

## Community Response towards Polio Vaccination at Bajaur Agency Pakistan: A Case Study of Ghazi Baba

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### Abstract:

*Polio is a very sensitive issue ruled medical research. WHO and other organisations, working for human health, are trying their level best to eradicate this menace of underdeveloped and developing countries including Pakistan. Keeping in view the current scenario of polio, the present study was conducted at Village Ghazi Baba, Bajaur Agency. In order to evaluate the community response towards polio vaccination, this qualitative type research through in depth interviews were conducted among the local people of the study area. This study revealed that the local masses are miss-guided by the local leaders by creating different miss beliefs in their mind such as; polio vaccines diminish reproductive capabilities of their children, making them disrespectful towards parents and elders, and it is a campaign to eradicate their population etc. It is urgently needed to educate these masses by arranging trainings, seminars and workshops for them. Mass awareness programs should be initiated on large scale to vanish*

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*the false beliefs created by the local leaders and awaking masses regarding this threat. If not possible for the government, the program should be outsourced to a third party or the government along with institutions and organizations, working for human health, must work together to eradicate this disastrous jeopardy. This is not a time to trifle with such an important cause otherwise Pakistanis might face more travel restrictions as WHO is going to meet in November this year. Before be quarantined by the world, something really urgent is needed to be done.*

**Key words:** Vaccine, Community, Eradication, Security, Religious leaders

## **1. Introduction**

Poliovirus is still endemic in a number of countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. These countries have never been professed polio free. During January 2013 to May 2014 wild poliovirus got re-introduced into many countries of the world including Egypt, Cameroon, Equatorial Africa, Ethiopia, Israel, Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia and Kenya (MOH, 2014). Poliovirus is highly contagious and specific to humans. It causes polio or poliomyelitis, a highly contagious and acute infectious disease. It can lead to paralysis, breathing problems and even death. Poliovirus is generally found in areas with poor sanitation. It can easily spread through faecal-oral route via contaminated water and food, unhygienic conditions and inappropriate dumping of waste fluids (WHO, 2014). It can also pass of infected persons through direct contact with normal incubation period of 7–14 days (Atkinson *et al.*, 2009). The control measure of polio is done through vaccination.

According to world health organisation 406 polio cases were reported globally in 2013, while in 2012, 223 cases were reported. Polio is endemic to Pakistan (93 cases), Nigeria (53 cases) and Afghanistan (14 cases) in 2013. A number of new cases were also reported from Cameroon (4 cases), Ethiopia (9

cases), Kenya (14 cases), Syria (25 cases) and Somalia (194 cases). Till May 2014, a number of cases are reported from Pakistan (66 cases), Afghanistan (4 cases), Nigeria (3 cases), Equatorial Guinea (3 cases), Cameroon (3 cases), Iraq (1 case), Syria (1 case) and Ethiopia (1 case). More information regarding polio cases are available at ([www.polioeradication.org/Infectedcountries/PolioEmergency.aspx](http://www.polioeradication.org/Infectedcountries/PolioEmergency.aspx)). In the month of September 2014, 23 new polio cases have been reported and is still counting (Express Tribune, 2014). Figures 1 to 4 are showing polio cases in last 6 months, 12 months, 2013 and 2014 (<http://www.polioeradication.org/>). Figure 5 is showing intensified Transit Sites (WHO Report, 2014).

As polio is one of the major problems, we are passed with. The miss beliefs of the elders and religious leaders are making the issue even more miserable. Most of the people are not having basic knowledge regarding polio and its disastrous effects. Therefore the local masses do not use to take vaccine and do not let their children to be vaccinated. In the past year this issue has been the core issue of Pakistan especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Therefore our study was aimed to know about the response of local community towards polio at Ghazi Baba, Bajaur Agency.

