



## COVID-19 AWARENESS CHALLENGES AND CONTROL, EXPERIENCE OF RURAL PEOPLE IN A DISTRICT OF NORTH INDIA

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### Abstract

The current global pandemic of COVID-19 necessitates a public health strategy with more emphasis on epidemiology, especially with regards to understanding the causes as well as identifying appropriate population based behavioral and educational programs. However, the virus does not differentiate between rich-poor or rural-urban dichotomies. It is particularly a threat to a country like India, where 65–68% of the population live in rural areas that also have the highest overall burden of disease globally. The corona virus disease has various negative consequences on various section of society.

**Keywords :** Covid-19, Lockdown, Awareness, Challenges, Experience.

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### Introduction

This article highlights the potential consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for India's rural population of Meerut District. The COVID-19 pandemic created a special challenge due to the paucity of testing services, weak surveillance system and above all poor medical care. The impacts of this pandemic, and especially the lockdown strategy, are multi-dimensional. The corona virus disease has various negative consequences on various section of society.<sup>[1]</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis with an actual or potential impact on citizens of all nations. This outbreak has already had a significant impact on mental health, especially in vulnerable groups and rural and urban people. Besides causing distress in their own right, these psychological symptoms have the potential to adversely impact immune functioning.<sup>[2, 3]</sup>

The health care services and systems in India are still developing and have challenges of workforce shortages, absenteeism, poor infrastructure and quality of care.

The State focus has been on curative care, whereas poor infrastructure and poor coordination between the line departments makes it difficult to tackle public health emergencies such as COVID-19. The health care system is not adequate or prepared to contain COVID19 transmission in the rural areas, especially in many northern Indian States because of the shortage of doctors, hospital beds and equipment, especially in densely populated underserved states.<sup>[4]</sup>

### Aim and Objectives

Department of Community Medicine, Subharti Medical College, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University received a letter from Head of Institution to conduct a study regarding impact of COVID 19 epidemic in rural areas. The source of letter was University Grants Commission (UGC) with number D.O.No.F.1-1/2020 (secy) dated 12th June 2020 and the letter stated that the University should conduct a study/survey in 5 to 6 nearby or adopted villages.

This study was conducted in nine villages of peoples in Block Kila Parikshat Garh, District Meerut on following issues:

1. What were the awareness levels in the village regarding COVID 19?
2. How did the village withstand various challenges posed by COVID 19?
3. What were the best strategies or measures adopted by the village to combat the challenges posed by COVID 19?

### Methodology

A cross sectional study was conducted among village people of Meerut district in the month of June 2020. Field practice area of Rural Health and training Centre (RHTC) Khazoori of Department of Community Medicine, Subharti Medical College, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University have 9 villages namely Khajoori, Ikla, Badhla, Sohna, Eitmadpur, Jai, Khanpur Bangar, Nangla and Allipur. There are total population of 44794 with 11734 families. 10% families of each village were included in the survey. Families were selected randomly from the family register maintained at the health center. Probability proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling method was used to find number families to be interviewed from each village. The sample size was found to be 1200 respondents.

Following the guidelines issued by the Government of India regarding social distancing telephonic interview (in vernacular language) was done with the head of family after receiving verbal consent.

To assess the awareness level, various challenges and best strategies or measures and their determinants among rural public during COVID -19, a pre-designed, pretested, pre-validated, semi-structured and close ended questionnaire was used by discussion/interview.

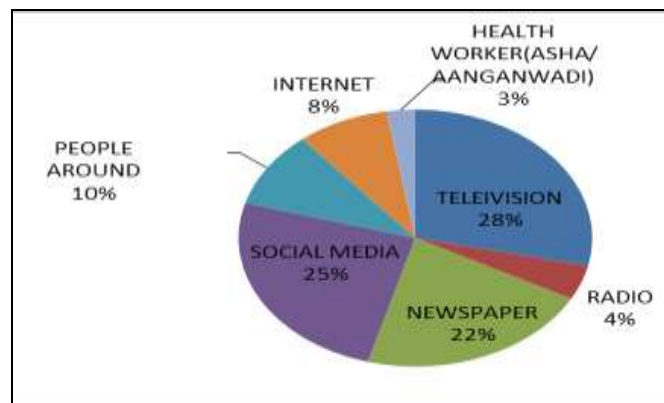
For statistical analysis, the data was entered and analyzed using statistical package SPSS Version 20. Results were tabulated in percentages, mean, standard deviation. Chi square test was applied to test the significance.

