

Why are pregnant and breastfeeding women in rural India who want the COVID-19 vaccine not getting vaccinated?

Nadia Diamond-Smith, MSc, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics
Institute for Global Health Sciences, University of
California San Francisco

Preetika Sharma, PhD

Research Associate

Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education
& Research, Chandigarh



**VACCINATION ACCEPTANCE
RESEARCH NETWORK**

 **SABIN VACCINE INSTITUTE**

Study Team

Organization	Team Members
Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, Delhi (IIIT, D)	Pushpendra Singh , PhD, Professor Jasmeet Kaur , PhD student
Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education & Research, Chandigarh (PGIMER)	Dr. Mona Duggal , MD, Associate Professor Preetika Sharma , PhD, Research Associate Navneet Kaur Gill, PhD, Research Assistant
Survival for Women and Children (SWACH)	Dr. Vijay Kumar , MD, Executive Director Jagriti Gupta, Research Assistant
University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)	Nadia Diamond-Smith , PhD, MSc, Assistant Professor Alison El Ayadi , ScD, MPH, Associate Professor Kathryn B. Vosburg , MPH, Associate Director



COVID-19 Vaccine Context in India

Vaccination in India is high overall (61%) but what about in pregnant women?

- Women have excess COVID-19 mortality compared to men, including among younger women of reproductive age
- COVID-19 infection during pregnancy is of particular concern as pregnant women are more likely to develop severe disease from COVID-19 infection and there is evidence of impacts on neonatal health
- COVID-19 vaccine was approved for pregnant and breastfeeding women in India (July 2nd, 2021)

We know little about vaccine uptake among pregnant and breastfeeding women in India

Our study: Aims and Methods

- **Aim:** To understand vaccine uptake, barriers, hesitancy (delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccination despite availability), facilitating factors and sources of trusted information among pregnant and breastfeeding women
- **Population:** November 2021- Collected data from pregnant and breastfeeding women in Northern India
 - Demographics: rural women, mostly under age 25 and with less than a secondary level of education
- **Data:** 300 phone surveys and 15 in-depth interviews





Results

Vaccination rates were low; but desire for vaccination was high

Vaccination Status

- Only one-third (36%) of pregnant and breastfeeding women had received the vaccine
 - Despite ALL women being connected to the health system

Vaccine uptake

- About half (47%) of non-vaccinated women said they would get the vaccine now if they could
- An additional 20% want to get it soon but would wait,
- 27% reported that they would not get it at all

Concerns

- 30% were worried about safety for their baby in one way or another
 - Baby could get COVID
 - The potential for impact on the physical and mental development of child
- Concerns it would cause maternal fever

Why were women not getting the vaccine?

Confusion amongst health professionals on vaccine safety

- **There were mixed responses regarding health care provider perspective on vaccine uptake by pregnant women.**

"I went to hospital a number of times but they refused to vaccinate me by saying that you are pregnant so you can't have it. Come after delivery".

- **Health care workers/doctors were the most trusted source of information (90%), so where they did provide COVID-19 vaccines, women were happy to accept them**

"My mother had a word with the [community health worker] regarding COVID-19 vaccine. She suggested us to have it. Actually, we had discussed it with our doctor and they gave us approval only that's why we had vaccination otherwise we would not have taken it"

Low women's autonomy

- **Low empowerment did make it difficult for some women to advocate for vaccination or to seek information they needed about the vaccine**

“I don't know much because I stay home and rarely go out. I don't talk to people in the community. My in-laws go out and they share what is happening in society.”

- **Where women were able to advocate for themselves, they faced repercussions from family members**

One woman who did get vaccinated when her baby was an infant described how her mother-in-law would not let her hold her baby for many hours after her vaccination.

Behaviors can evolve...

