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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Why COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among vulnerable people in PNG is high

Vaccination is one of the proven ways to reduce the likelihood and severity of infections and illnesses. Yet, in 2020 and 2021, the refusal and the delay to accept vaccination against the coronavirus (COVID-19) was a significant area of public health concern in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The government was particularly worried that a large number of unvaccinated people, if infected, was likely to contribute more to overall rates of community transmission of the virus. But the biggest concern was the fate of people with chronic diseases or those with weak immune systems who were more reluctant to take the vaccine.

In the National Research Institute (NRI) Discussion Paper No. 198: “COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among wholesale and retail service employees with pre-existing medical conditions: evidence from Papua New Guinea” released today by the PNG NRI, researchers Dr Edwin Machine and Dr Francis Odhuno found that vaccine hesitancy among vulnerable people working in the wholesale and retail service sector was almost 66%.

The study noted that information on the vaccine and the pandemic was largely to blame for the high rates of vaccine hesitancy. While COVID-19 vaccine rollout was slow at first, the survey of wholesale and retail service sector workers in the National Capital District found other factors that may have contributed to the reluctance to get vaccinated, including:

- The level of education played a big role in deciding whether to take the COVID-19 jab. Workers who had post-secondary education were more likely to take the vaccine given the opportunity as compared to those with Grade 12 and lower education levels.
- Sources of information that build a lack of trust or misinformation contributed to the low rates of vaccine acceptance. Lack of trust is perhaps the reason why information from government departments, including from health authorities, significantly reduced likelihood of taking the COVID-19 vaccine, just like information obtained from social media did.
- Vaccine hesitancy was also strongly associated with how much responsibilities one had in their households, provision of personal protective equipment at their workplace, their level of optimism about future employment, and how they felt their household responsibilities affected their ability to focus at work.

Intervention is needed to target the perceptions people have on the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine in addition to making the vaccine widely available. Engaging respected members of community might also help with disseminating quality information on the vaccine and its uptake.

The Publication and Media Release can be accessed on the PNG NRI website <https://www.pngnri.org>.

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