

Myths surrounding Covid-19 Vaccination: a study of Punjab

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Abstract

A vaccination that is feared seems to be the failure of Indian healthcare system. No vaccination till date was feared as much as the vaccination for covid-19. The main concept of this article was to understand why people are trying to avoid getting vaccinated. An interview survey in the major cities of Punjab is performed and the few myths were deciphered with some solutions too. The vaccination drive of corona is the biggest in India ever and the most failed one too. The changing statements of the government are not helping much. The lack of international support for the vaccination is another problem. The article highlights few of the hurdles faced by Indians in term of vaccination.

Keywords: vaccination, covid-19, myths, driving factors.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 as the name suggested came into being in 2019, there are many controversies on its emergence and spread but whatever it is deserves another day of discussion. The main problem India is facing is getting the Indians to believe in the vaccine being given to them. There are two main vaccines that are being circulated around in India, Covaxin and Covishield

COVAXIN

It is one of the vaccine formulated in India against covid-19. It contains inactivated corona virus and is given intramuscular. It is given in two doses both equal in strength but the second one is given as a booster dose. The vaccine was formed by Bharat Biotech under the research name BBV152. It was developed in collaboration with ICMR. It was formulated on the concept that dead virus can't replicate but still have the tendency to build once immunity. The two doses are given 28 days apart. It needs a storage at 2-8 degree Celsius. As stated by

Bharat biotech COVAXIN demonstrated 78% vaccine efficacy against mild, moderate, and severe COVID-19 disease. The efficacy against severe COVID-19 disease was 100% with an impact on reduction in hospitalizations.

COVISHIELD

Astrazeneca and serum institute of India together formulated the vaccination against covid-19 under the trade name of covishield. It contains non-replicating viral vectors. It is an intramuscular vaccine. The research name of the vaccine is AZD1222. The other name of the vaccine which is not so common is oxford astrazeneca vaccine. There are two doses given each of 0.5 ml with no difference in their strength 12-15 weeks apart. The major contradiction for vaccination is any allergic reaction or in case after 1st dose there was clot formation in combination with decreased platelet count.

There are many myths surrounding covaxin and covishield use. The initial drive of vaccine was

started with covaxin and now the main vaccine being used is covishield.

Myths that surround the vaccinations

While interviewing people from Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana, the myths that we came across were both serious and hilarious. Rehman Singh, age 24 years, a hotel Manager in ludhiana by profession stated that “he didn’t want to receive the vaccine as it may cause side effects like blood clotting and he being the only son didn’t want to take the risk.” Shankutla Devi, 45 year old, a mere villager in Dakoa, Jalandhar stated simply “There is nothing like corona, government is making it up to get rid of our farmers at the border. They are not giving any medicine all they are doing is injecting water in your body.” Kishan Singh, 62 year old farmer from Amritsar, went on to say that “I eat a healthy diet, I don’t need to get vaccinated, my immunity is already at its best level, it is for city-dwellers who eat junk these days.” Inderjeet singh, a 35 year old , doctor in jalandhar said that “ he himself asked a few patients why weren’t they getting vaccinated and their answers shocked him , they had heard from a source that after 2 years of getting vaccinated one tends to succumb to the changes vaccine causes in our body.” Many more people both villagers and city-dwellers, professional and non-professional, educated and non-educated were asked five basic questions, the five research questions were

RQ1- Would one like to get vaccinated?

RQ2- The reason of not getting vaccinated

RQ3- The source that guided them so

RQ4- What could instigate believe in them

RQ5- If the contents of vaccine were explained would they still not accept it?

Vaccination is a Go or a no Show

As it turns out vaccination was not accepted by people wholeheartedly, the few people that were interviewed either refused to get vaccinated or the one who agreed did so that the nation could start getting back to normalcy it had before. Vaccination according to some

was a joke, a fraud or a need, but for none was it an acceptancy. Digging deep one understood the dilemma the world is facing and just to put a stop to that the hope of vaccination was considered. In India people believe myths from facts. It is how we explain India is the simplest language, so introducing something that was not Godly would automatically pose problems. The answer to research question one was 85% against getting vaccinated. Some were stipulating the role of education but as the study progressed education played no role, it was the believe one held that played the major role in acceptance of the vaccine

Myths or facts

Few myths that we came across while studying this article are listed below:-

- Getting vaccinated will have a lot of side-effects and one may succumb to it, so I rather take my chances washing hands and wearing mask
- Social media group on whatsapp had a news in which scientists claim that the people who are getting vaccinated will die in 2 years, how easily a fake news spreads on social media this is the biggest example. In support with this they stated that the person who got vaccinated as the primary or first recipient died already.
- The vaccination may cause changes in one’s body especially since the young generation is at fertile age they would not want to risk losing the ability to reproduce for obvious reasons.
- Indian vaccine, the mere word India doomed the usage of vaccine, if it is made in India it is useless, we would prefer Pfizer, mederna or sputnik
- The sole bread earner of the family should not get vaccinated because if he succumbed to it who will take care of the family.
- It’s all a scam, there is nothing like corona, it is only a strategy of government to avoid their duties for citizens.

- Corona a threat, modi government raised so that our farmers would leave border. If the government is so concerned about the health of citizens and corona is a thing one could heed to the request of citizens and end the protest.
- My neighbour suffered from an autoimmune disorder after he got vaccinated, why would, I knowingly cause injury to my body.
- The vaccine Covaxin is not even approved by world health organisation how can one trust it
- Covishield is prohibited in Canada because of its side-effects like blood clotting' who can say that it won't do the same to us
- For villagers its only water and they already have the strength they don't need artificial strength
- If you has corona already , one doesn't need to get vaccinated
- For some it can alter our DNA as it contains toxins.

Sources of these myths

- Social media apps like whatsapp
- Word of mouth
- Newspapers
- World health organization in case of covaxin
- Near and dear ones.
- Scientific studies

Making it believable

Only things that are said by the religious persons are mostly followed in India. One believes their guru more than the doctors. Recent news in India of Baba Ramdev deeming the vaccination and corona medicines to be unfit spread like fire. The followers supported his belief. It was only after he apologized that somethings got under control but still in mind of the followers they feel he was forced to do so. Dr. Khafeel Khan in his study stated that

“India’s mission Indradhanush is the largest strategy in the world so far pertaining to immunisation, every year there are millions of cohorts who are given vaccination. The mission was derailed after the pandemic came into existence. India decided to administer 500 million doses of covid vaccine by June 2021 for which they need to double up their strategy as they are far behind the set aim.” The misinformed people need to be educated with the help of people they follow. Actors, religious gurus, politicians, doctors and even a mere layman plays an important role in making it a success.

Conclusion and recommendations

In Punjab the major issue that people are facing are the agricultural reforms suggested by the government and that is the reason people are conceptualizing reasons behind the sudden surge of covid-19. Most of the people mainly farmers and those related to them are not willing to believe anything said by government, they question the mere existence of corona. The solution to their problem is the only way they will gain believe in the government again. The others can be educated by doctors, by providing advertisements, explaining what actually the vaccine is about, why is it causing side-effects in some, can be a solution. A prior testing of antibodies of corona before administering it can be fruitful too. The misinformed need to be informed and the government needs to gain by the trust it has lost especially when it comes to Punjab. May be these recommendations will help or they may not but if they come into play there can be some changes that are warranted in these times

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