

CLINICAL RESEARCH

Analysis the Anti-Vaccination Movement in Afghanistan

Kimia Mohammadi^{1,2*} and Ahmad Kalateh Sadati^{1,2}

¹Health Policy Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

²Department of Sociology, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran

Correspondence should be addressed to Kimia Mohammadi, Health Policy Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran and Department of Sociology, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran

Received: 26 September 2022; Accepted: 10 October 2022; Published: 17 October 2022

Copyright © Kimia Mohammadi. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

ABSTRACT

Afghanistan is a country that, suffers with wars and problems related to health issues, and has many shortcomings. Especially in the area of infectious diseases such as measles, corona, paralysis, etc. There are many health challenges in remote areas since the spread of vaccines in this field in Afghanistan. Many groups opposed this process, including religious groups, rural women, clerics and other hidden groups that benefited from this. Therefore, this group talked about the harms of vaccination in mass media, gathered places and made people hesitate not to vaccinate, hence, this has become a challenge. The solution is to cooperate between the cooperating organizations and people who support the vaccine and increasing the level of public awareness of the vaccine, can go through a successful process in Afghanistan.

Almost majority of Afghan people are Muslims, and this has played a constructive role in determining the success of vaccination groups, and most of the anti-vaccination movements arise among religious groups. The research conducted in 2017 by Ali Ahmed amid Islamic countries has reached the conclusion that in Islamic countries, parents value moral approvals to vaccinate their children and get fatwas from clerics to vaccinate them, and sometimes the clerics refuse to do it because of disorder. DNA is known and causes its lack of trust among people, which lays the foundation of anti-vaccination movements.

KEYWORDS

Anti-vaccination; Vaccines; Afghanistan; Interpretation; Movement; Social media

INTRODUCTION

Vaccination prevents people from getting infected by infectious diseases. Afghanistan, which has vulnerable groups in every way, and based on economic poverty, the growth level of infectious diseases is very high, and in different parts of Afghanistan, especially women and children are more victims of this [1]. There are various diseases. In rural Afghanistan, the number of deaths of women, children and elderly due to infectious diseases is

significant, but in the past few decades, the World Health Organization, in cooperation with local governments, cooperative associations and volunteer groups, has sent vaccination groups to villages and centers to save children's and women's lives. The cities send, but they face the objections of some anti-vaccination groups. These groups advertise against the vaccine through the media, mosques and public places and consider it harmful to human's health. Stories such as lack of quality of vaccines, being haram, and the side effects of vaccines in the field of various diseases such as measles, tetanus, Kuwait 19, etc., are made up to dissuade people from vaccination. In fact, they challenge health groups and challenge the health guarantee of the society. In the research conducted regarding the Corona vaccine and antibodies, it is shown that the injection of vaccines among the elderly and women seems more necessary, but in most countries, anti-vaccine views are among people who challenge the success of vaccines and create doubts in the society and show the risky side of vaccines with fake stories [2-12].

Bearing in mind that the research conducted in 2021 by Spiliotopoulos, Spiliotopoulou [10] about anti-vaccine movements and public health has reached the conclusion that it plays a decisive role in growth and development of anti-vaccine views on social media, including Facebook [10]. In Afghanistan, the use of Facebook among young people reaches almost 95 percent, and in this way, anti-vaccination campaigns have achieved great success by creating advertisements and conspiracies against vaccine advocates.

The discussion of race and medicine is not meaningless in the provision of medical services in Afghanistan, and this itself causes the growth of groups that work against vaccines, and an example of this issue was seen in corona vaccine in America and Africa, where 43% of black people During the time of covid-19, have been deprived of vaccination services, and the synonym of this can also be examined among Afghan races 40% of ethnic groups such as Baloch, Turkmen, Peshai and the like have faced racial issues during the time of Corona virus and even measles [7].

If we refer to the research conducted in England in 2005, the controversies of antivaccine movements arose from moral roots and they used to chant that vaccines cause blood to be transferred from one person to another and transmit many diseases to humans. It means that not only it cannot cure the diseases, but also leads to the increase of the diseases [4].

