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# Family Pressure, Social Media Influence, and COVID-19 Vaccination Hesitancy among Students at Higher Education in Pakistan

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## **Abstract**

This article has been designed to examine the COVID-19 pandemic vaccination hesitancy among students at higher education institutions in Pakistan. The COVID-19 vaccination has been declared mandatory with the reopening of higher educational institutions and students feel hesitation based on multiple factors. This study has used a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional survey has been conducted. A sample of university students in the BS (4 Years) program has been sampled through a proportionate random sampling technique and 4178 students participated. Structural Equational Modelling (SEM) technique has been used to test the model. The study findings conclude that students have to face pressure from university and family for COVID-19 vaccination. Furthermore, side effects and prefer natural immunity have also been added to COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students. Resultantly, social media also spread fake news regarding the side effects of vaccination in the future among students. Summing up the argument, COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students has been based on multiple interlinked factors i.e., university pressure, family pressure, future fear, side effects, prefer natural immunity, and social media influence.

**Keywords:** Side Effects, Natural Immunity, Family Pressure, Fear of Infection, Vaccination Hesitancy, COVID-19 Outbreak.

## 1. Introduction

In late 2019 cases of unusual and atypical pneumonia were reported in Wuhan, China (Shoaib & Abdullah, 2020). The cases were clustered in a food market and were assumed to have a single origin (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021). In the beginning, the cause of the pneumonia was not known. It was assumed that the most probably the disease has a viral origin. After further study and genetic analysis, it was proved that this disease is indeed caused by viruses and further evaluation proved that the disease is caused by a novel coronavirus 19. COVID 19 was the name given to the disease by WHO (2020c). The virus is also named SARS-CoV 19. It has very high infectivity potential

and has a human-to-human transmission (WHO, 2020a, 2020b). This virus can be transmitted from an infected person to a healthy person and the most common mode of transmission is by aerosol droplets (Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021). Initially, attempts were made to contain the virus in Wuhan and prevent its transmission to other parts of the world but due to its infectivity it kept on spreading, and in 5-6 months, it spread to the whole world and was declared a pandemic by WHO on 11th March 2020 (Naseer, Shoaib, Ali, & Bilal, 2021). In the beginning, attempts were made to contain the virus by employing measures that reduced human-to-human contact and decreased exposure to aerosol droplets. These measures included social distancing, covering of face with face masks, frequent handwashing, prevention of gatherings, and lockdowns to contain the spread (Ahmad, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2021). These were temporary measures that were employed to buy time, and reduce the spread till an effective treatment is produced (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021). Several treatments were postulated and tested to treat the disease. Dexamethasone, ascorbic acid, remdesivir, aspirin, oxygen supplementation, azithromycin, zinc, etc., were tested with some proving less or non-effective to others being very effective in treatment. Meanwhile, research to develop a vaccine was started and on December 11, 2020, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the emergency use of the Pfizer vaccine to prevent COVID-19. Similarly, the Moderna vaccine was authorized for emergency use by Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on December 18, 2020 (Naseer et al., 2021; Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021).

# 1.2 The Study Context

It has been observed that Coronavirus disease 19 or COVID 19 is caused by a novel coronavirus that is part of a large family of viruses known to cause different animal and human diseases (Naseer et al., 2021). Coronaviruses are implicated as a causal agent in different diseases ranging from mild upper respiratory tract infection to severe systemic illnesses like DIC, and pneumonia (Ahmad et al., 2021; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2020). Previously coronaviruses are known to be causal agents in Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). These viruses infect humans as well as other animals. Infection from one species to another species is postulated to be the cause of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (camels), similarly, it is postulated that bats were the reservoir of novel coronavirus 19 that led to the pandemic and coronavirus disease 19 (COVID 19). Since the development of a vaccine, health authorities are advocating for the masses to get vaccinated (Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021). This is advocated in addition to preventive measures to contain the spread of disease (Ahmad et al., 2021). But several hurdles hamper mass vaccination and vaccination rates have been poor especially in developing and underdeveloped countries (Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021). It has been attributed to several causes like financial constraints, lack of knowledge and access to the vaccine, fears about vaccine efficacy and potential side effects, and preference for natural immunity against vaccine acquired immunity.

