

Thinking about Pakistan's HPV Vaccine Campaign

The recently launched HPV vaccine campaign has sparked a lot of discussion amongst doctors, teachers and parents in Pakistan. There is an uncertainty over the vaccination after the misinformation that spread around the time of the Covid vaccine. And so parents who didn't question vaccines before have become sceptical and seek to understand the need to research and make informed decisions.

The HPV campaign, launched in partnership with WHO, Gavi, and UNICEF, targets 9-14 year-old girls. The stated goal is to protect 13 million girls from cervical cancer, the third most common cancer in Pakistan, which affects thousands of women each year. ([Source](#)) The vaccines used primarily target cervical cancers caused by HPV types 16 and 18, with Gardasil offering additional coverage for types 6 and 11 warts and some cross-protection for other oncogenic type.

A vast number of cervical cancer cases are caused by HPV, with types 16 and 18 responsible for about 70% of these cancers. HPV can also cause other cancers and conditions, making it a significant public health concern.

The issue is this – the HPV 16 and 18 infections, while the reason for cervical cancer, are associated with sexual behavior, especially the number of sexual partners, with HPV 18 more linked to multiple partners and HPV 16 more linked to early sexual debut. While they can also be transmitted through non-sexual skin-to-skin contact, such as hand-to-genital contact, this is less common. There are "low-risk" HPV types that cause genital warts but do not cause cancer, and "high-risk" types that can cause cancers such as cervical, anal, penile, vulvar, vaginal, and oropharyngeal (throat) cancers. ([Source](#))

The stated reason for targeting girls at such a young age is that it provides the strongest and longest-lasting protection when given before exposure to HPV, which is primarily transmitted through sexual contact. Vaccinating children before they become sexually active maximizes the vaccine's effectiveness in preventing HPV infections.

This decision is one of the reasons why the vaccine is not widely accepted – the worry, understandably, is that it promotes a discussion surrounding sexual conduct at a very young age and may encourage promiscuity.

In Pakistan, though, parents aren't being educated on the causes of the HPV infections transmission. They are just being told that the vaccine is needed to protect daughters from a cancer that affects a vast number of women across Pakistan. And while the vaccine is being publicised as being voluntary, there is a very real push to encourage young girls to get vaccinated in order to reach the quota that's been set.

But we live in a society where we are constantly dealing with a clash of ideas. The vaccine is meant to target an illness that primarily spreads through promiscuity, and yet they are encouraging girls to be promiscuous by making relationships outside of marriage acceptable. Most prominently through the recently announced Urdu-

language reality show *Lazawaal Ishq*, which is being publicised as Pakistan's first dating show.

“Over 100 episodes, four men and four women will live together in a luxurious villa, their interactions and challenges captured on camera. The season will culminate in the crowning of a “winning couple”.” Omar said the Urdu iteration needed a host who could connect with its audience: “There were many candidates, and I feel grateful I was selected. The show has Pakistani participants, boys and girls, who you can spot in the promo. There’ll be a lot happening because it’s all about love — and there will be a winning couple.”

PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) released a statement and said that this show wouldn't be aired on TV and is outside of its jurisdiction as it is being uploaded to YouTube. But this is just one very prominent example of where Pakistan will go if we follow the West and leave Islam.

Examples such as this remind us that there is a very real need to live under the protection that Islam provides. Does it not show us that rather than working to eradicate the virus at its core, they are encouraging its spread through the propagation of relationships outside of marriage. And then providing a ‘vaccine’ to make us feel safe in a world of kufr?

We need to remember that in Islam, vaccines are allowed. And they will be used under the Islamic State, when and where they are needed. That is not the issue here. The problem is the way that vaccines are being encourage as solutions to problems that only exist because of Kufr. And unless we go back to Islam, we will all be victims in one way or another.

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