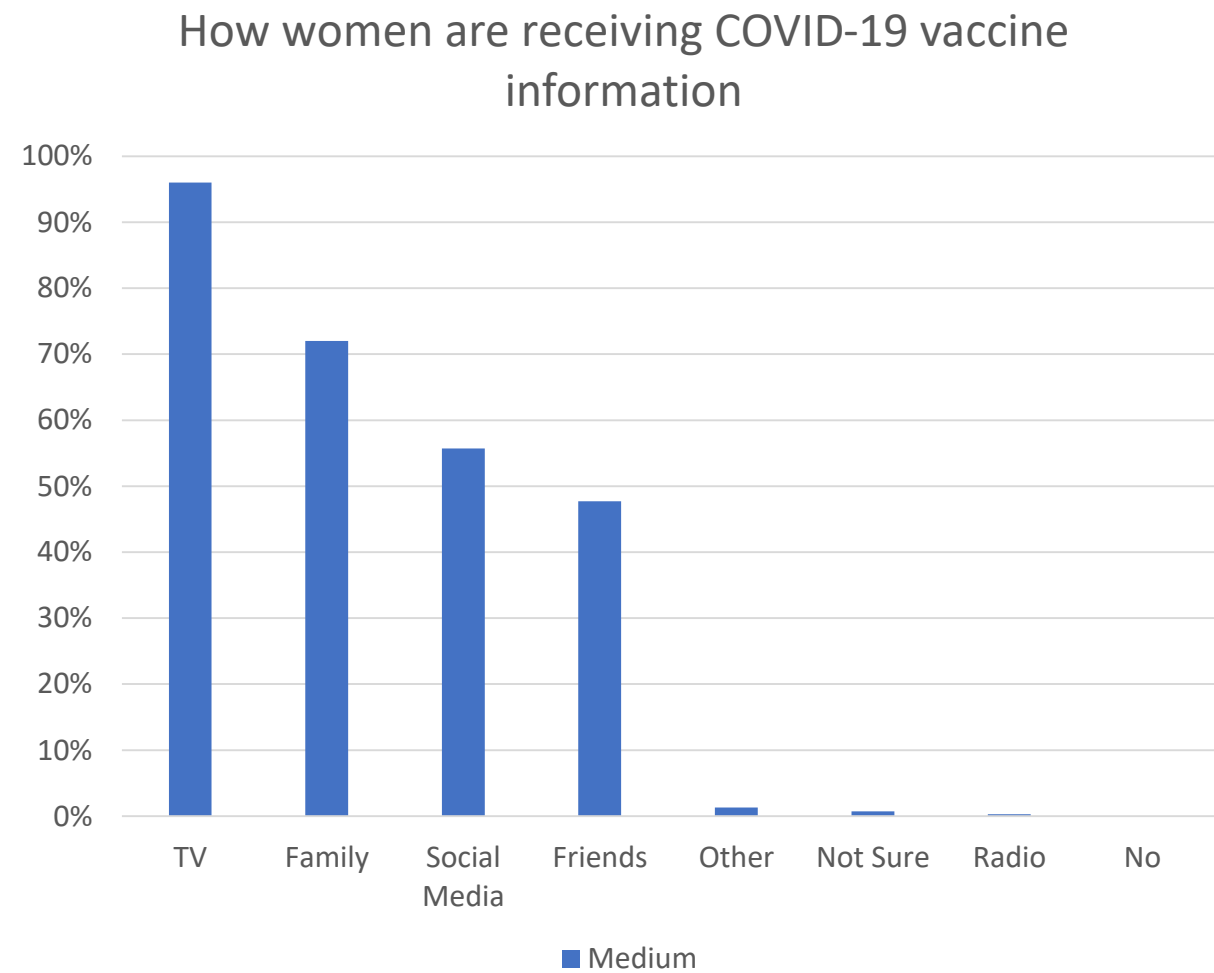
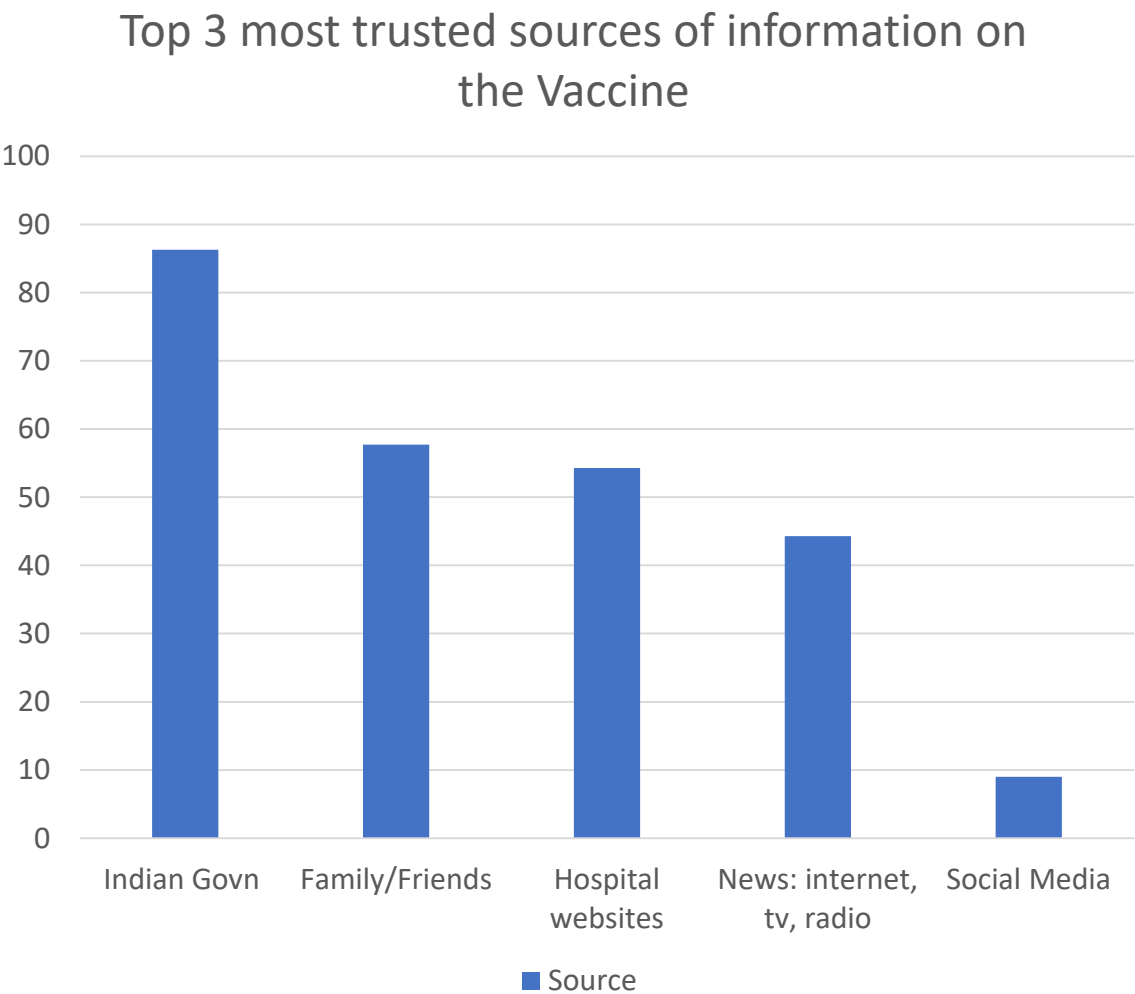
- **Initial low uptake in the community was a barrier, but as more people got vaccinated, social norms and acceptability to be vaccinated increased**

