

THE PUBLIC'S AWARENESS AND CONCERNS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Around the world, governments and health experts are scrambling to limit the spread of the novel Coronavirus which started in Wuhan China. This outbreak was declared a pandemic by WHO.

Aim: To estimate the level of public awareness and concerns regarding the spread of novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) in India.

Material & Methods: A web-based survey was done by sending questionnaire randomly over mail irrespective of age, gender and locality. The weblink was kept open for 1 week. This study was carried out in the 3rd week of March 2020. Study results were analysed using Microsoft excel software.

Results and Discussion: A total of 104 responses were received (45% were essential care providers). 76% of the participants were aware about the pandemic and its effect. 59% of the participants had acquired this knowledge on Covid -19 from television. 79 out of 104 participants were fearful about the health of self or family members. 88% members knew fever, cough and running nose to be the primary symptoms of Corona infection, which is correct. 82 % of the participants have changed their travel plans to avoid contamination. But only 48% participants are meticulously following hygiene protocols like handwash, coughing using a tissue, using mask if sick and social distancing. Only 60% are aware about the nearest testing centres. Lastly only 13.45 believed that Indian healthcare is well equipped to handle such pandemic whereas 48 % believed that Indian healthcare is not well equipped for the same.

Conclusion: The level of awareness was good among the study group with regard to the symptoms and mode of transmission. However, there were some lapses, lack of information and motivation, which we need to address in order to prevent and manage novel coronavirus pandemic and to further avoid any infection or pandemic of such scale.

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INTRODUCTION

An acute respiratory disease, caused by a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) started in Hubei province, Wuhan China from there to whole of China as well as entire world[1]. On 30 January 2020, Covid-19 epidemic that started in China was officially as a public health emergency of international concern by World Health Organization (WHO). Since its outbreak infection has spread very rapidly to almost every corner of the world. Aerosol generated during coughing and sneezing and surface to surface transmission (fomites) are the primary modes of transmission of the virus. High rate of community spread is noticed which is due to spreading of the virus occurs due to close contact with an infected person, exposed to coughing, sneezing, respiratory droplets or aerosols.[2,3] These aerosols penetrate the human body (lungs) via inhalation of respiratory

droplets from infected person through the nose or mouth. To avoid the contamination of the virus, WHO has recommended frequent hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and environmental cleaning and disinfection, as well as the importance of maintaining physical distances and avoidance of close, unprotected contact with people with fever or respiratory symptoms.[3]

Aim/Objective

To estimate the level of Public awareness and the concerns regarding the spread of novel Coronavirus in India just at the outset.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A 10 questions questionnaire was designed and was sent to random population using surveymonkey application via email and weblinks irrespective of age, gender and profession. All

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the subjects were interviewed using this questionnaire that tested their knowledge, attitudes, and use of precautionary measures in relation to emergence of novel Coronavirus that has emerged in Wuhan. Questionnaires were sent out irrespective of age and gender. This web based survey was done in the 3rd week of March (22 March 2020 – 28 March 2020) and the link was open for only 1 week. This method helped in collecting data without physically contacting the participants to avoid transmission. 104 people sent back their responses. Which was exported to the excel sheet and was analysed using excel sheet.

RESULT

Out of all the people who responded 45% were essential service providers (Doctors, nurses, healthcare staff, police, bankers etc) and 55% were the non-essential service providers who were presently working from home.

By the 3rd week of March around 76.9% people (80/104) were aware about the novel Coronavirus disease which is a good sign for the society. 17 participants (16.3%) had some knowledge about the disease. Only 2 participants had absolutely no knowledge about the disease. 59 participants (56.7%) have acquired their knowledge about the pandemic of Covid -19 from Television, 22 (21.15%) have gathered information from social media sites and 21 participants have read the journals to gather the information. 79 participants (75.9%) are very concerned that they or someone in their family might get sick by Novel Coronavirus whereas only 17 and 6 participants were somewhat concerned or not much concerned about the sickness. Only 1 participant agreed they he was not at all concerned (Fig -I)

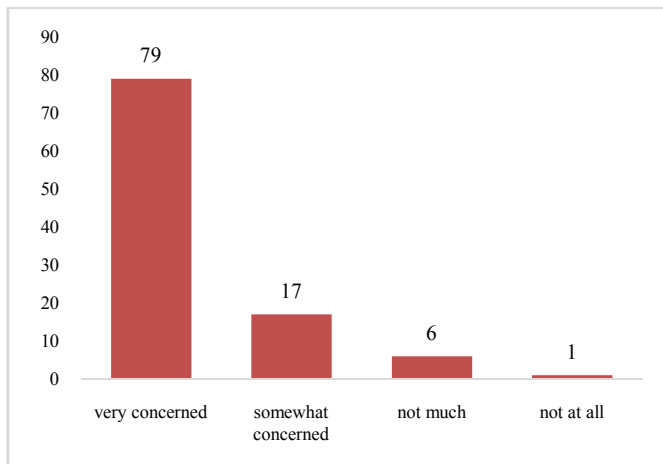


Fig I (Concern about the health of own and near and dear ones)

88% (91) participants considered fever, cough, running nose to be a symptom of coronavirus infection, which is correct. 78% considered headache & shortness of breath as a symptom of coronavirus infection, which is also correct. 25% considered nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea as symptoms of coronavirus infection, which are incorrect. 10% believed that coma is the symptom of coronavirus which is not true.

