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**POLICY AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS**

*Development, Security, and Cooperation*

December 9, 2021

Programme Director  
Nur Center for Research and Policy  
3rd floor, College Building,  
Fatima Memorial Hospital,  
Shadman, Lahore

**Subject: NAS Letter of Reference**

On behalf of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and as the Implementer of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)- sponsored Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER program), as Program Officer of PEER, I certify, that Dr. Tasleem Akhtar of Nur Center for Research and Policy and her PEER team successfully completed their USAID-sponsored PEER project, entitled “*Enhancing reproductive health services use by married adolescent girls - role of women volunteers*”.

**PEER Project Principal Investigator:** Tasleem Akhtar, NUR Center for Research and Policy (NCRP), Pakistan

**U.S. Partner:** Adnan A. Hyder, George Washington University, and John Sandberg, George Washington University

**Project dates:** January 2019 - September 2021

**Total PEER funding awarded:** \$161,895.00

**Funding Source:** The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) Program implemented by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

The research study originally aimed at testing the effectiveness of Community Women Volunteers (CWVs) in enhancing the utilization of Lady Health Workers’ (LHWs’) services by married adolescent girls and young women aged 15- 25 years, with the following original objectives: (1) Increasing access of LHWs to young women for the provision of Family Planning and Reproductive Health (FPRH) services; (2) Pursuing solution-testing research to inform policies and implementation of the IRMNCH&N program; (3) Promoting community mobilization to address gaps in family planning and reproductive health awareness; and (4) Increasing inter-sectoral collaboration.

Although all aspects of the full study could not be fully implemented due to the unforeseen onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the PEER team effectively revised their project scope adapting to the new circumstances. The project team, which included Ms. Humna Rao, the Project Manager and the NCRP team (Manager Finance & Strategy, Mr. Rizwan Shahzad, Manager Communication, Ms. Saman Tariq, and the Field Team) - was able to collect a large observational data set on the community perceptions of

FPRH needs of married adolescent girls and young women, the FPRH knowledge and practices, and utilization of services by this age group of women, the potential of CWVs in providing support and facilitation to LHWs in reaching out to the community and creating awareness about the FPRH services the LHWs provide, and the views of LHWs and their supervisors on the contribution of volunteers and the acceptability of volunteers to them.

Observational dataset with quantitative and qualitative data was collected from: (1) Community groups on their perspectives on the Family Planning and Reproductive Health needs of adolescent girls and young women and knowledge about LHW-provided services; (2) Married adolescent girls and young women on their knowledge of FPRP and available services, their FPRH practices and utilization of services and use of contraceptives; (3) Community Women Volunteers (CWV) on their reasons and motivation for volunteering to work without pay and their experience of volunteering during the project and; (4) Lady Health Workers (LHWs) and Lady Health Supervisors (LHSs) on their own FPRH practices and views on their felt need for volunteers for support and facilitation of their work and the effectiveness of the volunteers during the project.

As part of the project deliverables, the PEER team produced and shared a series of one-of-the-kind impactful documentary video interviews with the participants. These videos, along with the final executive summary report that the PEER team produced are outstanding and have been serving as an example of excellence and impactful delivery to our other PEER program project teams who are finalizing their reports with the goal of conveying project impact and lessons learned.

Dr. Akhar and her team's dedication, commitment to the project and responsiveness have been evident from the inception of the project until its completion, all while effectively navigating unprecedented hurdles of the pandemic. On behalf of the National Academy of Sciences and our PEER program, I want to express full appreciation, support, and hope that the project team's work and impact continues.

Do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Lina Stankute-Alexander  
Program Officer, PEER Program  
Policy and Global Affairs  
National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine  
Washington, DC., USA