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PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PANDEMIC: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

India has encountered various epidemics and pandemics in its history. Influenza, cholera, and dengue are some of the important ones to mention. Pandemic causes threat at global level and cause severe threat to some nations. It is possible to eradicate some diseases, but many continue to pose a threat to the community at large. Recently, Coronavirus was declared as pandemic by World Health Organisation (WHO) and the whole world is in a situation of massive upheaval due to COVID-19. Pandemic is a situation when there is a global outbreak of disease because of a new virus in the environment, and the population holds little and even no immunity to fight for that particular virus or disease. According to Merriam Webster definition, “An *epidemic* is an outbreak of disease that spreads quickly and affects many individuals at the same time”. History indicates that there were pandemics like H1N1 pandemic of 2009, Black Death (plague) and the Spanish flu of 1918-19 since the beginning of the 20th century, and now the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019-20.

COVID-19 or novel coronavirus is an infectious virus that started spreading from Wuhan, China. Corona viruses have the potential to cause illnesses like common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). COVID-19 is a severe and more threatening form of corona viruses and the severity of its symptoms may range from mild to severe. The best way to deal with present pandemic is to understand the nature of COVID-19. Since the beginning, COVID-19 has threatened the existence of humanity at global level. Though there is no vaccine for present pandemic till date, but there are some precautionary measures that need to be followed to save the world from the severity and harshness of killer corona. People are distressed and running out of resources for survival. There is constant job loss and the resultant stress is making the population more vulnerable to psychological disorders and suicides. COVID-19 pandemic has led to major psychosocial and severe economic impact at global level.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

The psychological impact of COVID-19 can be summarized under the three headings of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral impact. According to Sim and Chua (2004), pandemics have a strong impact on the mental health of individuals. This was confirmed by another study that focussed on the psychological impact of SARS epidemic in China (Wu, et al., 2009).

EMOTIONAL IMPACT/AFFECT

The emotional impact indicates the emotions or affects part related to the pandemic. When the whole world is suffering from the deadly disease, depressive feelings are inevitable in population at large, beyond the boundaries of gender or nations. Such feelings are more

severe with the vulnerable population like old age members of families or those who are already undergoing treatment for some psychiatry disorders. It was observed that individuals with psychiatric co-morbidities had more issues related to treatment and recovery (Asmundson & Taylor, 2020). There is a constant feeling of unhappiness, agitation and anger in individuals, resulting into irritability. People, especially vulnerable ones feel more overwhelmed. It has also been observed that there is a feeling of loneliness and isolation, resulting into suicides in critical and vulnerable cases.

COGNITIVE IMPACT

With such heavy and emotionally charged state of mind, the cognitive impact gets reflected in memory issues, where it has been reported that there is a diminished or lack of concentration. Individuals have become more pessimistic with racing thoughts about death and survival. It has been observed that the news of COVID-19 spread has led to constant state of worry and rigidity in population all over the globe. It has also been reported that the threat of death and dying and the consequent negative thoughts were more severe in the beginning of the pandemic, when people were trying to understand the nature of the virus.

BEHAVIORAL IMPACT

The behavior of individuals gets affected by the thinking patterns and the feelings they experience. Eating disturbances like over eating or not eating much, and sleep disturbances in the form of oversleep or inability to fall asleep are some of the behavioral changes observed in population suffering from the negative or pessimistic thoughts about COVID-19 spread. Social withdrawal, nail biting, anger outbursts, frequent crying, and substance abuse like alcohol has also been observed. There is a growing stress in families and resultantly relationship issues have also been a major concern all over the globe. The psychological impact of epidemics and pandemics has been well researched in the past too (Mauder, et al., 2003; Reynolds, et al., 2008; Robertson, et al., 2004).

SOCIAL IMPACT

When the whole nation is trying to deal with the distress related to COVID-19, the social impact gets more serious. The major impact of the pandemic situation has been observed in educational institutions where schools and colleges have been closed, leading to a great loss in academic sector. Moreover exposure to screen has increased to multiple times due to online teaching and social interaction. There is a rise in antisocial behaviors like violence and black marketing due to lockdown restraints. People are losing jobs, business units are at loss and unemployment has raised the insecurities in public all over the globe. E-communication, work from home and online teaching-learning has made people more prone to cyber threats. Bilateral relations have changed due to the spread of virus from Wuhan city of China and there is rise in political controversies in the blame game of corona spread. There is distrust in families, especially when members of the family move out of home. Research indicates that the impact of pandemic has negatively impacted the healthcare professionals where they are dealing with the pain, sufferings, and loss of lives due to spread of virus (Greenberg, et al., 2020; Wu, et al., 2009).

ECONOMIC IMPACT

During lockdown the business units were closed and employment sector suffered due to restricted movements. The demand for resources was high and the supply was low, leading to inappropriate allocation of scarce resources. Financial stress and heightened prices took toll on the pockets of poor and made the survival difficult. There was loss of revenues due to business losses, consumption in welfare schemes and other healthcare maintenance expenditure. The economic loss was faced by almost all the nation all over the globe due to lockdown policy to contain the spread of pandemic.

PREVENTION

COVID-19 situation was not easy to deal with in the beginning and threatened the mere existence of population. People were extremely fearful during the struggle to understand the nature of virus. But as the days and months passed, people started understanding that this is a new normal and they will have to live with it for a long period of time. It was understood that in the absence of medicines or vaccines, prevention is the only available option. There was a move towards Ayurveda and Aarogya Setu App was made available in India. The concepts of quarantine, isolation and containment zones were made clear through online social platforms. Social distancing, use of masks, and hand hygiene was promoted as a means to contain the spread of virus. Hotspots were sealed as the precautionary measure to avoid the spread of virus to surrounding areas.

Use of music in coping with the stress related to COVID-19 was promoted. Slowly and gradually healthy behaviors were promoted through education like fostering healthy attitudes and beliefs in population. Projects like *COVIDVEER* were undertaken not only for research but also to contact the students and their families in order to understand their individual sufferings. This promoted a sense of belongingness in people of Haryana and the needful people were counselled as well. Counseling platforms like *TOUCHBASE-Live* and *YourDost* was started as an initiative to resolve the queries of students during lockdown. Psychological support and counseling promotes psychological support and give adaptive coping strategies during pandemic (Dong & Bouey, 2020; Patel & Jernigan, 2019) Government came up with various guidelines to be followed during pandemic times like guidelines for marriages restrained the number of people to 50 only. People were advised to follow healthy lifestyle, maintain support system and buffer positivity through hope and humor. Online teaching, research and webinars were promoted so that education sector stays on the track. Various teaching learning platforms evolved for the flexible communication of syllabus related material to students. Children and adults were advised to utilize lockdown period for self care and creativity. They were also asked to minimize exposure to news about COVID-19, especially sensitive news and rumours. It was important to stay socially close even during social distancing, and there was a need of stress management and relaxation techniques for adaptive functioning. Promoting holistic wellness was the central idea of prevention techniques adopted by population at large.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic is taking toll on the psychological, social, economic and political front of nations in all over the world. The psychological sufferings due to pandemic are more

prominent in individuals with psychiatric issues. Research indicates that elder members of the families are more vulnerable. The society suffers due to pandemic spread, and healthcare workers deal with the physical and psychological sufferings of patients. Moreover, bilateral relations also change in these tough times. It is important for the nations and citizens to understand the nature of the virus and accept the challenge to save their lives through adoption of preventive measures. The economy can be brought back with efforts but the mental health cannot be revived easily, so it is important for everyone to maintain their psychological self and well being.

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