

Decolonizing Global Health and Strengthening Vaccination Programs Using Online Platforms: a Bottom-up Approach

Baldeep K. Dhaliwal^{1,2}, Rajeev Seth³, Betty Thankachen³, Yawar Qaiyum³, Anita Shet^{1,2}

¹ Maternal and Child Health Center India, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA
² International Vaccine Access Center, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA
³ Bal Umang Drishya Sanstha, New Delhi, India.

Background

- Vaccination advocacy efforts have traditionally relied on in-person gatherings to design and implement interventions.
- The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by national lockdowns and travel limitations, led to innovations in in-country stakeholders and frontline health workers leading health initiatives.¹
- Physical gatherings can reinforce hierarchical structural barriers and power dynamics by limiting participation from certain groups and neglecting voices who may be most impactful in strengthening vaccination programs.

Objectives

- To incorporate online platforms to design a community-led intervention to strengthen vaccine uptake.
- To lead to a more horizontal and equitable approach to partnerships between researchers and the community.
- To bring together diverse perspectives to conduct effective research and facilitate long-lasting, sustainable changes in vaccine uptake, led by the community and local experts.

Methods

We took a multi-pronged approach:

1. Development of a Community Accountability Board (CAB) of local influential leaders;
2. Use of online human-centered design (HCD) workshops to co-create interventions to improve vaccine uptake;
3. Implementation of a co-designed, community-led six-pronged intervention incorporating online activities.

Figures

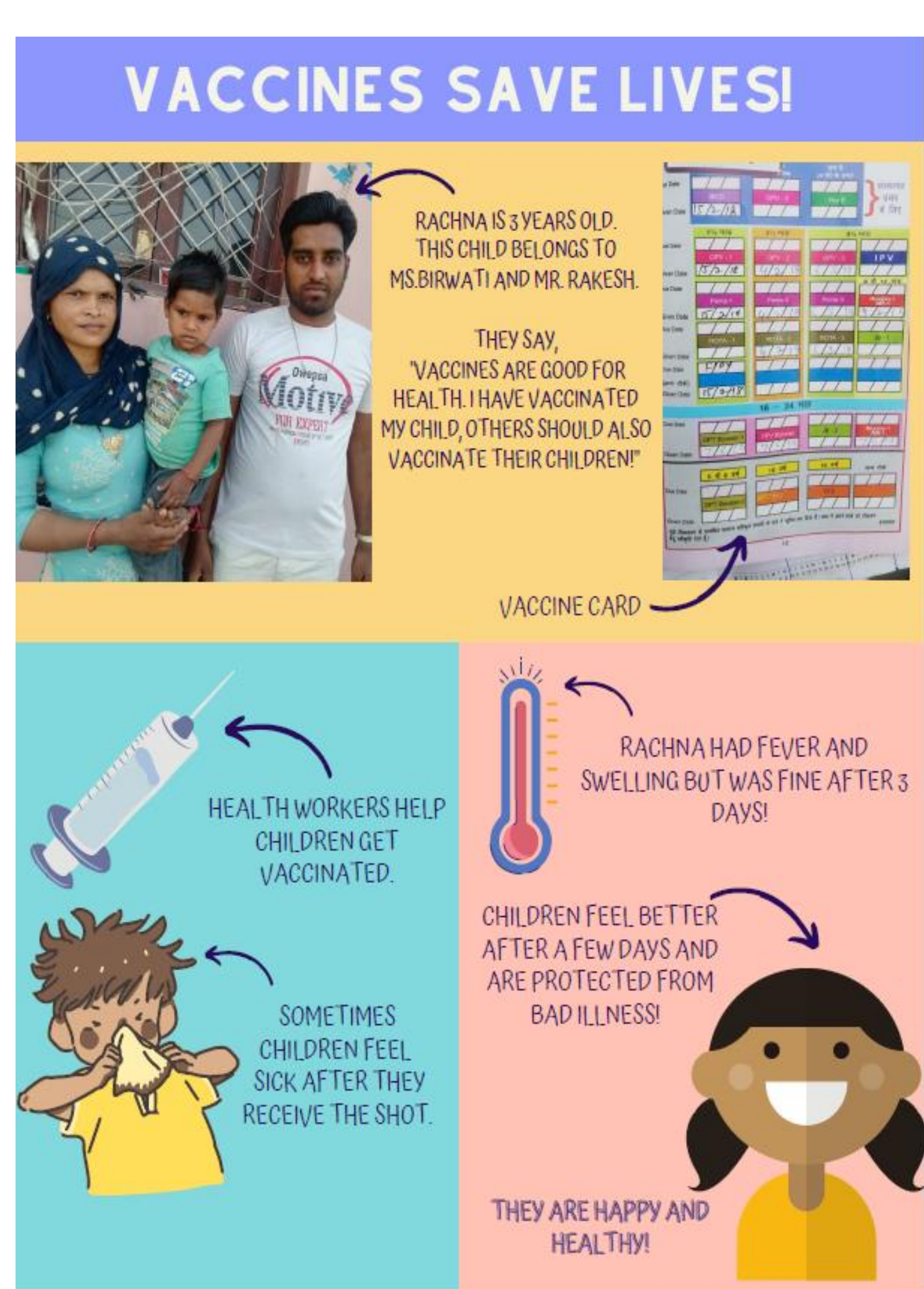


Image of intervention aspect: pamphlets of local families advocating for vaccines.



