

LEBANON SITUATION REPORT

A monthly situation report aimed at tackling COVID-19 rumors to debunk the "infodemic"

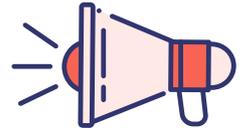
JANUARY 2023 | #10

ABOUT ROOTED IN TRUST

Rooted in Trust is collecting, analyzing, and responding to rumors in 13 countries with generous support from USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA). We focus on equipping journalists and humanitarian communicators with the tools they need in the languages they prefer, to combat rumors and misinformation during the COVID19 pandemic.

HOW WE DO IT

We identify and analyze rumors to help humanitarian actors and health workers better inform their Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) strategies.



SITUATION BY THE NUMBERS (WHO)

- Covid-19 cases reported during January 2023: **5,696** (2094 December 2022)
- Total number of deaths: **10,775**
- Latest reported cases per day: **105**
- Total vaccinated: **5,814,699**
- Persons vaccinated with at least one dose: **2,740,227**
- Persons fully vaccinated: **2,414,223**

INTRODUCTION

The total number of COVID-19 cases reported in January 2023 (5,696) continues to significantly increase compared to December 2022 (2,094) and November 2022 (1,163). Throughout January, cases increased weekly from 1,316 in (week 4-11) to 1,660 (week 11-19), with a total of 5,696 by the end of January. Cumulative deaths increased as well from 10,757 to 10,775, with 41 deaths in January compared to 8 deaths reported in December 2022. The WHO linked the slight increase to the spread of the Omicron variant. Local positivity rate decreased due to decline in reporting of private hospitals, people not testing if the symptoms are not alarming, and use of RDTs. In addition, there is a spread of seasonal influenza with its own specific measures including vaccinations, so this might have shifted attention away from the COVID-19 vaccine and test.



DATA OVERVIEW

In January, Rooted in Trust (RiT) Lebanon onboarded a new partner called Akkarouna (a local non-profit non-governmental organization) who will be leading the collection of both online and offline rumors for the project. Throughout the month, RiT Team Staff in collaboration with Social Media Monitors from Akkarouna collected a total of 114 online rumors. On 30 January, Akkarouna began collecting offline rumors and successfully collected 46 offline rumors in the north of Lebanon.

Most online rumors collected were under the theme of "Other Health Topic" (39%), followed by COVID-19 General (38%), COVID-19 Vaccine (22%), and Other Non-Health Non-COVID-19 (1%). Unlike online rumors collected at the end of 2022, most misinformation rumors came from Ordinary People (62%) rather than supposed Healthcare Professionals.

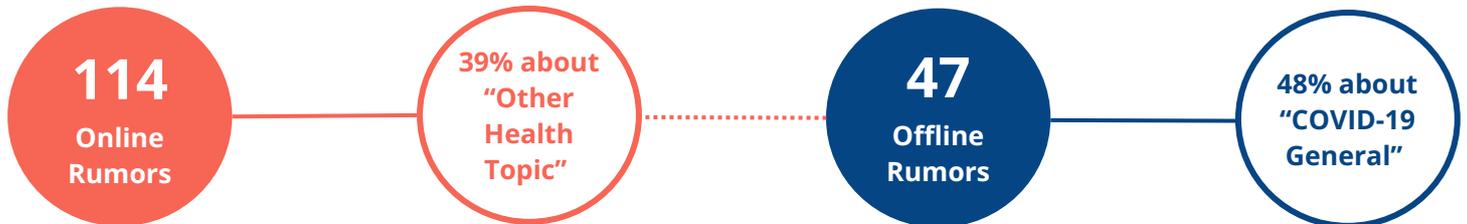
The subtheme of "Communicable Disease" continues to be top trending with a total of 19 rumors. Almost all of these rumors made reference to different influenza viruses with most of them highlighting the seasonal influenza while others mentioned H1N1 or H3N2. Some

rumors continued to spread misinformation around Cholera, but continue to decline in total numbers following trends seen towards the end of 2022.

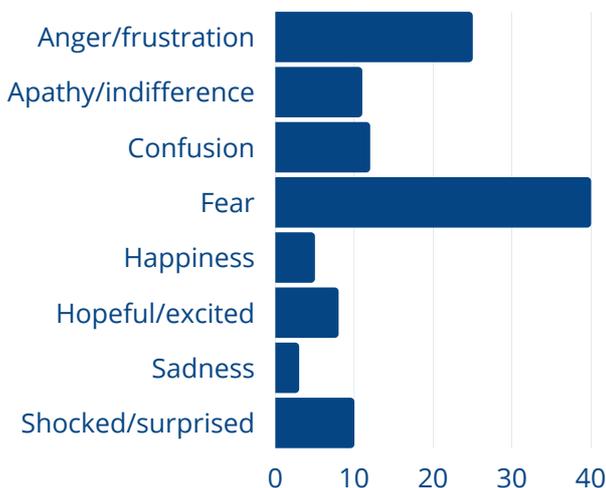
For the 46 offline rumors collected in January, the majority of offline rumors were under the theme of "COVID-19 General" (48%), "Other Health Topic" (35%) and "COVID-19 Vaccine" (17%). These rumors were collected from the north of Lebanon, specifically Zahrieh (19 rumors) and Mhamra (27 rumors) through Listening Groups / Focus Group Discussions.

