



**Bark Worse than Bite: Fears  
around the COVID-19 Vaccine**

## Executive Summary

While 2020 heralded in the COVID pandemic that would go on to ravage the globe, 2021 brought in hope for a vaccine, an end to this virus that had brought giants of modern society to its knees. During a conversation we had with Sapna<sup>1</sup> who cleans an office in New Delhi, in early April 2021 we realized that she was unaware that a COVID vaccine had been released in the market and her ailing pensioner mother had been eligible for her free shot for over a month. While we were learning how to register our loved ones on various portals to ensure earliest access to the vaccines that had finally reached India's hallowed shores, a significant portion of our population was unaware that they were now even eligible for a vaccine that could help protect them against one of the greater health crises we had witnessed. Along with the lack of awareness about the vaccination drive and the process, the community members showed hesitance about the vaccine and were skeptical about getting vaccinated.

The current study aims to understand the **attitude, perception, misconception, fear, and widespread myths** the community members have about the vaccine. Through this their willingness to take the vaccine was explored along with the awareness they have about covid and its vaccine. A **primary survey was conducted with 1500 members across the following 9 states : Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal.**

- At the time of survey (during the first three weeks of April) 34 percent of the respondents were eligible to get the vaccine (the members who were of 45 years of age and older). **Of the eligible members more than half of the respondents hadn't yet taken the vaccine.**
- **Willingness to take the vaccine:** Only **17 percent** of the members were **willing to take the vaccine**. Around 44 percent of the respondents informed that they **might** take the vaccine. And around 34 percent of the respondents denied to take the vaccine. More than **50 percent of the respondents from West Bengal were willing** to take the vaccine, while only 1 percent of the respondents from Jharkhand were willing to take the vaccine. Also more than 80 percent of the respondents from Jharkhand informed that they might take the vaccine. In the states of Rajasthan and Punjab more than 50 percent of the respondents wouldn't take the vaccine.
- **Awareness about the Vaccine:** A short covid vaccine awareness survey revealed **54 percent of the respondents were well informed** and aware about the vaccination process, the precautionary and safety measures to practise after getting the vaccine. 18 percent of the members were less informed and 28 percent of the members were moderately informed. Only 32 percent of the respondents knew about the Arogya Setu app.  
In the states of **Gujarat and Jharkhand more than 70 percent** of the respondents fell

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<sup>1</sup> Name has been changed to protect their privacy



under the *well informed* category. In Rajasthan more than 50 percent of the respondents were under the *less informed* category and in Nagaland and Uttarakhand 43 percent of the respondents fell in the *less informed* category.

- **Perception About the Vaccine amongst the members:**
  - Data revealed that about 54 percent of the total respondents felt that their **health would get negatively impacted** if they took the vaccine.
  - 45 percent of the members were **worried** about the number of **days they would have to be out of work** if and after they get vaccinated.
  - More than 70 percent of the population get their **information** about covid and its vaccine from their **friends and family members, neighbours and televised news** and 50 percent gets informed through whatsapp. Only 5 percent of the members informed that they get information from ASHA workers, SEWA aagewans, anganwadi workers, and hospitals.
  - Around 49 percent of the members knew someone in their neighborhood who had taken the vaccine and 28 percent of the **members knew no one who had taken the vaccine.**

### **Major Challenges the members face to access the vaccine and reasons for COVID vaccine hesitancy**

- **Access to the Internet:** **47 percent of the respondents had a smartphone** and 1 percent of the members owning a smartphone did not have access to the internet. 17 percent of the respondents who didn't have a smartphone or access to the internet individually, had someone else in their household who had both these things. However, about **29 percent of the respondents' households had no smartphone.** These households get excluded from the latest phase of vaccination drive which requires the members to register themselves online beforehand.
- **Access to the vaccine:** The **vaccination centers are quite far** from the place of residence of the members. After at least 2 hour long travel to the vaccination center they have to **wait in queues** which are 5-6 hours long, resulting in the members avoiding the vaccine. The members are even worried about the possibility of catching the virus being amongst so many people in the queue and mode of transportation.
- **The post vaccination symptoms:** The individuals who have taken the vaccine, majority of them had fever for some days and a sore arm because of swelling around the vaccine administration site. It is important that they take proper rest at least till they have fever. This would keep them out of work for that number of days. The members now cannot afford to remain out of work for even one day. In this context, 45 percent of the survey respondents also said they were worried about being out of work post vaccination.
- **Misconceptions and fear about the vaccine:** The members in their conversations with their family members, friends and family, neighbours, and people they work with,



talk about the various fears related to the vaccine. From their conversations through different mediums like phone calls, whatsapp messages and in person conversations and the news they watch and read, the following are some of the fears and beliefs the community members have about the vaccine:

- The vaccine will shorten their lifespan
- The vaccine will cause other disorders and cause a negative impact on the health of the individuals
- The news of some people dying soon after taking vaccine had increased the fear of death if and after they take the vaccine
- The vaccine will cause impotency in men and infertility in women
- The vaccine is a 'slow poison' to kill everyone who takes it
- Some members believes that the virus dies in the sun and since they work under the sun all day, they do not need to take the vaccine

