



Profile: Tahiranaz

Frontline Health Worker in Pakistan

When I joined the polio campaign over seven years ago, I was working as a vaccinator part-time, for five days every month. And I was not working in my own area. Sometimes I did not feel safe. There were areas where polio workers were being attacked and even killed. I have faith in Allah and believe that my life should be to serve people. But because I'm a human being I was also scared.

Now for the very time, I am working inside my own area. If I were to go one mile away, people would not know me. But inside this little area where I live, it is very different. I know the names of all the children. I know which women are pregnant. I know who is travelling to visit their relatives. We know all these things. To make sure of everything, my supervisor helped me to do a micro-census. Before the campaigns I went to every house and listed every child – their name, their father's name and their address. Nothing was missed.

My husband is very supportive of me. He is very proud of me. Even he said to me – our country is shamed by this polio disease, because everyone who goes to the Hajj must be vaccinated. My husband has even accompanied me, to help me feel secure. But I told him that now he doesn't have to do it anymore.

I feel that this is a very great opportunity for women to work in a public sector job, in a job that really has respect and makes a contribution. And because I am working full time now, I feel more secure and also families know that they will see me regularly. They don't like seeing new faces.

Women are also very good at working hard. Today, for example, I woke up dawn, offered prayers and made breakfast for my husband and five children. Before 7am I went to the health facility to meet my Area-in-Charge and take vaccine and markers and logbook and vitamin A. We discussed the day and made our plans.

Then I started work. First I went to catch up 15 children who were not at home yesterday. Then I did my normal day's work, walking door-to-door to as many as 60 households. It usually takes me until 3:30. You have to spend time, to be polite and win the trust of the family. I take a break in someone's house for prayers, and maybe some tea. Then I go back to the health centre for the evening meetings. We talk about refusals and other issues and decide what to cover the next day. I'm lucky, I have a great team. We are all friends. I go home by 5pm and then I have to prepare the dinner. Duty is duty.

Not many people refuse. In my area, there is a confusion that this is for family planning. But I remind them: look around you - how many children have born during the polio campaigns? They also want other services. I have to listen to their issues. Sometimes I have to say, do you want your children to be paralyzed? If the government is giving you this for free, then you should take it!

Every day I remember the women I have worked with in this campaign. Before, there were just a few of us. Now there are more, and I hope many women will join us. I never forget the women I have worked with and all we have been through. And I feel that when we come to people's doorsteps, we deserve their respect.

Banner image: ©UNICEF/Claire Hajaj