## 1.3 The objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students.

#### 2. Review of Literature

Several studies have been conducted and found that control of many infectious diseases is achieved with the help of vaccination and diseases like mumps, rubella, chickenpox, etc., that once used to cause massive outbreaks, now seldom cause any small or mild outbreak (Naseer et al., 2021; Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021). This is achieved due to massive vaccination against the common childhood infectious diseases. Although vaccination against diseases has always been a very effective tool and it helped eradicate diseases like smallpox, polio, etc., it faced resistance from

many groups. Several reasons lead to vaccine hesitancy among the masses. Some of them are backed by scientific knowledge, but most of the beliefs are due to fear of the unknown, lack of knowledge, propaganda against vaccination, lack of resources, and access and preference for natural immunity against vaccination; just to name a few (Anwar, Shoaib, & Mustafa, 2022; Fontenot et al., 2021; Geddawy et al., 2021; Gursoy, Can, Williams, & Ekinci, 2021). Parents and consumer groups have long advocated that vaccination in children leads to autism and autism-like disorders that have no scientific basis and has been repeatedly proven to be false, but the belief is very hard to be shunned and that leads to reduced vaccination and breakthrough infections. Similar fears of vaccination against COVID-19 are present among masses that side effects of vaccination are very severe and are worse than actual infection (Holeva, Parlapani, Nikopoulou, Nouskas, & Diakogiannis, 2022; N. Naseer, Shoaib, & Naseer, 2022).

The COVID-19 vaccination has some common side effects and a few severe side effects, but studies have proved that their incidence is very low and protection from COVID-19 infection provided by vaccination, outweighs the risks that are posed due to vaccine-related side effects (Kim, Kim, Lee, & Andreu-Perez, 2022; Le An, Nguyen, Nguyen, Vo, & Huynh, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022). Lack of knowledge regarding the mechanism of action of vaccination, its components, its effects on the human body, and its long-term effects have allowed people to fill the gap of knowledge with their own beliefs that are mostly false and are not backed by scientific knowledge (Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022). A belief that oral polio vaccination causes male infertility has reduced the vaccination rate in tribal areas of Pakistan and that is causing breakthrough infections, due to which polio being eradicated from the rest of the world still presents in tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This belief has no scientific basis and research has repeatedly refuted the claims. Such claims about the COVID-19 vaccine interfering with human genes, altering behaviour, and manipulating the choices are also present especially among rural and underserved communities. Such claims are not backed by any scientific knowledge but because of the prevalent belief, this idea is difficult to be shunned and is a leading cause of low vaccination rates in rural communities.

Developing countries have a large proportion of a young population and most families have the nuclear family model (Ahmad, Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021; Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021; Shoaib, 2021). Due to this model children follow the advice and commands of their parents and as a result vaccination rates are influenced by the choices and decisions that are taken by elders and their parents. Because of some unproven fears regarding vaccination, they tend to discourage youngsters and pressurize them against vaccination (Wan et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). This is also one of the causes of reduced vaccination. Some people prefer natural immunity and believe that the immunity that is provided by natural infection is better and sustained than the one that is provided by vaccination (Huynh, Nguyen, Van Tran, Le An, & Tran, 2022). Although data backing this claim is scarce this is also a cause of reduced vaccination and reluctant behaviour (Wan et al., 2021). COVID-19 vaccines are not 100 percent effective to prevent infection and efficacy varies from one vaccine to another. Due to this breakthrough infections do occur, but these infections are mild as compared to the infections that occur in unimmunized persons (Tan et al., 2022). Because of these breakthrough infections people question the efficacy of vaccination and believe that vaccination is not helpful and argue that it won't help even if they get vaccinated or not. This belief is also one of the reasons that people are not getting vaccinated against COVID-19 (Ahmad et al., 2021; Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021). Several researches have been conducted using quantitative study design (Mariam, Anwar, Shoaib, & Rasool, 2021; Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020; Shoaib, Khan, & Ashraf, 2011; Shoaib, Khan, & Khan, 2011; Shoaib, Latif, & Usmani, 2013; Shoaib,

Munir, Masood, Ali, & Sher, 2012; Shoaib, Saeed, & Cheema, 2012; Shoaib & Shah, 2012; Shoaib, Shaukat, Khan, & Saeed, 2013) and bibliometric analysis (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021; Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al., 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Shaukat, 2021; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2023; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023; Shoaib, Usmani, & Ali, 2022). Hence, this study opted quantitative approach to employ SEM model.

