"How the Controversy and Misconceptions of Vaccines have Affected American Society and Views" by Alexis Pozzuto (Faculty Advisor: David Lampe)

Undergraduate Research and Scholarship Symposium Award in Global Health sponsored by Center for African Studies
How Vaccines and the Controversy Surrounding them has Affected Americans and American Society

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Abstract
In recent years, there has been an ongoing controversy surrounding the safety, and effectiveness of vaccines. There are two sides of play, those who support vaccines and encourage their use for the sake of public health, and those who oppose vaccines and encourage alternative routes of protection against various diseases. This research explores both sides of the controversy and further as to why the controversy has an effect on the thoughts and actions of the general American public. The study was conducted by having a total of 20 questions in a survey that was distributed amongst 25 students at Duquesne University. A wide variety of students were chosen in the participant group, across all age levels, because they represent a variety of knowledge, as one would experience in the general American population. The participants were chosen at random. All participants were given the same survey and prior reading material. They were each answered questions in the survey, stating that their answers were anonymous if needed. The study took me to complete and gather all of the feedback from a handful giving an overview of the most controversial vaccines and why they are controversial was given to all participants. After they had filled out the form, an excerpt of the survey gave information on a new viral outbreak. The first question asked the participant to circle, on a scale from 1 to 5, how likely they would be to vaccinate their children, and 5 being how likely they would be to vaccinate their children. The second question asked them their reasoning, and the third question asked them if they were knowledgeable of vaccine controversy protest wording had something to do with the decision. There were no questions asked that were not on the survey. After all of the results and student responses were gathered, the responses were analyzed to find out what percent of them would and would not receive the vaccine, and second, to see the reasoning. The survey resulted in the most states which Americans are in regarding vaccines, being that it is controversial and divided.

Methods
In order to better answer vaccine controversies effects on American perception of vaccines, a survey was distributed amongst university students. The goal of the study was to see what the general consensus of the American population is regarding vaccines, using the students as representatives for the American population. The study’s results can help us estimate current research to further discover if the reason why people are and are not getting vaccinated is not based solely on the facts of vaccines, but the controversy surrounding them might also have an effect on their decision. Knowing this can help medical professionals move forward with how they allocate their patients and the public. The survey was given to 25 students at Duquesne University. A wide variety of students were chosen in the participant group, across all age levels, because they represent a variety of knowledge, as one would experience in the general American population. The participants were chosen at random. All participants were given the same survey and prior reading material. They were each answered questions in the survey, stating that their answers were anonymous if needed. The study took me to complete and gather all of the feedback from a handful.

Results
The majority of the students and their children because they believed it is the most effective way of preventing disease. 79 percent of the students specifically said they would vaccinate their children. Of these students, 66 percent of them rated their likelihood to vaccinate their children a 5 out of 5, meaning they would most likely vaccinate. 44 percent rated their likelihood a 4, meaning they would definitely vaccinate their children. When asked to give the reasoning, a common answer was because the vaccines are scientifically proven and approved. Students even pointed out that they realize there are risks but the benefits outweigh them. One student said specifically that it would help them and their children. When asked if they were knowledgeable of vaccine controversy protest wording had something to do with the decision. The majority of students said yes, over 60 percent of them said yes to this question. Some students did not know much about vaccines, and they believed it was a normal part of medical procedures. The majority of students believed that controversy did not affect their decision to vaccinate.

Discussion
The results, for one line up with the thought of the general population where the majority of people are behind vaccines, but there is a group of people who are not. The results also indicate that the controversies surrounding vaccines do in fact have an effect on the public’s decisions in vaccinating their children or themselves. The last point that the result section brought to light was that many Americans are not educated on the facts of the vaccines, so they go off of what they hear and their own opinions. Many citizens of the United States go off of hearsay rather than what they have been told. Children, often are not sure if they would receive the vaccine or not cause they are not informed and do not understand how important vaccines are. This aligns with the thoughts of the general American public because it is common for people to skip vaccines because they are not listed and approved by the government and does not have enough time. This also aligns with some of the thoughts of controversy because some think that vaccines are poisonous and do not trust the government. Americans get right to the flu vaccine and bring up the point that the flu vaccine doesn’t work. The fact that the student responses match up with the thoughts of the public is a good indicator that the results of the study can be applied to the rest of the public as well.

The research question posed asked whether the controversies surrounding vaccines and the debate between anti-vaccines and pro-vaccines has affected American’s decisions to get vaccinated. In a nutshell, the study indicates that the controversies do play a role in the public’s decisions. This was indicated when multiple students mentioned that some vaccines do not work, referring to the controversy surrounding the flu vaccines. Some students also asked questions about side effects of the vaccines and stated that, they would like to know these side effects beforehand because that would affect their decision. This is a common point in the debate over vaccines because many people believe that some side effects are too dangerous to risk. Small studies could reduce a larger trend in the population, people are being influenced by the controversies around them.

Not only do the controversies themselves affect the public’s decisions on vaccines, but the lack of education lacks people to be easily influenced. This was seen in the study when the students who were not educated on the facts of the flu vaccine. Some students even clearly said that they did not know much about vaccines, so they get their information off of the fact that these are not necessary, that the controversy does not affect them. Some students even realized that the controversy is not affecting the decisions of those who do not have an opinion. Many people will follow what their parents believe in order to make sure they do not get the opinion of their parents. The controversy surrounding vaccines directly affects the decisions of those who do not want to vaccinate. Even some people on either side of the controversy are not educated. For example, the fact about the MMR vaccine causing autism quickly changed because people were misinformation on the topic and the truth of the matter. This controversy surrounding vaccine not only affects the decision of the public, but it also affects them through a lack of education.

Overall, the controversy that surrounds vaccines has an effect on the public’s decisions to vaccinate their children. The results of the student survey indicate that this is a trend. It would benefit all Americans to skip the trend. If the public did not even read on what is best for individual health, then we can make better decisions, leading to a healthier and happier America.

Intro/Purpose
As Americans, we are a society that encourages curiosity and innovation. This society in recent years has become obsessed with knowing what exactly is in our foods and products we use. We access the internet to find the companies on everything. We take a rumor and make it into a “fact” creating a new myth that surrounds our lives. It is because of this spread of false information that the vaccine controversy is so prevalent in society today. Regarding the acceptance of vaccines in society, experts say, “While the percentage of US children who are fully vaccinated remains high (83–85%), the number of unvaccinated children has been growing because of nonscientific exemptions from vaccine requirements due to concerns about vaccine safety and an overperturbation of the benefits of vaccines” (Campbell-Ortah, 2015). There is a lack of growth in opposition to vaccines. Why is this? Why are parents choosing not to vaccinate their children in today’s society because they’re scared of the controversy? Campbell-Ortah (2015) says, “In 2004, the controversy axis was how many vaccines are too many and how many vaccines are too few. The controversy axis is now due to many myths that have been spread about the benefits of vaccines. At society, it is our job to be educated on the importance of vaccines and how they affect our lives today.

References