Societal impact of novel corona virus (COVID–19 pandemic) in India

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Abstract

The whole world is facing a big crisis due to the spreading of newly detected novel corona virus 2019 (COVID–19). A huge number of people have already been infected since last 4 months. People are thinking about the prevention of infected individuals, vaccine, medical treatment, and other precautions. The governments of most countries including India have already taken several measures like lockdown, social distancing, closure of schools, colleges, religious gatherings etc., to reduce its spreading. India is a developing country and most of the people are having below the standard income. So the lockdown in India has affected the poor and middle income group people. In this article, we will discuss in detail on the societal effects in India due to COVID–19 pandemic. The effects of health, essential commodities, Indian economy, domestic violence, politics, and psychology on society due to COVID–19 will be elaborated in detail. The aim of this research is to have a clear understanding of the present societal scenario during lockdown, which may help the government for better management and prevention of the disease.

Keywords: COVID –19, social impacts, Indian economy, politics, violence on women.

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Introduction

The whole world has a long history of epidemic diseases. Most of the countries suffered from several pandemic situations since more than 100 years like Spanish flu, influenza, small pox, cholera, swine flu, SARS, H7N9 etc., which caused many impacts on the society [1-5]. The coronavirus pandemic started as a simple outbreak in December 2019 from Wuhan, China and it has now become a global threat within 4 months [6]. As most countries were not prepared for this, now it has become very difficult to prevent the spreading. Therefore, it has been affecting several people throughout the world. The health systems have already been overburdened due to the huge loads of corona infected people. It has been reported by this time (25/04/2020) more than 2.8 million cases and over 1.9 lacs deaths worldwide due to COVID-19 [6,7]. The governments from most of the countries have already implemented several protocols in order to reduce the impacts of corona virus spreading such as social distancing, closure of schools, colleges, universities, airports, restaurants, shopping malls etc., where the gatherings are most inevitable [8]. Most of the citizens are prohibited to leave their homes except the healthcare workers, police, and the workers involved with other emergency services. This is consequently affecting the several impacts on society like major economic downturn, international stock market slowed down, health system overburdened, poor people starvation, and many employees are left jobless. Many scientists from medical science background are trying to invent vaccine for preventing corona virus [9], whereas the researchers from other community are interpreting and modelling the spreading to understand the quantum of this epidemic [10-13]. The impacts on socio-economic effect due to COVID – 19 also need to be understood as any epidemic diseases have a long history of societal impacts [1-5]. Many developed countries like USA, Italy, Germany, France, and Spain have already been handling the critical situation. India is not also exception of this. Being a developing country with dense and huge population, India will be affected in a large scale

both from economical background as well as many societal impacts. The schematic of the corona virus spreading and how it is affecting on the society worldwide starting from December, 2019 to April, 2020 is shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1: The schematic of corona virus spreading throughout the world and India starting from Wuhan, china. The societal impacts of corona virus in India are also schematically shown.

In this research article, we investigate the societal impacts due to newly spreading novel corona virus in India. The motivation of this research is to provide a better understanding to the government in order to improve the management in our society due to

the outbreaks of infectious disease. We have taken the information and data from several journal articles as referred, government documents, authentic newspapers, media, and discussions with experts from different fields during this investigation. We have discussed with people from several categories over telecommunication to understand their psychology and feedback about lockdown for this pandemic situation. The several effects on society like health, economy, essential commodities, politics, domestic violence etc., are presented in this article. In addition to these, some positive impacts and preventive steps to come out from this situation are also discussed in light of the present scenario.

Social impacts of coronavirus

The impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID–19) pandemic are influencing enormously on the social life and the economic activities in almost every country in the world. The spreading and its preventions are being discussed throughout the world. However, people have been affected from several angles in their daily life in addition to the corona virus threat. COVID–19 has a large impact on society in many developed countries like USA, Italy, Germany, France etc. India being a developing country and not having sufficient infrastructures, lockdown has seized the sleep of night of many people. The lockdown was announced on 25th March in India and people were not prepared for this. The several impacts on society in terms of health, economy, poverty, transportation, tourism etc. will be discussed below.