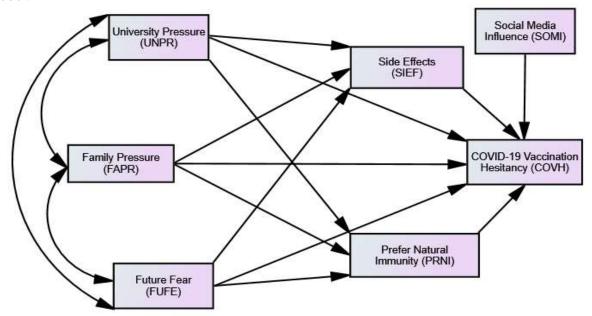


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## 3. The Data and Methods

**Study Design:** This study has used a quantitative approach i.e., explanatory research. The rationale to use this design has been based on the nature of the topic and the objective of the study. Further, the sample size has been more than 30 and a conceptual framework has been developed to test the model.

**Study Area and Population:** The study area for this research has consisted of two public sector universities i.e., the University of Gujrat, Gujrat, and the Government College University Faisalabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan. The students of the BS (4 Years) program constitute the population of the study. It is worth mentioning here that the students are male and female, from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> semesters. The COVID-19 vaccination has been notified compulsory for all students to enter the university and classrooms. Hence, students from all the semesters i.e., Fall-2021 have constituted the population of the study.

**Sampling Procedures:** A sampling frame has been collected from all the departments offering the BS (4 Years) program on campus. A proportionate random sampling technique has been used to draw a representative sample from two public sector universities mentioned above in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. A total of 4178 students participated from the universities. However, the questionnaire has been distributed among 8560 students. The response rate has been calculated as 4178/8560\*100=48.8 percent. The said response rate has been low as the classes have been started late and students have fear of contagiousness. Hence, they are attending classes late, on leave, and also keeping social distancing in the university.

**Technique and Tool of Data Collection:** A face-to-face cross-sectional survey has been conducted to conduct this study. A structured questionnaire consisting of the different sections has been developed. An attitudinal scale has been used to measure the response of the students.

**Pre-testing:** A pilot testing of 30 (15 from each university) randomly selected university students has been done to check the reliability of the tool of data collection. The value of Alpha has been measured as followings;

Table 1
Reliability Test

| Sr. | Variables                      | Code | Items | Alpha |
|-----|--------------------------------|------|-------|-------|
| No. |                                |      |       | Value |
| i   | University Pressure            | UNPR | 5     | .762  |
| ii  | Family Pressure                | FAPR | 6     | .741  |
| iii | Future Fear                    | FUFE | 5     | .709  |
| iv  | Side Effects                   | SIEF | 4     | .710  |
| V   | Prefer Natural Immunity        | PRNI | 5     | .719  |
| vi  | Social Media Influence         | SOMI | 5     | .724  |
| vii | COVID-19 Vaccination Hesitancy | COVH | 6     | .837  |
|     | Overall                        |      | 36    | .928  |