In Afghanistan, by adapting this research, it can be said that the anti-vaccination point of view, after the previous fall of the first term of Taliban and the formation of the Karzai government, used morals and religion, and considered the vaccine as non-religious, and sometimes they considered it the cause of the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the depth of anti-vaccine views, conspiracy theory is necessary. Conspiracy theory in anti-vaccine movements implies that anti-vaccine groups promote their theories by giving the vaccine a bad name among people [6].

Another theory that is useful for understanding anti-vaccine movements is the narrative theory, which is widely used in Afghanistan and around the world. Antivaccination groups try to highlight the disadvantages of vaccines by defining historical narratives and people's lived experience. Stop vaccinating. Another theory which is

mentioned in anti-vaccine movements is the theory of development. The improvements of societies, especially social media, has caused many groups to work in different fields, and in the area of vaccines and their harm. There are extensive advertisements in the media. Social media is widely used in Afghanistan, and this shows that many groups are active in this area, including anti-vaccination groups.

Another theory that can be investigated in this field is the dual process theories. This theory shows that the people of a society in use of vaccines refer to the intuitive theory before they refer to analytical and logical theory and what is inspired and moral from it adapts four sides of the hearing and stands up against the vaccine. In Afghanistan, this intuitive dimension is more active than any other fields in the field of anti-vaccination movements, because people refer to the intuition of inspiration and morals for the affairs of life before they refer to reality.

BACKGROUND

The fear of vaccines is as old as the vaccine itself. From the day that vaccines and pro-vaccine groups started working, anti-vaccine groups also started spreading propaganda about the harms of vaccines among people, and some of them condemned and declared it haram. Increasing refusal and hesitancy of Muslim parents to accept children vaccination as one of the effective factors in increasing the cases of preventable diseases was identified from vaccines in countries like Afghanistan, Malaysia and Pakistan. Dissemination of false and irresponsible information by anti-vaccinationist created the movement, which may do more harm than good to Muslim communities. To curb this issue, Health authorities in Pakistan and Malaysia have imposed strict penalties on parents who do not allow their children to be vaccinated. Information related to religious concerns such as Halal issue should be prioritized and well communicated to the public and encouraging it is only the acceptance of vaccination that saves people from diseases, and this history has the same history as the vaccine itself has, but motivating communities to play an active role in promoting Vaccination is also important. The local government of the affected area should try to create awareness among Muslim parents that vaccination is a preventive public health strategy that has been done and It is approved by many doctors of all religions.

For the above-mentioned reasons, risks associated to vaccination have been always overemphasized, inspiring mistrust and anti-vaccine movements, whose arguments are often disseminated through unbalanced news media accounts of vaccine risks. The impact of anti-vaccine thinking (i.e., a combination of fear and mistrust) tended to oscillate over the time, declining in the 1940s, but then flourishing again in the 1970s. However, in accordance with Wolfe and Sharp who compared arguments of present-day vaccine opposition with those of 19th century counterparts, “beliefs have remained remarkably constant over most part of two centuries, suggesting that such beliefs are deeply held.

According to Butler the composition of vaccine opponents is rather diversified. They may be alternative medicine advocates, such as herbalists, naturalists, conspiracy, theorists, pseudoscientists, people with a political agenda, or belonging to anthroposophist communities or religious groups. In Europe, all member States have a vaccine opposition in one form or another, but there is no anti-vaccine lobby uniform, since they have diverse agendas, they are more individualistic than organized, and they are neither powerful nor well-funded as in the US. The history of anti-vaccination movements in Afghanistan goes back to the time when Karzai's rule, after the fall of

the Taliban, vaccines for paralysis, measles, etc. started working until the time of the Corona virus. They have started to advertise among people and have told about the harms of vaccination such as sterilization of young people, death of the elderly, etc., in social media and mosques.

METHODS

In this research, keeping in mind Afghanistan and its current situation, antivaccination movements and the interpretation of anti-vaccination views have been explored, and not to forget the worldview of the research and its subject, and also the research taste of the researcher using a qualitative method with a grounded theory approach has been used. In this method, the researcher entered the research field and collected the data in the research text from the experience of participants, and interviewees told the real story of their lives. Also, the data was collected impartially through in-depth interviews and coded in three stages. It has been done in first open coding where the text passages were extracted and the data edited, and then concepts were extracted in the axial coding and finally in selective coding stage. The core category is defined, which tells the main story of the research in this article, an in-depth interview was conducted with ten people who were from most Provinces of Afghanistan and who had injected multiple vaccines every day and told about their experience.