Of the "COVID-19 General" theme rumors, the top sub-theme was "Disease Severity" (five rumors) with three of the rumors claiming COVID-19 as being equivalent to the seasonal flu and two of them claiming that COVID-19 no longer exists.

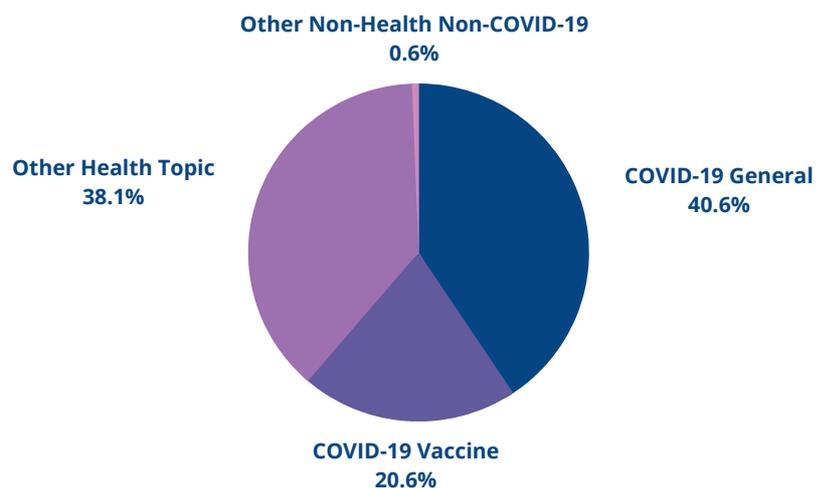
There were also 10 offline rumors collected for the sub-theme of "Communicable Disease" with them making reference to Chickenpox, Cholera, Meningitis, Scabies, and that all diseases are spread through the respiratory system.



