

How COVID-19 is Affecting Apprentices

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objective: Coronavirus induced disease (COVID-19) is affecting people all around the world. The rising number of deaths due to COVID-19 is not only harassing people but also causing strong emotions in adults as well as in children due to anxiety, fear and stress. The objective of this study was to assess the fears, anxiety and stress due to COVID-19 pandemic and related issues among the apprentices at various levels in different parts of world.

Methods: It was a cross sectional survey design to assess the students/trainee's immediate psychological response during COVID-19 outbreak by using an anonymous online questionnaire. A snowball sampling technique was conducted focusing general public all around the world from 3rd April 2020 till 7th April 2020. A total of N=354 participants filled the form completely. The structured questionnaire collected information on demographic data and psychological aspect of this outbreak, including extreme fear and uncertainty.

Results: A total of N = 354 participants completed the questionnaire; majority were from the age group of 21–30 years. Approximately 66.4% were females and 33.6% males. Participants from Asia were 83.6% while 9.9%, 3.4%, 2.8% and 1% from America/Canada, Europe, Africa and Australia respectively. Out of n = 354 participants 59.3% were relying on health professionals for authentic source of information regarding COVID-19 while 16.4%, 15% and 5.4% considered social media, television and World Health Organization (WHO) website respectively as their authentic guide. Out of the (n = 354) participants 80.5% were afraid about health status during COVID-19 most predominantly females (66.3%) (P = 0.000). A total of 65.8% participants felt agitated or irritated in this outbreak.

Conclusion: COVID-19 lockdowns are affecting both physical and mental health of students and apprentices enrolled at different levels of education. Females are more affected and concerned to their loved ones and themselves. Working norms are being maintained and responsibilities are being fulfilled despite this grave situation.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic, Anxiety, Coronavirus, Survey, Lockdown.

How to Cite This:

Hassnain S, Omar N. How COVID-19 is affecting apprentices. Biomedica. 2020; 36 (COVID19-S2): 265-9.

INTRODUCTION

The word pandemic gives us the fear of spreading disease to geographical areas affecting the whole country or the entire world.¹ The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is having lasting effects on people all around the world. In December 2019, emergence of cases of COVID-19 from the city of Wuhan, China were reported.² This disease rapidly spread to the whole world in early January 2020.³ World Health Organization (WHO) declared this disease as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

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on 30th January 2020 and as pandemic on 11th March.^{4,5}

The rising number of deaths due to COVID-19 infection is harassing people and bound them to limitations. Every individual reacts differently to the stressful situation. Across the world the different levels of Coronavirus outbreak are observed. Anxiety, fear and stress about the disease cause strong emotions in adults as well as in children.⁶ The individual response to the outbreak depends on personality trait and the background as well.⁶

The National Health Commission of China released a notification on 26th January 2020 according to which mental health care should be provided for COVID-19 patients, close contacts, suspected cases isolated at home, families and friends of affected people, health professionals and the public as well.⁷ During Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak depression, anxiety, panic attacks and even suicide were reported among the affected population.^{8,9}

The uncertain incubation period of Coronavirus and its asymptomatic transmission cause fear and anxiety in general population. Governments all over the world took major decisions of quarantine and lockdown. But these measures are developing stress and anxiety among general population due to several issues like overabundance of misinformation on media, shortage of supplies and low economy.¹⁰ It is creating a great panic among population but hats off to the government and the media who are promoting awareness to ease down the general public and get them aware of these terminologies along with its significance based on the experience of outbreak in the Wuhan, China.^{11,12}

Generally, disasters bring destructions and deterioration in the lives of people by lack of basic necessities, economic consequences or disintegration of families and communities. The psychosocial effects are related to many factors including their living conditions and physical and social environment. The aim of this study was to survey the trainees/students enrolled in varied educational programmes in different countries all around the globe to get the glance of psychological effects and to assess the fears, anxiety and stress of this COVID-19.

METHODS

A cross sectional survey was designed to assess the public's immediate psychological response during COVID-19 outbreak by using an anonymous online questionnaire. A snowball sampling technique was conducted focused on general public living in all the countries experiencing COVID-19 based on personal links. All participants were provided informed consent. Survey was started from 3rd April 2020 till 7th April 2020. A total of n = 354 participants filled the form completely as all the questions were set at "required" setting using Google docs as the medium of survey. The structured questionnaire collected information on demographic data and psychological aspect of this outbreak including extreme fear and uncertainty. Socio-demographic data collected were age, gender, education and residential location. Source of information about COVID-19 was also asked to get information that which medium was mostly considered authentic by general population regarding this disease.

