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To Study Awareness, Attitude, Anxiety and Perceived Mental Healthcare Parameters during COVID-19 among Indian Population



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ABSTRACT

Objective: Healthcare information provided during any disease break-out is a fundamental component to control the break-out. This study mainly aimed to study the awareness, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental healthcare need during the COVID-19 pandemic in India. **Method:** A questionnaire of 28 items was formed on google forms and was sent through email and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was organized in such a manner that awareness, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental healthcare need can be assessed separately. The response choice was either 'yes' or 'no' or 'I'm not sure' while one section response was either 'always' or 'often' or 'sometimes' or 'never'. **Result:** 206 questionnaires were sent out of which all the 206 participants responded. The majority of the responders belong to general population (68.4%) while only (31.6%) were healthcare professionals. People had adequate level of awareness about the COVID-19 infection and its preventive aspects. The anxiety level was high. More than 60% of the people reported the need to use gloves and sanitizers. Sleep difficulties, paranoid about getting the infected and stress related to posts on social media about the COVID-19 were reported in the study. People are afraid if anyone around them is sick, 35% participants thinks that they need to buy and stock the essentials at home. About 37.6% sometimes freak out leading to their inappropriate behaviour. The perceived mental healthcare need was seen in more than 80% of the participants. There is a need to spread more awareness and address the mental health issues of people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by coronavirus. It first came to light on 31st December 2019 in Wuhan, China. COVID-19 is now a pandemic affecting many countries globally ^[1] On 11th January China announced its first COVID-19 related death of 61 years old man exposed to the seafood market ^[2]. Symptoms of COVID-19 appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. The symptoms include fever, dry and persistent cough, sore throat, tiredness, nasal congestion, body ache and loss of taste or smell. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually ^[1, 3].

People with underlying medical problems and older people are at high risk of catching COVID-19 infection and developing serious illness. Anyone experiencing fever and cough, difficulty in breathing, chest pain should immediately seek medical attention ^[1].

COVID-19 infection usually spread from person to person through droplets from nose or mouth when a person cough, sneezes or speaks. People can become infected by touching any surface like tables, doors, etc. which already had these droplets and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. This is why it is important to wash your hands regularly with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand rub ^[1]. WHO has declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020^[4]. By declaring the outbreak a PHEIC, WHO has emphasized the urgent need to coordinate international efforts to investigate and better understand 2019-nCoV, to minimize the threat in affected countries and to reduce the risk of further international spread ^[4].

Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) was set up to protect the states. There targets were to limit the transmission, provide early health care, communicate key information and minimize social and economic impacts ^[5]. Mass gatherings and events should be restricted. Respiratory infections are most commonly transmitted at such events ^[6]. Social distancing decreases the social contact among people of all ages and reduces the transmission of virus from person to person. The closure of schools and universities, childcare facilities, religious services, entertainment venues, and other places where people congregate is an important such measure ^[6]. As COVID-19 is a new disease and is having the most devastating effects globally, its emergence and spread causes confusion, anxiety and fear among the general population ^[7]. A lot of facts are changing regarding the prevention and management of the COVID-19 infection in the general population. WHO are providing useful and authentic information.

Government are also urging people not to share any fake news or messages without checking their authenticity ^{[5][7]}.

There has been an increased use of masks and sanitizers resulting in shortage of resources in the market ^[5]. A Shortage of personal protective equipment endangers health workers ^{[5][7]}. The governments, media, doctors, researchers, celebrities, police and other stakeholders of the society appealed to the public gatherings including sports, religious ceremonies, family functions, classes in schools and colleges to prevent the global spread of coronavirus infection ^{[7][8]}. Despite these efforts, many people ignore the importance of social distancing.

The anxiety and concerns in society are affecting every individual to some extents. There are many studies of the psychological impact of quarantine in the scientific literature. A recent review of existing literature found 24 studies, mostly concerned with SARS, swine flu and Ebola, of which 23 found a link between quarantine and adverse psychological impacts ^[9]. Most demonstrated an increase in common mental disorders (such as anxiety, depression and confusion) as compared to general population ^[10].