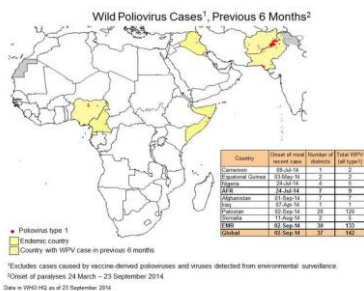


Figure 1. Polio cases in last six months

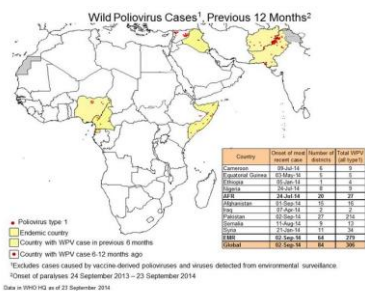


Figure 2. Polio cases in last twelve months

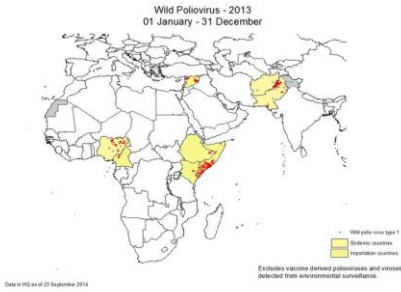


Figure 3. Polio cases in 2013

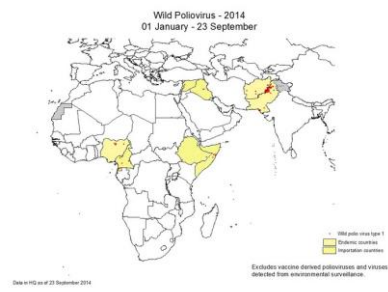


Figure 4. Polio cases in 2014 till Sep 2013

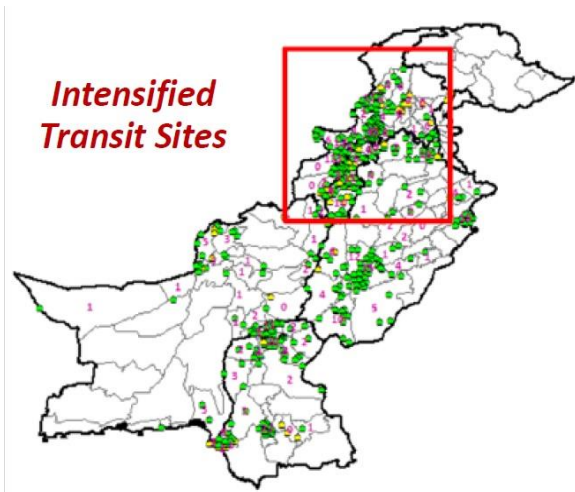


Figure 5. Intensified transit sites for Polio in Pakistan

### 1.1 Limitation of the study

During the study period on account of curfew imposition and hesitation shown by the local people during interview, economical problem, problem related to transport, and less interest and cooperation of the local people limited our study to Ghazi Baba only.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. Study Area

This study was conducted at Ghazi Baba, a hilly area of Bajaur Agency Pakistan. Bajaur is an agency of the tribal belt,

notoriously known for terrorist attacks. The reason for selecting this belt for this specific study is due to the fact that campaign has been underway against polio for many years in the very same belt with less or no result.

## **2.2. Data Collection**

The study conducted was of qualitative type. An effort was made to know about the observation of the participants through in-depth interviews. The interviews were focused on perception of local masses towards polio.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The study was conducted in the tribal belt of Pakistan in Bajaur Agency. At the time of the study the Pakistan military operation against terrorists was in full swing and the target area of the study is also the integral part of tribal belt. So, it was never easy to collect information about polio vaccination. During data collection the people were quite scarred and hesitated but the things got a bit normal after some time being in them. The local people were thinking of the researchers as spy outside first and did not allow interviewing them.

Those who were reluctant to vaccinate their children were of the view, that it is a western diplomacy against Muslims, which leads to infertility and family planning. Especially they considered polio is a campaign against the Muslim world. They were disagreeing of not vaccinating their children and were considering polio vaccine as their sole enemy. After 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, they started unending war in most part of the world including the tribal belt of Pakistan. This thing provoked a narrow and negative image of America among the local people. So whatever project or program was launched in the study area, it was considered as a threat and harmful for the Muslims. WHO campaign was against polio to vaccinate the local subjects, but local masses

linked WHO with America and refuse to vaccinate their children. This miss belief shaped polio as a menace for the entire belt.

The local leaders are using the religious fanaticism of the local masses. This thing is playing its role against polio in the belt. The religious leaders are having strong and rigid miss beliefs that polio drops are anti-Islamic, anti-Quran and so on. As their followers are very conservative and stubborn, so they strictly follow these miss beliefs. Due to these leaders, they did not vaccinate their children and elevating the chances and cases of this devastating infection. The researchers were very much surprised to come across a statement. Some religious leaders are of the view that polio vaccine is manufactured of pig flesh which is haram for Muslim. These leaders are of the opinion that if Pakistan government is really interested in eradicating this menace then they should develop their own vaccines according to Quran and Sunnah.

Some of the religious leaders and followers were of the opinion that polio drops is just to disturb our reproductive physiology and minimize our population. According to them reduction in population will lead to weakness in Jihad and fight against those working against Islam.

The researchers came across a shocking reply when asked of not vaccinating their children. Majority of the respondents told that the disobedience in present young generation is attributed by polio vaccine. They told that these young ones do not respect their parents and elders in society and is not a good sign for social relation continuity. They urged that after introducing polio vaccination, their children and Youngers are not respecting and valuing their elders and parents.

