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Journal Pre-proof

Letter to the Editor of Public Health in response to 'Effect of ontological insecurity on vaccination behavior against COVID-19: a hospital-based cross-sectional study'

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Letter to the Editor of Public Health in response to ‘Effect of ontological insecurity on vaccination behavior against COVID-19: a hospital-based cross-sectional study’

Dear editor,

I read the article “Effect of ontological insecurity on vaccination behavior against COVID-19: a hospital-based cross-sectional study” [1] with great excitement and would like to compliment the authors for their superb work. However, I would like to express some concerns about the study design.

First, in my opinion, the authors make one valid statement: ontological insecurity of participants affects their behavior of recommending the COVID-19 vaccination to others. However, based on this statement, the authors suggest that improving ontological security in China can probably promote vaccination based on the statement. Can the conclusions drawn from the inpatients be applied to Chinese society as a whole? A nationwide survey would be more representative.

What’s more, there is a time gap between the actual time the patient was vaccinated or recommended COVID-19 vaccination to others and the survey about ontological insecurity. Ontological security identifies a complex human emotion that merges concerns not necessarily linked with COVID-19 [2]. Therefore, for the same person at different times, ontological insecurity can vary depending on the different life experiences, such as unemployment and disease. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the authors' study was conducted with inpatients who may have ontological insecurity due to diseases. Therefore, I doubt whether the ontological security at the time of the questionnaire survey can be representative of the ontological security at the time of vaccination. I think a better design would be to conduct a questionnaire survey of unvaccinated people to collect information about their current ontological insecurity scores, their willingness to be vaccinated, and their willingness to recommend others to be vaccinated.

My last concern is about one question in the questionnaire “Have you recommended anyone for the COVID-19 vaccines?”. I think when setting up the questionnaire questions, the authors could have considered the reality that in China. In China, it is almost mandatory for students and people with jobs to be vaccinated. Therefore, recommending others to get the COVID-19 vaccine is probably because vaccination is mandatory in workplaces and schools, and getting vaccinated can make life more convenient. They do not recommend vaccination for risk aversion. Therefore, to examine the participants' true attitude towards recommending others to receive the vaccine, I think a better approach would be to set the question as "Would you be willing to recommend others to receive the vaccine if it was not mandatory at your company or school?"

Best regards,

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- [2] Valente R, Valera Pertegas S. Ontological insecurity and subjective feelings of unsafety: Analysing socially constructed fears in Italy. *Soc Sci Res* 2018;71:160–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.11.007>.

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