The knowledge and attitudes of the public are expected to largely influence the degree of adherence to the personal protective measures and ultimately the clinical outcome. Hence, it is important to study these domains in the Indian population. The mental health issues are other major health concerns, which are expected to increase day by day during this epidemic. There is a paucity of research that evaluated the mental health concerns during this pandemic. Considering the relevance of all the above factors, it was aimed to evaluate knowledge, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental healthcare needs in the community during the coronavirus pandemic in India ^[7].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional, observational study was carried out in India from March 2020 to May 2020. A Snowball sampling technique was used. This method is purely based on referrals and can go on-and-on just like a snowball increasing in size (in this case the sample size) till the time our researcher had enough data to analyze & to draw a conclusive result. Data collection was performed by using a questionnaire which was developed by using google forms. The questionnaire was conducted in English language. The participants aged 18 years or older understand the content of the questionnaire. The link of the questionnaire was sent through e-mails. WhatsApp and other social media. The participants were asked to forward the

questionnaire link to as many people as possible. The survey starts with the demographics details like age, gender, category and then the questions appeared sequentially which the participants were to answer [7, 13].

The data collection was initiated on 5th March 2020 and closed on 5th May 2020. As the survey was rolled out by the participants, I was able to collect data from across various states on India.

The questionnaire contained four sections related to awareness, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental healthcare needed during COVID-19. The questionnaire consisted of four primary sections. The first section assessed participants awareness about COVID-19. The second section assessed participants attitudes towards COVID-19. The third section assessed their anxiety toward COVID-19. The final section assessed the perceived mental healthcare during COVID-19. In the first three sections, the participants were asked to respond to questions as 'yes or no or I'm not sure' and the fourth section the participants were asked to respond to questions as 'always or sometimes or often or never'.

RESULT

This online survey related to awareness, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental health care needs in the community during the corona pandemic was conducted in the Indian population. A total of 206 participants participated in the study. Out of the total, the mean age was 25 years (SD= 11.9, range= 20-30), 113 (54.9%) were males and 93 (44.7%) were females. 65 (31.6%) were health care professionals and rest 141 (68.4%) belongs to general population.

ASSESSMENT OF AWARENESS

A total of seven questions were used to measure awareness on the COVID-19. Shown in Fig.1 Out of the total participants 87.9% answered that the main clinical symptoms are fever, dry and persistent cough, body ache, chest pain, joint pain and 7.3% answered that these are not the symptoms of COVID-19 and 4.9% were not sure. 79.6% answered that virus spread through touching, sneezing, eating or touching animals, 11.7% answered that COVID-19 is not spread by these 8.7% were not sure about it. 80.4% agreed that it is highly contagious and fatal, 12.3% answered that it is not contagious and fatal and 7.4% were not sure. Almost all the participants marked yes (98.5%) that it is necessary for children and adults to take measures to prevent the infection by COVID-19 virus. 92.7% answered that isolating a person with symptoms stops the spread of the virus. Most participants (87.3%) acknowledged that washing hands frequently

could stop the spread of infection. Maximum participants (94.6%) answered that people who have contact with someone infected with virus should be immediately isolated for a period of 14 days.

ASSESSMENT OF ATTITUDE

Participants were asked to four questions in assessment of attitude. As shown in Fig.2, Most participants knew that frequently washing hands and wearing mask can lower the risk of infection (95.1%). 78.9% answered that if a person having fever and cough should be quarantined or isolate themselves, while 12.7% were not sure about it. Most (94.1%) participants thought social distancing is essential to stop the spreading of virus. However, 77.2% considered travelling is not safe during this time.



