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Psychosocial impact of COVID-19 to general population in India

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Abstract

Coronavirus, also named COVID 19 by WHO (World Health Organization) is a pandemic disease which spread from the city of Wuhan in late November 2019. It's a highly contagious virus and can spread from one individual to another through suspended droplets and can be contracted through the mouth, nose and eyes. At present the virus has spread to almost all regions of the world and brought the world to a standstill. The psychosocial consequences from the fallout of the pandemic, like depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, financial loss, rise in domestic violence are a cause of worry, especially those working in the mental health community. Various measures can be adopted to prevent the spread of the virus, such as social distancing, exercising and using indigenous medicine and staying connected through phone to prevent a feeling of loneliness and depression. In conclusion, one should not worry excessively or get panicky and instead follow the guidelines laid down by the government and the WHO. It is also noted that many people have recovered from the illness and the mortality rate is low at around 3%-5%. Medical colleges and Universities and associations across the country have come together as a mark of solidarity and provided valuable assistance in these difficult times. Their efforts need to be applauded.

Keywords: Covid 19, psychosocial impact, mental health, general population, wellbeing, coping strategies

Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO, 2020). Respiratory infections can be transmitted through droplets from infected person to another when these droplets enter inside mouth, nose, and eye. Therefore, it is required for all to cover mouth and nose by a mask, regular hand wash and stop touching eyes, nose and mouth are very important to prevent form this deadliest disease. In India this disease spreads every states and every corner but when concern about north east of India which is call seven sister the prevalence rate of this deadliest disease is quite low. The state like Sikkim, Manipur and Arunachal are now considered as corona free states. In Manipur two infected cases was found but luckily they overcome from this disease likewise in states of Arunachal one cases was found and recovered. Many medical professionals, Psychologist, social workers, paramedical staff work so hard making day and night together for the welfare of the country. It is also uncertain that many unwanted act had also been done in different parts of India like beating up the medical doctors, police personals, paramedical staff because of wrong belief and rumors. Nevertheless north east students who are studying in different parts of India were also discriminated as they look like Chinese. Corona virus is a killer disease which does not see any race, culture, religion, rich, poor etc. It can be infected to any person despite of you age, it is also true that senior citizens have more chances to be infected as their immune system are poor and weakened. People who are already suffering from cardiac, diabetes, asthma, and any other serious illness may also have higher chances to be infected.

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History of coronavirus (COVID -19)

A woman whose age is 57 years old and who sells shrimp in China's Wuhan city was the first case pointed out suffering from coronavirus pandemic. According to media reports after a month-long treatment she got negative and fully recovered in January 2020 (A Wuhan shrimp seller identified as coronavirus 'patient zero', 2020) [1]. Wet market is the market where people kept live and dead animals together like dogs, chickens, pigs, snakes, civets, and more. Therefore there is maximum chance to easily jump the virus from animals to human being thus how the spread of coronavirus started.

At the end of 2019 somewhere by November unidentified coronavirus emerged which is also called as COVID-19 by WHO (WHO, 2020). This virus was first emerged in Wuhan, China and its outbreak started not only in the country of China but it kept on spreading each and every corner of the world (Chi *et al.*, 2020) [2]. Literature found that coronaviruses which can be passed in human being were found in 1965 and that virus was named B814. This virus was found in human embryonic tracheal organ cultures which is obtained from respiratory tract of an adult who is suffering from common cold (Kahn *et al.*, 2005) [4]. In another study it was reported that coronaviruses are found in a diverse array of bat and bird species, which are believed to act as natural hosts. Molecular clock dating analyses of coronaviruses suggest that the most recent common ancestor of these viruses existed around 10,000 years ago (Wertheim *et al.*, 2013) [5].

Impact due to COVID-19

Psychological

Depression

Many people get worried what will happen as there is no vaccine for the treatment of COVID-19. They become insecure about their life, worried for the future and some people committed suicide because of depression. They are overwhelmed by this stress, many reported of panicky when they heard and talk about this disease. They also lost their happiness and pleasure. It is evident that people get difficulty in carrying out their daily activities and in concentration. Some people start drinking more, start abusing medication and taking drugs because of fear.

