

COUNTRY FACES NEW WAVE OF COVID-19 INFECTIONS

# Overcoming job hesitancy

SOUTH Africa is currently facing a new wave of infections related to the much higher transmissibility of the Omicron Covid-19 variant and its sub-variants.

The most recent spike has had similar characteristics as the fourth wave in January 2022: increases in infections have not been accompanied by similar increases in hospitalisations and deaths.

These changes present a challenge to policymakers trying to improve vaccine take-up, particularly in vulnerable groups. The government set a target of getting 67% of the population vaccinated by the end of 2021. But rates have fallen far short of this. As of May 22 2022 only 31.4% of the population had been vaccinated.

Understanding the depth of vaccine hesitancy, and the drivers behind the lack of take-up is critical to preventing further deaths, infections, and continuing harm to the economy. Vaccine take-up is particularly crucial for the country because of the HIV prevalence rate of 13% as well as the fact that it has the highest rates link of TB and TB/HIV incidence in the world. Both are known correlates of Covid-19 mortality.

We have been involved in research to understand levels of vaccine hesitancy in the country with a view to providing insights into how vaccine take-up can be boosted, particularly among high-risk groups.

Two surveys of unvaccinated South Africans have been conducted. The first took place from November 15 to December 15 2021. The Omicron variant had been announced a few weeks earlier. The second survey consisted of 3 608 unvaccinated individuals, of whom approximately half were re-interviewed from Survey 1, as well as 386 individuals who were vaccinated between Surveys 1 and 2.

The dataset cannot be considered a prevalence survey, or nationally representative. Nevertheless, it was a diverse sample with broad coverage



KATHERINE EYAL

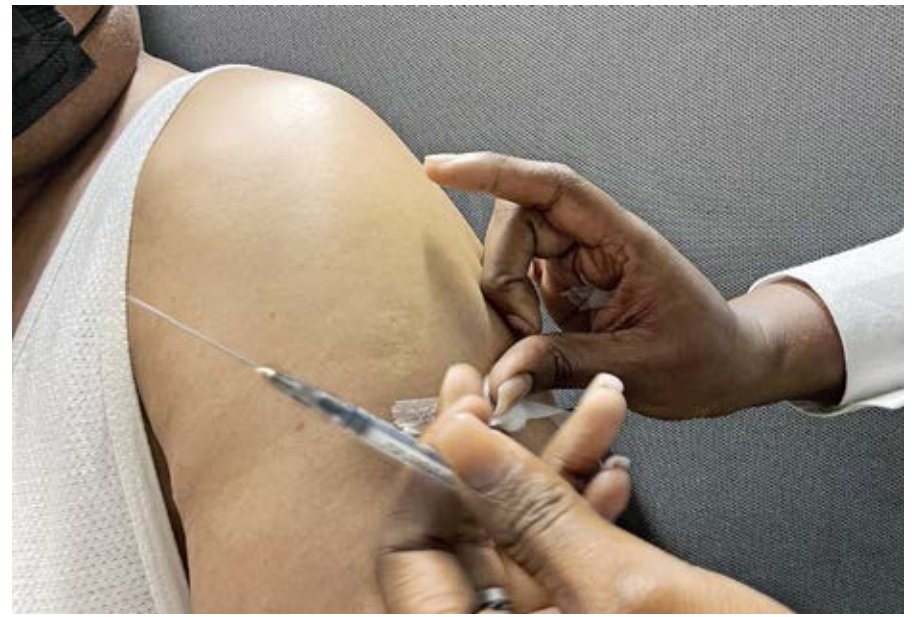
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over race, vaccine-eligible age categories, province, income levels and geographical area. We found that vaccine hesitancy in our sample was high, and had become entrenched since December 2021.

We also tested the likely success of messaging and information campaigns, and how information should be framed and distributed. Understanding the precise drivers of vaccine hesitancy is key to designing these interventions. Most people we spoke to did not want to be vaccinated. A small portion were still undecided. Less than one in five intended to get vaccinated as soon as possible, half the number reported in December 2021. More than a third definitely did not intend to be vaccinated.

A quarter of respondents said they would be vaccinated only if required to do so by a mandate. Worryingly, those who have chronic illnesses were no more likely to get vaccinated than others. Vaccine refusal was very high among older respondents. We found that access didn't feature at all as a reason for not getting vaccinated among the most reluctant (a large group).

Our results showed that it's imperative to spread awareness of need for the vaccine, despite the current context of Omicron. Few of the respondents we spoke to thought they needed the



IMPROVING belief in the efficacy of the vaccine is critical if vaccination rates are to increase, the writer says.

vaccine and many cited a very low personal risk of becoming very sick from Covid. Many also thought that the vaccine doesn't work, and that it may kill them. Few thought it would protect them against death. Few people believed that the vaccine was safe for pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers, or the chronically ill. And only one in four of our entire sample say they trust government information about Covid-19 a lot.

A very high number of respondents opposed a vaccine mandate (nearly 75% of the entire sample) even though about half thought mandates would work well. Opponents overwhelmingly cited that it was an individual's right to decide, with some saying the president said vaccination would not be mandated.

Given that mandates are likely to be used at work or school, with South Africa's high rates of unemployment, mandates may not improve vaccination rates substantially, and will have to be approached with care.

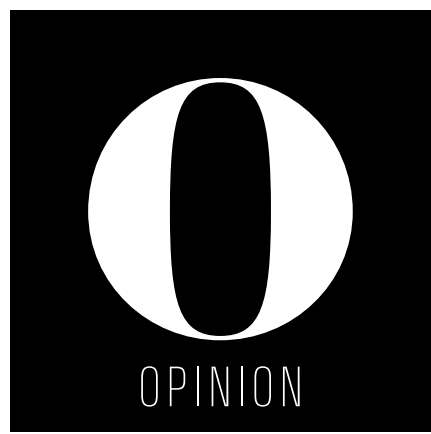
Messaging campaigns are a tool often used to improve take-up, and are attractive due to their low-cost nature.