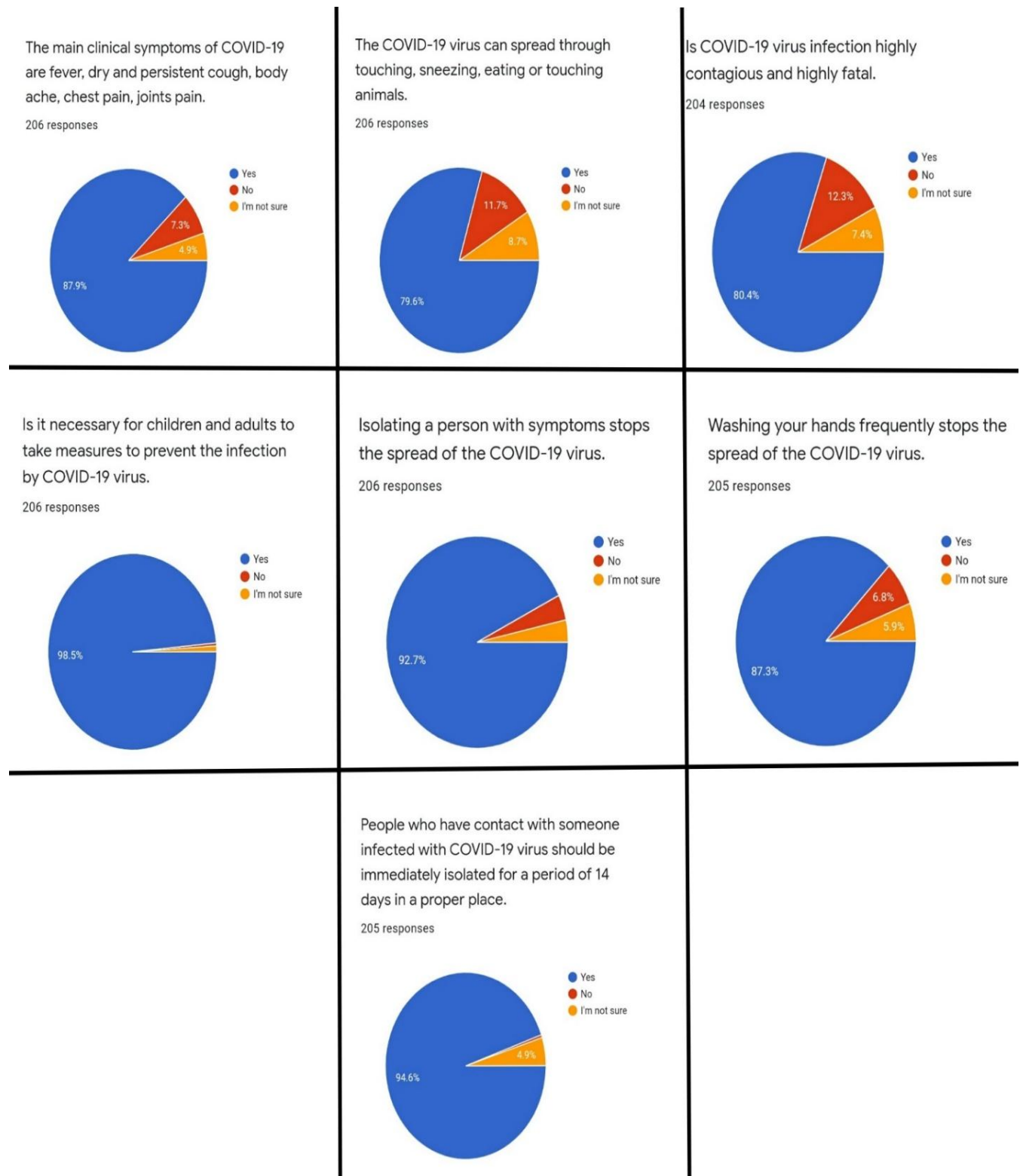


Figure No. 1: Awareness of participants about COVID-19.

