

Social Panic Regarding Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is the unprecedented disease outbreak that world has not witnessed in past hundred years. Infection cases has passed hundred million mark which is a serious cause of concern. This and many other consequences were emerged and the effort of taking comprehensive overview has been done in this article.

SUMMARY

The panic situation is always associated with the uncertainty pf the situation. The more people think that the future looks dim, the more panic is aggravated. Also, any danger or perceived danger about basic necessities such as food, cloth and shelter make human being anxious and it tries to deal with it by various method one of which is panic buying which gives it a sense of comfort. Various other aspects are also victim of panic which can be minimized by proper steps taken by competent authority.

CONCLUSION

Awareness about supply and assurance about future that everything will be alright can provide some sense of relief. Words coming from highest administrative authority are believed by many and panic situation is tackled much more effectively.

KEY WORDS:- Social Panic, Economic Panic, Pandemic Covid-19, Age Panic

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 is wreaking havoc all over the world. Almost all the counties and regions inhabiting human being are affected by the COVID-19. The disease outbreak was so unprecedented that no other event in human history in past hundred years proved lethal at such level. As of January 31, 2021, 102,663,887 case infections are reported from more than 200 countries all around the world and 2,221,737 case fatalities has been reported due to COVID-19 related complications(1). The case fatalities happened due to novel coronavirus or SARS-COV-2 are mainly the result of vulnerable population contracting the disease. Although the case fatality rate is way less than the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) and stands at one to two percent, when converted to numbers it touched the unfortunate mark of two million(2). United States of America, India, Brazil, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and France are the top countries having more than half case infection and case fatalities of the World(3). The new mutated strain of the virus reported from United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil has been reported(4). The former two are supposedly seventy percent more virulent than the current strain which is a serious cause of concern. As the inception of the virus in Wuhan city of the Hubei province of China, initially it was not paid heed as world thought it is some kind of pneumonia. But as the cases increased in Wuhan, the origin points of the virus where wet market is situated, other countries started taking cognizance of the situation. By the Month of March, it was established by The World Health Organization declared it as a pandemic which was not done by the institution since its inception.(5) The lockdown was imposed as a containment measures and all kind of international travel were banned. Panic was set in and various sectors and section of society experienced the panic related to COVID-19. From stock market to retail sector, panic selling and panic buying happened in respective fashion. Health care workers and front-line warriors were more in panic than any other section of society as they have to deal with the extremely contagious and lethal virus. This and many other consequences were emerged and the effort of taking comprehensive overview has been done in this article.

SOCIAL PANIC REGARDING COVID-19

As the emergence of the unknown pneumonia in Wuhan city of the Hubei province in China, there were hardly any knowledge that it can prove lethal at unprecedented levels. In December 2019, Wuhan which harbors wet market, found some cases of pneumonia and people complaining about the breathing problem. In the wet market where, live wild animals are bought and sold, first woman died due to unknown disease. She was also called as patient zero. As COVID-19 is zoonotic virus and needs an intermediary species to hop between various species like humans and other animals. Then the viral diseases started to spread through Wuhan city which is the emerging financial market of the China. Then whole of Hubei province was shut down. Till then virus was named as novel coronavirus and the disease caused by it is called as coronavirus disease 2019. The news spread

through the world like wild fire but the world was busy celebrating New Year and other festivals. It was until March 2020, when world came to know the high virulent nature and lethal capacity of the virus. Initial denial of human-to-human transmission by World Health Organization (WHO) proved fatal as there was no banning flight to and from China. As the cases started emerging from the incoming passengers, various governmental agencies around the world were awakened from deep slumber and had to take effective measures to contain the virus. Non-pharmaceutical intervention like lockdown was tried to contain the spread. The plan was to identify all the incoming passengers and testing them for the disease and if the results are affirmative then they would be treated for the COVID-19(6). The lockdown made people realize that COVID-19 is some lethal disease and it is dangerous as government imposed such restriction which was never happened before. People were taken aback as there was no precedent of such disease outbreak. Previous of coronavirus such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) was also happened. But they were confined to limited area. SARS were confined to china and some parts of Hong Kong and East Asia and MERS was confined to gulf countries. No major lockdown was announced as the virulent nature of the virus and its spreading capacity was way less than novel coronavirus or SARS-COV-2. As people were exposed to deadly pictures and videos from Spain and Italy, the two hardest hit countries of the Europe. People started feeling worried as many of the people were unable to get themselves admitted and treated. The fear and anxiety of getting contracted the disease was on peak and everyone was worried about their health and loved ones. Also, pandemic induced lockdown has shut down the economic activities and industries which employs millions and millions of people. The loss of jobs and livelihoods made the circumstances more uncertain and people were anxious about their future. Even people were unsure that they will get food or not if the lock down continues. The symptoms were cough, cold and fever. Lots of advisories were issued by WHO and local health authorities which cautions some group of people more than the other about the contraction of the disease. These vulnerable groups include elderly with age more than 60 years, pregnant women, infants and children's and comorbid patients means patients having underlying medical illness which were said to take more precautions. The level of anxiety and panic was more among these groups and it was affecting the day-to-day life of the people. Also, if a health care professional was working under hospital administration treating COVID-19 patients, he or she was more worried than any other person. The health care professionals are the first point of contact while treating COVID-19. Therefore they are the most vulnerable individuals for contracting the COVID-19(7).

