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Why do people believe health misinformation? – MedFake study results

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been accompanied by a significant increase in the activity of anti-vaccination groups and the spread of health misinformation. Fake news about vaccines and inconsistencies in the official messaging regarding the COVID-19 pandemic have generated resistance to the vaccination system within a part of Polish society. Among the reasons for reluctance to receive COVID-19 vaccines among young Poles are primarily the following: a lack of belief in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines, and underestimating the severity of the disease itself.

The pandemic has only deepened the scepticism toward vaccinations observed in Poland for several years. According to data from the National Institute of Public Health – National Institute of Hygiene, the number of refusals of vaccines for children increased from 3437 in 2010 to 30,090 in 2017 and 72,700 in 2022. Identifying the causes and implementing appropriate interventions is one of the challenges in public health.

According to the results of the MedFake study, 60% of the Polish population aged 15–39 years have ambiguous attitudes toward vaccinations. In this group, we find individuals who are partially convinced and doubtful, indifferent, or have inconsistent attitudes. This part of Polish society is particularly susceptible to health mis-

information. Exploiting concerns about vaccine safety, especially in childhood vaccinations, and inducing fear (by anti-vaccination groups) deepens belief in medical fake news. Such actions, in the long term, result in a shift from a neutral to a sceptical attitude. Healthcare policy efforts should be directed at this group, especially in the area of vaccination education.

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DISCLOSURE

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