Money is not everything: experimental evidence that payments do not increase willingness to be vaccinated against COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Rapid, large-scale uptake of new vaccines against COVID-19 will be crucial to decrease infections and end the pandemic. In a recent article in this journal, Julian Savulescu argued in favour of monetary incentives to convince more people to be vaccinated once the vaccine becomes available. To evaluate the potential of his suggestion, we conducted an experiment investigating the impact of payments and the communication of individual and prosocial benefits of high vaccination rates on vaccination intentions. Our results revealed that none of these interventions or their combinations increased willingness to be vaccinated shortly after a vaccine becomes available. Consequently, decision makers should be cautious about introducing monetary incentives and instead focus on interventions that increase confidence in vaccine safety first, as this has shown to be an especially important factor regarding the demand for the new COVID-19 vaccines.

The first vaccines against COVID-19 have been approved and it is just a matter of months before they will become globally available.1 While the rapid, large-scale uptake of vaccines is required to end the pandemic, poll data show that worldwide vaccination intentions are declining.2 In pandemic, poll data show that worldwide uptake specifically and increase vaccination intentions.1 Media and Communication Science, University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany

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Response
as social desirability of getting paid for vaccination may be low. When vaccines against COVID-19 become widely available, the behavioural consequences of monetary incentives should be investigated in field experiments.

While it may be worthwhile to further investigate the positive effects of monetary incentives for specific subgroups such as health professionals, future work should also focus on different interventions to improve vaccination intentions in the public. Other research suggests that current hesitancy about new COVID-19 vaccines is strongly related to a lack of confidence in their safety.4 10 Thus, educational campaigns addressing the safety of vaccines as we learn more about them may enable undecided people to make educated, informed decisions. Once safety concerns are reduced, monetary incentives could drive vaccine uptake. This should be addressed in future investigations.

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Table 1 Results of regressing intention to get vaccinated against COVID-19 on communication about the need for high uptake and payments for being vaccinated

| Predictor                                      | b     | SE  | CI−   | CI+   |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| (Constant)                                    | 4.46  | 0.18| 4.106 | 4.805 |
| Communication (baseline: no communication)    | −0.34 | 0.25| −0.838| 0.152 |
| Payment (baseline: no payment)                | 0.22  | 0.21| −0.189| 0.619 |
| Communication × Payment                       | −0.05 | 0.29| −0.619| 0.524 |

None of the predictors was significant. A priori power analyses revealed a power >0.95 to detect a small effect ($R^2=0.05$). $R^2=0.01$, adjusted $R^2=0.01$. CI− and CI+ are the lower and upper bounds of the 95% confidence intervals.

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