1. Impact on health

Impacts of any infectious disease on health sectors are most straightforward as it directly influences the society. The health systems of many developed countries like Italy, Germany, UK, USA etc., have already been overburdened due to COVID–19 pandemic. As the health system of India is not so well compared to some developed countries, the healthcare workers

are facing difficulties in every time. Especially the rural cities are facing more difficulties than urban areas due to lack of health care infrastructure such as hospitals, sufficient beds, ventilators. Only 28% of our populations in urban areas are being served by the 74% of the doctors, whereas 72% of our populations in rural areas are being served by 26% of the doctors [14]. The doctor to people ratio in India is very less. According to the data of National Health Profile-2019, there are only 0.53 hospital beds per 1000 population in India [15]. Even there is a huge shortage of N95 masks and PPE for the health care workers. Still the front liners are struggling hard to fight this pandemic situation. By 25th April 2020, the virus has been spread to almost 210 countries and in India an increasing number of around 25000 people have been infected already with death of 775 people [7]. This is affecting the other emergency patients like the patients suffering from cancer, kidney dialysis, pregnant women due to the shortage of medicines, unavailability of the health service etc. Due to the limited transportation and production of medicine, there has been shortage of some important medicines and sanitary pads especially in the small cities and rural areas. Besides that, some people are behaving in-human to those health workers who are battling for us in this pandemic situation. In some areas, health care workers have been asked to leave their houses by their landlords as they are taking care of corona infected people. However, our government has taken needful steps after those incidents.

2. Impacts on essential commodities and transportation

Essential commodities and transportation are two different things, but connected with each other. Though the government has given full relaxation to continue the selling of essential commodities such as foods, groceries, medicines during the full lockdown, still people are facing shortage of some items because of the transportation service. Some people are facing the extreme shortage of medicine and grocery due to the excessive storage of those items by some selected people for panic whether they will get those items during lockdown. However,

the government is always assuring common people not to panic for essential things. Some shops are selling essentials items at much higher rates than normal price. Now India's top online groceries have restored operations in larger cities, but due to lack of workers, delivery is still unavailable in rural areas. Several E-groceries systems like Big Basket and e-commerce like Flipkart and Amazon notified consumers to expect delayed deliveries in remote cities due to transportation service. As the economy fluctuates, 35% of sellers predict that their sales will be decreased due to consumer's financial situation, supply chain disruptions and product shortages. In this coronavirus pandemic situation, from the fear of infection, so many people are avoiding in-store shopping and this may increase a sudden demand of e-commerce as many consumers turn to online shopping to avoid in-store shopping.

3. Impact on Indian Economy

The most important impact is the effect on economy due to COVID-19. It has already affected world strong economic country USA [16]. Indian economy will be badly affected for this coronavirus pandemic situation. Supply chains have been disrupted for the lockdown restriction throughout the country. Various private industries such as airlines, restaurants, hotels, multiplex etc., are closed and they are deducting salaries or even terminating their employees [17]. The economic analysts have estimated that the lockdown may have cost the Indian economy 7-8 lacs crores during 21 days only. It will affect the GDP loss in the economy. Major companies have temporarily suspended some factories across the country. Entertainment Management Association estimated losses at around Rs.3000 crore because of the cancellations of conferences and big shows [17]. Majorities of employees from private institutions are going to lose their job. From the third week of March, e-commerce services like Flipkart and Amazon have stopped their non-essential products in India; even the e-groceries like BigBasket and Grofers have restricted their services. There is a large impact on

film industry also. Film releasing dates have been postponed to future dates across the world; the global box office is dropped by billions of dollars [15]. As the government is mainly helping poor people, middle class self-employed persons are suffering a lot in this lockdown. The government has already announced a huge package in this situation, which will affect the overall economy.

4. Impact on poor people

The poor people are always most sufferers in any critical situation in India. As most of the people in India are not having fixed monthly income, they have been in a big trouble. Many migrant workers who work in different states are spending critical time outside their home without any income. Many workers are suffering from starvation. However, government has initiated the rationing system to those people also, but still all the workers are not getting sufficient ration. As per the United Labor body warning, about 400 million people working in informal system are at risk of falling deeper into poverty due to the coronavirus crisis [18]. This will affect many people and leave them as jobless.

5. Domestic violence

One of the most unexpected things is the domestic violence even in this pandemic situation. The domestic violence mainly on women is very common if we see the report of National Commission for Women (NCW) [19]. However, it is increased in a large number during this ongoing lockdown situation. Not only in India but also in many other countries, the domestic violence has been reported at a large number mainly on women [20].

In India, According to the report of the National Commission for Women (NCW), a 45% increased number of domestic violence was found in just 25 days. In the first week of March, the total number of complaints from women was 116 which were increased to 257 in the final week. NCW have registered 587 complaints of domestic violence between 23rd March and

16th April [21]. NCW chief Rekha Sharma said, “Domestic violence cases have doubled than what it was before the lockdown. The cases of domestic violence are high in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Punjab” [21]. However, the real scenario may be more dangerous as many women from rural areas are even scared of complaining and also they do not have the access to register a complaint during lockdown.