Findings

Traditionalism and vaccines

In this research, all the participants have agreed that more than 80 percent of Afghan people live in villages and all of them are trapped in the trap of traditions and misconceptions, although, a small percentage of Afghan people have accepted the vaccine. There are many people who rise from within the traditions and chant against vaccination.

Anti-vaccination groups in Afghanistan are more noticeable among illiterate women and religious people. They consider vaccination haram and look at it with a religious approach. People who have been interviewed from different provinces of Afghanistan such as Herat, Kabul, Bamyan and Ghazni have emphasized that the traditional view of health causes Afghan women and men to show opposition to vaccination and make others hesitant not to vaccinate.

Religious medicine

Religious medicine is a type of medicine that people turn to Sheikhs and Mullahs to find solutions to their health problems. And many people in Afghanistan go to pilgrimage sites and pray to get well. Such beliefs among people make the society discouraged from vaccination. The participants of this research confirmed that superstitions still rule in Afghanistan and people use it with different beliefs, of course, spiritual people call this religious medicine. The history of vaccines in Afghanistan is tied to superstitions of course people also have a bitter experience with vaccines, which has contributed to the strength of anti-vaccination movements and views in Afghanistan.

Dispersal conspiracy

Dispersal conspiracy exists in all societies, especially in developed countries it can be seen to a large extent. Dispersal conspiracy existed during the time of vaccines by different groups in different countries, including Afghanistan and this group, for example, uses social media, mass programs and mosques to report the harms of

vaccines, and the participants of this research have also emphasized that this group introduced the vaccine as a black phenomenon and made the society hesitant or prevented from vaccinating, all the participants had this understanding.

Rumors about the corona vaccine can be seen in Afghanistan, and the participants point out that the anti-vaccine groups were chanting that corona vaccine would make young people sterile, and they also started rumors about other vaccines among people. And from participants point of view, in Afghanistan' society, women mostly listen to these rumors and act on them, because the rate of infectious diseases is very high in Afghanistan. This disease has grown more when extremist groups and anti-vaccination groups have actively prevented people from getting vaccinated.

Economic poverty

Afghanistan is one of the poorest country in the world. In Afghanistan, poverty is widespread in rural and urban areas. However, it has been estimated that poverty in Afghanistan is mainly concentrated in rural areas. It has been estimated that four out of five poor people live in rural areas. In these rural areas, families without enough access to adequate nutrition see many infants and children become stunted, malnourished, and die each year. The regions in Afghanistan where almost half of the inhabitants are poor are the East, Northeast, and West-Central regions. According to Afghan government's estimates, a huge population of Afghan people lives below the poverty line. Also, half of people who are living just above the poverty line are highly vulnerable to falling into poverty. The interviewees of this research believed that a large percentage of vaccines used in Afghanistan come from outside. Afghanistan due to economic poverty, and antivaccine movements use this and incite religious groups against vaccines. They say that vaccines are not Islamic.

Cultural poverty

In relation to cultural poverty, it should be said that in Afghanistan, more than 70 percent of people are illiterate, especially women, who are mostly victims of illiteracy in Afghanistan and most of these literate women live in villages, which are far from cities. After the fall of Afghanistan, the level of illiteracy has continued to increase, women and girls have been deprived of literacy. The interviewees, of whom there are women and men, believe that illiteracy is the only root that strengthens the anti-vaccination groups in Afghanistan because those people who are not literate, and cannot refer to social media or read books, will definitely believe every rumor and hesitate. The participants evaluated women as more naive than men in medical matters and believe that women's society is less inclined to vaccination, although ethnic, racial and geographical discriminations are not meaningless in this field.