“They [family members] were not agreeing for it [the COVID-19 vaccine] because others were not going to get it and now they are lining up in vaccination camps because they are seeing others' vaccination results [no side effects, helping people].”

Lack of Access to Trusted Information

- **96% of respondents said they did not know where to get accurate information on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines.**
- **Women were confused about the info they were seeing**
 - 61% said they saw information that they could not tell was true or false

Misalignment between where women got information and trusted sources



Lack of Access to Trusted Information (cont.)

- *"All my family members have been vaccinated. Earlier somebody told us that pregnant ladies are not eligible for vaccination. But when I found the Prime Minister's statement regarding vaccination on google, then I told my husband about it. We discussed it with our gynecologist, and she told us that vaccination is good to take and then I had my vaccination. Earlier, my husband was worried about if the vaccination would harm the baby, but everything went well after vaccination. My husband says that everyone should take this vaccination if they are being asked to do so".*

Conclusions and Recommendations

Targeted Community Education

- Development of widespread public health education campaigns about the COVID-19 vaccine to ensure they are educated about COVID-19 vaccine safety
 - Specifically target women
 - Specifically engage household members in increasing access for pregnant and breastfeeding women

Health worker education

- Invest in educating front-line healthcare workers who provide the majority of care to pregnant and breastfeeding women and are mostly women themselves
- Address concerns about vaccination safety in pregnancy/breastfeeding
 - In all health care providers

Thank you for your time
Questions?
Please email:

nadia.diamond-smith@ucsf.edu
preetika.sharma43@gmail.com