PANIC ON ECONOMIC FRONT DURING COVID-19

As the novel coronavirus was surging its case numbers and was growing at an exponential rate and painting the grim and out of control picture of future, various governments across the world thought that it must be controlled otherwise it will cost dearly to us. In the last week of the month of March 2020, almost all the major countries imposed the non-pharmacological intervention (NPI's) which includes lockdown and movement restrictions. Before that on March 11, 2020, World Health Organization was compelled to upgrade the status of the coronavirus disease 2019 to pandemic from public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) after analyzing the rapidly increasing data emerging out of one of the first hit countries like China. Confirmation of human-to-human transmission was a key factor as before that it was not believed that it can spread through humans and therefore flight services from and to Wuhan city of the Hubei province of china where the emergence of novel coronavirus happened, was not stopped. As soon as WHO announced the

coronavirus disease 2019 as pandemic, the world finally took cognizance and started to think seriously about containment of the disease as they were receiving few cases from arriving passenger. This has grave impact on the economic front. The panic was especially seen in highly volatile sectors like stock markets and investment funds trading in equity, debts and other economic instruments(8). Stock market is said to be extremely sensitive regarding the surrounding situation and it tells the investors mood about how it perceives the overall economic outlook. Any good thing will make the market bullish and the rally can be seen happening during the trading sessions and on the contrary of any bad news coming then it makes the market bearish in which people try to square off their positions in the market so as to minimize their losses. After the WHO announcement that it is declared as pandemic which was first time in the history of WHO, investors started to feel something bad and it had a very crushing impact on stock market around the world. From the month of February 2020, stocks started to fall steadily but in slow fashion. As the coronavirus spreads out of Wuhan and China, many countries were not sure about the future course and were looking normal. But as the flights from and to Wuhan were on, taking many people from and to Wuhan, it transmitted the disease to other countries. The black Monday event on March 09, 2020, the stocks came crashing on Dow Jones Industrial Average index, one of the premier western indexes of stocks. The said US stock fell by 2014 points which was worst single day fall in the history of index. Standard and Poor's 500 index fell by almost 7.6 percent. This was not over as on March 16, 2020, Dow Jones industrial average index fell by 2997 points, which was only happened in the great depression of 1929. Indian stock market such as National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) also felt the heat of the situation and its compounding effect. On March 09, 2020, Sensex which indicates the BSE listed stock indices and Nifty 50 which indicates the NSE stock exchange dropped by huge margin. Sensex fell by 1941 point and Nifty 50 fell by 538 points. The red rally was still going and biggest slump was seen on March 23, 2020, when Indian government announced strict nationwide lockdown and movement restriction which created panic among investors as they were uncertain about the situation. Sensex lost almost 3935 points and Nifty 50 index plunged by 1135 points standing at all-time low of 7610 points. Investors lost millions and millions of dollars and companies lost a huge percentage of their share value(9).

PANIC AMONG WORKING AGE POPULATION

As the pandemic induced lockdown was imposed in almost all the major countries affected by COVID-19, various activities were closed down by movement restrictions. To curb the viral spread, it was important to maintain minimum safe distance among people after discovering that the virus can be transmitted from human to human. Therefore, people were coerced to stay wherever they are and ban on any activity other than essential services were imposed. This included the industries and factories which provide the livelihood for millions of people. These units were closed down and workers and daily wagers told that they need not come to work as the unit is closed and there will be no salary. This created panic among the daily wagers, hawkers, street vendors, industry laborers who basically spend their day's income on night's food. Their income was already meager and pandemic made its worst move. The uncertainty attached to the viral behavior was more concerning as no date was in line of sight when these industries and factories will open(10). The question of lives and livelihood arose. As the income was stopped, question of even basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter came up. Migrant laborers started their journey way back home from their work state in India. Millions of migrant laborers from economically

backward state such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh were working in economically advanced states such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Telangana. They were shocked as lockdown was imposed and panic spread across the migrant laborers' camp. They started to take the journey on foot as no transport allowed in movement restriction guidelines. Lakhs of people completed their journey on foot which was of 400 to 500 kilometers. Families along with their children were made to sleep on road as panic and uncertainty around the food, clothing and shelter was there. Such long journeys happened only due to panic tightened its grip on the laborers even when government assures them of providing basic amenities wherever they are (11).

