



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

OBSERVATORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Tracking public opinion about unsupported narratives

Observatory on
Social Media (OSoMe)
Indiana University-Bloomington

Tracking public opinion about unsupported narratives

Wave 7, June 6-14, 2021

Indiana University's Observatory on Social Media (OSoMe) continues to track widely circulated but unsupported narratives in public discourse, with the goal to assess the public's awareness of them, the extent to which they are believed, and whether a person's political leanings, media use, and personal traits are related to vulnerability to these narratives.

This is a report on our seventh wave of data, collected from June 4 to 16, 2021. The first six waves were pre-election surveys. The summary report from waves 1-6 can be found at:

https://osome.iu.edu/research/survey/files/FinalSummary_UnsupportedNarratives_OSoMe.pdf

Narratives

In each wave, we showed respondents screenshots from social media that represented trending but factually unsupported narratives, and asked them if they had encountered the narratives, or similar ones, on social media or the internet. In addition to asking whether respondents had encountered each narrative, we also asked to what extent they believed the narratives.

In Wave 7, we tracked two narratives:

The CDC is hiding negative effects of COVID vaccines. ¹

COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility among women. ²

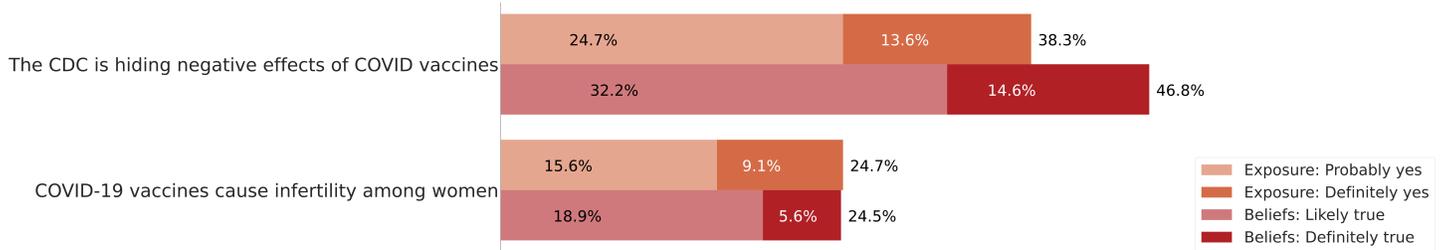
Results

As in previous waves of our surveys, we found that significant groups of respondents have seen the narratives and believe that they are true. Figure 1 shows that 38% had seen the specific CDC narrative that we showed, and even more (46.8%) thought that it was either definitely or likely true that the CDC is hiding negative effects from COVID vaccines. About 24.5% both saw the story about infertility, and believe that it may be true.

¹ <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2021/may/20/facebook-posts/cdc-not-manipulating-its-covid-19-breakthrough-dat/>

² <https://www.factcheck.org/2021/02/scicheck-no-evidence-vaccines-impact-fertility/>

Figure 1 Exposure to and belief in vaccine misinformation



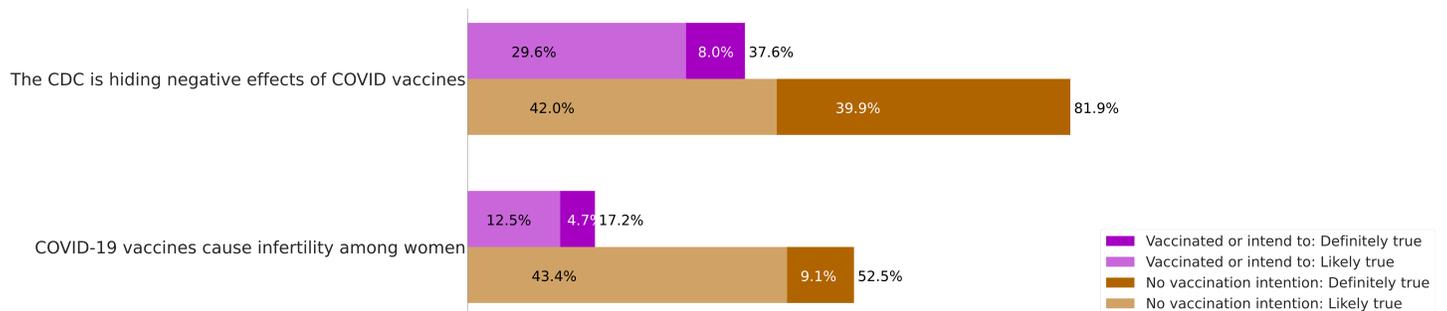
Narratives and vaccination intention

In our survey, 15.3% of participants had tested positive for COVID at some point.

