MERC hosts DataLEADS 'VaxCheck-Kashmir' webinar

Experts discuss problem of vaccine 'infodemic', strategies to fight it

Srinagar, May 29: Media Education Research Center (MERC), University of Kashmir on Saturday hosted a webinar titled "VaxCheck Kashmir" during which experts helped the participants to learn how to combat the vaccine-related misinformation and false claims. The training is a Google News Initiative, in partnership with DataLEADS, which is organizing this special fact-checking "Town Hall series" in different states/UTs of the country.

At the beginning of the webinar, Surbhi Pandit Nangia, Director-Outreach and Engagement at DataLEADS, Health Analytics Asia outlined the huge impact COVID-19 has had and is continuing to have on the daily lives of people from past two years and stressed the need to reach out to people to tackle "the infodemic" taking place which, she said has resulted in vaccine hesitancy and further spread of misinformation.

In her welcome address Dr. Aaliya Ahmed, HoD MERC, highlighted the need for having health literacy programs in times of misinformation which, she said, "would help to mitigate the serious effects of infodemic."

Highlighting the importance of tackling the issue of misinformation and fake news in the times of pandemic, Dr Aaliya stressed the need of imparting proper information backed by scientific evidence which would in turn help in acting as a measure to build the confidence in vaccines and overcome the vaccine hesitancy.

Resource person of the first session, Ghazala Yasmin, Assistant Professor Aliah University, Kolkata and GNI Trainer talked about why we need awareness and sensitization about vaccine misinformation, how much it has previously impacted the society and how it leads to vaccine hesitancy.

She talked about the techniques through which misinformation is being spread across media platforms and trained the participants in picking up such instances.

Yasmeen also deliberated upon using the internet in a correct way in order to not to fall prey to both the data deficiency regarding COVID and at the same the overabundance of the information.

Resource person of the second session Ms Abeen, Senior Research Analyst DataLEADS deliberated upon the ways to conduct proper online searches in order to be safe from the infodemic. In the session she discussed the topics like effective use of keywords, using Boolean queries for better and appropriate search results and tips for nuanced searches.

The training webinar concluded with a vote of thanks by Surbhi Pandit Nangia wherein she mentioned the importance of such training which has the potential of impacting many lives. She reached out to the team at MERC for hosting the session and allowing the VaxCheck Kashmir- virtual fact-checking training Town Hall series to become a reality. She hoped to continue such endeavours in future as well.

Besides the MERC faculty members, scholars and students of the department also participated in the webinar.