

SUFFERINGS AND PAIN OF RETIRED (OLD) AGED PEOPLE DURING COVID-19: A CASE OF INDIAN FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of writing this paper is to understand the situation of old age people in India during the COVID-19 lockdown. The old age people are facing difficulties due to their health conditions, and those difficulties are affecting their stay. This is a descriptive paper based on interviews collected from one old age (senior citizen) couple in Delhi/India. Secondary resources, like news articles, have also been considered for writing this paper. The main findings of this paper are that lockdown is like a double edge sword for old age people in India. They cannot remain inside the house as they are facing health issues, they need to walk and socialize, but those things are not possible during the lockdown. If they go outside, then probably the virus will affect them.

Keywords: Older people, India, Emotional health, COVID-19, Mental health, Stress.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 made life torturous for older and sick people in India (Express HealthCare, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 is visible worldwide, and India cannot remain untouched by that. Due to COVID-19, the lockdown in India started on 25th March'2020, and it went in different phases till now. Phase 1 was for 21 days from 25th March'2020 to 14th April'2020. Phase 2 was for 19 days from 15th April'2020 to 3rd. May'2020. Phase 3 was for 14 days from 4th May'2020 to 17th May'2020 and Phase 4 again for 14 days from 18th May'2020 to 31st May'2020 (Bansal & Hasin, 2020). Phase 5 started on 1st June'2020, and it is going till now. Phase 4 and 5 were different from earlier phases because, in these phases, some relaxation has been given to the people. Delhi is the capital of India, and in Delhi, the corona pandemic is increasing at a devastating pace. Delhi government opened lockdown with few restrictions after successfully completing the three phases. The state government argued that they could not go further by keeping all the activities shut. They need revenue to run the state, so few commercial activities started beginning in Delhi on 18th May'2020. Today, in Delhi, there are approximately 41,182 cases, with 1,327 deaths (Marwaha, 2020). In this paper, the researcher will discuss the pain and suffering of old age people based on interviews taken by his own parents. This lockdown time is most torturous for old age sick people as they must limit their lives inside the home only. The dilemma is that if they go outside, it will be dangerous for them, and if they will not go outside, then also it is dangerous for their health.

The Pain Of Senior Citizens

There are many senior citizens in the country who are facing the atrocities of other diseases as well. The first interviewee in this paper is suffered from diabetes, and he is recovering himself after both knee transplant surgery. On occasions, the doctor also diagnoses him for a high intake of protein in food as he is advised not to take most protein-rich food because the body will not be able to consume it properly. The lockdown has completely changed his daily routine. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he used to visit daily in the morning and evening as walking is required for his artificial knees. During the walk, he also used to do certain physical exercises to keep his body fit and healthy. The senior citizens also feel nice while socializing with other people in the daytime when they go to purchase some stuff from the market. Socializing with outside people helps them in building positive emotions and happiness inside the body (Hickey, 2006). In old age, people look to talk to others so that they can express their internal. In the neighborhood and in the market, they meet different types of personalities and feel happy in expressing themselves. Aging is also a reality of life like other stages of life. The mental psychology and internal emotions of old people are different from normal adults. They also want to describe their day and other experience to outside people. It can be said that talking and walking keep them active in life. COVID-19 lockdown has taken the necessary oxygen out of the life of old and senior citizens. Indian culture is different from western countries. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, India scores high in power distance and collectivism (Hur, et al., 2015). The implications of this theory are that old age people are more respected in Indian culture. Collectivism culture means people like to meet and greet their friends, family, and relatives and take decisions in consent. Meeting with people is very often in Indian culture, and India is a country of festivals. Not only old people but people of all age groups interact with each other during festivals and over a cup of tea. Socializing is very normal in Indian culture. During COVID-19, all the behavioral activities are changed in India and other countries. People of any age group need to restrain themselves to their homes; they cannot go even for a normal walk. The problem interviewee faced that his daily walk helps him to keep his artificial knees going but being at home for the last three months can create major health issues for him. He wants to develop new energy, confidence, and emotions by talking to other people of his age, but unfortunately, he must restrict himself inside the boundaries of four walls. It has been recommended that normal adults can go for the purchase, but even a little visit for old people is banned outside the home. The mental situation of the interviewee is such that he started feeling uneasy. Daily disturbing news of death and increasing COVID-19 pandemic are floating on the news channel. In this lockdown, it is very hard for old age people to remain at home peacefully. The news channel is floating news related to COVID cases in Delhi are increasing every day, and old people have very fewer chances if once they got affected because their immune system is very weak. The first reaction of the interviewee after hearing such news is to go out and discuss such things with his friends. The outside visit provides him the necessary oxygen of life, but unfortunately, he can't discuss it. Another interviewee also discussed her concern as a housewife during this lockdown period. She is approaching 60 years of her life, and it has been very uneasy about remaining at home. She used to visit her doctor every month for regular checks and used to go for brisk walks to keep herself fit. On a few occasions, she felt joint pains, so walking and

