

Overcoming the Vaccination-Religion Nexus in Pakistan

Stories Captured During Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine Campaign
In Islamabad, the Federal Capital of Pakistan,
February 2021



Preamble

The case studies enclosed in booklet have been collected during the “Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine Catch-up Campaign” conducted in Islamabad in February, 2021. The cases present an overall account of the methods, strategies and interventions utilized for advocacy, communication and social mobilization to overcome and counter vaccine hesitancy, particularly concerning TCV.

Through these case studies, the socio-cultural context of the refusal and resistant cases is elaborated. In that, cultural and religious conservatism, myths and misconceptions, the fear of side-effects, and the simultaneous roll-out of COVID—19 vaccine remained the most prominent causes of refusing TCV. In addition to this, the target audience comprised of populations in urban slums mostly and children in their early teenage years who proved difficult to handle due to their fear of injections. Therefore, these stories focus attention on how community engagement and interventions have helped address many myths, misconceptions, reservations and a general lack of awareness that have led to refusal towards vaccination of children to deadly childhood diseases, such as typhoid fever.

In order to counter vaccine hesitancy, these case studies provide evidences that trust in social mobilizers plays a pivotal role in convincing the more traditionally and culturally conservative communities. Additionally, in order to convince large close-knitted communities, engaging local influencers and notable persons from communities paves way in consolidating the trust of the communities and helps in countering their hesitancy. The role of communication skills of social mobilizers is another crucial factor in addressing the concerns of refusal cases. The case studies also underpin the importance of fact-based arguments, especially while addressing concerns of communities about side-effects. And since the TCV campaign targeted children between the ages of nine months to 15 years, the use of incentives for children in the form of stickers, crowns, ‘Tikku’, etc. played a significant role.

Overall, these cases of countering vaccine hesitancy further emphasize that primary data and assessments derived from local communities in Pakistan should be taken into account to understand the resistance to vaccination and immunization. Additionally, these case studies have been collated with an understanding that their broader dissemination would add to the existing knowledge of other civil society organizations working in the field of immunization so that increasingly integrated frameworks of collaboration can be instituted to ensure immunization coverage in Pakistan.

CHIP Team



The religious and culturally conservative communities in Pakistan are apprehensive towards receiving vaccinations. These settlements are mostly marked by make-shift houses, large family sizes, and strict adherence to purda for females. The settlements also have a history of refusing routine immunization. The campaign for TCV faced by similar refusal cases which emerged mainly from settlements in the outskirts of Islamabad inhabited by Afghan refugee populations.



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Afghan Basti Naseerabad

In order to overcome the socio-cultural conservatism in refusal cases, a two-prong strategy was utilized. First, Pashto-speaking CHIP supervisors were tasked with social mobilization in communities while females were also engaged who could disseminate TCV message to females in houses.



