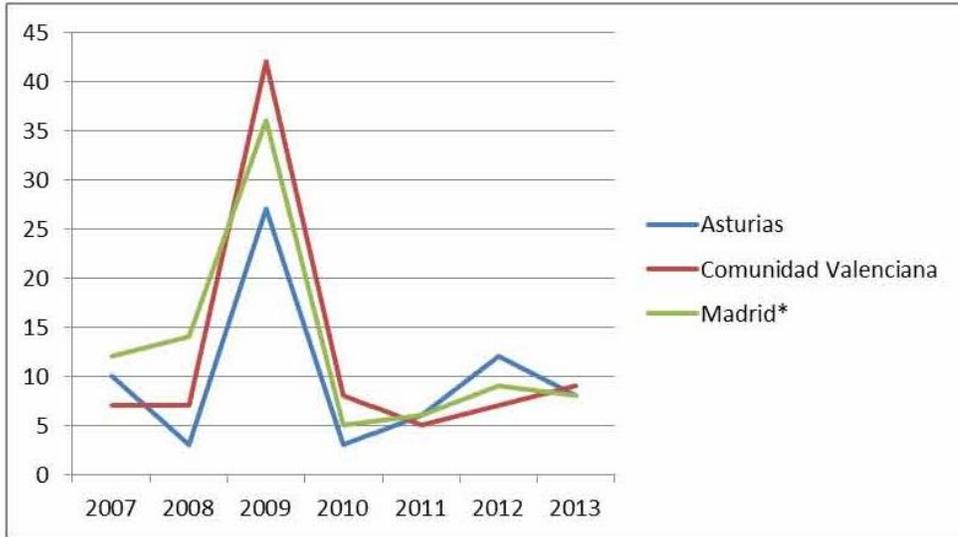


Figure 2 (Moreno-Lopera_Figure 2)

42 of 121 stories were published in the newspapers from Valencian Community, as is shown in the second graph.

Figure 3 Pieces of news through years (2007-2013)



Figure 3 (Moreno-Lopera_Figure 3)

The third one, shows the highest number of stories focuses on the period in which two girls were admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at the University Clinical Hospital.

Discussion

Three communities chosen for research have provided very interesting data, from policy making to the economic costs of the vaccine. In 2012 Asturias was a piece of news on the European mass media because a teenager died after she was vaccinated. Valencia was the centre of “negative” news at the beginning of the vaccination campaign. Two girls were admitted in the Intensive Care Unit of the Clinic University Hospital after the second dose of the vaccine. Madrid has some differences with the rest of autonomic communities. The community managed to reduce the cost of the vaccine calling an auction where the pharmaceutical enterprises offered a more reduced price. The regional government buys the vaccine in 92€ per dose, the rest of regional governments will pay 103€. This vaccine has been controversial since it was included in the immunization schedule and news reported was mainly related to adverse effects or uncertainties. In this vaccine, who the groups have defended a moratorium are health professionals, such as doctors, public health experts and academics who are supporting the arguments against the vaccine. It's the reason that those affected are achieving have much visibility on media and digital platforms, the weight of the scientific arguments.

Conclusion

The introduction of the HPV vaccine in the vaccination calendar was coincident with the controversy of the flu H1N1 vaccination. In the social imaginary prevails the idea of spurious interests of the pharmaceutical companies in the commercialization of the HPV vaccine, therefore, there is some doubts relating to the utility of the vaccination of 11-years-old girls. The anti-vaccine movement has increased in the last decade, in particular with the HPV vaccine. The role of the media reporting on socially controversial topic is very important. While other vaccines have nearly 100% coverage of the population, the average HPV is about 50%. In some areas from Spain the vaccine reaches 65% and others where barely reaches 17%. The vaccine has not become as health authorities had anticipated. Most of the information is that report public health risks or

uncertainties about vaccination. Some experts interviewed told us that the benefits of the HPV vaccine were higher than the risks and concluded that there was no demonstrated causal link between vaccination and the side effects reported by girls. Affected explained in interviews that they were not anti-vaccine and side effects were taking place in greater proportions than other vaccines. Therefore, we are facing a problem of effectiveness and not causality.

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