Image of intervention aspect: video of vaccine advocacy.

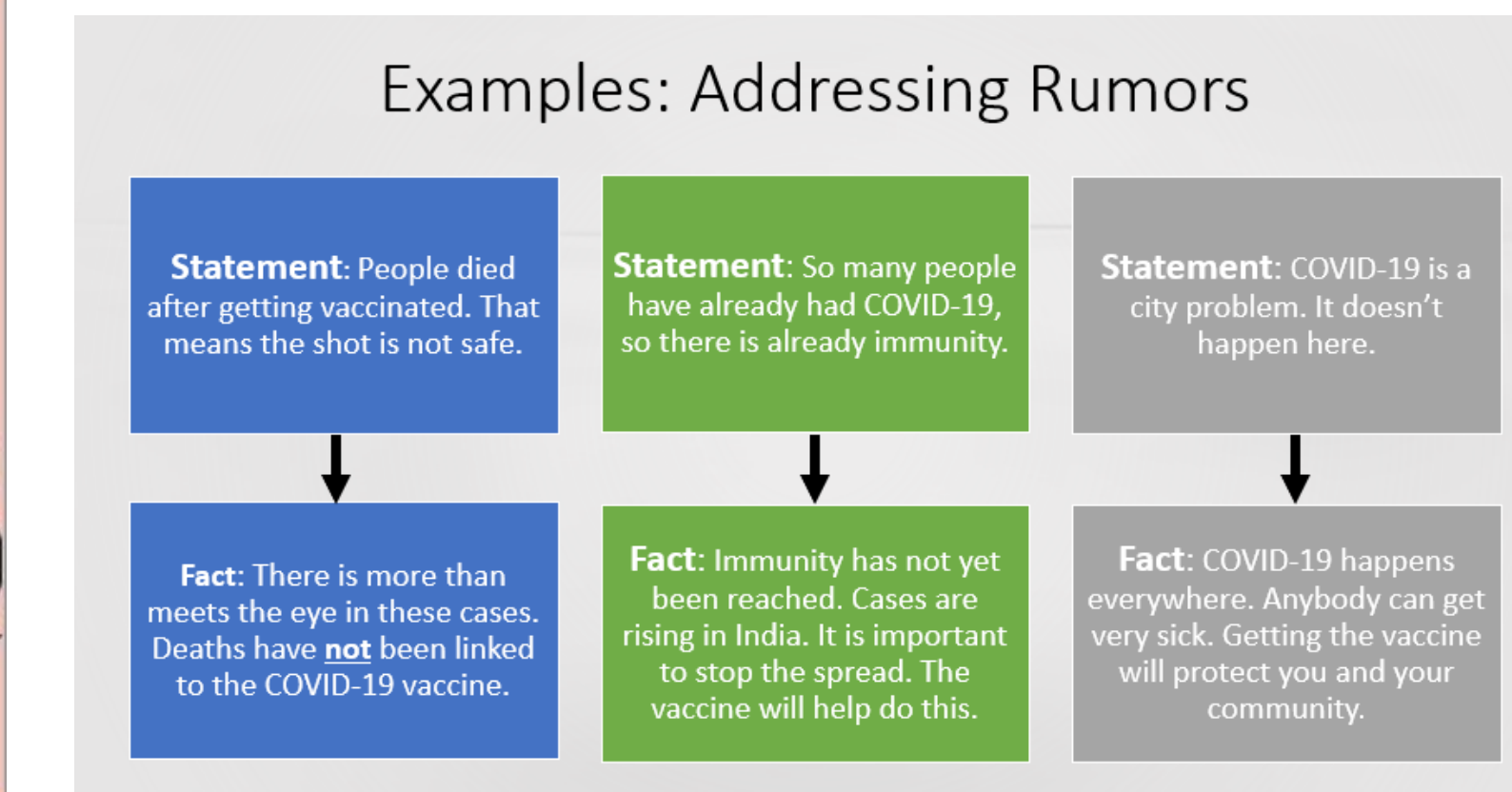


Image of intervention aspect: communication training for frontline health workers.