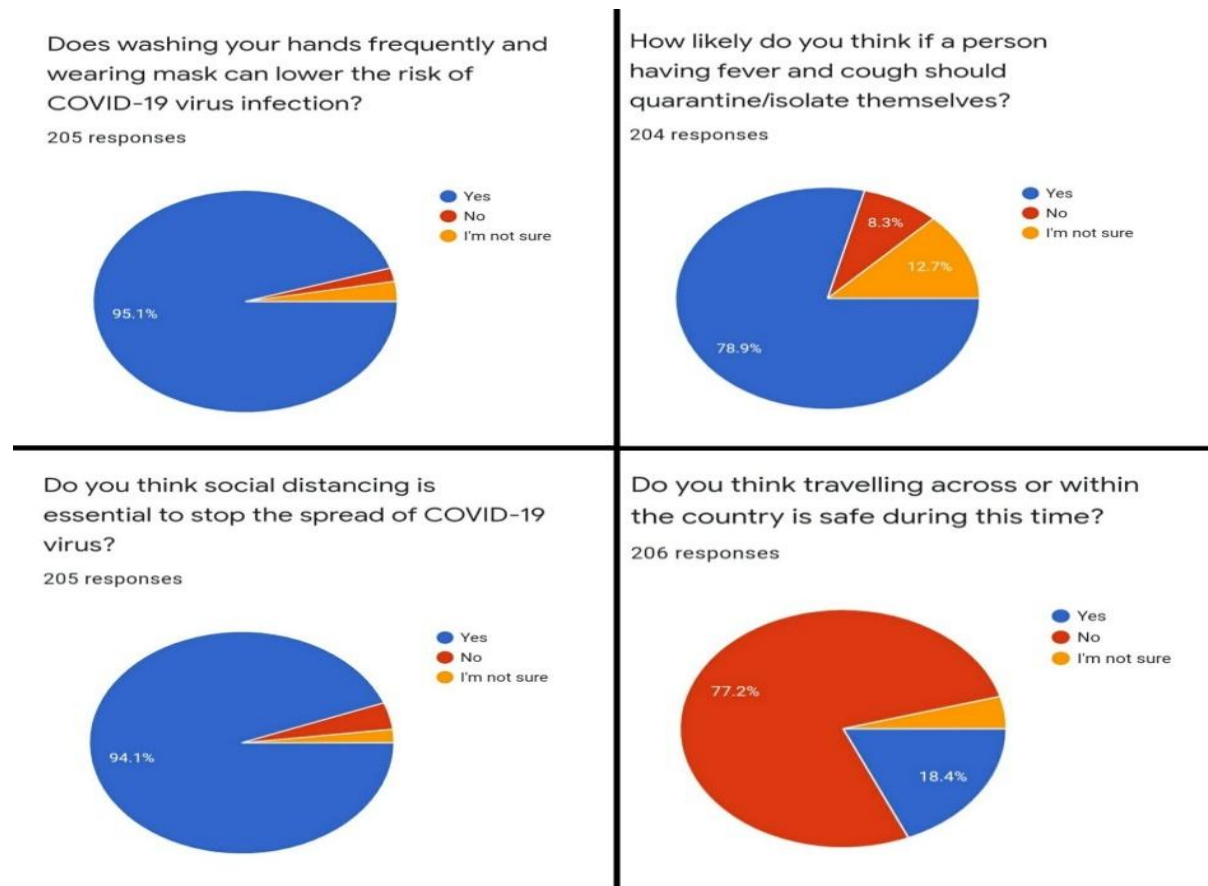


Figure No. 2: Attitude of participants towards COVID-19

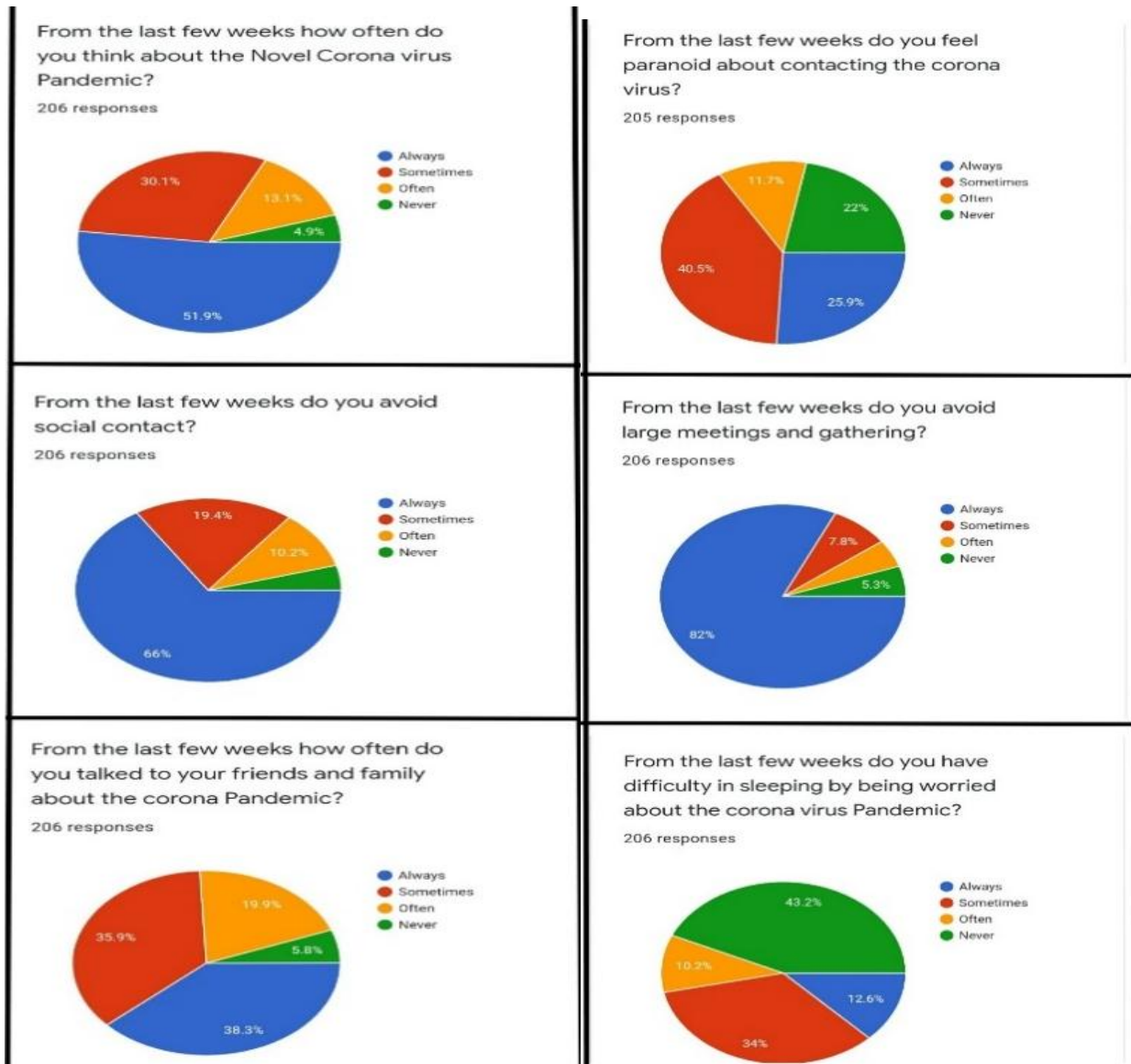


Figure No. 3.1: Anxiety related to COVID-19.

ASSESSMENT OF ANXIETY

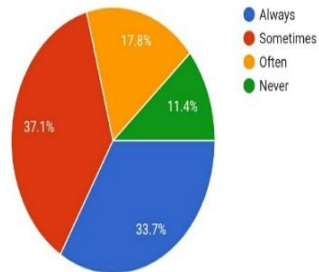
A total of thirteen questions were used to measure the anxiety on the COVID-19 ^[7]. Shown in Fig. 3.1 and 3.2, Half of the participants (51.9%) agreed that they always think about the Novel coronavirus from the last few weeks while 30.1% sometimes think about the Pandemic rest 13.1% marked often and remaining 4.9% never thought about it. Approximately 40.5% of the participants sometimes feels paranoid with the thought of contacting the infection, 25.9% always feels paranoid while 11.7% often feels about it and 22% never feels from the past few weeks. Maximum participants (66%) always avoid social contact while 19.4% avoid sometimes. Among the participants, 82% avoid large meetings and gathering. A total of 38.3% participants repeatedly talk to friends and family about the Pandemic, 35.9% talks sometimes

while 19.9% often talks about it. Around 43.2% participants never have any difficulty in sleeping by being worried about the pandemic and for 34% sometimes it become difficult, 10.2% often 12.6% always have difficulty