6. Impact on politics

Any pandemic situation always influences the politics both internationally and locally [22-25]. In another way, it can also be said that the political decisions play a major role for preventing any epidemic disease. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the political systems of many countries like suspensions of legislative and parliamentary activities, isolation and deaths of many politicians, postponed of elections etc [22]. This has also affected the international political relation among the leaders [26]. In India, the legislative assembly and parliament, where the discussions about common people are made, have been suspended. Several elections have already been postponed for COVID-19. People have been complaining about the distribution of essential commodities from government. However, the government is trying to do their best to help the poor people.

7. Psychological impact

The novel coronavirus is causing fear, stress and anger among the people after spreading rapidly across the world. As senior citizens are at a high risk, a small lack of negligence on them can cause a severe casualty. The family visits have been stopped by the authority in old-age homes, which brings loneliness, fear, and anxiety in old-age homes. In this pandemic situation, with increasing number of rumors, older adults are being more stressed about their near ones. While a rise of fear and anxiety is probable during this pandemic, there is a chance of increasing self-harming possibility also among people with mental health issues. It was

seen during the 2003 SARS epidemic that there was an increase of suicidal rate among older adults above the age of 65 years old [27]. The recent study by William Gardner et al., elaborates the risk factors of elderly people and their caretaking staffs who are at long-term care (LTC) facilities [28]. They have also suggested that elderly people should be given priority to prevent the spread of this pandemic among them.

8. Impact on tourism

Currently tourism is one of the most affected sectors, which directly affects the economy of the country. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) have informed that the coronavirus pandemic could cut 50 million jobs in the global travel and tourism industry [29]. This impact depends on how long the pandemic lasts, but according to the report of the WTTC, Asia is expected to be the most affected continent [29]. The airlines and cruise ships will be more impacted than hotels. In Indian tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic could render 3.8 crore people jobless and run into loss of thousands of crores of rupees [30].

9. Some positive impacts on society

Lockdown has been given a golden opportunity for people who hardly got time to spend with their families. The lockdown led to people working from home, spending more time with their parents, spouse, and children. They can teach their children to develop responsibilities, involving them in household chores since the helpers are not coming. Besides that, as the COVID – 19 pandemic spreads around the world, the air pollution is reducing due to lockdown. Animals are getting space in this world during this lockdown situation as most of the people are staying at home. Among the major negative impacts, it is a good sign for us that researchers are working hard for vaccine against corona virus. We hope we will get this vaccine very soon. This will give a new learning for both researchers as well as governments to combat any future pandemic.

Discussions

Most of countries are following the same protocols like lockdown, isolation of some people having travel history, contact with corona infected people etc. In addition to these, government should take care of the health infrastructure such as increasing hospital beds, ventilators, isolation wards etc. The rural areas may be in more danger if there is any infection. So, the special vigilance may be taken on those areas to monitor the social distancing, gatherings etc. To control the shortage issue of essential commodities, few steps may be taken like the selling of every essential product may be restricted to a limited quantity to every individual. As the domestic violence has become the most unexpected thing in this lockdown condition, some officers may be deployed to focus on these complaints only, especially the village areas should be in the more priority. As the risk factors among children and old people are more, they should be taken special care. Special counselling may also be done mainly for old people to reduce the panic. Though our government is doing their best by helping the poor people, they should also look into the matter of salary deduction and job termination mainly in private sectors, as a huge number of people are expecting so.

Summary and conclusion

This research shows, in detail, the social impacts of COVID-19 till now for lockdown in India. We have discussed the several societal impacts like health, economy, essential commodities, domestic violence, politics, psychology, poor people, tourism etc. for the novel corona virus spreading. Note that the results and discussions in this article are based on specific thresholds, information available in the literature, and interaction with several individuals from different fields. So, some points may be overlooked in this article. We have also neither intentionally and unintentionally tried to criticize any government policy, steps nor given any political views. Nevertheless, the results still provide an informative collection

of several factors, which have been affected due to this pandemic situation. The preparation and effectiveness of combatting any infectious diseases are very much dependent on the quality and amount of information available to the government. Our research in this situation may be helpful to the government for better management against COVID–19 pandemic in India as research on the societal impacts of any infectious diseases play a key role for the prevention of epidemic disease.

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