**Data Analysis:** After the collection of primary data from the universities students, the process of data editing, screening, and computerizing has been done. The data have been normally distributed and a parametric statistical test has been employed. Data analysis has consisted of descriptive statistics of the variables, correlation, and Structural Equational Modelling (SEM) technique to measure the effects of the model. In the proposed model as mentioned in Figure 1 conceptual framework, there are three variables used as an independent variable i.e., university pressure, family pressure, and future fear. Similarly, two path variables have been used named side effects and prefer natural immunity. Likewise, social media influence has been used as an intervening variable and COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students as the dependent variable.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The primary data analysis points out that 58 percent of the student's gender is male and 42 percent of the student's gender has been female enrolled in BS (4 Years) program at University of Gujrat, Gujrat and Government College University Faisalabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan. All these students are studying in different departments and faculties. Similarly, their residential area has also been reported as 66 percent from rural residential backgrounds and 34 percent of them have a familial residential background as urban.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics (n = 4178)

| Variables                      | Range | Mini. | Maxi. | Mean  | Std.  | Vari.  |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
|                                |       |       |       |       | Devi. |        |
| University Pressure (UNPR)     | 12    | 8     | 20    | 15.04 | 2.332 | 5.440  |
| Family Pressure (FAPR)         | 14    | 10    | 24    | 20.83 | 3.114 | 9.700  |
| Future Fear (FUFE)             | 15    | 5     | 20    | 15.91 | 3.684 | 13.573 |
| Side Effects (SIEF)            | 9     | 7     | 16    | 14.23 | 1.828 | 3.343  |
| Prefer Natural Immunity (PRNI) | 12    | 8     | 20    | 17.51 | 2.372 | 5.627  |
| Social Media Influence (SOMI)  | 13    | 7     | 20    | 17.65 | 2.287 | 5.229  |

| COVID-19 Vaccination | 9 | 11 | 20 | 17.75 | 2.231 | 4.977 |
|----------------------|---|----|----|-------|-------|-------|
| Hesitancy (COVH)     |   |    |    |       |       |       |

Table 2 points out the descriptive statistics of the variables. It is stated that the data has been collected using an attitudinal scale of (dis)agreement. Thus, descriptive statistics have been calculated based on the indexing of the score of all the statements of the variables. The university pressure in terms of COIVD-19 vaccination among students has a range value of 12 mentioning 8 minimum and 20 maximum values. Similarly, the table also indicates the 15.04 mean value, 2.332 standard deviations, and 5.440 variances of the variable i.e., university pressure. It is worth mentioning here that the family pressure variable range value has been calculated as 14 along with 10 minimum and 24 maximum scores of the indexing against the statements. However, the mean value of the family pressure variable is 20.83, 3.114 standard deviation, and 9.700 variances. The analysis also asserts the descriptive statistics of the variable named future fear among university students i.e., 15 range, 5 minimum, 20 maximum, 15.91 mean value, 3.684 standard deviations, and 13.573 variances. Further, it is pertinent to mention here that the descriptive statistics of the variables including side effects prefer natural immunity, social media influence, and COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students have also been provided in Table 2.

Correlation Statistical Test (n=4178)

| Variables  | UNPR | FAPR   | FUFE   | SIEF   | PRNI   | SOMI   | COVH   |  |
|--|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--|
| UNPR   | 1    | .295** | .120** | .161** | .265** | .268** | .252** |  |
| FAPR   |      | 1      | .306** | .308** | .511** | .597** | .450** |  |
| FUFE   |      |        | 1      | .066** | .486** | .240** | .280** |  |
| SIEF   |      |        |        | 1      | .211** | .236** | .419** |  |
| PRNI   |      |        |        |        | 1      | .560** | .454** |  |
| SOMI   |      |        |        |        |        | 1      | .440** |  |
| COVH   |      |        |        |        |        |        | 1      |  |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). |      |        |        |        |        |        |        |  |

Table 3 indicates the Pearson correlation statistical test. As the data have been normally distributed and the parametric statistical test has been employed to check the correlation of the variables before moving towards Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique. Data in the table presents that the variable university pressure has a weak positive correlation with family pressure (r=.295), future fear (r=.120), side effects (r=.161), prefer natural immunity (r=.265), social media influence (r=0268), and COIVD-19 vaccination hesitancy (r=.252) among university students. In the same fashion, family pressure has also a weak positive correlation with future fear (r=.306) and side effects (.308) of COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy. On the other hand, this variable has a significant moderate correlation with prefer natural immunity (r=.511), social media influence (r=.597), and COIVD-19 vaccination hesitancy (r=.450) among university students. It is worth mentioning here that there is a weak and moderate positive correlation between the remaining variables i.e. future fear, side effects, preferring for natural immunity, social media influence, and COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students as mentioned in the table. It is worth stating that the study findings are aligned with the study finding of Kotta, Kalcza-Janosi, Szabo, and Marschalko (2022), Ouyang, Ma, and Wu (2022), Shoaib, Mustafa, and Hussain (2022), and Tarus, Ölmez Yalazı, Öz, and Demirci (2022).

