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**Title:** COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Serious Mental Illness

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**Abstract Type:** Original Research

**Background and Purpose:** According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH, 2020), 14.2 million people have had a severe mental illness in the past year. People who have a severe mental illness are at an increased likelihood of a COVID-19 infection and associated mortality due to biological, behavioral, and iatrogenic risk factors. Although vaccines are widely administered within this patient population, vaccine hesitancy still exists. This study highlights the motivations when acquiring the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as continuing motivation for further vaccinations.

**Methods:** Data collection occurred at a certified community behavioral health organization within St. Louis City (MO) that focuses on improving access to care and treatment. The sample included adults (18-79 years) actively engaged in treatment for a severe mental illness at the time of data collection. SIUE Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the data collection process of verbal surveys while using Qualtrics and Excel to extrapolate.

**Results:** Fifty-four participants completed the survey November 1, 2022 through December 31st, 2022. Majority of the participants identified as male (86%) and fully vaccinated (87%) with the initial COVID-19 series. Forty-eight percent received at least one booster vaccination. Half of respondents received their vaccines from a pharmacy residing within where they receive behavioral health services. Forty-six percent of respondents stated they received the majority of their information regarding COVID-19 by private/personal medical sources; which was the most accessible resource for this patient population. Top three reasons for declining vaccination included: not thinking it was needed (22%), didn't think it was safe (15%), and having a previous "bad" vaccination experience (13%). Among unvaccinated participants, 100% stated their mental health currently is the same or worse than prior to the pandemic; compared to 79% of vaccinated individuals. On the day of data collection, 44% rated their mental health currently as less than good.

**Conclusions:** Respondents got most of their information and education regarding COVID-19 from medical sources and none from social media. Understanding COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and motivation within this population is important to promote vaccine acceptance while developing strategies tailoring to the specific needs of the patient.