

CASE STUDY

From Counter to Care

How Training, Reflection, and Compassion Transformed a Pharmacy Experience

This project, implemented in ICT, Pakistan (2018–2026) by Ipas and partners, used a user-centered design approach to test scalable solutions and generate insights to address barriers to post-abortion family planning (PAFP). It expanded access to accurate information and quality services for women self-managing abortions through integrated community, pharmacy, and digital interventions.



In the busy streets of Bhara Kau, Islamabad, Abdul's pharmacy had always been a dependable corner for the community. From early morning until late evening, customers walked in with prescriptions, requests, and questions—most expecting a quick transaction and a prompt exit.

Behind the counter, Abdul worked with precision. Medicine was handed over, payments were made, and conversations rarely went beyond necessity.

For years, this routine defined his work.

Until something made him pause—and change.

A New Way of Seeing his Role

Abdul began to reflect on a pattern he had never truly noticed before. Many clients came to purchase medical abortion pills, often quietly and with hesitation. They left just as quickly—without discussion, without guidance, and without knowing what came next.

Some returned again, facing the same situation.

That realization stayed with him.

Around this time, Abdul had the opportunity to participate in a hands-on training supported by Ipas, focused on family planning (FP) counseling in pharmacy settings. What began as a learning opportunity soon became a turning point in his professional life.

Ipas conducted capacity-building trainings for pharmacists/drug sellers from August 2024 - March 2025

Learning Beyond Medicines

The training was not just about information—it was about transformation.

Abdul learned about:

-  Healthy timing and spacing pregnancy
-  Understood his personal and professional values impact on client's decision making
-  The rapid return of fertility after abortion
-  How to guide clients toward informed choices

But what impacted him most was a session on Values Clarification and Action Transformation (VCAT).

"I realized that I had been carrying quiet judgments," Abdul reflects. "Sometimes I refused to sell or avoid conversations. The training helped me understand that every person deserves respect, privacy, and the right to make their own decisions."

Through role plays and real-life scenarios, Abdul practiced how to communicate with empathy—how to replace silence with support, and discomfort with confidence.

KEY OUTCOMES



Trained in family planning counseling



Staff sensitized and engaged



Clients guided to contraceptive methods



A trusted space built in the community

Applying Learning into Action

The training did not end in the classroom.

Abdul continued receiving **ongoing guidance, mentoring, and support**, helping him apply his learning in real-life situations. Counseling tools, visual aids, and simple messages made it easier to begin conversations—even in a busy pharmacy setting.

This continuous support strengthened his confidence and reinforced his commitment to change.

"It wasn't just learning once—it was being supported to actually practice differently every day," he says.

The First Real Conversation

Back at his pharmacy, Abdul's approach began to shift—but not without hesitation.

For a few days, he struggled to find the right moment, the right words.

Then, one day, a man came in to buy abortion pills.

Abdul paused.

Instead of completing the transaction quietly, he gently started a conversation. He explained that fertility can return very quickly after abortion and that family planning could help avoid another difficult situation.

The man listened.

Using simple, clear explanations, Abdul shared available options and guided him toward a nearby health facility.

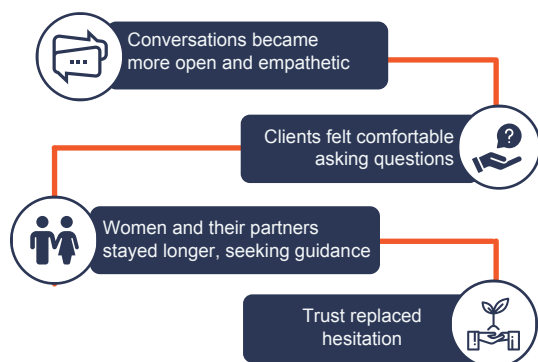
A few days later, the man returned—with gratitude. His wife had chosen a long-term contraceptive method.

For Abdul, it was more than a successful referral. It was proof that a small conversation could make a lasting difference.

A Pharmacy Reimagined

From that day forward, Abdul's pharmacy began to change.

Not in structure—but in spirit.



Abdul also shared his learning with his staff, ensuring that everyone contributed to a more respectful and supportive environment.

"Now, when people come here, I see more than a customer," he says. "I see someone who might need information, reassurance, or simply someone to listen."

A Young Woman's Story: Finding Confidence

A young woman from the nearby area, remembers her first visit.

"I went just to buy medicine. I expected no conversation," she says.

But Abdul spoke to her—calmly, respectfully, without judgment. He explained family planning options and why they matter after abortion.

For the first time, the woman felt informed.

"I didn't feel judged. I felt supported," she shares. "Now, I come here with confidence."

Later, she chose an injectable contraceptive method—a decision that gave her control over her health and future.

A Shift in Purpose

Today, Abdul's pharmacy is more than a point of sale—it is a place of care.

Clients return not just for medicines, but for advice and reassurance. Some bring others along. Many openly share concerns they once kept hidden. Abdul's business has grown—but more importantly, so has his sense of purpose.

"Before, I thought my job was to sell medicines," he reflects. "Now I know it is to help people make informed choices about their health."

From Counter to Care

Abdul's journey shows how **training, self-reflection, and continuous support** can transform everyday practices into meaningful service.

What was once a silent counter has become a space for conversation, trust, and dignity.

"The counter is no longer just for sales," he says with a quiet smile. "It's where care begins."— Abdul