We tested two vaccine promotion messages (being part of the solution to ending the pandemic, or becoming vaccinated to enjoy greater freedoms), and found some small impacts on vaccine intentions.

Our results showed that targeted campaigns would be necessary among groups with greater hesitancy or risk.

The surveys enabled us to identify some key determinants of vaccination levels and established that policy action should not need to stop after vaccination – further communication should ensure people return for boosters, and share their positive vaccination experiences with others.

Fears about vaccine safety must be allayed, and improving belief in its efficacy is critical if vaccination rates are to increase. This information will have to come from innovative sources given low trust in government Covid-19 information.



## Why is Cele still police minister?

CRIME statistics always under-report the true extent of the scourge of crime.

Some victims of crime do not even bother to report crimes perpetrated against them or their loved ones for various reasons, including lack of confidence in the SAPS.

In a democracy where the government is truly accountable to its citizenry, after the police minister had announced those horrifying crime statistics, he should have tendered his resignation or be fired.

Alas, not in South Africa. The police minister speaks without shame nor modicum of humility.

Instead he was nattily dressed, even donning his trademark Stetson hat, in full knowledge that his job is safe no matter the crime statistics.

The police's dismal performance is a reflection of a poor political leadership by a police minister who lacks the understanding of jurisdictional limits that restrain him from interfering with police day-to-day operational affairs. He is clueless when it comes to police matters.

Cele has nothing to offer the citizenry except his big ego, notorious for impromptu gibberish speeches that are not borne out by policing science, expertise and experience.

He has no chance of improvement; he will keep on doing what he is doing: going to crime scenes, to bereaved families and attending funerals with TV cameras in tow as he makes his predictable ill-conceived heartless and unprofessional speeches.

We are robbed, killed and maimed every day by brazen killers and assailants who do not fear detection, apprehension and conviction because they won't be caught and prosecuted, as they are law unto themselves, running their own parallel state to the constitutionally sanctioned one.

If the director-general in the Presidency can be threatened with death in a letter accompanied by a bullet, then we are officially a Mafia state.

Where is crime intelligence? Where are the police?

Who are we if the police failed to protect their own, resulting in the murder of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Kinnear in Bishop Lavis in the Western Cape in 2020?

There is no short-term or long-term vision assuring the public of the possibility that policing, crime prevention and detection will improve.

### IMAGE OF THE DAY



A SOUTH Korean relative of a victim of the war visits the Seoul National Cemetery in the capital yesterday. South Korea observed the anniversary of Memorial Day, first observed in 1956, commemorating the men and women who died in military service during the Korean War (1950-53). | EPA

IN SUPPORT OF PALESTINE

## Hold Israel to account; no more impunity

BELLA MKHABELA

LAST year, we witnessed the South African population divided over sending Miss South Africa to Israel to compete for the world pageant title.

For years, the government has been calling for Israel to be held accountable for the injustices committed against Palestinian civilians.

The government argued that Miss South Africa's participation in a competition held in Israel would be the equivalent of condoning the state's actions and ignoring the atrocities that continue to happen against Palestine.

Despite the government's reluctance Miss South Africa went on to compete for the pageant title in Israel.

The implications may have seemed insignificant at the time, but indirectly a precedent was set. If the government is relaxing its stance on the Palestine and Israel conflict, Israel may never be held accountable by anyone in the world community for its injustices? Sadly, the tensions between the two

nations continue to rise, with more innocent lives lost in the crossfire.

In the past month, Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh was shot and killed during an occupation by Israeli forces in the West Bank.

Her death sparked a surge of anger across the world, with states, international agencies and activists calling for a probe into the reporter's death.

Many are asking whether her death will finally incentivise intervention from the international community.

Among a few other nations, South Africa had long been calling for an investigation of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories. Will the rest of the world follow suit in holding the oppressive government accountable for the atrocities?

Abu Akleh was shot wearing a helmet and body vest marked press; Palestinian officials blame Israeli forces claiming that the military opened fire on civilians and the media during their occupation of the West Bank. Shortly after the incident, the mil-

itary attacked a crowd of mourners attending the reporter's funeral. The prime minister of Israel suggested that the bullets could have been from Palestinian shooters or a soldier defending themselves against a terrorist attack.

Palestinian officials claim Israel cannot be trusted to perform a fair and accurate investigation.

But what was unique this time was the international community's response. Its track record regarding the conflict between Palestine and Israel is failure on numerous occasions to step in despite a record of human rights violations committed by both states.

However, the UN Security Council demanded an immediate, thorough, transparent, fair, and impartial probe. It marked a rare occasion where it stood unified in its stance towards Israel.

One of Israel's closest and most trusted allies, the US, condemned the military for their poor behaviour towards Palestinian mourners and demanded a transparent probe. Abu Akleh's murder has forced the

international community to call out the perpetrator that continues to commit atrocities against innocent civilians and violate international law. – a unified outcry from the international community is a start. And the unified endorsement from developing nations and world powers will ensure states that claim to support the struggle in Palestine remain consistent.

The South African government had a responsibility to hold firm in its opposition against Israel, not only for the sake of principle but also for victims like Abu Akleh.

South Africa, especially, understands what continued pressure from the world community can change.

The South African government has a principal obligation to continue calling out, excluding, and condemning the aggressor without any exceptions.

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