### Results

In this study, the majority (94%) of respondents were aware about that COVID 19 is a pandemic. The Maximum (92%) of respondents were aware about that COVID 19 spreads from infected humans to other humans. Mode of transmission was found through sneezing (81.33%), coughing (75.25%), touching infected objects /humans (76.08%) and speaking (48.08%) among the respondents. Fever (92.4%) and cough (81.4%) were found highest symptoms of COVID 19 although breathless (65.7%), cold (74.9%) and sore throat were another possible symptoms of COVID 19 infection.

(95.0%) of respondents replied that COVID 19 can infect any person despite of age, religion and socioeconomic status. (83.0%) of respondents replied that most of the cases of COVID 19 are mild and early recovered. (94.0%) of respondents knew that COVID 19 cases are severe in old age, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease and other diseases as co-morbidities. (92.8%) of respondents replied that stay at home is best way to prevent corona virus. Although social distance (82.16%), covering the face mask or cloths (81.83%) hand washing (74.99%) and proper sanitation (65.58%) were found in this study. (98.0%) of respondents replied that we can fight with COVID 19 by increasing immunity.

Remaining stress free was preferred by almost 90.91% to keep them safe from COVID 19 infection. Ayurvedic measures like kadha, tulsi, ginger etc were preferred by 85.91%. Yoga practice by 82.41%.



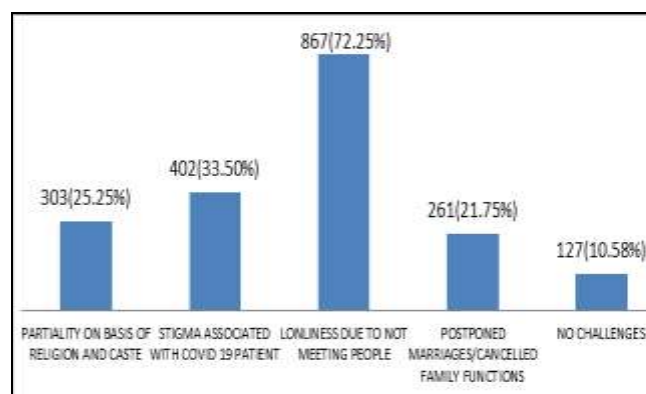
**From where you get maximum knowledge about COVID 19.**

The source of information Television was most preferred with 28% while social media which included Face book and WhatsApp was 25%. Newspaper was delivered regularly during lockdown also so (22%) of people preferred it also.

Financial problem was present in 81% responses and scarcity of food products in home 72.25% but none of them said they ever had to remain hungry because the social support system in villages was strong and help was just a door away.

Domestic Violence was 41.75% and almost all felt there was an increase in domestic issues and perceived reasons were financial issues, stress due to pandemic, long time stay at home and increased expectations from each other.

### Social challenges among rural people



Non availability of doctors 60.50% was also perceived as an issue of stress and anxiety in family. 25.25% respondents had said that few news channels in television and some news articles were biased towards a particular community and held them responsible for transmission of COVID 19 in India which created anxiety and apprehension in that particular group.

33.50% answered that COVID 19 patients and their families were bad and we should not keep relation with them and refrain from meeting them in future also.

72.25% were feeling loneliness as they were not meeting with their friends and relatives on daily basis as they

used to do and they did not find anything for their entertainment at home.

21.75% Postponed marriages were also creating stress as many thought if they stretch it for uncertain and long time it may also cause disagreement for marriages in both male and female. Few people also said this is good time for marriage as the expenses are very less.

The problems faced by farmers during this time. Selling the harvested crop was emerged as the biggest challenge as markets were not open and no transportation was available. Many vegetable farmers had big losses in this duration. The state of people who were in jobs and business. A decreased earnings due to no movement in market was the problem.

35.2% said that people in village tease the person who wears mask and this discourages them to wear it. Also they felt for a farmer it's hard to cover face all the time in this hot climate. 71.4% said hand washing was not possible in village as water is not available everywhere for washing hands and we don't find place to keep soap also. Villagers didn't like idea of keeping alcohol based hand sanitizer in pocket. 70 % said they never bothered about social distancing.

### Discussion

Corona Virus disease emerged as global pandemic in 2020 which has affected more than 200 countries in the world. It has shaken the world major power like USA, UK, China, Russia and India. There is no drug treatment available of this disease at present. Therefore, it has caused great morbidity and mortality across the world. The most of the countries has adopted lockdown and social distancing as major preventing strategies for corona virus disease. These measures have caused restriction of trade and travel activities across the globe. The social distancing has become the mantra for prevention of corona disease.