PANIC BUYING AMONG PEOPLE

Another phenomenon was seen during COVID-19 times and has been observed when the crisis happens is panic regarding various commodities. As the COVID-19 induced lockdown was announced, along with fear of contracting the disease another fear arose among the masses. As the lockdown was imposed, movement restrictions came into being and this created confusion whether the stores of daily needs and retails will remain open or not. Uncertainty about the lockdown period and the capacity to provide the necessary stuffs of store, market and food market was under questioning as the transport sector was also affected by the lockdown (12). Supply chain mechanism was hurt severely and the delay in reporting or fulfilling the demand was seen. Therefore, people were under deep doubt whether they will be getting the essentials or not. Then the panic kicked in and panic buying started and people started buying in large quantity in order to secure their ration for next few days. This erratic human behavior has been regularly seen when there is a crisis situation or the feeling that one will arrive soon. Although there is requirement of more in-depth studies on how and when people resort to erratic and unpredictable behavior like panic buying but few of them worth mentioning here. In an analysis on data from almost 93 countries and several media reports found some results that correlates the panic buying and contemporary situation. Among 784 media reports from various countries 613 reports were selected for the analyses. Every three out of four cases found to be buying extra stuffs only due to the sense of scarcity that is widespread in crisis situation. 66 percent people said that there is increased demand therefore they were compelled to buy the things. 23 percent of them was anticipating the increase in price in future (13). The COVID-19 related factors were overpowering the other factors and genuine need was way less. The price hike in future and fear of running out essentials were among top. Also, some anti-social elements started to hoard the stocks of daily needs and essentials. They were seeking profits and opportunities in the trying times of crisis. Enforcement agencies were quick in nabbing these culprits. But they speculated the price hike in future and lack of supply will increase the process by many times. Therefore, the people thought that it would be legible to stock some stuffs so as to make the arrangements for at least few days in future. Even if initially, there is no price hike, there will be invoked because of stocking commodities. Although this might be a temporary phenomenon, the effect is differential and poor and vulnerable section of society. More entitled and richer section of society can get away with price hike but poorer section which already lost their livelihoods and jobs will face difficulties in procuring the essential commodities (13).

PANIC DUE TO INFODEMIC

As the pandemic induced lockdown has imposed movement restrictions, except essential service provider people, all other folks were sitting at their residences. The penetration of cell phones and internet connectivity has been already reached to millions of people and they are using it for various purposes. As we know that if there are some upside there will be downside too. During lockdown, a phenomenon of rapid transfer of mis information and false news were seen. The damage done by these news was of comparable degree and various agencies compelled to take note of this menace(14). World Health Organization has to declare an Infodemic that is running wild. Infodemic is a combination of two words, Information and pandemic. The rapid and continuous flow of mis information on various social media networks and through other ways has been proving lethal as much as the COVID-19 pandemic. Various messages and information are passed on as authentic message and information to convince the reader of the message about the content. Many a time's content circulating is harmful to user or society as a whole and is capable of creating social unrest and chaos. The panic buying situation was somewhat instigated through well-articulated social media messages and shares and people get trapped into such convincing but fake information. Creating fear and anxiety about certain front line workers and doctors were all the result of Infodemic(15). A number of related studies were reported from India. Bakshi et. al. reported psychosocial effects of Covid-19 pandemic on health care professionals and medical students (16). Kaple et. al. reported on social aspects and safe behaviours in Covid-19 (17). Similar studies were also reported by Nanotkar et. al (18), Shrivastava et. al. (19), Budhrani et. al. (20), Jachak et. al. (21). Mujbaile and Damke reported the impact of COVID 19 on pregnant women and child health in India (22). Sahu et. al. reflected on impact of Covid-19 on stranded cruise ships(23). After a year, scientist and various researchers are now arrived after long and hard efforts up to a vaccine which are meant to prevent the COVID-19 from happening. The vaccine approval is very tedious task and after through testing and analysis it gets approval. But some anti-social elements are creating scare about the vaccine and its consequences and warning people of unforeseen consequences. This creates a vaccine hesitancy and people refrain from taking dosage which are duly checked and thoroughly tested after various phases of trials. This hampers the vaccination drive and efforts regarding restarting the whole economic activities. Strict laws and regulations are in place but coercive action is not enough to contain this phenomenon. Digital literacy and digital hygiene must be spread and practiced so as to make the people an informed and educated responsible citizen. Indulging in any such activities must be stopped by user itself so that Infodemic which is also called as pandemic within pandemic can be controlled and divergence of resources can be reduced.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation and efforts must be taken on war footing to contain it. Panic is natural response of the human being when something unexpected happens which was never imagined. Panic is inevitable and is natural thing. Dealing it with proper and calibrated way is the golden path which can minimize the damage that can be done by panic reaction. Panic buying can be stopped after creating awareness and assuring the people that they will get all the necessary commodities and there is no lack of supply. Infodemic which is increasing day by day should be controlled by enacting dedicated law and also by creating awareness, later being the most efficient way. Finally, the COVID-19 situation is a hard and trying time which needs multi-pronged approach to deal with it. Wider stakeholder consultations can be done to achieve best outcome and avoid chances of errors.

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