Trust in Medicine throughout Health Policy Change in the United States

Alyssa Peachey  
Pennsylvania State University, USA

Sung W. Choi  
Pennsylvania State University, USA

Abstract  
Despite the increasing number of in healthcare, the public is less confident in medicine today than 30 years ago. Decreased trust in medicine is problematic because fewer people will go to their doctor or comply with their medical treatments. The purpose of this research is to analyze the impact of healthcare policy change on the public’s confidence in Medicine, compared to several other large institutions including education, finance and all other institutions. Using 2006 – 2016 General Social Survey data, an ordered logistic regression model was adopted to analyze the association of the Affordable Care Act implementation with public trust in medicine over other institutions, controlling for respondents’ socioeconomic characteristics, demographic backgrounds and self-rated health. The odds of trusting medicine over other large institutions increased by 17.92% after implementation of the ACA. The multiple reasons behind increased public trust in medicine over other institutions were discussed.

Keywords: Affordable Care Act, confidence in medicine, policy change, public trust in institution

Introduction  
Medical technologies tirelessly do the work that improves our health and quality of life. Mobile stroke units, spectral computed tomography, and LED blue violet disinfectant have been ranked among some of the most advanced technology in 2018, according to the Emergency Care Research Institute. However, considering the number of medical advancements and treatments available, the public is less confident in Medicine today than 30 years ago (Mewes & Giordano, 2017; Twenge,
Campbell, & Carter, 2014; Zheng, 2015). There are several reasons why the public’s attitude towards the profession has changed though the decades. Increased online accessibility to medical errors and patient-safety horror stories have certainly impacted the public’s attitude toward medicine (Schlesinger, 2002). News outlets have well-publicized the great trepidations of seeking care in our healthcare system. Consequently, the outcome of greater social awareness of medical errors and the media’s pervasive coverage of what really goes on in hospitals reduces the legitimacy of professionals in Medicine (Schlesinger, 2002). In addition to any anxieties one may have about seeing a doctor, our health care system is expensive, time-consuming and difficult to navigate. If more Americans had insurance that gave them greater access to this system, would the levels of confidence in the institution rise despite the decline of trust over the past 30 years?

The most relevant data note that irrespective of the considerable amount of medical advancements made, confidence in medical institutions has declined. Interestingly, researchers believe that over the past three decades, Americans have gained more trust in their abilities to treat their diagnosis over their healthcare provider (Twenge et al., 2014). At the community health level, it is vital that patients and consumers trust their medical institutions and are compliant with their instructions. Surely, countless variables affect a patient’s level of trust or distrust in the medical institution, but the decline of trust could surge movements that negate evidence-based practice, such as refusal of immunizations. Studying the factors that lead to worsening or improving trust in healthcare will help providers and instructors in medical institutions understand how to communicate better, as well as, educate and follow up with specific populations.

Prior to the Affordable Care Act, arguably the last comparable health reform was the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid (Obama, 2016). The year prior to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, 44 million Americans were uninsured without affordable access to care (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2019). Patients without insurance are most likely forgoing their preventative yearly visits or even worse, unable to pay for their care entirely in the event of a traumatic injury. It seems palpable that limited access to healthcare could brew discontent among uninsured populations contributing to the trend of