in sleeping from the last few weeks. About 33.7% always get affected by the post on social media about the COVID-19, 37.1% sometimes get affected, 17.8% often and 11.4% are not affected by any news or posts on any platforms. From the last few weeks, about 35% always feel the need to buy and stock all the essentials at home, while 31% sometimes feel the need. 37.8% of the participants affirmed feeling scared when someone in their social circle become sick while 30.3% sometimes feels scared. About 63.1% always feels the need to use sanitizer and gloves. 68% always feel the need to constantly wash their hands while 18.7% sometimes feel the need. Almost 59.6% are always worried about themselves and close ones regarding the spread of the infection, 21.7% sometimes feels worried. Nearly 37.6% freak out on the idea of coronavirus infection leading to inappropriate behaviour while 32.7% never freaks which leads to inappropriate behaviour with anyone.



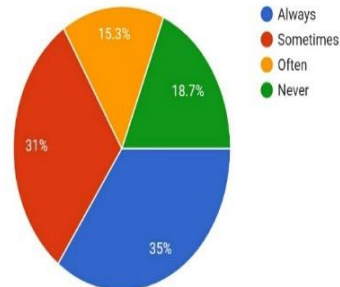
From the last few weeks how affected do you feel by the posts on social media and news in the news channels about the corona virus Pandemic?

202 responses



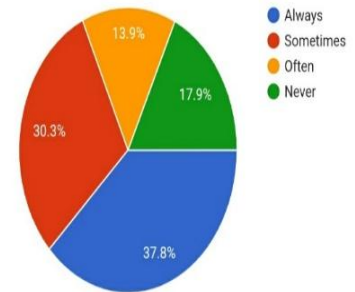
From the last few weeks do you feel the need to buy and stock all essentials at home?

