

## Myths Associated With Covid-19 Infection

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COVID-19 has affected the wide number of individuals globally. The gravity and the fast spread of the disease have led the researchers and the scientist around the world to take several steps to combat the disease.<sup>1</sup> The rapid spread of the infection also brought along numerous conspiracy theories and created panic of spreading disease and develop various myths.<sup>2,3</sup> The source of expeditious dissemination of myths is social media. One of the measures other than social distancing and limiting overcrowding is vaccination of individuals. The researchers are working in a collaborative environment to develop vaccines that can save everyone from the drastic consequences. WHO testify that a great number of individuals are reluctant to get vaccinated.<sup>4,5</sup>

Sahoo et al have stated several myths that people have in their minds related to the spread and precautionary measures against covid-19 infection. These include the use of garlic, turmeric and lemon as home remedies, the virus killed in saline water, heating can kill the infection, donating blood can make an individual prone to catch virus, newspapers are considered as sources of virus spreading as the virus can remain there for several hours and if someone develops covid infection, the virus will always remain in body.<sup>3</sup> There are several reasons behind this apprehensive approach including religious beliefs, misinformation about the effects of vaccine and lack of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Rutten et al have documented that lack of confidence in vaccination results in refusal of vaccine. Other reasons include the rapid development of vaccine, social media propaganda and the sociopolitical environment surrounding the people.<sup>6</sup> Similarly a research conducted in USA has stated that the reason behind lack of vaccination includes believing that Covid-19 is a myth and also the disbelief in regarding the safety of the vaccine.<sup>7</sup> Al-Kuraishy reported that in Iraq the myths are communicated in great number through a social media platform via Facebook. Many believe that the disease can be prevented by spraying face masks with disinfectants and chlorine, not realizing that the intervention can be a source of pneumonitis and chemical poisoning. The infodemic

spread by charlatans regarding the beneficial effects of onion, garlic and peganum seeds in prevention from disease prevails in high numbers.<sup>8</sup> The decision to be vaccinated or not also depends on the social, cultural and political values surrounding people. These days, the propaganda on the media has made the people disbelieve the affectivity of vaccines against the pandemic. The anti-vaccine attitude surrounding society lead to failure of vaccination program and their success.<sup>5</sup>

Pakistan is no different from other regions; in fact the reluctance witnessed here is way ahead of other nations. We as a nation are still not being able to eradicate polio. The major reason for still having polio and doubtfulness in getting vaccinated for both polio and covid is due to myths that are present in peoples' mind regarding the consequence of being vaccinated. The natives of Pakistan believe that the vaccination is a planned conspiracy against the Muslim nations and that is why the common men stay away from being enrolled for free of cost vaccination.<sup>2</sup> Another study conducted in Pakistan has also reflected the myth oriented mindsets of the Pakistani natives. The public believe that use of hand dryer, taking warm bath, staying in a warm environment, nose rinsing with saline water are among the measures that can prevent the illness. This study reported that (55.3%) of participants had false beliefs that the Covid virus is a bioweapon that was made by the government authorities and it was made in laboratory to harm the general public.<sup>9</sup> Yang et al in their study have highlighted various false perceptions that have been spread through twitter. The public believes that the spread of covid infection is done through cell phones' 5G technology. The infodemic such as the virus is being spread through mobile phones make it sounds like a computer virus rather a biological one. Additionally people believe that drinking alcohol prevents the covid virus infection.<sup>10</sup>

The myths related to the pandemic, its spread and infection have also created stress among the individuals leading to the development of fear and anxiety among the affected ones.<sup>10</sup> Many have become obsessive compulsive as they think that virus could attack them from any surface or any person they come in contact with.<sup>8</sup> The anxious behavior and fear of unknown is causing various mental ailments. Also, the life during quarantine has also brought several psychological, emotional and social impacts associated with the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> A study conducted in West Africa documented

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that the natives believed that drying hands with the hair dryer and use of hand sanitizers can kill the virus.<sup>11</sup> Vraga et al in their study have mentioned the role of social media in the spread of misconceptions. The general public without any know how of the science behind the virus infectivity and Covid-19 prevention possibilities, spread misperceptions that lead to misunderstandings on a whole. It was concluded that genuine fact based information in the form of graphics can have a powerful effect on the disruption of Covid-19 based myths. Although such measures cannot fully control the disinformation but reduction and busting of myths by organizations like WHO, can certainly occur at the level of general public.<sup>12</sup> Dutta et al in their study also highlighted the myths that affect the general population. People believe that exposure in sunlight have protective effects against the pandemic. Other common myths include the transmission of infection by mosquito bites, thermal detectors can detect whether a person has containment of virus within the body, consumption of alcohol as a protection against the deadly virus, affectivity of antibiotics in the treatment of Covid-19, acid in the stomach has the ability of killing virus within the body provided consumption of ample water is taken. Other interesting myths include the destruction of virus by clapping hands and by reciting religious chants. Also, the people believe that Indian people have better immunity than the west and they can face the Corona virus without having any detrimental effects on their bodies.<sup>13</sup> Sarla et al also mentioned myths like eating meat and keeping pets can lead to the spread of virus.<sup>14</sup>

The myths regarding Covid infection and its spread have caught the attention of the general public on a larger scale. The false believes lead to wrong comprehension and imaginations regarding the virus.<sup>15</sup> Contextually in Pakistan, there is excessive burden of virus, various stake holders has to work together to halt the spreading of disinformation such as Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority has to take measures that can stop false media propaganda. The health professionals should come on social media to create awareness among the people. The policy makers should take a step forward in abolishing the false prevalent beliefs and surveillance based information should be available on social media. To rectify the religious misconceptions regarding the vaccines, the Islamic scholars of the country should have meetings with health and government officials so all of them can be on one page. This step could help clear several ambiguities in people's mind regarding the vaccines being halal or haram. By working collaboratively, the medical authorities would be able to neutralize the conspiracies budding in peoples' minds.

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**Quratulain Javaid:** Substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data

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