These experiences might evolve to include a broad range of public mental health concerns, including distress reactions (insomnia, anger, extreme fear of illness even in those not exposed) change in eating habits, irritability, agitation and feeling downhearted or blue in this pandemic.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Online data was extracted and cross-checked for any discrepancy. Data was analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0). Mean and standard deviation were given for quantitative variables and frequencies and percentages for qualitative variables.

RESULTS

A total of n = 354 participants completed the questionnaire. The majority of the responders (66%) were from the age group of 21 - 30 years. Out of n = 354 participants 66.4% were females and 33.6% males. A total of 33.1% participants were postgraduates, 64.1% graduates and undergraduates while 2.8% were doing PhD or postdoctoral. Among n = 354 participants, 83.6% were residing in Asia at the time of outbreak while

9.9%, 3.4%, 2.8% and only 1% were from America/Canada, European Africa and Australia respectively. Only 59.3% participants were relying on health professionals for authentic source of information regarding COVID-19. While 31.4% considered social media and television and 5.4% followed WHO as their authentic guide.

Among the participants (n = 354) 80.5% were afraid of their own health or their loved ones during this COVID-19. Females 66.3% were more fearful as compared to males in expressing their fears of death or harm to their loved ones also exhibiting significant associations ($P = 0.000$). Among all 65.8% of the participants were agitated or irritated in this outbreak and 66.3% females felt good for doing something for their families and community.



Fig. 1: Level of Qualification of the Participants.

DISCUSSION

COVID-19 as declared pandemic on 11th March 2020 led to a global approach to fight the disease in the form of lockdowns in effected countries resulting in different experiences and circumstances.¹³ This study discusses the psychological experiences and emotions in the form of fears, anxiety and stress of general population.

Most of the participants were middle aged females 66.4% and Asians 83.6% with a sound educational background as also observed in other surveys.¹⁴ In present study information regarding the pandemic was received majorly from health professionals, social and print media¹⁵ which is in accordance to the findings reported in another study conducted in China.¹⁵ This is also in line with

the fact that health authorities were disseminating information extensively.¹⁴

Fear, agitation and extent of death for loved ones, relatives and one-self was expressed more by females 67% while comparing to males. It also exhibited significant associations ($P = 0.000$) that supported the women were more worried and expressive in sharing their emotions. Similar findings were observed with significant associations ($P < 0.05$) in a study conducted in London.¹⁶ Treatment of COVID-19, its availability, success, changing regimens and standards is another dilemma being faced, luckily in present study fear of receiving treatment was not expressed as it has been stated that patients place their trust in the treating health care professionals.⁷ A study in Singapore reported psychological disturbances within the community and recommended joint efforts of community and social agencies psychiatric workers to develop strategies to allay the anxieties and fears of general population so as to combat mental health issues as well as compliance to the preventive measures in accordance to the system.¹⁸

Restricted movement and increased time at home has detrimental effects on the sleeping and eating patterns. As observed in present study disturbance in sleep and eating patterns was noted especially in the younger and middle-aged groups (45%). Many factors might be responsible like staying at home, closure of schools or workplace, increased screen times which needs to be addressed as prolonged the lockdowns may lead to stress, physical ailments, obesity and compromised cardiorespiratory fitness.¹⁹

Fears and anxiety were not a barrier in developing concentration to work in 48% participants as they denied any difficult. The only contributing factor might be gender as mostly were females with multitasking in addition to the nature of work.²⁰ Concurrently studies do conclude that individual variation of productivity and job requirements with complementarities must be taken into consideration when working from home.²¹

The study highlights the experiences of general population in the unusual circumstances of lockdown taking into consideration their fears, anxieties and positive feelings making it novel as

not many researches have been conducted with the respective aim. It helps us develop a holistic approach in addition to the physical challenges they are mental challenges too.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 lockdowns are affecting both physical and mental health of general population. Females are more affected and concerned with the implications to their loved ones and themselves. Working norms are being maintained and responsibilities are being fulfilled despite the grave situation giving positive feelings.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Due to pandemic, an internet-based survey was the only feasible method of recruitment and chief among these is the use of snowball sampling to rapidly recruit the non-probability-based sample via the internet. More research is needed in this area as people are getting frustrated day by day due to lockdown, financial issues and the rising cases.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors highly appreciate all those who took time out to fill this questionnaire at this point in time when everybody is in a situation of uncertainty.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None to disclose.

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Author's Contribution

SH: Conception, analysis and interpretation of data.

NO: Data analysis and interpretation, drafting the article, critical revision for important intellectual content and final approval of the version to be published.