When asked about the performance of polio teams, the respondents replied in negation. They told that their children are not vaccinated on time and are having no or less awareness regarding this very acute disease. According to them the

government are spending much money on them and are providing them with proper security yet they are not following government instructions. We observed a very delighting thing that government has organized polio teams performing their duties. They are working in days other than campaign days and are vaccinating children in the protection of security forces. We also observed a religious leader vaccinating children at a check post. That was really a great message for other those who oppose polio vaccination.

Most of the interviewers expressed their hesitation and urged that why government and NGOs sector is spending so much on polio eradication, as there are other most dangerous and prevailed diseases such as TB and Cancer. They were doubtful about the monitoring system of polio team. According to them one team vaccinate their children, second team monitor them and at last world health organization use to send its teams for assuring vaccination. They were also suggesting that the government should involve local masses in these campaigns and should recruit the local jobless people for these projects and secure their future perspectives. This will also make the project to run more smoothly and successfully as these personals will easily and efficiently convince the local people.

According to the educated interviewers, lack of social awareness is one of the main reasons for these people not vaccinating their children. The local masses are even unknown of fatal diseases. They are not having access to television, newspapers and digital media etc. According to them the government should organize trainings, workshops, seminars, symposiums and awareness program at root level. They must visit each and every village and educate all masses regarding this fatal infectious disease. This will aware the people opposing polio vaccination and will be a positive step towards eradicating and curing this menace. Lack of education is one of the main hurdles as the elders are illiterate and are opposing these campaigns and other developmental projects. They urged

that education provide basis for any society and social community structure. Therefore the government should take an initiative for educating these masses by building schools, colleges and other technical institutes in these areas.

Socio-cultural obstacles are also playing its role, as some of the respondents told that we have to follow our local customs and traditions. We have to follow our social norms and values. Violating even of these is considered as apostate and the local maliks or land lords sent them out of the region. After evacuating from the region, they cannot enter again there. Such inhumanity also forced many people to death. FCR is a very callus law in the agency, which had already given unacceptable verdicts against these innocent people.

Many of the interviewers told that the polio drops are delivered by the WHO free of cost and anything which is free has no value.

The respondents, favouring polio vaccination was considering the above mention findings as a negative propaganda of non-state actors. The local elders of the area were also interviewed. The response were mix, half were favouring vaccination while half were opposing it. The most interesting thing was most of them were not answering the questions on account of fear of government and local levies force. It was observed by the researchers that two security members accompany polio teams and protect them against any type of aggression or threat.

The study area comes within Bajaur Agency, having more number of educated and modernized masses as compare to other agencies. Therefore these people are a bit aware of polio and it is not that much prevailed in the area. But it is quite saddening that the rate of polio cases is increasing in number in other agencies. The number of reported cases throughout the country is 146 and is still counting. The majority of cases are reported from FATA. It is of no surprise that North Waziristan among the tribal belt is most effected



one, followed by Khyber Agency. These both areas have been in conflict for a longer time and have witnessed large scale enforced migration. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rank second with 25 cases while Sindh with 11 cases rank third. Balochistan is having 2 cases while Punjab is having 2 cases of polio. The cases reported of FATA are of those children, who have not been vaccinated once, while the one from elsewhere have had a history of irregular immunisation (Express Tribune, 2014). In the month of September 2014, 23 new polio cases have been reported and are still counting.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study concludes that polio has been eradicated up to 99% globally but cases are still there, paralyzing children in Pakistan. There are two reasons of high cases of polio in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including; 25 % of children in FATA is not being reached consistently because of long time deadly conflicts with insurgents and 10% of children are not vaccinated on account of not reaching them or refusal of their parents to immunise them. The study also revealed that the local masses are miss-guided by the local leaders by creating different miss beliefs in their mind such as; polio vaccines diminish reproductive capabilities of the children, making them disrespectful towards parents and elders, and it is a campaign to eradicate our population etc. It is urgently needed to educate these masses by arranging trainings, seminars, workshops for them. Mass awareness programs should be initiated on large scale to vanish the false beliefs created by the leaders and awaking masses about this dangerous menace. If not possible for the government, the program should be outsourced to a third party or the government along with institutions and organizations working for human health must work together to eradicate this disastrous menace. This is not a time to trifle with such an important cause otherwise Pakistanis might face

more travel restrictions as WHO is going to meet in November this year. Before be quarantined by the world, something really urgent is needed to be done.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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## **Disclosure**

None of the authors have any conflict of interest and it is the combine effort of all the authors.

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