daily stretching helped her to come out of those pains. Being a homemaker, she also had the responsibility of visiting the market for daily grocery purchases, but during the lockdown, the grocery purchase is not normal, and she cannot do her normal activities, which she was doing successfully. In Delhi (India), many retailers do business in the unorganized sector. The often-run small grocery shops. The interviewee is under self-doubt while purchasing the grocery items from those unorganized retail shops as well. She needs to change her home routine and outside routine by 360 degrees. Previously she used to socialize with her friends in the community part in the evening time, but all those socializing activities are not possible now. Based on interviews of both the interviewee, it can be said that this pandemic has made a negative impact on the mental and physical health of old age people. The psychological distress has been creeping due to restrictions of lockdown to stay at home. The old age people are feeling a lack of control in their life during this lockdown. They are feeling like somebody is programming them and observing them behave in a certain manner. The internal stress level is affecting mental and emotional health (Kumar & Nayar, 2020). The patience level is decreasing. There are protecting their lives from one virus by following government orders of lockdown, but anxiety, loneliness, and stress level is increasing day by day (Kazmi, et al., 2020; Hiremath, et al., 2020). The old and senior citizens are also in such an age in which they cannot modulate their behavior. Internally their mind is resistant to change their normal behavior pattern, but externally they are forced to make changes if they will not change themselves than life will be in danger. For old and sick people, Scenario 1 is that if they go outside, then probably the COVID-19 virus can affect them, and it will be harmful to their life. In the second scenario, if they will not be got outside, then chances of mental and emotional disturbance will maximize.

Lack of Medical Attention Is A Problem In Hospitals

Like our two interviewees, many old age people are facing several other medical issues pertaining to their health. They require medical attention every month, but the situation is very bad in hospitals. The doctors and nurses are so occupied with COVID-19 patients that they are not able to see regular patients who are suffered from another disease. The old age and sick people are waiting for regular appointments with the doctor because they are looking for a prescription. In this document, the first interviewee is not able to visit his doctor and go for medical checkups because hospitals are full of COVID-19 patients. The doctor is not giving appointments, and it is adding to the stress level of old age people. They see their lives deteriorating inside the house as well. No doctor is ready to come to the house to see the other diseases of old age people because they are threatened due to the coronavirus. Old age people want to communicate their pains and sufferings, but unfortunately, no-one is listening to them.

Suchitra (2020) narrated about problems of old-age homes. The owner of an old-age home in Delhi is not able to provide medical care and necessary attention to the old people. The lockdown situation is working as a double-edged sword for the old age people. They cannot remain inside because they need the care and attention of doctors for regular checkups, and they can't go to hospitals because their immunity is weak. "How will they be able to escape themselves out of the coronavirus pandemic?" Another dangerous situation is that they have a low mortality rate. Once they got in the hold of this virus, it will not be an easy recovery.

Doctors are afraid even to provide normal regular checkups to old age people. They are thinking about their lives. It is a normal suggestion for old and sick people that they should keep themselves happy. Will it be possible for them to keep themselves happy in lockdown conditions? They have followed a different lifestyle over their life suddenly everything is changed. In Indian families, relatives often come and visit houses occasionally, but in this pandemic, lockdown no-one can enter the house because the external person in any form can bring virus inside. Old-age people are very skeptical about their life.

Technology Is Not A Solution for Old Age People In India

India has the lowest number of internet users in the age group above 50 (Roy, 2009). People of the old generation are not very prone to the usage of the Internet and smartphones. In India, among old age people, the Internet is not the prime mode of communication between the same age group of people. People like to meet physically and socialize with each other. Unfortunately, that loneliness is creeping inside them, and they are not able to counter that (New Vibes of India, 2020). The young age adults matured and working people are still getting themselves busy in webinars, online conferences, and other modes of communication. The people-to-people interaction is happening among adults, and that online interaction is helpful for their mental and emotional health. The adults can complete their daily dose of communication with the help of the Internet and technology, but older people are completely lacking. The old age people lack those technical skills which are required to operate smartphones, conferences, and other online tools. The homely environment is completely different from the corporate environment. The interviewee in this paper has communicated that they are missing the healing touch of their doctor. Lack of physical activity and proper communication is making them more inactive. The interviewees stated that the doctor is not ready to give consultation over the phone because they require fees for a checkup, and both old age interviewees are not comfortable with online payment through mobile phone. They have also stated that they lack sleep, and their anxiety level is creeping more and more.