Loneliness

Lockdown has seen an exponential rise in subjective feeling of loneliness as opportunities to interact face to face is limited. This is particularly so for students, bachelors and single individuals who are confined to the perimeter of their homes for days, weeks and months on end doing nothing. Instead Internet and mobile phones are used as proxy for real human interaction.

Increase internet gaming addiction

People prone to gaming addiction are more vulnerable to the temptation of gaming addiction. The symptoms of gaming addiction had been on the rise. This is evidenced by an exponential increase in people playing games like PUG G and this has had a detrimental effect on their mental wellbeing.

Trauma

Death of a family member due to corona virus has caused extreme distress and trauma among the family members.

Since the deceased was infected the last rites is conducted by the government which prevents the members to see and say their goodbyes to the departed. This affects the grieving process. Gathering of family members and well-wishers is abstained during this period of grief. The social support required by the grieving members is curtailed due to the need for social distancing.

Social

Mass Media

A constant barrage of information in mass media, which often has a negative tone has led to an increased feeling of doom and hopelessness. This is especially true of some channels who adopt a high decibel style of reporting and has a psychological effect on people's wellbeing even if it operates on a subliminal level. There have been instances of suicide due to general feeling of panic and anxiety perpetuated by the mass media.

Loss of finance

It is evident that private employees are worried about their salary during lockdown. Many migrants going from their job place to their home town by walk for 1000 kilometers along with their family members- some of them were small kids. People are also worried about their financial loss, job loss, farmers particularly worried for the cultivation of crops thus life becomes unmanageable.

Domestic violence

As all the family members were staying together in the family due to lockdown. In certain cases if one of the family members had been infected by corona virus, the domestic violence starts beginning. Family members start discriminating the person infected with corona virus, each of them starts arguing, blaming and indulges in fault finding. Thus it raises tension in the family and this is more prevalent in the lower socio-economic section of the society.

Loss in business

Loss of income due to lockdown has caused financial stress to business owners and self-employed individuals. Due to the shutdown many individuals have been laid off from work or their salaries put on hold. Not being able to meet their financial obligations has caused them increased stress. This loss of income is more pronounced in those who are daily wage earners and employed in the non-organized sector. Migrant workers from UP, Bihar and West Bengal have lost their daily livelihood and unable to go back home. They are stuck at the borders and unable to decide the next course of action. This added financial stress spills over to the personal relations and causes friction in the family dynamics. Children of such households are particularly vulnerable to the emotional stress experienced by the parents and the verbal discord that ensues.

Religious belief

The Covid-19 pandemic is causing strain on the secular fabric of the nation. One particular section is being held responsible for the proliferation of the virus. Religious tension is on the rise. Misplaced beliefs by members of certain religious affiliations about the genesis of the virus has caused discord amongst others with different religious backgrounds.

Medical Issues

A significant proportion of the population is ailing from various illnesses and require regular follow-up in the OPD. However due to lockdown, they are unable to consult the physicians and this may further exacerbate their illness due to lack of support. Even though help is available in the form of telemedicine, it is not as personalized as a regular face to face interaction. This is particularly true for the rural population who are not well versed with the concept of telemedicine and therefore do not know how to seek help.

Remedies and Prevention

Government policies

The government has issued two lockdowns. Lockdown 1.0 from the 25th March to 14th April, 2020 and Lockdown 2.0 from 15th April to 3rd May 2020, as the virus is highly contagious and the only way to curb its spread is through social distancing. Mass gatherings in public places has been banned keeping the before mentioned in mind. Till the time a vaccine is available this seems to be only remedy to prevent its spread. Virologist, epidemiologist and experts in the field have tried to understand the spread and mode of transmission of the virus and the general consensus is that the virus can transmit itself over a distance of one meter and therefore wearing masks and maintaining distance is crucially important to prevent its spread.

