

## Expectations of Unvaccinated Health Workers in Greece and the Question of Trust: A Qualitative Study of Vaccine Hesitancy

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**Abstract :** The reasons why people remain unvaccinated, especially health workers, are complex. In Greece, 2 percent of health workers (around 7,000) remain unvaccinated, despite the fact that for this group of people vaccination against COVID-19 is mandatory. In April 2022, the Greek health minister repeated that unvaccinated health care workers will remain suspended from their jobs 'for as long as the pandemic lasts,' explaining that the suspension of the workers in question was 'entirely their choice' and that health professionals who do not believe in vaccines 'do not believe in their own science.' Although policy circles around the world often link vaccine hesitancy to ignorance of science or misinformation, various recently published qualitative studies show that vaccine hesitancy is the result of a combination of factors, which include distrust towards elites and the system of innovation and distrust towards government. In a similar spirit, some commentators warn that labeling hesitancy as "anti-science" is bad politics. In this paper, we worked within the tradition of STS taking the view that people draw upon personal associations to enact and express civic concern with an issue, the enactment of public concern involves the articulation of threats to actors' way of life, personal values, relationships, lived experiences, broader societal values and institutional structures. To this effect, we have conducted 27 in depth interviews with unvaccinated Greek health workers and we are in the process of conducting 20 more interviews. We have so far found that rather than a question of believing in 'facts' vaccine hesitancy reflects deep distrust towards those charged with the making of decisions and pharmaceutical companies and that emotions (rather than rational thinking) play a crucial role in the formation of attitudes and the making of decisions. We need to dig deeper so as to understand the causes of distrust towards technical government and the ways in which public(s) conceive of and want to be part in the politics of innovation. We particularly address the question of the effectiveness of mandatory vaccination of health workers and whether such top-down regulatory measures further polarize society, to finally discuss alternative regulatory approaches and governance structures.

**Keywords :** vaccine hesitancy, innovation, trust in vaccines, sociology of vaccines, attitude drivers towards scientific information, governance

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