



Vaccine Reluctance in Pakistan, another Challenge in Covid-19 Pandemic

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Opinion

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently identified 10 threats to global health [1] including a reluctance to vaccinate or refusal to be vaccinated, reversing progress made in diminishing vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccine development is a great achievement to cater Covid-19 pandemic, but the hesitance to vaccinate may create devastating consequences. Although, the recent surveys in different countries have reported the vaccine reluctance to Covid-19, [2-4] but it is more drastic in Pakistan. Pakistan is on the verge to hit the third wave with more than 70% cases are with more infectious UK based mutant strain. Pakistan has procured the vaccine somehow and dedicated the first phase for the citizens of above 60 years of age (8 Million) [5]. As per figures supplied by the National Health Services, Pakistan, only 1,80,000 senior citizens have registered their selves for the vaccination, that is merely the 2.25% of the targeted population⁵ – creating an alarming situation. This denial to vaccination is not only limited to the residents of Pakistan but interestingly the similar trend has also been observed among the Pakistani immigrants in UK. In a Bradford based survey, Pakistanis are at top (23%) to refuse for the vaccination followed by the Bangladeshis and Indians, 15%, 6% respectively. We have already seen the failure in the eradication of polio virus due to the vaccine reluctance and WHO has declared the 80% responsibility of polio virus spread to Pakistan.⁶ This denial of vaccine in a specific community will act like a reservoir of Covid-19 as it is already in the case of polio virus. This could act as a serious threat to the global community and must be dealt with swift approaches.

In order to achieve the herd immunity, 70% individuals in a community should be vaccinated. Currently, it is important to run a vibrant and a large-scale public awareness campaign to overcome the conspiracy theories that are similar to the polio and influenza vaccines i.e., infidel vaccine, embedded nano chips, infertility, containing monkey fecal content [6] etc. It is also a well-established fact that a successful vaccination program requires high coverage,

prepared ground for acceptance and an effective delivery strategy. A rigorous campaign must be run by involving the public figures, religious scholar along with the social, print and electronic wings of the media. In Pakistan more than 90% population is following Islam, religion-based conspiracy theories i.e., infidel vaccine, embedded nano chips, birth control etc. can easily be addressed by prominent clerics taking in confidence. The spread of mis-information can be combated, and trust level can be strengthened by vaccinating the religious figures first or by sharing their success stories through the webinars, seminars and short video clips. It is also required to eliminate the ill-bound rumors about the preparation of Covid-19 vaccines, what does it contain, how it works, possible side effects. The team of local experts can be hired to educate the citizens to disseminate the rumors. In another global survey on “attitude to vaccines” it has been observed the publics with better awareness achieved high rates on vaccine acceptance [7]. Covid-19 vaccine reluctance is a matter of concern for global health, it must be addressed immediately by the administration of Pakistan along with the international watch dogs as country is already surrounded by many problems like lack of food security, floods, political instability and bad economy.

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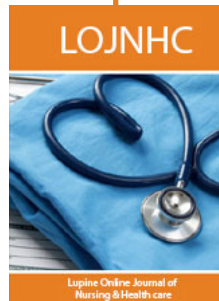
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