203 responses



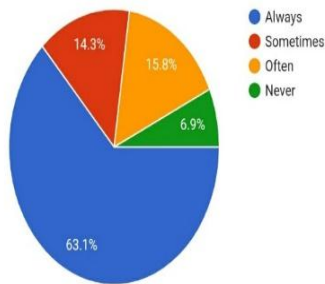
From the last few weeks do you feel afraid if anyone in your social circle reports of being sick?

201 responses



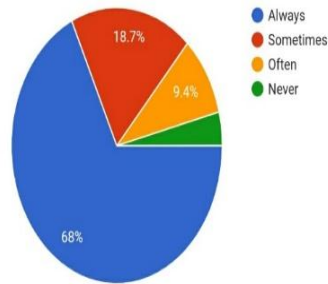
From the last few weeks how often do you feel the need to use sanitizer/gloves?

203 responses



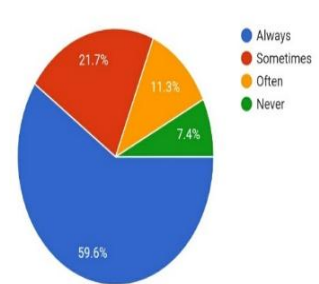
From the last few weeks how often do you feel the need to constantly wash your hands?

203 responses



From the last few weeks how often do you feel worried about yourself and close ones regarding the spread of COVID-19?

203 responses



From the last few weeks how often does the idea of corona virus infection freak you out leading to inappropriate behaviours with anyone?

202 responses

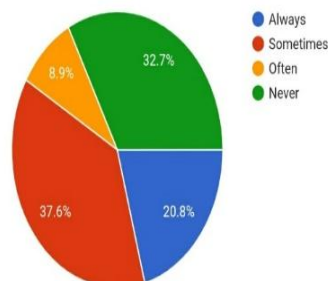


Figure No. 3.2: Anxiety related to COVID-19.

ASSESSMENT OF PERCEIVED MENTAL HEALTHCARE

Total four questions were plotted to measure the perceived mental healthcare. As shown in Fig.4, About 72.9% of the participants agreed that it would be nice to talk about your worries regarding the COVID-19 viral Pandemic. A total of 78.7% participants felt the need to get mental health help if anyone panics in this Pandemic situation. More than 80% of the participants think it would be beneficial if mental health professionals help people in dealing with the current situation. In this study, 78.7% participants will suggest people obtain mental health help who are highly affected by the Pandemic.