RESULT

During the research, an in-depth interview was conducted with ten people with a qualitative approach, in the meantime, the researcher tried to stop the interviews with data saturation and the clues that were extracted during the interview. It has been extracted from the participant interviews in a detailed and deep way. In this research, all the interviewees emphasized the effects of religion, ruling traditions, economic and cultural poverty in the growth of anti-vaccination groups in Afghanistan. Also, the participants pointed out the hidden activity of these groups and paid attention to the fact that Afghanistan's society, due to economic and cultural poverty, takes help

from religion and superstitions instead of getting help from science in health matters. Anti-vaccine groups have become more active in spreading rumors against vaccines and advertise its harms among people with the help of mosques and social media.

DISCUSSION

In this research, interviews have been conducted with people who, did the corona vaccine, and also received vaccines such as measles, polio, etc., and they were afraid of the corona vaccine. But in the other vaccines, they were not afraid and they did them safely by themselves and their relatives. These participants believed that anti-vaccine movements have been very active in the vaccine sector and have used every loophole to make vaccines look harmful. Also, the interviewees of this research, who have used Johnson's corona virus vaccine and other vaccines, say that they also have been active in anti-vaccination groups before giving this vaccine, but it was unwanted and uninformed. And they have added that they have helped spread rumors in the society against the vaccine and they have told and argued about the harms of vaccine among their relatives. In the same way, the interviewees emphasized the lived experience in the growth of antivaccine movements in Afghanistan and added that sometimes lack of experts in vaccine is the reason why the vaccine causes medical challenges and allergies which has caused people's pessimism and the growth of anti-vaccination movements, for example, during corona virus vaccination, a large percentage of the vaccinated people got skin allergies and heart fever after being vaccinated, or they got infected again. Corona virus has not played any role.

Either other vaccines such as red and the like have had must present of the vaccination of spots on the skin or some other sensitivities that have a direct role in being hesitant about vaccines and people have become anti-vaccine groups from their experience has been.

CONCLUSION

The result of this research provides similar reasons with the arrival of vaccines after the previous Taliban government, radical movements against these vaccines started to operate with religious, cultural and political approaches. Because the literacy level of Afghan people is very low and social disorders are high in society, especially among women, these groups have continued their movements actively until now. Considering the theories of participants of this research and the presentation of their life stories. It is understood that although the villages of Afghanistan have more or less accepted other vaccines, are strongly opposed to the corona vaccine and avoid it.

REFERENCES

1. Ahmed A, Lee KS, Bukhsh A et al. (2018) Outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases in Muslim majority countries. *Journal of Infection and Public Health* 11(2): 153-155.
2. da Rosa Amaral A, Jung AK, Braun LM et al. (2022) Narratives of anti-vaccination movements in the German and Brazilian twittersphere: A grounded theory approach. *Media and Communication* 10(2): 144-156.
3. Stefanelli P and Rezza G (2014) Contrasting the anti-vaccine prejudice: A public health perspective. *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità* 50: 06-09.
4. Durbach N (2005) *Bodily matters: The anti-vaccination movement in England, 1853–1907*. Duke University Press.

5. Glasper EA (2021) Reducing the impact of anti-vaccine propaganda on family health. *Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing* 44(2): 79-85.
6. Introne J, Korsunska A, Krsova L et al. (2020) Mapping the narrative ecosystem of conspiracy theories in online anti-vaccination discussions. In *International Conference on Social Media and Society*: 184-192.
7. Batelaan K (2022) 'It's not the science we distrust; it's the scientists': Reframing the anti-vaccination movement within Black communities. *Global Public Health* 17(6): 1099-1112.
8. Kandiyoti D (2005) The politics of gender and reconstruction in Afghanistan (No. 4). UNRISD Occasional Paper.
9. Wardak MF, Rahimi A, Ahmadi A et al. (2021) COVID-19 vaccination efforts: Is Afghanistan prepared?. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 105(5): 1137.
10. Spiliotopoulos N and Spiliotopoulou M (2021) The anti-vaccination movement: A serious threat to public health. *HAPSc Policy Briefs Series* 2(1): 208-213.
11. Okuhara T, Ishikawa H, Okada H et al. (2020) Dual-process theories to counter the anti-vaccination movement. *Preventive Medicine Reports* 20: 101205.
12. Wolfe RM and Sharp LK (2002) Anti-vaccinationists past and present. *BMJ* 325(7361): 430-432.