



ATTITUDE OF PAKISTANIS TOWARDS COVID-19 VACCINES

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Pakistan is planning to induce COVID-19 vaccine jabs to 70% of its population by the end of year 2021. Myths, conspiracy theories, disinformation, stigma among people are the major impediments in this social welfare drive. The government of Pakistan has initiated the vaccination process from February 2021 in different phases. In the first phase, front-line health workers were planned to be vaccinated.¹ According to a report, 142,135 health workers in Sindh province registered for vaccination but only 33,356 health care workers vaccinated themselves.² In the second phase government has started vaccination process of senior citizens aged 60 and older. The influx of people remained very low. The third phase mass inoculation drive included people aged from 40 to 59. The fourth phase is just launched by the government to inoculate young people aged from 19 to 39.^{1,2}

The health authorities are hoping that COVID-19 vaccine jabs will help them to contain this pandemic, but unfortunately most of the people are not ready for vaccination. Conspiracy theories are spreading like hot-cakes in a Muslim-majority state.² According to a report, 49% Pakistanis are still reluctant to vaccinate themselves even if it's free of cost. Health experts opines, false religious beliefs, disinformation is adding fuel to fire for mistrust of people about

vaccines.³ Pakistan, a country with over 220 million population has recorded 916,239 coronavirus cases and reported 20,680 mortalities. People at large, think that the pandemic does not exist anywhere, another rumor mongering is Western countries has inserted a Surveillance microchip in vaccine shots.⁴ A cab driver said that he does not trust this vaccine, it might be a conspiracy propoganda from the West to spy on Pakistani people, his next apprehension was about the side-effects of vaccine which might alter his DNA and affect his future generation. Some people in Pakistan thinks that Vaccines are forbidden in Islam, as it contains pig's gelatin, alcohols, fetal tissues etc.¹

The main reservoir of this disinformation is a social media app named WhatsApp which is widely being used by 39% Pakistani people, other rumors on Youtube, Facebook is also exciting this very cause.²

Pakistan has successfully vaccinated 1,513,144 people so far, and these digits need urgent increase. Health experts are concerned if people will not take this pandemic seriously it might trigger another deadly wave of coronavirus.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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