

ABSTRACT

(max: 250 words)

Background: As of 2022, Pakistan remains endemic for the polio virus, reporting 22 cases in 2022, including co-circulation of both WTPV type 1 and VDPV type 2. Karachi, struggles with maintaining immunization rates, with OPV3 plus IPV vaccination coverage at 47-62%. Failed campaign quality indicators result in missed children and a high-risk mobile population, jeopardizing program fidelity. Pashto-speaking ethnicity, a marginalized group, contribute to vaccine hesitancy, affecting program acceptability.

Objective:

Explain the impact of program acceptability and fidelity on polio program performance.

Method:

We conducted a realist evaluation mixed-methods study in two Karachi SHRUCs: Islamia Colony-9 (IC) and Ittehad Town-2 (IT). These areas experience high refusal rates and still missed children during campaigns, with a population including Afghan refugees and Pashto-speaking ethnicity. Secondary quantitative data was collected followed by interviews with stakeholders, frontline health workers (FLWs), community influencers, and parents of children under 5 to inform program theories.

Results:

IC consistently reported persistent missed children during campaigns (2.0-7.0%), while IT reported percentages ranging from 1.4 to 3.2%. LQAS indicator status passed for 73% of IC campaigns and 64% of IT campaigns between 2021-23. Qualitative interviews identified common themes: Pashtun ethnicities playing a central role in vaccine acceptability, misconceptions and religious beliefs fueling refusals, low compensation and challenging work conditions for FLWs, verticality of the polio program, and government dependence on partner staff.

Conclusion:

Refusals, often rooted in misconceptions and false beliefs, particularly within Pashtun ethnicities, continue to threaten program acceptability. While program fidelity remains satisfactory with support from partner organizations, integrated service delivery faces implementation challenges. This study warrants change in polio program policies.

Keywords: Polio, fidelity, acceptability and realist evaluation.