Table 4

Regression Weights, Covariances, and Variances (n = 4178)

| Variables   |    |      | Standardized | Estimate | S.E. | C.R.   | P    |  |  |
|---|----|------|--------------|----------|------|--------|------|--|--|
|   |    |      | Regression   |          |      |        |      |  |  |
|   |    |      | Weights      |          |      |        |      |  |  |
| FUFE  | >  | SIEF | .033         | .017     | .008 | 2.156  | .031 |  |  |
| UNPR  | >  | PRNI | .113         | .115     | .013 | 8.922  | ***  |  |  |
| FAPR  | >  | PRNI | .368         | .280     | .010 | 27.945 | ***  |  |  |
| FAPR  | >  | SIEF | .295         | .173     | .009 | 18.417 | ***  |  |  |
| UNPR  | >  | SIEF | .078         | .061     | .012 | 5.052  | ***  |  |  |
| FUFE  | >  | PRNI | .360         | .232     | .008 | 28.410 | ***  |  |  |
| PRNI  | >  | COVH | .189         | .169     | .015 | 11.419 | ***  |  |  |
| UNPR  | >  | COVH | .071         | .065     | .012 | 5.201  | ***  |  |  |
| FUFE  | >  | COVH | .093         | .053     | .009 | 6.247  | ***  |  |  |
| FAPR  | >  | COVH | .137         | .093     | .011 | 8.645  | ***  |  |  |
| SOMI  | >  | COVH | .162         | .150     | .012 | 12.531 | ***  |  |  |
| SIEF  | >  | COVH | .303         | .351     | .016 | 22.250 | ***  |  |  |
| Covariances   |    |      |              |          |      |        |      |  |  |
| UNPR  | <> | FAPR |              | 2.146    | .117 | 18.312 | ***  |  |  |
| FUFE  | <> | FAPR |              | 3.512    | .186 | 18.920 | ***  |  |  |
| FUFE  | <> | UNPR |              | 1.031    | .134 | 7.701  | ***  |  |  |
| Variances   |    |      |              |          |      |        |      |  |  |
| FUFE  |    |      |              | 13.570   | .297 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| UNPR  |    |      |              | 5.439    | .119 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| FAPR  |    |      |              | 9.698    | .212 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| e3  |    |      |              | 5.227    | .114 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| e1  |    |      |              | 3.005    | .066 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| e2  |    |      |              | 3.415    | .075 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| e4  |    |      |              | 3.132    | .069 | 45.700 | ***  |  |  |
| Chi-square = 2536.915, p-value = .000, df = 6, GFI = .944, AGFI = .925, CFI = .913, |    |      |              |          |      |        |      |  |  |
| RMSEA = .056  |    |      |              |          |      |        |      |  |  |

Table 4 points out the direct effects of the model. It indicates that the future fear has been directly affecting side effects, prefers natural immunity, and COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students. Similarly, university pressure has also been affecting prefer natural immunity, side effects, and COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy. Likewise, family pressure has also been found to have favourable effects on preferred natural immunity, side effects, and COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among students. Additionally, preferring natural immunity has a favourable contributor to COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students as mentioned in the statistical analysis in the table. It is important to mention here that social media influence and side effects have been affecting COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy positively among students at the tertiary level. The results are aligned with the findings of Wiysonge et al. (2022), Rodger and Blackshaw (2022), Shoaib, Anwar, and Rasool (2022), and Boto-García and Francisco Baños Pino (2022). Table 5 indicates the indirect effects of the model. It is stated that university pressure, future fear, and family pressure have an indirect effecting COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among students at the university through the mediation of preferring natural immunity. It is asserted that family