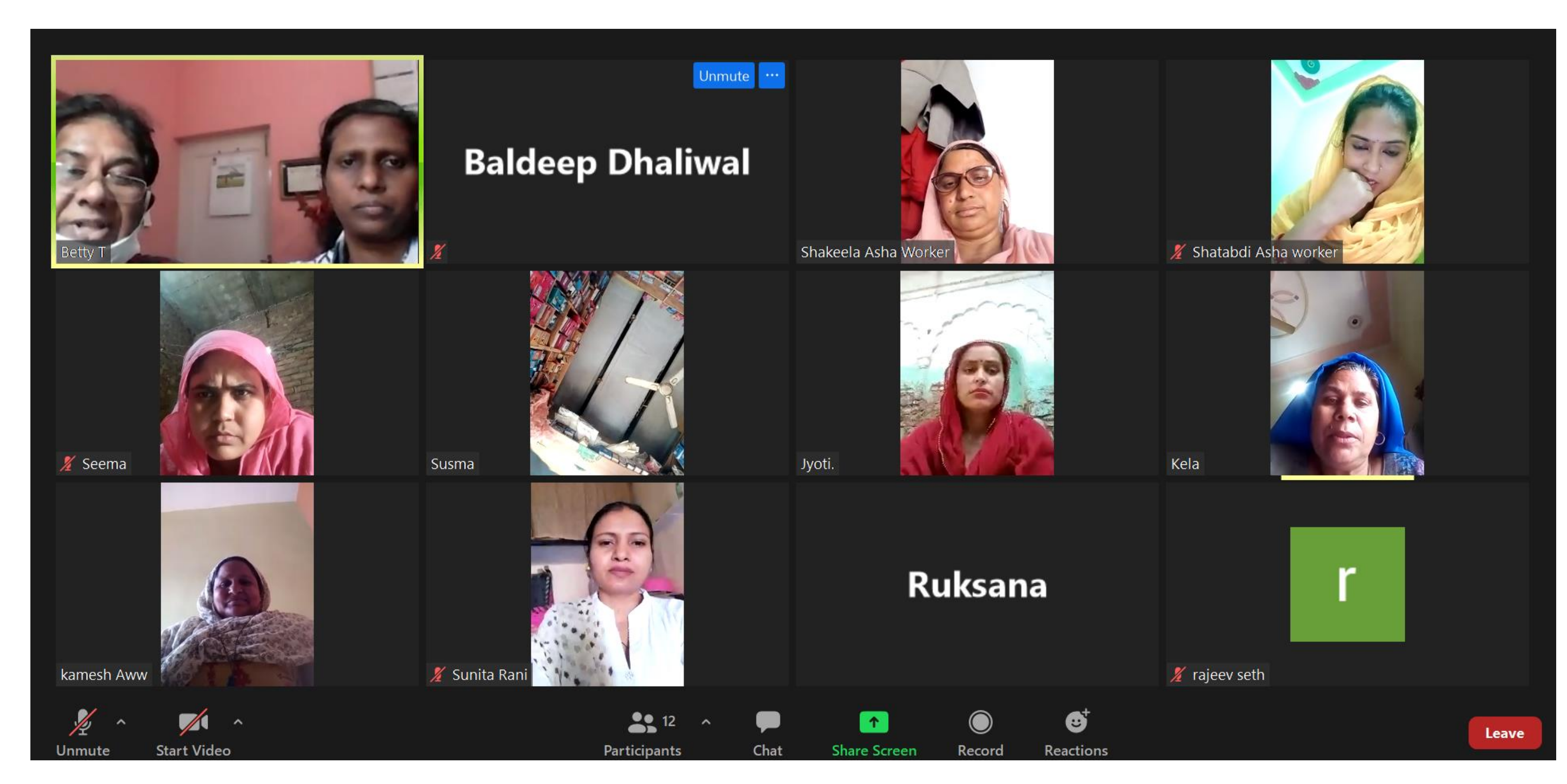


Image of virtual human-centered design workshop: frontline health workers contributed to the design of the intervention to strengthen vaccine uptake.

Results

- Using online platforms to design an intervention provided an opportunity to combat systemic barriers that in-person activities often facilitate in terms of gender, social standing, professional standing, and background.
- Online workshops brought together a high number of women who are typically unable to participate in these types of activities due to societal expectations or logistical household barriers.
- We strengthened the diversity of participants, provided a space for more marginalized groups to speak up, and minimized logistical barriers to attendance.
- Using online platforms to facilitate meetings and workshops enabled the community to have a larger voice in the planning of activities and the creation and implementation of interventions to strengthen vaccine uptake.
- Researchers must still grapple with doing more to ensure equity, particularly in populations without internet access.

Conclusions

Online platforms can overcome economic and travel-related barriers, which contribute to lower participation from institutions and countries with limited resources. Online platforms also empower women who bear more social costs to attending in-person meetings, as well as early career practitioners. To further strengthen equity, there is a need to recognize the power of virtual strategies to facilitate underrepresented groups to meaningfully participate in all aspects of research.

References

1. Dhaliwal BK, Singh S, Sullivan L, Banerjee P, Seth R, Sengupta P, Bhattacharjee I, Mehta K, Reddy KS, Shet A. Love, labor and loss on the frontlines: India's community health workers straddle life and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of global health*. 2021;11.

For further information please contact: bdhaliw1@jhu.edu

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to frontline health workers and members of the community accountability board who so graciously shared their time and expertise with our project team.