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Mass media effect on vaccines uptake during silent polio outbreak

Iftach Sagy^{a,b,*}, Victor Novack^b, Michael Gdalevich^c, Dan Greenberg^a

^a Department of Health Systems Management, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er-Sheva, Israel

^b Clinica Research Center, Soroka University Medical Center, Be'er-Sheva, Israel

^c Southern District Health Office, Ministry of Health, Beer-Sheva, Israel

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ABSTRACT

Background: During 2013, isolation of a wild type 1 poliovirus from routine sewage sample in Israel, led to a national OPV campaign. During this period, there was a constant cover of the outbreak by the mass media. **Aims:** To investigate the association of media exposure and OPV and non-OPV vaccines uptake during the 2013 silent polio outbreak in Israel.

Methods: We received data on daily immunization rates during the outbreak period from the Ministry of Health (MoH). We conducted a multivariable time trend analysis to assess the association between daily media exposure and vaccines uptake. Analysis was stratified by ethnicity and socio-economic status (SES). **Results:** During the MoH supplemental immunization activity, 138,799 OPV vaccines were given. There was a significant association between media exposure and OPV uptake, most prominent in a lag of 3–5 days from the exposure among Jews (R.R 1.79C.I 95% 1.32–2.41) and high SES subgroups (R.R 1.71C.I 95% 1.27–2.30). These subgroups also showed increased non-OPV uptake in a lag of 3–5 days from the media exposure, in all vaccines except for MMR. Lower SES and non-Jewish subgroups did not demonstrate the same association.

Conclusion: Our findings expand the understanding of public behaviour during outbreaks. The public response shows high variability within specific subgroups. These findings highlight the importance of tailored communication strategies for each subgroup.

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1. Background

The state of Israel was certified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a polio free country in 2002. During April 2013, a wild poliovirus type 1 was isolated from routine sewage sample in Rahat and Be'er-Sheva, two cities in the Southern Region of Israel [1]. At the end of May 2013, the central virology laboratory identified the pathogen as a non-Sabin poliovirus type 1, which was isolated previously in Pakistan and Egypt [2]. Most of the isolations came from children below 10 years living in Bedouin Arab communities characterized with high IPV immunization rate (90–95%), but also with low socio-economic status and poor sanitation and overcrowded living conditions [3,4]. Not a single case of clinical polio infection was documented in Israel during the transmission period.

The Israel Ministry of Health (MoH) responded to the polio transmission with several actions, including the initiation of supplemental immunization with bOPV (bivalent oral polio vaccine) and the launching of a nationwide bOPV campaign throughout

mass media channels [5–11]. By the end of the supplemental immunization activity, a coverage of 80–90% was reached in the Southern District where the outbreak began among the high risk pediatric population.

The notion that media coverage can impact the public response during crisis was first described in the late 1950s [12]. This phenomenon can be attributed to the lack of information, atmosphere of risk and media tendency to focus on sensational stories which can alter health behaviour [13–15]. For instance, statins use was recently shown to be associated with negative media coverage of drug's potential adverse effects. [16,17].

The aim of this study was to investigate the association of media exposure and vaccines uptake during the 2013 polio silent outbreak in Southern Israel.

2. Methods

2.1. Clinical data sources

The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee. The study population included all children under 10 years old (during 2013) in the Southern District of Israel who received at

* Corresponding author at: Clinica Research Center, Soroka University Medical Center, Beer-Sheva 84101, Israel.

E-mail address: iftachsagy@gmail.com (I. Sagy).

least one polio vaccine (any type) during the study period. We chose this group as they were the target population for the bOPV vaccination during the MoH supplemental immunization activity.

We obtained data on immunization rates from the MoH. This included the number of daily bOPV vaccines given during the supplemental immunization activities (August to October 2013). Additionally, we collected data on routine immunizations to investigate a possible “spillover effect” of the polio exposure on the media to other routine scheduled vaccines, such as the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis-hemophilus influenza B-inactive polio (DTaP-Hib-IPV) vaccine, measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV), vaccine against pneumococcus bacteria (PCV) and against rotavirus (RVV) (June to October 2013). The latter period was chosen since after the supplemental immunization activities were initiated (August 2013), most of MoH resources were aimed at delivering bOPV even at the expense of the routine immunization plan. We retrieved demographic data from the Israeli MoH database including ethnicity of Jewish/non-Jewish communities and socio-economic status [18].

2.2. Mass media exposure

Media exposure was assessed by an Israeli commercial firm (Ifat) that maintains a database of all Israeli mass media publications, applying content analysis methodology to determine relevance of the publication to the present study, as has been reported elsewhere [19]. We searched television, radio, local and national newspapers and news websites (in Hebrew, Arabic, Russian and English) excluding blogs and forums, to identify relevant keywords for the polio silent outbreak. The cost of purchasing advertisement in national press in Israel directly reflects the public reach of the newspaper.