In India, the vulnerable section of society like migrant workers, laborers, daily wage earners, farmers etc. has become more vulnerable due to lack of food, shelter and transport. The government has taken various initiatives like PM care fund, 20 lakh crore economic packages etc. for the welfare of the people.

The nationwide lockdown has left farmers across the country bereft of agricultural labor just before the crucial harvesting season. Farmers also worry about government procurement and their ability to sell their crops, given that many agricultural markets are still closed, despite orders from the home ministry to exempt all farming activities from the shutdown. Unless the government acts soon, farmers in India will face a bleak future leading to bankruptcies and farmer suicides.

The center and state government has announced various relief measures for migrant workers and laborers. However, there have been lacunae in implementation of these measures and many workers had to walk hundred kms on foot to reach their hometown. It causes employment and livelihood insecurities in villages when these work reach homes The lockdown restriction has stopped religious gatherings in the country. The people are advised to pray at home.

The economic shutdown during lockdown has caused fear in youth about loss of jobs. The stay home during lockdown has also increased stress among youth.

Elderly people are more prone to COVID 19. Therefore, morbidity and mortality of COVID 19 has been high in elderly people. The various old people in India are unemployed and not cared properly at home. Therefore, COVID 19 has made elderly people more vulnerable.<sup>[5]</sup>

Many countries have reported an increase in domestic violence and intimate partner violence attributed to lockdowns amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial insecurity, stress, and uncertainty have lead to increased aggression at home, with abusers able to control large amounts of their victims' daily life.<sup>[6]</sup>

The various government hospitals has been turned into COVID hospitals. The various private clinics are set. It has made health services inaccessible and unavailable to most of Indian population. Therefore, there is increased need on improving health infrastructure in post Covid world.

There is excessive fear and anxiety in general population due to health and financial insecurities. The lack of work may make people more prone to alcohol. Therefore, the general people needs to be given psychological support and should learn to live in post covid world.<sup>[7]</sup>

Therefore, we need to learn living in Post corona world. In this post corona world, the various attitudinal and habitual changes could be seen in people. The facemask and social distancing or 2 ghaj doori is going to be norm in coming days. The various countries has made wearing facemask compulsory in public places.

The people are going to be more concerned about health, hygiene and nutrition. Therefore, we can see emergence of health promotion activities like yoga and plant based diets. The ministry of Ayush has promoted herbal tea / decoction (Kadha) made fromTulsi (Basil), Dalchini (Cinnamon), Kalimirch (Black pepper), Shunthi (Dry Ginger) and Munakka (Raisin) Chyavanprash, golden milk etc. as Ayurveda immunity promoting measures. A study done in north India showed that 52% of rural people started to practice immunity boosting measures as suggested by ministry of Ayush. [8] These findings suggest that there can be emergence of Ayurveda as an important medicine system in future as it has immense health promotive ingredients. There can be shift toward vegetarianism in the world as various diseases like Covid 19, Swine flu, SARS had been associated with non-vegetarianism.

The COVID 19 has imposed a challenge to globalization as unrestricted trade and travel activities have caused spread of Corana virus. Therefore, there is requirement of giving more emphasis on our local products.

Thus, it seems that we will continue to face the challenges due to corona virus disease. The society needs to adapt in post Covid world as corona virus disease have various socioeconomic and political consequences. The world will have to come out from the lockdown strategies gradually because the poverty alone can kill more people than death due to corona disease. In fact, we need to save not only lives but also to save economy.

In the coming times, the government, corporate, scientists, NGO and local people will have to work together for wiping out the tears from the poor and rural peoples. The international efforts would be required for the development of drugs and vaccines against Corona disease. The health

infrastructure needs to be upgraded to deal with such public health emergencies in the future. We need to follow social distancing and preventive measures like facemasks for our own safety. The economic activities would resume slowly across the world but preventive measures against the corona virus will continue among the people. The various innovative measures like work from home, virtual classes, teleconsultation can provide solutions in the near-term future.

The great Indian text Bhagavad Gita says that the man cannot be happy if the society is weeping. Now, the whole society is weeping due to the corona disease. Therefore, each section of society should come together to win this battle against the corona disease. The efforts should be made to convert this adversity into opportunity. The rural people would have to work even harder to cope with the damage done by the corona virus.

### Conclusion

The corona virus disease has various negative consequences on various sections of society. Rural populations in our sample were fairly knowledgeable about the pandemic and were taking fair care of their immunity. People were aware of the importance of social distancing and sanitization but most of them were not practicing them. A strong advocacy on the behavioral change of sanitization measures is required in the observed villages.

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