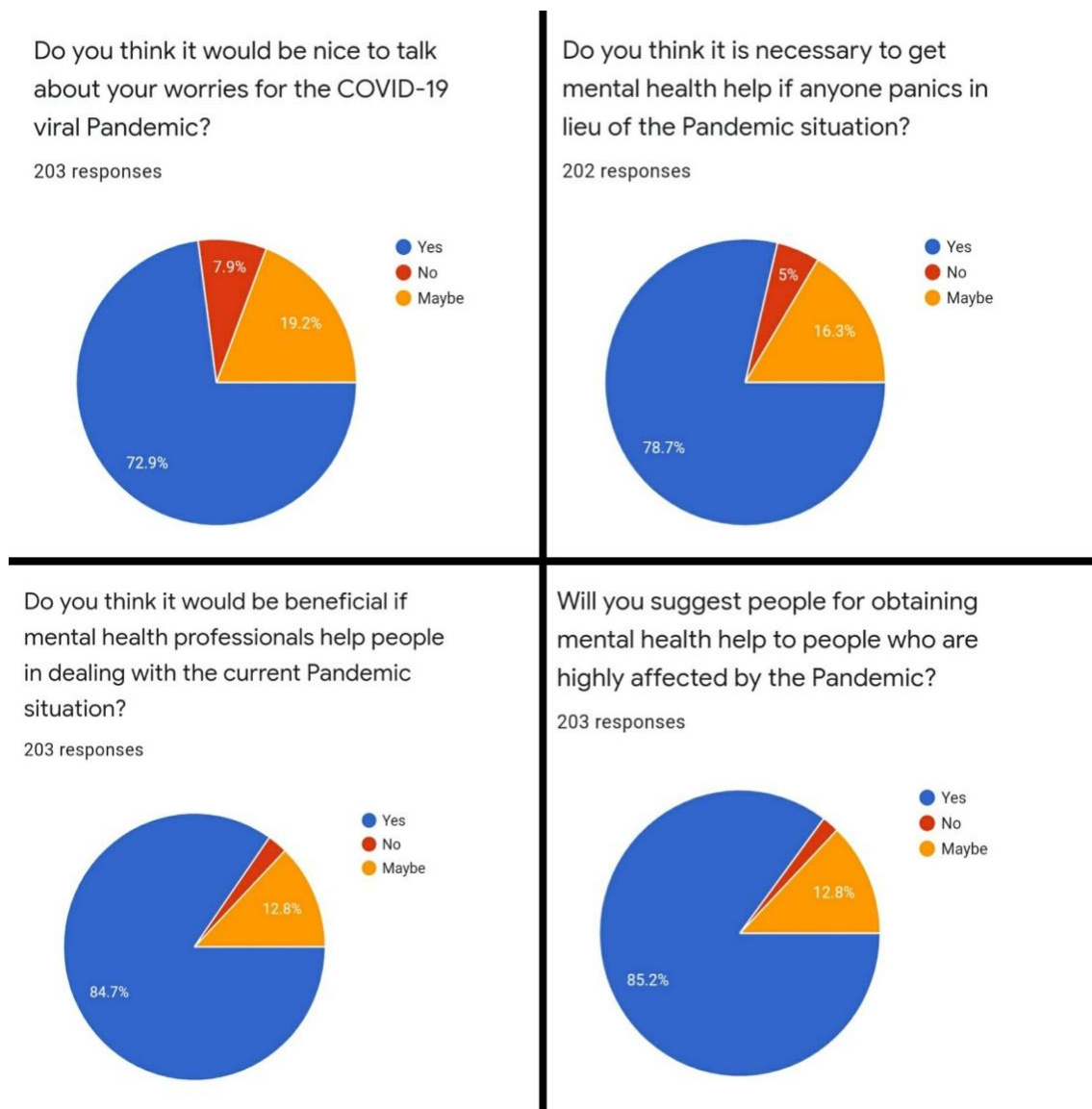


Figure No. 4: Perceived mental healthcare needs among participants during COVID-19.

DISCUSSION

COVID-19 is a threat to public health as it is an infectious and fatal disease. Within a short span of time, it has spread at a very high rate and has shown its devastating effects ^[13]. The present study aimed to assess awareness, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental healthcare during COVID-19. Preventive measures play an important role in reducing infection rates and controlling the spread of the disease. In a study on KAP toward COVID-19 in the Bangladeshi population also showed that the participants had a good knowledge on COVID-19 ^[15].

In the present study, it was found that the participants were aware about the COVID-19. A satisfactory level of knowledge has been shown in the study. High rate of correct answers regarding awareness about the COVID-19 was not surprising. This may be due to the awareness gained via television, news and media platforms. It may also be due to the questionnaire, amid the COVID-19 outbreak ^[11]. Most participants in our study were also aware of the clinical symptoms of COVID-19. Several studies have indicated high levels of COVID-19 awareness among general population and healthcare professionals ^[14]. Large majority of participants showed positive attitude towards overcoming COVID-19. High level of positive attitude was also detected in the KAP study conducted in China ^[12]. This is all possible because of the drastic measures taken by the Government.

The participants in this study reported the frequent use of sanitizers, masks and washing hands during the past few weeks. This has led to the increasing concern towards personal hygiene measures to avoid the infection ^[7]. Most of the participants agreed that social distancing, travelling in or within country is not safe in this period of time. Participants showed strong response to isolation or self-quarantine when having any symptoms related to COVID-19 that showed that they are worried about their close ones. However, fear and positive stigma is reflected when asked about the inclusion and recovered COVID-19 patients to the mainstream of society ^[7]. Proper awareness may minimize this feeling.

Anxiety has also affected the people which results in buying and stocking essentials of home which has led to shortage of resources. Because of social-distancing, staying at home has led to no physical activity and people have to adapt the unwanted lifestyle. This may affect their mental health. Participants showed worriers regarding their family or close ones being infected by the COVID-19. They are not able to sleeping properly which has resulted in sleep disturbance and above all these the change in their behaviour is a big concern. The study

showed the worries in the participants about the posts and discussion about the COVID-19 in the news channels. This indicates that despite being aware and having adequate knowledge about the infection people are still getting influenced by all this information, this has led to the increase level of anxiety. Many participants felt the need for help for their mental well-being.

