



REPORT

Delhi University, UNICEF partner to fight vaccine hesitancy from an anthropological perspective

NEW DELHI, 26 June 2021 – The Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, and UNICEF have come together to boost COVID vaccination uptake across the country and understand vaccine hesitancy from an anthropological perspective.

The partnership will invest in using anthropology and research, and leverage the presence of anthropology research scholars on the ground to understand psycho-socio-cultural challenges and mindsets that promote vaccine hesitancy in the present context.

Speaking at a webinar, "COVID-19: Applying Anthropological Understanding to Vaccine Hesitancy," held today, Ms Zafrin Chowdhury, Chief of Communication, UNICEF India, said, "India's tribal population makes up 8 per cent of India or 104.2 million people. The issues brought in by COVID-19 get enhanced in the tribal areas, where issues like nutrition, sanitation, health accessibility and beliefs that hinder COVID Appropriate Behaviour make them more vulnerable. They have migration patterns that also hinder their vaccine uptake. We need to work closely with the communities to understand deeper what drives their sentiments and what determines their vaccine decision, and accordingly tailor our communication strategies to address vaccine hesitancy."

The webinar was attended by over 150 anthropology academia and research scholars from various universities in India. Dr N K Arora, Chairman, COVID-19 Working Group, National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI), delivered the Keynote Address and gave an update on India's progress on the COVID vaccination drive. He addressed concerns of students around the efficacy of vaccines in India, the confusion around the interval between two doses of COVISHIELD, ongoing research on vaccines in India, and the type of vaccines and brands that India could get in the near future.

The webinar was also attended by Prof P C Joshi, Vice-Chancellor, Delhi University; Mr Pravir Krishna, Managing Director, TRIFED; Prof R P Mitra, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi; and Mr Siddharth Shrestha, Chief of Communication for Development, UNICEF India.

The Department of Anthropology and UNICEF have come together in the past to raise awareness on Child Rights from an anthropological perspective. The partnership aims to design an elective short-term courseware on Child Rights, to be integrated into the current curriculum of the Department for the "Media and Anthropology" module.

Speaking on the current partnership, Prof M P Sachdeva, Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, said, "I am happy that our partnership is being extended to fight vaccine hesitancy. The research and feedback provided by our research scholars will help fight vaccine hesitancy by prioritizing scientific medical knowledge over folk beliefs and factor in relationships between cosmopolitan and indigenous knowledge, right and wrong, science and magic, truth and myth."

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