



Corona pandemic and Mental health of old age people

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Abstract

COVID-19, the biggest epidemic of the century has caused great damage to the human civilization. It has affected every segment of the society but, the impact is more pronounced on the vulnerable groups like old age. The 2nd wave of corona generated lot of distress, anxiety, fear, apprehension and panic among the population. The aim of this paper was to analyze effect of pandemic on the mental health of the old age people during the 2nd wave of covid-19 in India. An online survey was conducted. A total of 100 senior citizens (age above 60 years) completed the self-constructed google form questionnaire in month of May 2021.

The results highlight that 50% of the respondent's experienced restlessness, anxiety, sadness, depression during this time.

Keywords-mental health, anxiety, depression

Introduction

Pandemics are disease outbreak that spread globally. The highly infectious novel coronavirus which was first identified in Dec 2019 in Wuhan, China, engulfed almost the entire world in just few months. In the first wave India, registered quite a low number of covid-19 positive cases. But the devastating 2nd wave overwhelmed the country and its health system. In many cities and states, oxygen supply had been critical, hospitals turned patients away and crematorium ran out of space. As of May 18, India had reported more than 26.4 million confirmed cases and over 27,4000 deaths from COVID-19.

During the first wave, the strict nationwide lockdown imposed by the central government resulted in curbing the spread of the infection. But in march 2021, due to mass gathering in religious places, festivals, marriage ceremonies, political rallies and lack of coordination between center and state governments, India experienced its peak. The 2nd wave of covid -19 generated a lot of stress, panic, fear among people. The older population experienced greater adverse mental health issues apart from the physical issues. The decreased immunity, physiological changes associated with old age, and pre-existing comorbidities made the elderly population more vulnerable to becoming seriously ill.

The UN (united nations) stressed that COVID-19 is not only a physical health crisis, but it has seeds of major mental health problems too. It has been suggested that measures taken by government for social distancing and isolation can result in social isolation and loneliness. This will decrease the mental wellbeing and increase the risk of many psychological problems. Brooke and Jackson also pointed that decline in activity and mobility due to lockdown can lead to lower wellbeing in older adults. Indians are more social and have large social network, they engage in several gatherings like festival, marriages and other family functions. After complete lockdown for some months during 1st wave, another lockdown and corona at its peak in march 2021 in India, lead to downgrading effect on the psyche of the general public and elders in particular. A study by NGO Agewell foundation, COVID -19 situation affected the

health conditions of 26% of the elderly population in India. The study revealed that not just health conditions but also the social life, psychological and financial well-being has also been greatly hit. During 1st wave media reported that the number of older people seeking help for mental help increased by 20% (Lolwal,2020)

Mental health is defined as the successful performance of mental function, which resulted in productive activities fulfilling relationships with other people and the capacity to adjust to change and cope with difficulties and hardship. It is a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms and a capacity to establish constructive relationship and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life (Goldenson 1984). COVID-19 can occur at any age, but the elderly population is in the high-risk zone. Apart from the physical illness, strong social restraints, social distancing, and quarantine measures to prevent corona spread have raised the concern about their mental health. This study was carried out to analyze the mental condition of the elderly population during the pandemic.

METHODS

Objective

To study the mental well-being of the old age people (above 60 years) during 2nd wave of covid-19

Sample and Procedure

An online survey was conducted in May 2021. The survey was designed using the google forms. A total of 100 complete responses were received, which were further analyzed by calculating percentage. The gender split was 60% percent male and 40% percent female. The mean age of the respondents was 60-75 years. About 55% percent lived in joint family 35% percentage lived in nuclear family and 10 % lived alone.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to analyze the state of mind of the elderly population in the background of 2nd COVID-19 wave. Out of the total respondents about 27.3% were themselves infected with corona virus. Whereas about 65% reported that some or the other in the family or relation had been infected with this disease. 36% had lost a family member or relative due to corona. These factors did create a lot of distress among the people ,75% respondents agreed that corona had adversely affected their life.

As corona virus is highly infectious, isolation is one of the precautions to curtail the spread. But being alone for several days is also highly stressful. This is clear from the response of the respondent as 47.9% & 16.7% reported being fearful of being isolated if infected, always and at times respectively where as 33.3% were not fearful.

Due to lockdown, the movement outside was restricted, which did have impact on the daily activities of the people. About 75% reported that their daily routine was badly hampered due to corona, where as 25% felt no disturbance

Looking at the mental state of people in this segment about 34% had negative thought coming to mind always,19.1% at times and 46.8% no negativity. About 25% found it difficult to concentrate in any activity always, 16.7% at times and 58.3 % had no such problem. The mental well-being of the respondents was adversely affected, but it also depended on how the respondents spent their time during lockdown. Out of the total respondents, about 62.5% of the respondents spent time with family members, 16.5% spent time watching television, 8.3% carried out long conversations with their family members or the relatives over telephone. And a portion of 12.5% spent time alone.

In the question how they were feeling during these days, 38.3% were anxious, 6.4% sad,19.1% felt depressed whereas 36.2% felt happy. This shows that lockdown did have detrimental impact on the participants behavior. This could be attributed to the reason that for the first time in the history of human civilization, people were locked down in their homes, not allowed to step out of the houses, social distancing was practiced, markets were shut, corona cases were rising, deaths were increasing, the hospitals were overcrowded, and shortage of oxygen worsened the condition.

80% respondents were worried not about themselves, but the family members health, about their children, grandchildren and other loved ones, 10% reported no fear and rest others showed worries about side effect of covid, and the concern about the availability of vaccination.

Conclusion

The elderly population has been impacted by covid-19, situation. Not only physical, but the social and psychological well-being has been influenced, as about 38.3 respondents felt anxious and 19.1% depressed. But the well-being is also moderated by the family structure, socialization process, locus of control and personality type.

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