For Old Age, People Detected Positive for COVID-19

The situation in the hospitals is more pathetic in Delhi, India, for patients detected COVID positive. Especially in the case of old age people, many hospitals refuse to admit them because they want to reserve a bed for some young adults. Shortage of medical beds, proper care, attention, proper hygiene, medicine is making death a possible truth for the old age people. In many hospitals, patients are not properly accommodated. The COVID-19 treatment requires the proper care and patience of the doctor. The cleanliness and hygiene should be maintained, but it has been observed that in many medical hospitals, ' patients are crying for care and attention. It has also been observed that dead bodies are lying around on the floor of the hospital without proper cremation (Outlook, 2020). Such a situation will create more panic in the minds of old age people, and they will feel devastated. The doctors are giving priority to young people because they have better chances of fighting with coronavirus. In this age, the old age people are dependent for help on the young generation. Firstly, the doctors in the hospitals are not able to provide medical facilities, and even if they admit some old age people, then those patients are not

allowed to meet their relatives. If an old age person remains unattended on his bed in the hospital, and he/she is seeing dead bodies or listening hue and cry daily, will that person be able to recover? That old age person is physically unwell, and the surroundings are making him mentally unwell too. A doctor, nurse, or hospital staff need to be extra cautious while treating an old age patient, but this is not visible. It is not the fault of doctors; the resources are limited, and they need to handle a greater number of patients. The overall system is lacking that efficiency. In Delhi, many doctors are even crying for their salaries. That sense of belongingness is missing, which is required while dealing with old age patients.

Lack of Recreational Activities and other Support

The second interviewee in this paper has communicated that she was taking the help of a local cook for preparing food and house cleaning activities. The joint-pains do not allow her to do cleaning activities in the house, but in this lockdown, she refused the help of a local cook for cooking and cleaning. The whole work burden was on her shoulders, and her age is not allowing her to take such a burden. Comfort and peace are absolutely missing from the life of old age people. Many old age people are living alone with their servants and helpers. In lockdown situations, the helpers and servants are not allowed inside houses because they can carry COVID-19 virus along with them. Those old age people who are living alone are completely helpless. No-one is to take care of them.

Financial Constraints And Religious Sentiments

The first interviewee of this paper explained that he is also facing financial constraints during this lockdown period. The old person was not able to visit his bank for cash withdrawal and pension-related formalities. He does not know much about online banking, so he always does the banking work by physically visiting the bank branch, but no such visit is possible. He is totally dependent on cash and saving in the home. This tension is also making him uncomfortable. Both the interviewees of this paper have suggested that their religious sentiments are also bothering them during this lockdown. In India, Hinduism is the main religion; Muslims and Christians are minorities. The old age people are more devoted to the daily worship of Gods in temples and churches, and other religious places (Tilak, 1989). Both the interviewees and many other old age people all around India are not able to complete their daily offering or prayers to God in temples. They are doing it at home, but it does not satisfy them. In this age, people become more religious, but now they cannot fulfill their appetite for worship to Gods. Daily newspapers and other media channels are showing death news, which is disturbing and making their mind unrelaxed. Both interviewees have communicated that they want to go outside and live their remaining life on their own terms, but this lockdown is not allowing them. A lot of things are storing in there, which is affecting their nervous system. They cannot handle this pressure because it is taking a toll on their life. In the absence of their daily routine, they are losing their sleep and hunger. The loss of appetite and hunger will affect their willpower, and it will eventually end their life. The old people are scared more of inside lockdown rather than going outside.

CONCLUSION

Based on the entire discussion, it can be concluded that the old age people are feeling very low and losing their life during this COVID-19 lockdown. This lockdown is deteriorating their mental and emotional health. As per Indian culture, old age people like to socialize, physically meeting, sharing their experiences, and visiting a religious place. Suddenly all the activities are stopped. They themselves are feeling caged. Loneliness, anxiety, and feeling of self-doubt is creating inside. Their regular medical checkups are not possible, and they are not very prone to technology for connecting with people outside. Sufferings and pain are increasing. They see death on both sides. Their life will not be easy post COVID too. The governments need to take certain actions to help the old age people. First, proper medical care and attention should be provided to old age patients who are detected COVID-19 positive. Proper arrangements need to be made in hospitals, especially to handle old people. Every life is worthy, and their life can't be sacrificed in this pandemic. On television, there should be some telecast of health-related news on which doctors can prescribe or give regular medical advice to the old age people. The government can track the bank accounts of old age people and create a mechanism in which their pension can be couriered to them at their home address so that they will not feel financial constraint. A healthy and happy environment needs to be created by young members of the family inside the houses so that the old person will not feel lonely and unattended. Regular communication and some light exercises at home can help old people. Young members of the family should share more positive news and funny moments with old age people. They have the responsibility to turn them positives.

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