About 64.5% had received or already made an appointment to receive a COVID vaccination. Of individuals who had not been vaccinated, 58.1% indicated that they did not intend to. Overall, 79% of the sample had either already been vaccinated, made an appointment, or intended to get vaccinated.

Of those who have no ultimate vaccination intention, 81.9% believed that the CDC is hiding negative effects of the COVID, and 52.5% believed that the vaccines are causing infertility among women. In comparison, among those who either have already been vaccinated or intend to get vaccinated, about 37.6% believed that the CDC is hiding negative effects and 17.2% believed the infertility effects (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Belief in vaccine misinformation: people who have been vaccinated or intend to be vaccinated vs. people who have no intention to be vaccinated



Ideology and vaccine intention

Vaccine intention is related to party affiliation and ideology. Almost 95% of self-identified Democrats and Democrat-leaning moderates stated that they have received the vaccine or intend to get the vaccine, versus 66.9% of Republicans and Republican-leaning moderates. Independents without leaning were at 61%. For those who had voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 election, 66.0% said they either have been or will get vaccinated. Among those who had voted for Joe Biden, 94% reported positive vaccine history or intention.

Table 1 Vaccine intention and political party

Party affiliation	Democrat (or Democrat leaning)	Independent	Republican (or Republican leaning)
Vaccination Intention (within party %)	N = 344	N = 47	N = 302
No vaccination intention	9.6%	21.3%	33.1%
Vaccinated or intend to	90.4%	78.7%	66.9%
Candidates voted for in 2020	Joe Biden/Kamala Harris	Did not vote or other candidates	Donald Trump/Mike Pence
Vaccination Intention (within party %)	N = 315	N = 128	N = 250
No vaccination intention	6.0%	30.5%	34.0%
Vaccinated or intend to	94.0%	69.5%	66.0%

Interaction of exposure to COVID narrative, belief, and vaccine intention

Exposure to narratives and belief in them are correlated, though not perfectly so. Of those who saw the narrative that we showed about whether the CDC is hiding side effects, 59.1% overall believed that it might be true. Of those who did not see that narrative, still 39.3% believe it, suggesting that people hear about these narratives from sources other than social media, or may simply believe them to be true for other reasons and predispositions.

The interaction of exposure and belief is strong in predicting who has been or will be vaccinated. As Table 2 shows, 56.9% of respondents who had both seen our narratives and believed them had been vaccinated or intended to be. Those who did not believe the narratives, whether they had seen it or not, were vaccinated (or plan to be) at rates of 93.8%. Belief alone was a stronger predictor than exposure.

Table 2 Percentage of respondents who have been vaccinated or plan to be, by narrative exposure and belief

	Were exposed	Were not exposed
Believed	56.9%	57.5%
Did not believe	97.2%	93.8%

Methodology

This is the seventh of a series of reports tracking diffusion of misinformation. Data in this wave were collected from an online panel of American adults, recruited by Qualtrics. Data were collected from 4th to 16th June 2021. The sample size was 693 (margin of error $\approx 4\%$). Fifty one percent of participants were female. The average age was 44.2 (SD = 17.4), with a range of 18 to 85. The sample was 61.9% white, 16.7% Black, and 7.7% Latina/Latino.

OSoMe

The Observatory on Social Media is a joint project of the Network Science Institute (IUNI), the Center for Complex Networks and Systems Research (CNetS) at the Luddy School of Informatics, Computing, and Engineering, and the Media School at Indiana University.