Talking about the mental healthcare need about 70% above participants think that a mental health help should be given to the people who gets panics in lieu on the pandemic situation and it would be even nicer if they talk about their worriers regarding the viral pandemic. In this challenging and devastating situation, people urge mental health need by professional healthcare workers considering the risk of the spread of COVID-19 infection. Considering the risk of the spread of COVID-19 infection it would be a great idea that an online mental health consultation will be provided to the people.

LIMITATION

The study is limited to the people who had smartphones, e-mail IDs. The questionnaire was sent through different social platforms resulting that underprivileged population may not have been able to participate in this study. The limitation is related to awareness, attitude, anxiety instruments used in this study. The instruments had been taken from a survey study that has been previously used in China ^[12].

CONCLUSION

This study was able to provide that most of the people are aware about the COVID-19 due to the preventive methods and social distancing which has been initiated by the government to limit the spread of the infection. However, most people are affected by the Pandemic which has led to disturbance in their sleep pattern, they feel paranoid about getting infected by the virus. People are avoiding social contact and large meetings and gatherings which is actually important. People need to deal with their mental health difficulties which they are having in the current situation. There is a great need for awareness programs and discussion about the COVID-19 pandemic by health care professionals.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Awareness

1. The main clinical symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry and persistent cough, body ache, chest pain, joints pain.⁽¹³⁾
2. The COVID-19 virus can spread through touching, sneezing, eating or touching animals.⁽⁷⁾
3. Is COVID-19 virus infection highly contagious and highly fatal.⁽⁷⁾
4. Is it necessary for children and adults to take measures to prevent infection by COVID-19 virus? ⁽¹³⁾

5. Isolating a person with symptoms stops the spread of the COVID-19 virus. ⁽⁷⁾
6. Washing your hands frequently stops the spread of the COVID-19 virus. ⁽⁷⁾
7. People who have contact with someone infected with COVID-19 virus should be immediately isolated for a period of 14 days in a proper place. ⁽¹³⁾

Attitude

8. Does washing your hands frequently and wearing masks can lower the risk of COVID-19 virus infection? ⁽⁷⁾
9. How likely do you think if a person having fever and cough should quarantine/isolate themselves? ⁽¹³⁾
10. Do you think social distancing is essential to stop the spread of COVID-19 virus? ⁽⁷⁾
11. Do you think traveling across or within the country is safe during this time? ⁽⁷⁾

Anxiety

12. From the last few weeks how often do you think about the Novel corona virus pandemic?⁽⁷⁾
13. From the last few weeks do you feel paranoid about contacting the Corona virus? ⁽⁷⁾
14. From the last few weeks do you avoid social contact? ⁽⁷⁾
15. From the last few weeks do you avoid large meetings and gathering? ⁽⁷⁾
16. From the last few weeks do you talked to your friends and family about the Corona Pandemic? ⁽⁷⁾
17. From the last few weeks do you have difficulty in sleeping by being worried about the Corona virus Pandemic? ⁽⁷⁾
18. From the last few weeks how affected do you feel by the posts on social media and news in the news channels about the Corona virus Pandemic? ⁽⁷⁾
19. From the last few weeks do you feel the need to buy and stock all essential at home? ⁽⁷⁾

20. From the last few weeks do you feel afraid if anyone in your social circle reports of being sick? ⁽⁷⁾

21. From the last few weeks how often do you feel the need to use sanitizer/gloves? ⁽⁷⁾

22. From the last few weeks how often do you feel the need to constantly wash your hands? ⁽⁷⁾

23. From the last few weeks how often do you feel worried about yourself and close ones regarding the spread of COVID-19? ⁽⁷⁾

24. From the last few weeks how often does the idea of Corona virus freak you out leading to inappropriate behaviour with anyone? ⁽⁷⁾




Perceived mental health need



25. Do you think it would be nice to talk about your worries for the COVID-19 viral Pandemic? ⁽⁷⁾

26. Do you think it is necessary to get mental health help if anyone panics in lieu of the Pandemic situation? ⁽⁷⁾

27. Do you think it would be beneficial if mental health professionals help people in dealing with the current Pandemic situation? ⁽⁷⁾

28. Will you suggest people for obtaining mental health help to people who are highly affected by the Pandemic? ⁽⁷⁾

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