
PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS REGARDING COVID-19: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT PULWAMA

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ABSTRACT

Perception and awareness are integral and essential part of human life. Knowledge and awareness help human life to manage the things, events and issues in better way.

Covid- 19 encountered with human life all over the world and destabilized the human life from all side including physical, social, psychological as well as economical. This could be well managed through the proper awareness and knowledge among the people. This paper is an attempt in this regard to study the knowledge and awareness of people regarding covid-19 in district Pulwama of Jammu and Kashmir.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic is the respiratory disease cause by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) and subsequently, the illness caused by this virus was termed Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) or 2019 Novel Coronavirus" by the World Health Organization (WHO). The virus was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, and later declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in severe global, social and economic disruption, including the largest global recession since the great depression of the 1930s and noticeable impact on people's mental well-being besides physical well-being. It has changed perception about life, and their priorities, daily life routine and have affected people's lives across the globe as probably no other event in the history. In fact, it has been described as "The global health challenge since the Spanish Flu one century ago" (WHO, 2021). It has led to widespread supply shortages exacerbated by panic buying, agricultural disruption, and food shortages.

In this context, the present study assesses the knowledge and perceptions about COVID-19 among the general public of district Pulwama. Further, present study investigated the health behaviors changed whether (increased/improved or decreased/worsened) during the pandemic, and why these behavioral changes have occurred.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The perception of the COVID-19 outbreak includes the severity of the disease, attitudes toward the disease, information, support, worry about becoming infected, and worry for family members. During the outbreak, the government closed the schools, cancelled public activities, and ordered everyone to stay at home and avoid outside activities as much as possible. The transmission of COVID-19 from human to human, a large number of confirmed increasing numbers of deaths elicited public fear of infection (Bao et al., 2020). Meanwhile, people were flooded with varying and un-certain information from numerous sources, which may have increased public panic and potential psychological problems (Maunder, et al., 2021). The uncertainty of the new virus outbreak, the extensive information or rumours, and the shortage of necessities may have increased worry in the population. Risk perception is the subjective assessment of a risky situation's risk based on its characteristics and severity (Moreira, 2008). Risk perception can influence an individual's behaviour depending on how it is assessed (Weinstein, 1988). Covid-19 is influencing how people engage with one another in geographic space. Stay-at-home orders and social distancing have reduced people's bodily presences and social interactions in public spaces (James .c, 2020).

III. METHODOLOGY

In the present study, both primary as well as secondary data was used to examine the public perception and behaviors in response to this ongoing pandemic. A cross-sectional online survey was performed for data collection, using standardized questionnaires of WHO-Five Well-being Index (WHO-5), and the newly developed perceived changes Questionnaire (PCQ) (Bussing et al., 2020). Questionnaire was prepared on the

online application Survey Heart (SH) mode with 34 questions which was later on circulated across different social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn etc. The questionnaire is mainly comprised of three sections (1) Basic information of the respondent, (2) Change of perception, and (3) Behavioral changes during covid -19. To make sure that the questionnaire has content validity, expert suggestions were also considered. A total of 103 responses were collected across different gender and age groups ranging between 20-40 yrs. Strict parameters were set by keeping multiple entry off, that allowed only one social media account to response the questionnaire once, and use of the same internet protocol address to answer another questionnaire was forbidden to ensure the authenticity of responses.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a massive global health crisis, as well as widespread public behavior and attitude shifts. In the present study, the majority of respondents did increase their frequency of hand hygiene and reported hand washing, use of masks, following social distancing etc. compared to the initial stages of the pandemic where people were less accepting or adopting preventive behaviors. This perception is attributed to huge increase number of cases in the district which led to a substantial change in view point of people. There are a lot of constraints like ignorant behavior of people and the stigma prevailing in the society related to vaccination. However, it is observed that majority of people are adopting the change in their behavior and are religiously following the SOPs, avoiding close contacts; maintaining social distancing, wearing a mask and frequently washing their hands to prevent the spread of Covid- 19. To limit the risk of COVID-19 infection, the many people are going for double masking. This research also highlights the importance of addressing the social norms that related to the perceived practice among people as a potential promotion strategy targeting specific groups by following norms in the community. The findings also suggest the importance of eliminating barriers to vaccine hesitancy and considering these factors that affect hygiene behavior is not only important to improve health promotion strategies during the pandemic, vaccines can only improve health and prevent deaths if they are used, and immunization programmes must be able to achieve and sustain high vaccine uptake rates. The public's perception of health risk is important in the adoption of government policies to limit the spread of COVID-19, because these policies and actions have a direct impact on people's lifestyles and attitude. Our analysis of behavioral changes provides a starting point for public health warnings. Moving ahead, local health authorities can concentrate their efforts on encouraging sectors of the public who are hesitant to use COVID-19 infection control methods. It is observed that people are becoming more responsible and most of them are following SOPs, vaccinating themselves against covid-19. Administration is also doing a great work in Pulwama as door-to-door testing and vaccination are being done to minimize the impact of covid-19. More work needs to be done to determine the best way to increase personal knowledge and reduce or eliminate maladaptive beliefs. By helping to identify predictors related to protective behavior during a pandemic, this lead may help fill in important gaps in our understanding of how to help slow the spread of covid-19 from person to person.

V. CONCLUSION

Administration is doing a great work in order to slow down the spread of covid-19, but still there are few loopholes which need to be taken into account.

Administration should aware people about the importance of SOPs at the community level. Awareness at community level can be given by taking community religious leaders into confidence as they the responsible members of the society and people do have trust in them, they can aware people by using religious places.

Administration should make a list of financially weaker sections by taking mohalla president into account and financially help them as these sections are suffering a lot due to covid-19.

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