

# Engaging Islamic religious scholars and leaders to increase acceptance of MITS procedure in a mortality surveillance program in rural Bangladesh

Faruqe Hussain<sup>1</sup>, Emily S. Gurley<sup>2</sup>, John Blevins<sup>3</sup>, Maria Maixenchs<sup>4</sup>, Md. Saiful Islam<sup>5</sup>, Sanwarul Bari<sup>1</sup>, Abdullah Al Masud<sup>1</sup>, Abdus Suban Mulla<sup>1</sup>, Abu Uzayer<sup>1</sup>, Afroz Zahan<sup>1</sup>, Aziz Ahamed<sup>1</sup>, Shikha Datta Gupta<sup>1</sup>, Suruj Ali<sup>1</sup>, Sazzad Hossain Khan<sup>1</sup>, Tonmoy Sarkar<sup>1</sup>, Dalia Yeasmin<sup>1</sup>, Palash Mutsuddi<sup>1</sup>, Shams El Arifeen<sup>1</sup>, Shahana Parveen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>icddr,b, Dhaka, Bangladesh; <sup>2</sup> John Hopkins University, MD, USA; <sup>3</sup> Emory Global Health Institute, Atlanta, GA, USA; <sup>4</sup>ISGlobal, Hospital Clinic-Universitat de Barcelona, Spain, <sup>5</sup>University of New South Wales, Australia

## Background

- The Child Health and Mortality Prevention Surveillance (CHAMPS) program is implementing postmortem minimally invasive tissue sampling (MITS) procedures to identify the aetiology of <5 child deaths in Baliakandi, a rural sub district of Bangladesh.
- The MITS procedure evokes socio-cultural, emotional and religious concerns that could influence acceptance.
- Islamic religious approval 'Fatwa' (interpretation on a point of Islamic *Shariah*) from respective authority to implement MITS was prerequisite
- Formative research explored that it is important to expand the religious permissibility of MITS among all levels of Islamic religious leaders. and community residents for greater acceptance of MITS implementation.

## Objectives

- To establish endorsement of the MITS procedure from Islamic religious perspective at community level.
- To expand the social acceptance of MITS in light of religious permissibility among the predominant Muslim community residents.

## Implementation process

### Group discussions and meetings

- Two group discussions with:
  - Four (4) recognized Islamic religious scholars (*Muftis*) and
  - 21 Senior *Imams* (who lead congregational prayers)
- 84 group meetings at local Mosques including general community participants
- Circulated 246 copies of 'Fatwa' to:
  - All 84 Imams at Mosques where we arranged meeting
  - Presidents and secretaries of each Mosque Committee
  - Interested religious persons attended our meeting in Mosques
- We also explained the 'Fatwa' contents highlighting the major points related to MITS procedure to the general community members who came to perform religious prayer at Mosque.
- Our team noted and responded to the questions participants asked related to MITS and CHAMPS activities.

## Content and discussion on 'Fatwa'

### The 'Fatwa' focused on major issues related to MITS procedure:

- Tissue and blood sample collection is allowed only for research purposes; sample amount must be smallest/minimum
- Must ensure voluntary participation of parents and guardians of deceased children
- Any financial transaction is prohibited; should not hurt the deceased body (minimal invasion)
- Demonstrate respect to all deceased child by the team before, during and after MITS procedure
- Ensure no delay or difficulties in funeral activities and burial process for MITS procedure



### Implementation area information

- 7 administrative unions; 261 villages with 2,27,000 residents
- Predominantly Muslim communities (82%)
- Agricultural livelihoods
- 311 Mosques; 12 Madrasas (Islamic academic institution)
- 227 Mandirs (Hindu Temples)

| Year | No. of Meeting | Total participants attended |
|------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 2017 | 3              | 160                         |
| 2018 | 16             | 501                         |
| 2019 | 45             | 1425                        |
| 2020 | 20             | 634                         |

### Implementation period

From May 2017 to December 2020

## Results

### Agreement on 'Fatwa' and disseminating at local level

- All the participants attended the religious leaders meeting shown interest to discuss on to the content of the 'Fatwa'.
- Muftis* agreed to permissibility of MITS procedure following the 'Fatwa' and senior *Imams* concurred with them.
- Senior *Imams* suggested to continuously engaging with local level religious leaders and community residents to enhance acceptance of MITS procedure.

### Religious leaders support to our program

- Two of the *Muftis* and 10 (ten) *Imams* actively supported explaining the permissibility of MITS procedure in respect to Islamic religious perspective to the deceased families when our team requested consent for MITS procedure.
- Religious leaders also supported to reduce 'misconceptions' about MITS procedure to the community people explaining the MITS permissibility in light of Islamic religious perspectives.

## Influence of religious concerns on MITS procedure

- Of the 185 families (parents and guardians of deceased children) were requested for consent for MITS procedure, 37% (69/185) consented.
- Among the refusals of MITS procedure, only 9% (10 out of 116) reported religious beliefs as the reason, which declined over the time from 50% (3/6) in 2017 (inception of MITS procedure in September 2017) to 4.5% (1/22) in 2021.
- Religious scholars and leaders informed that 'seepage' after MITS is performed could negatively influence MITS acceptance.

## Program learning

- Religious scholars are well respected to and followed by religious leaders and community in case of religious confusions or controversies.
- All senior Imams have strong connections and regular communications with religious scholars (*Muftis*) for religious discussion and decisions.
- Junior Imams lead congregational prayers at local Mosque are connected with senior Imams and religious scholars (*Muftis*) as well.
- An Imam leads the funeral prayer and present in the deceased household until burial is completed which is strongly linked with religious acceptance of MITS procedure.
- Local religious leaders can respond to clarify and resolve any religious concern related to MITS procedure raised in the community.

## Conclusions

- Islamic religious scholars (*Muftis*) are the important stakeholders to endorse and extend religious permissibility of MITS procedure.
- Religious leaders are the key stakeholders to expand the religious acceptance of MITS in the community.
- Public health programs that include evaluations of deaths or needle biopsy must engage religious scholars and leaders throughout the study.

See more data at  
[champshealth.org](https://champshealth.org)

### Contact Information

Faruqe Hussain  
Assistant Scientist, PEI, IDD, icddr,b  
CHAMPS Bangladesh  
[faruqe.hussain@icddr.org](mailto:faruqe.hussain@icddr.org)  
+8801711437326