Social Distancing

Maintaining a distance of at least one meter is required to prevent contracting the virus. Recent research has also pointed to the fact that the virus can remain suspended in the air, and can be contracted by a person passing through.

Frequent hand wash

Maintaining hygiene through repeated hand washing and sanitization and changing clothes after making a trip outside. Physical contact with mouth, nose and eyes should be avoided. This is important as a person may inadvertently contract and adopting these safety measures can prevent its spread.

Government initiative during Covid 19

Under the leadership of Dr. MVR Raju, Professor of Psychology at Andhra University (AU) tele service is being provided to assist individuals in these dire times. The aim is to provide consultation over the phone when physical movement is restricted across the country. Department of Psychiatry at GMCH, Chandigarh under the guidance and leadership of Dr. B.S. Chanvan and Dr. Priti Arun is providing helpline services to cater to the needs of the public at large to help them with queries regarding the spread of virus and to help them cope in these distressing times. It is a commendable initiative and similar services is being emulated and provided by various hospitals across the country.

Ayush therapy

Indigenous medicine, especially Ayurveda advocate various remedies to protect oneself from both physical and emotional illness. Use of natural herbs like tulsi, brahmi, spices like cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, roots such as turmeric and ginger and extracts of plants with anti-viral properties like Giloy and neem leaves can be highly beneficial in warding off illnesses, both physically and

mentally. These natural remedies boost immune system and helps defend against various forms of infections, possibly corona virus as well, even though no scientific evidence exists at the moment. Also, gargling with lukewarm water is recommended by Ayurveda experts.

Yoga

Yoga is a time tested technique to deal with stress and improve general wellbeing. Simple breathing exercises like Lom Anulom, pranayama, surya namaskar and practicing various Yoga postures can be very helpful.

Quarantine Centers

The Government has made provisions for masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, PPE kits, ventilators, quarantine centers across the country to help deal with the current pandemic.

Financial assistance

Additionally, the government has made financial provision to the tune of 15000 crores (Approximately 2 Billion Dollars) to deal with the current crisis. However, more needs to be done to address the plight of the migrant workers who are stuck at the borders and cannot make their way back home. Acts of generosity by members of the film and business fraternity in the form of monetary donation as well as donations from the general public towards the Covid crisis is helping pool money to help fight and deal in these difficult times. Initiatives at GMCH to raise funds to provide PPE kits for the front line staff workers is a case in point. The initiative helped procure 1000 PPE kits and is testimony to the fighting spirit and generosity of the community.

Fooding

Measures are being taken to provide meals to individuals belonging to the lower socio economic strata of society. Various teams are being deployed to address the needs of the less fortunate, especially daily wage earners who are out of a job and have no source of income. Even though these initiatives by the authorities is commendable, more needs to be done so that no individual is left behind. Financial compensation through bank account transfer and come in handy to many individuals in the current situation also been made.

Pharmacotherapy

No drug so far has proved to be efficacious in fighting Corona virus. Hydroxychloroquine was purported to be effective in containing the virus, but recent studies have proved to be contrary. Various pharmaceutical companies are working to come up with a vaccine however the testing and approval may take time. Promising research by a team at Oxford are confident that a vaccine will be developed by as early as September of 2020 and 10 lacks doses will be made available.

Association

Members of various associations like IACP (Indian Association of Clinical Psychology), IAAP (Indian Association of Applied Psychology), IPS (Indian Psychiatric Society), IAM (Indian Association of Medicine) etc, have come together as a mark of solidarity to deal with the current crisis.

Conclusion

These are unprecedented times and once in a century event. This article attempts to raise awareness and to send a message of hope in dealing with the current crisis with grit, courage and determination. One needs to be careful to not fall prey to fear or get panicky and worry excessively. Even though there are negative consequences which the people face due to the illness, there are other ways to deal and handle the deadliest illness. Ayurveda guidelines are quite helpful as a preventive measure of covid-19. Never the less, initiatives by the government of India in tackling the crisis gives hope and reasons to be optimistic. It is quite thankful to the government of India that it provides financial help, support and food to the poor people during lockdown.

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