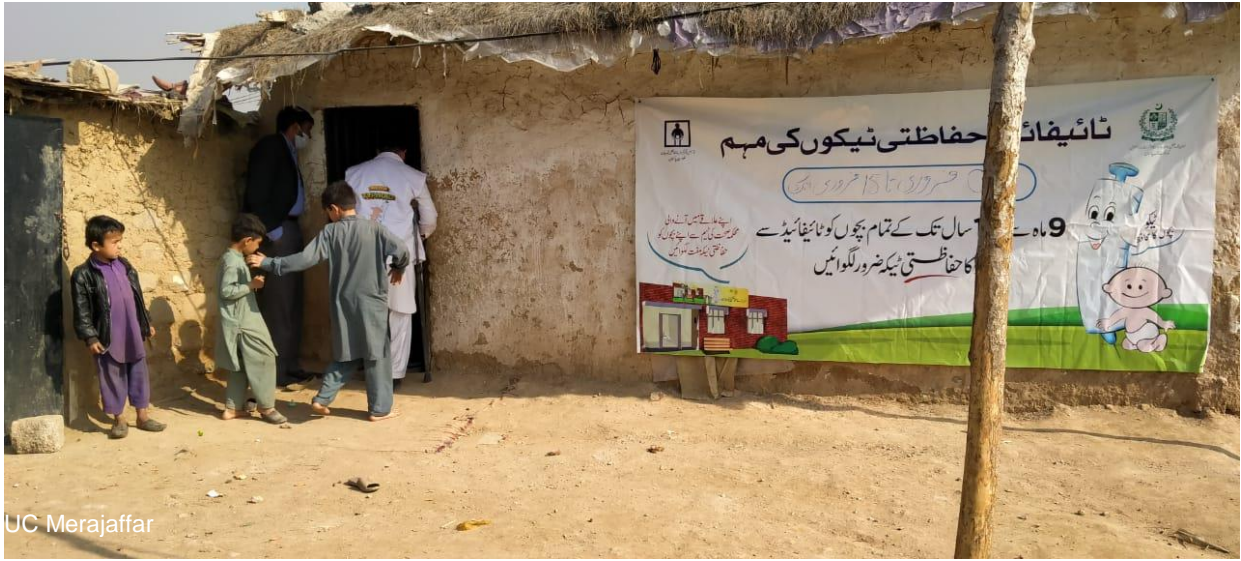
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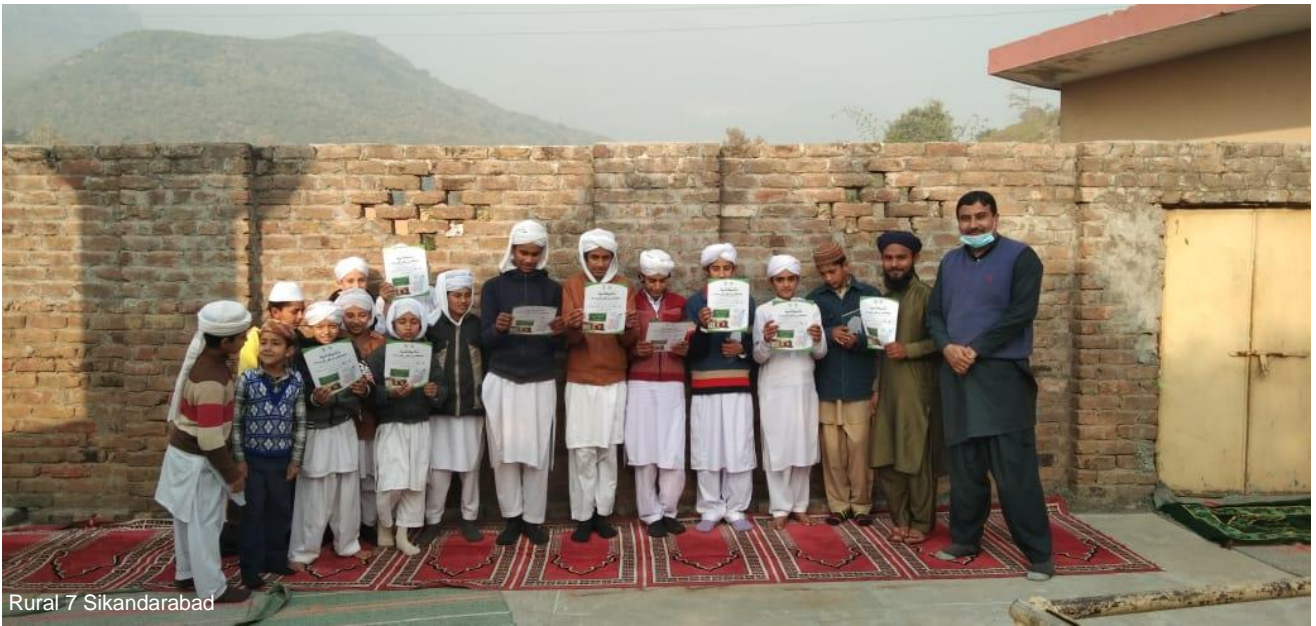


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And secondly, keeping in view the role of religion, local religious representatives and influencers were engaged to address the misconceptions and reservations of local communities. It was ascertained that religious leaders belonging to all sects and sections were engaged in such settlements.



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As a consequence of these efforts, TCV coverage was ensured in such secluded and resistant pockets of populations in Islamabad.



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