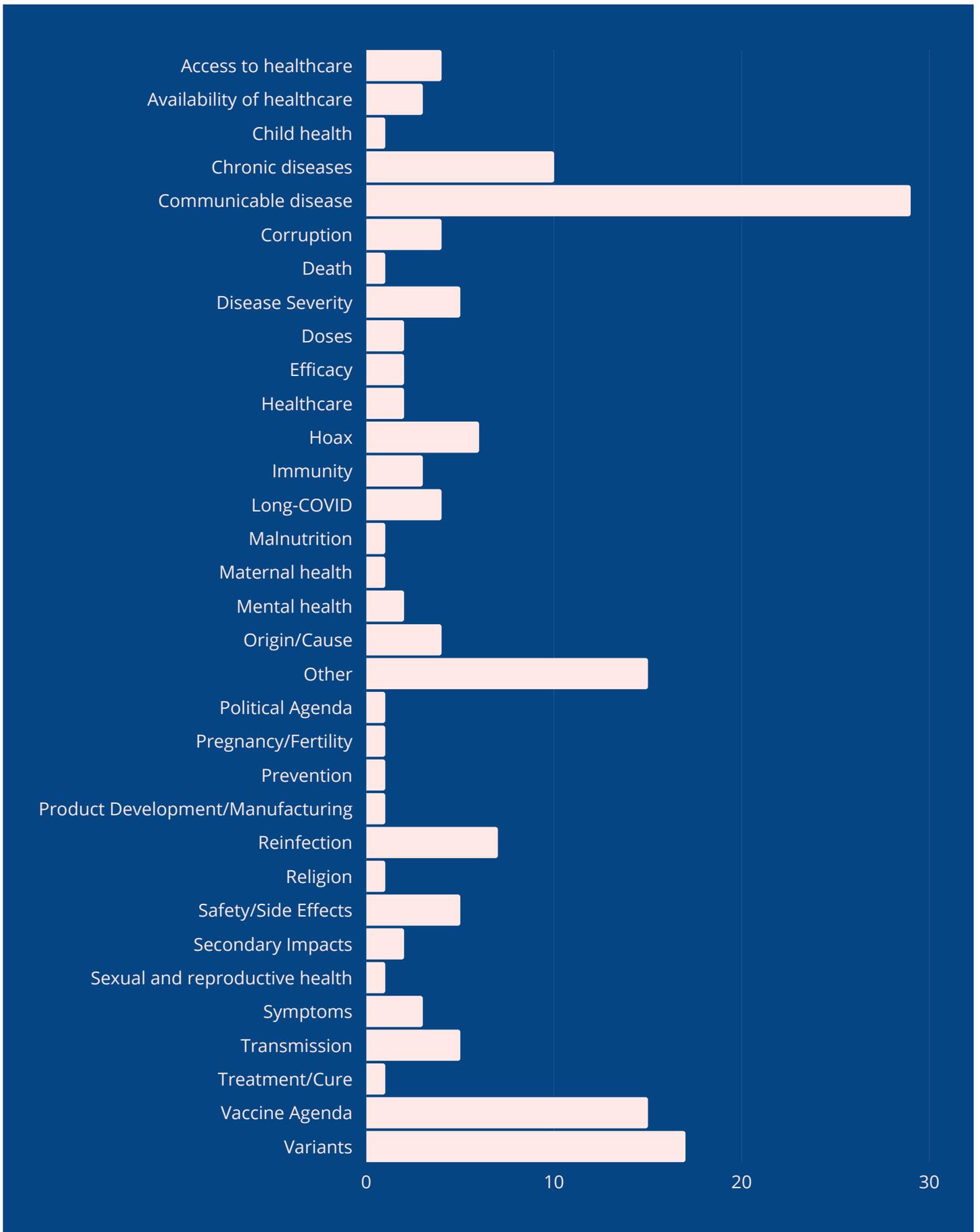
SENTIMENT ANALYSIS



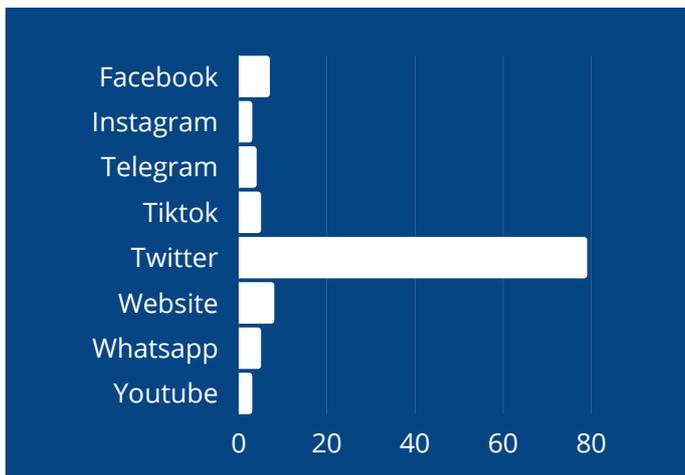
THEMES



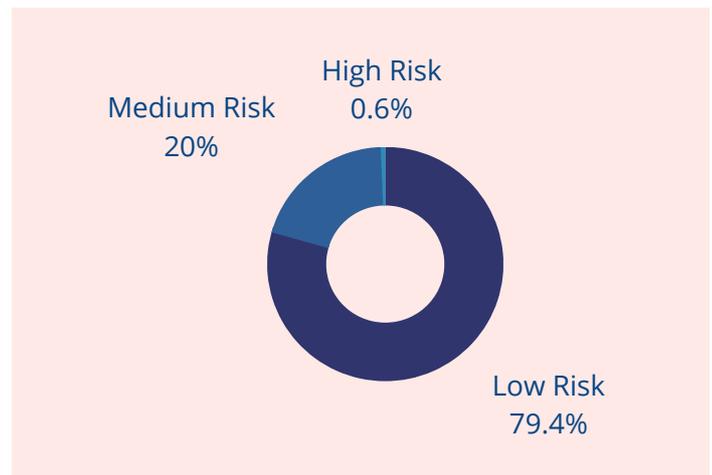
SUB-THEMES



CHANNELS



RISK LEVELS



ANALYSIS

While COVID-19 and other health-related rumors continue to linger on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Lebanon's socio-economic crisis continues to steal the limelight. In January the Lebanese Lira spiraled to an all-time low devaluation against the US dollar at 56,000. This has prompted demonstrations and further restrictions on daily ATM withdrawals, which coupled with the release of all suspects detained following the August 4, 2020 explosion at the Port of Beirut meant that most people's priorities and focus were redirected elsewhere.

As predicted in November 2022, the emergence of both online and offline rumors mentioning different influenza viruses have increased this month as evidenced by the emergence of Influenza A viruses (namely H1N1 and H3N2), which become more prevalent during cold and wet winter months. Often influenza and COVID-19 symptoms are mistaken as being one and the same.

Compared to offline rumors collected in 2022, those collected in January focused on the north of Lebanon and Akkar. 2022 offline rumors from the Bekaa predominantly revolved around the trending sub-themes of Death and Pregnancy / Fertility, specifically focusing on the COVID-19 vaccine causing death two years post-inoculation, miscarriages, or causing fertility issues.

However, while making reference to vaccine-related Death (1 rumor) and Pregnancy / Fertility issues (1 rumor) those collected by Akkarouna so far have placed focus on a wider range of topics, especially those related to the sub-theme of "Communicable Disease" alluding to Chickenpox, Scabies, and rumors such as Meningitis being transmitted through the respiratory system or that Cholera has been spreading in refugee camps due to poverty. Offline Cholera rumors may become more common given its historic prevalence in the north of the country to date.

CONTACT

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For more information on the project, visit
- <https://internews.org/resource/rooted-trust-rumor-bulletins-lebanon/>
- <https://rootedintrust.org/countries/lebanon/>