members are inserting pressure to avoid vaccination based on fear of infection. Likewise, the university administration has also instructed the students on COVID-19 vaccination as per rules implemented by the government. Furthermore, students have been reluctant to COVID-19 vaccination. Consequently, family pressure, university administration pressure, and future fear have indirectly contributed to COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students. The analysis reveals that family pressure, university pressure, and future fear have also indirectly effecting COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students through the moderating role of side effects of the vaccination. It has been argued that students have faced pressurizing environments from the university and family side. It results in creating fear of the side effects of the vaccination. Moreover, the university issued notifications to ensure the COVID-19 vaccination enters the classroom. This news has inserted more pressure on university students. Consequently, COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy has been observed among university students. the results of this study are conform to the results of Zhang, Lin, Chen, Tung, and Zhu (2021), Yörük and Güler (2021), Anwar, Shoaib, and Javed (2013), Yoda and Katsuyama (2021), Yahia et al. (2021), Shoaib, Ali, and Akbar (2021), and Serbezova et al. (2021). Table 5

*Indirect Effects of the Model (n = 4178)* 

| Indirect Path   | Unstandardized | Lower | Upper | P-    | Standardized |  |  |
|---|----------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--|--|
|   | Estimate       |       |       | Value | Estimate     |  |  |
| FAPR> PRNI> COVH  | 0.047          | 0.039 | 0.055 | 0.001 | 0.070***     |  |  |
| FAPR> SIEF> COVH  | 0.061          | 0.054 | 0.069 | 0.001 | 0.089***     |  |  |
| UNPR> PRNI> COVH  | 0.019          | 0.016 | 0.024 | 0.001 | 0.021***     |  |  |
| UNPR> SIEF> COVH  | 0.021          | 0.014 | 0.029 | 0.001 | 0.023***     |  |  |
| FUFE> PRNI> COVH  | 0.039          | 0.032 | 0.047 | 0.001 | 0.068***     |  |  |
| FUFE> SIEF> COVH  | 0.006          | 0.010 | 0.002 | 0.017 | 0.010*       |  |  |
| Significance of Estimates: *** $p < 0.001$ , ** $p < 0.010$ , * $p < 0.050$ , † $p < 0.100$ |                |       |       |       |              |  |  |

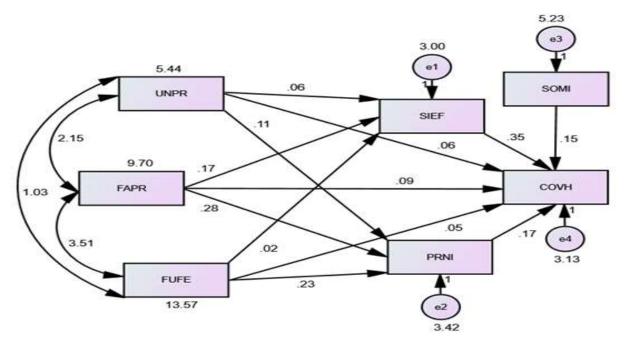


Figure2: Model Fit Diagram

#### 5. Conclusion

This research article concludes that COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy has been found among university students. It has been observed that control of many infectious diseases is achieved with the help of vaccination and diseases like mumps, rubella, chickenpox, etc., that once used to cause massive outbreaks, now seldom cause any small or mild outbreak. Similarly, COVID-19 vaccination has been declared compulsory for students enter in classrooms. The study findings conclude that students have to face pressure from university and family for COVID-19 vaccination. Furthermore, side effects and prefer natural immunity have also been added to COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students. Resultantly, social media also spread fake news regarding the side effects of vaccination in the future among students. Summing up the argument, COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy among university students has been based on multiple interlinked factors i.e., university pressure, family pressure, future fear, side effects, prefer natural immunity, and social media influence.

**Limitations of the Study:** The study has been limited to the quantitative study design and data has been collected from only two university students.

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