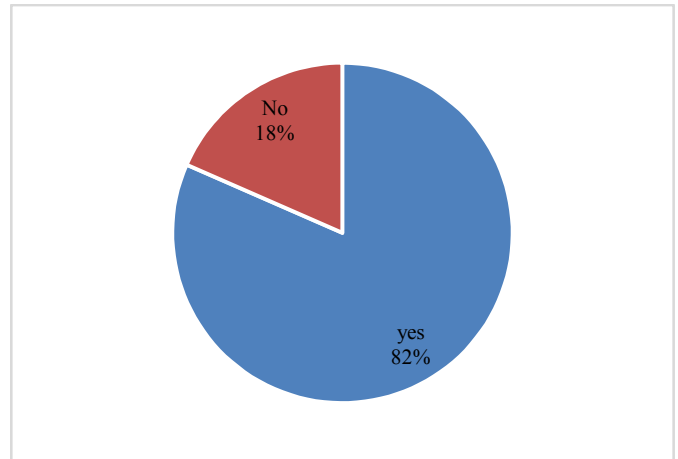


Fig II (travel plans) 82% participants agreed that they have changed their travel plans to avoid contamination, whereas 18% seem to haven't changed any.

Hygiene protocols such as hand washing, wearing a mask in public if sick and not touching your face to avoid getting infected etc are followed meticulously by only 46% participants and 50% participants maintained minimum 1 metre distance while meeting other people, coughing using a tissue or in the elbow. 0.04% (5/104) did not follow any of these measures.

84.6% participants have avoided any social gathering (marriage, birthday party/housewarming/restaurants/ religious gathering etc) and 13.4% participants haven't avoided any such gatherings in the past 2 weeks before the nationwide lockdown.

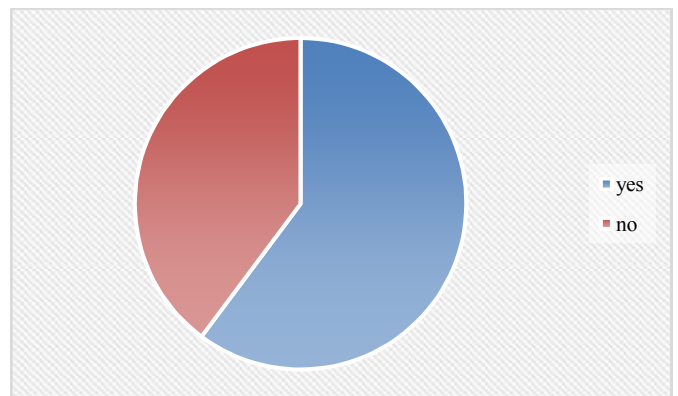


Fig III (Awareness about nCovid -19 testing centres in your locality)

As shown in Fig III, 60% participants were aware of the testing centres for your state or locality for Coronavirus/ Covid 19. Lastly, only 13.4% participants believe that Indian healthcare is well equipped to handle such a pandemic, 38.4% believe it is somewhat equipped and prepared to handle and 48% participants believed that Indian healthcare not at all prepared to handle such a pandemic.

DISCUSSION

Presently, there is no known vaccine or full proof treatment protocol to protect or cure novel Coronavirus (Covid-19). However, prevention is the key and people should follow certain habits that will help in reducing the risk of transmission. These practices include, washing one's hands thoroughly and regularly with water and soap or any hand washing disinfectant, coughing or sneezing on the upper arm or tissue (which needs to be disposed immediately afterwards)

[4]. Novel Coronavirus (COVID -19) has high risk of community transmission which can be curbed by maintaining social distancing, avoiding social gathering like marriage functions, birthday or housewarming parties, religious gatherings etc. [5,6]

Our study found that people involved in this study were well informed about the practices by various social media but there were lapses in their follow up. Countries who have already faced epidemics related to coronavirus (MERS-CoV, SARS) are a little more prepared in terms of hygiene practices and knowledge about symptoms [7, 8,9]. At the same time COVID-19 epidemic has caused a parallel epidemic of fear, anxiety, and depression. Our study found that about 76% (74/104) are very worried about their health and about the health of their near and dear ones. This may lead to a parallel pandemic of panic attack, fear and depression. People with mental health conditions could be more substantially influenced by ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, might as well result in relapses or worsening of an already existing mental health condition due to high susceptibility to stress.[10,11] Nationwide lockdown including travel ban that followed this study is considered to be a decisive factor in deciding how the country controls or fights against this global pandemic because only prevention is the key. But this lockdown may adversely affect people with pre-existing mental health disorders who might not be able to attend regular outpatient visits for evaluations and prescriptions.

CONCLUSION

The level of awareness was good among the study group with regard to the symptoms and mode of transmission. However, there were some lapses, lack of information and motivation, which we need to address in order to prevent and manage coronavirus. Communication between health care providers and the public is recommended to help dispel myths about the disease and to empower the public with the information needed to help the Indian government in controlling the disease outbreak. Television seems to be an effective medium in spreading awareness. So it should be used to spread positivity, and information.

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