**PAKISTAN MALNUTRITION: Q&A with photojournalist Sara Farid**

*Sara Farid is a professional photojournalist. She has worked with leading mainstream media outlets in Pakistan, as well as for international news wires such as Agence France Presse. She is currently working as a freelance photojournalist in and outside Pakistan. She recently visited MSF’s project in Dera Murad Jamali to photograph MSF’s work on malnutrition and child health.*

**What was it like going to Dera Murad Jamali to cover an issue like malnutrition and resistance to breastfeeding?**

Issues in Balochistan are not usually covered by the media, so I felt really lucky to get access to the communities of Naseerabad and Jaffarabad, Dera Murad Jamali (DMJ). As a photojournalist it was a great opportunity to learn about the area’s women and their stories regarding local health issues, particularly about malnutrition. As a journalist, you become a link between the community and the outside world, which gives you an opportunity to tell the outside world about the issues a community face. In this case, I also considered myself a mode of communication. I raised the voices of those women through the testimonies and photos that I took. This all truly makes a difference, probably not instantly but surely in the long term.

On a human level it was pretty sad and distressing to see stunted children. There were mothers who were completely unaware of the importance of breastfeeding, and there were young mothers between 14 and 18 years old who did not know how to breastfeed. It was certainly a shocking experience. When you step inside the community, you see how serious the issue is. Every day I saw dozens of families coming to the hospital with stunted children. On a personal level, I never saw so many babies dying. I spent a week in DMJ and while there were many children saved by timely and quality treatment, I also witnessed mothers crying because their child had died.

I don’t think talking about malnutrition and breastfeeding should be a one-time thing. We must continue to highlight it. There are high rates of malnourished children in Sindh as well but organizations and media have better access there, so the situation is better highlighted. Hardly anyone knows the scale of the issue in DMJ and the surrounding areas. But there is hope - I saw many mothers transformed. They started breastfeeding their children after counselling from MSF. We should highlight the stories of such mothers to motivate others.

**Do you have a favourite character from the photos and testimonies you took?**

Yes, 14-year-old mother Zubaida. I remember seeing her as she sat silently with a 40-day-old baby. The child was being taken care of by MSF staff and the mother appeared completely lost. She seemed unaware about her baby’s condition. Zubaida was shy and scared when I first spoke with her. She was married at a very early age, and had no knowledge about how to take care of a child or breastfeed. She and her husband often travel from one place to another to find work; hence there was no one around to teach her about breastfeeding and the nutritional needs of a newborn.

But I also met many older mothers who don’t breastfeed their children. They had misconceptions that the first milk that mothers produce, colostrum, is bad for their baby’s health. This left me with immense distress as a person and as a mother.

Another woman, Muradi, likewise captured the state of women’s health in rural areas and the issues of malnutrition and breastfeeding. She has given birth to a child almost every year for the last 20 years. Her children are all malnourished and some of them have died. She is from a poor family and works in the fields. In her tribe, the first milk produced, colostrum, is discarded as it is considered poisonous. She said she did not have any breast milk but when she made an effort to breastfeed, she did actually have milk.

**Was there a picture you wish you had taken?**

I think the issue was well covered. We showed young mothers who haven’t been taught the importance of breastfeeding, as well as mothers who have misconceptions about breastfeeding. There was one girl I wanted to photograph and interview, but her father stopped her from talking to me. She had a fragile body herself and a malnourished child in her lap – a perfect case of a malnourished child and a lack of breastfeeding.

Taking photographs of women is a very sensitive issue across Pakistan, but perhaps especially so in Balochistan. Even when the women are comfortable having their photos taken, their men don’t always allow it. Then, there are the area’s security problems. Considering the sensitivities and security concerns, it is challenging to cover a complex issue like malnutrition and breastfeeding.

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