- For newspapers reports we measured the size of the report (in square inches) and multiplied it by the cost of purchasing a square inch in the same section of the publication.
- For broadcast reports, a similar measure was used: the length of the publication (in minutes) multiplied by the cost of each minute of advertisement during the same program/time of day.
- For internet reports, each page ranked according to the time of exposure, the location and the web trafficking.

These calculations, in addition to the dominant keywords in each report (full, partial, marginal and/or minimal) yielded an estimated value of advertising (EVA) for each report [20]. We referred to the mass media exposure as the daily EVA during study period. In addition, Qualitative content analysis was conducted in a sample of the entire polio reports, in order to determine specific media frames and their possible effect on public response. The media reports were analyzed to investigate how each item frames the efforts of the Israeli Ministry of Health (MoH) toward outbreak response, either through positive sentiment (e.g. regarding the great effort of the MoH) or negative sentiment (e.g. regarding vaccine adverse effect) [21].

Furthermore, to investigate the role of web exposure on vaccine uptake, we extracted data from Google Trends using the same keywords and time frame that were used in the main analysis. We conducted analysis using the same methods only with Google Trends search volume in the model instead of EVA in lags of several days from the exposure on the web.

2.3. Statistical methods

We used Generalized Linear Models (GLM) with unstructured correlation matrix and Poisson as a link function to model the daily vaccinations uptake. Each model was tested as a time series model,

adjusted to seasonal variables. The models were tested for the entire cohort, and then separately for each layer (SES in deciles and Jews vs. Bedouins). The risk ratio and the 95% confidence interval were calculated for each variable. EVA was entered to each model after conducting a logarithmic (one scale) transformation to ensure normal distribution. Additionally, due to the longitude effect of media exposure on the public, we tested each model in lags of several days from the media exposure (in EVA) of the same day. The final models included variables selected upon statistical significance ($\alpha < 0.05$), the highest log-likelihood, model parsimony and clinical relevance. All analyses in this study were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 for Windows [Armonk, NY: IBM Corp].

3. Results

During August to the end of October 2013, there were 138799 bOPV vaccines given in the Southern District of Israel. The number of weekly bOPV vaccines and media exposure is shown in Fig. 1, with close positive association that can be seen between media exposure and public compliance to the MoH mass media campaign. This association was shown to be significant in a lag of 3–5 days from the exposure in the entire cohort (R.R. 2.02.C.I. 95% 1.39–2.92) among Jews (R.R. 1.79.C.I. 95% 1.32–2.41) and high SES subgroups (R.R. 1.71.C.I. 95% 1.27–2.30), Table 1.

Table 2 shows the association between media exposure and daily routine vaccines rates between June and early August 2013. During this period, 1240 DTaP-Hib-IPV, 1018 MMRV, 660 PCV and 636 RVV vaccines were given. Media exposure was associated with increased vaccine utilization mostly with a delay of 3–5 days from the media exposure, in all vaccines except for MMRV (negative effect with delay of 6–8 days which afterward diminished). The most prominent association was shown among Jews and high SES groups: R.R. 1.33 (C.I. 95% 1.06–1.67) within DTaP-Hib-IPV vaccine and R.R. 1.36 (C.I. 95% 1.08–1.71) within RVV vaccine for Jews and R.R. 1.27 (C.I. 95% 1.01–1.60) for high SES within PCV vaccine.

Table 3 shows the association between the media sentiment (positive vs. negative) and bOPV uptake. It appeared that only positive media exposure was associated with increased bOPV uptake, mostly in lags of 3–5 days from media exposure. Negative media exposure was not associated with change in vaccines uptake. Table 4 shows the association of OPV uptake with Google Trends search volume during the outbreak period. It appeared the similar to the results of the main analysis, the most prominent effect of Google search was during the first days and among higher socio-economic and Jewish populations. The effect diminished in more distant lags.

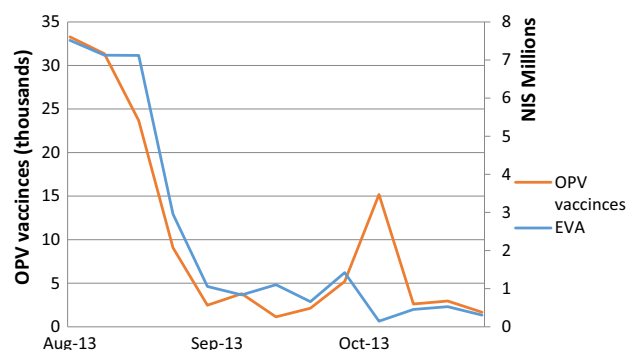


Fig. 1. Media exposure and weekly bOPV vaccines in Southern District of Israel (August–October 2013).

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