



PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEVES OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR VIEWS ABOUT ROLE OF MEDIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Background: - After the start of COVID-19 pandemic from Wuhan city of China in December 2019 and appearance of first case in Pakistan in February 2020, health care professionals (HCPs) played the role of front-line soldiers around the globe especially in developing and limited resource nations like Pakistan. The understanding of HCPs played an important role in limiting the spread of this infection in Pakistan.

Methodology: - It was an online cross-sectional study done by EAST Surgical ward MAYO hospital Lahore. An online generated proforma was created on Google forms and was sent through WhatsApp and Facebook contacts of authors to HCPs all over the Pakistan. This survey consists of total of 31 questions. Total 1000 questionnaires were collected. The completed questionnaires were compiled and analyzed by using SPSS software version 21. Frequencies of responses were calculated.

Results: 650 (65%) of the respondents were male and 350 (35%) were female. Majority of the respondents were from the age group of 25 to 40 years 431 (43.1%) and from the province of Punjab 490 (49%). Majority of HCPs (86.5%) believed they have enough knowledge about COVID-19 and they feel no reluctance in treating COVID-19 patients (75.9%). The news on media were not reliable (52.8%) and it caused anxiety and depression (62%) among society.

Conclusion: - Despite enough knowledge about Covid-19, more training sessions should be arranged for HCPs and they should be encouraged and media should be made responsible in reporting and spreading awareness in this pandemic.

Keywords: - COVID-19, Media, Doctors, Pandemic, Pakistan.

Introduction: -

Corona virus infection also known as COVID -19 is caused by a newly discovered corona virus in the Wuhan city of China[1]. It is a single stranded RNA virus which is zoonotic disease and led to human infection predominantly through air droplets. It

causes acute respiratory tract infection. Corona virus affected nearly 210 countries around the globe[2]. It became pandemic in a very short span of time. In the past, the world had faced similar pandemics like severe acute respiratory syndrome

coronavirus (SARS-CoV) in 2002-2003, H1N1 influenza in 2009, middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in Saudi Arabia in 2012[3]. Till 15th May 2020 there has been around 37218 confirmed cases and 803 individuals have lost their lives in Pakistan and figures are rising every day[4].

Till June 2020 no definite treatment was discovered against COVID-19. Only health education and preventive measures played important role in halting the spread of virus. Many health agencies in developed nations and especially in the under developed nations played their role in dissemination of information through electronic print and social media in the development of awareness regarding preventive measures[5].

Health Care Professionals (HCPs) were front line soldiers in this pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has put the HCPs around the world specially in developing nations like Pakistan in an unprecedented situation in which they have to take impossible decisions and working under extreme pressures. These decisions included the allocation of limited resources, how to balance their own physical and mental health, how to provide care for all severely ill and unwell patients[6]. World Health Organization (WHO) released several treatment and prevention guidelines and also started many online courses and training sessions especially for Health Care Workers including doctors, nurses and paramedical staff to raise awareness and preparedness[7].

The official media channel and social media struggled hard to increase public awareness of preventions and intervention by broadcasting daily updates. But social media may lead to misinformation overload which in turn caused many mental health problems[8]. WHO also pointed out that identifying the underlying factors for fear, anxiety and stigma that augment the misinformation and rumor particularly through social media. Many studies revealed that the indirect exposure to mass trauma through the social media increased the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms[9]. A previous study also shown social media exposure may positively related to forming risk perceptions during the MERS outbreak in South Korea[10]. But there was no study to examine the association between social media exposure and mental health problems. So, this study aims to describes

perceptions and believes of health care professionals of Pakistan and their attitudes and their view on role of Pakistani media during this pandemic. This study will help us identifying the facts how Pakistani health care providers coped with the pandemic in limited resources and how media affected their mental health and personality.

Material and Methods: -

Due to restrictions and lockdown measures imposed by the government of Pakistan in different areas of Pakistan this cross-sectional survey was done online by EAST Surgical Ward (Unit 1) of MAYO hospital, Lahore which is an affiliated teaching hospital of King Edward Medical University Lahore Pakistan. This study was done in a time period of 3 months, from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 2020 and was approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) of King Edward Medical University. The aim of the study was to assess the perceptions, believes and attitudes of health care professionals of Pakistan and their view regarding role of Pakistani electronic media regarding the covid pandemic. An online generated proforma was created on Google forms and was sent through WhatsApp and Facebook contacts of authors of this study to health care professionals (HCPs). They included doctors who completed their final professional examination and were doing house job in different teaching hospitals of Pakistan and were registered with Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), Nurses who were registered with Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) and Para medical staff including ward boys, operation theater staff and pharmacists. This proforma was sent to different teaching hospitals of five provinces of Pakistan including Islamabad and response was collected. All participants were requested to forward the questionnaire to as many contacts as possible. This survey consists of total of 31 questions. 15 questions were about the perceptions and believes (PB) of Health care professionals in which PB 1 to PB 12 were answered as on a Agree/Disagree and don't know basis while PB 13, PB 14 and PB15 has different answers of each question. Similarly, 5 questions were regarding their Attitudes (A) among which A1 to A4 were answered Yes, No and not sure while A5 has different answers. 11 questions regarding the view of Health care professionals on role of electronic media of Pakistan (R) during the covid pandemic all of which were answered in Agree/Disagree and don't know basis. The

completed questionnaires were compiled and analyzed by using SPSS software version 21. Frequencies and percentages of different responses were calculated.

Results: -

Total 1052 responses were collected out of which 52 were rejected because of incomplete form filling.650 (65%) of the respondents were male and 350 (35%) were female. Majority of the respondents were from the age group of 25 to 40 years 431 (43.1%) and from the province of Punjab 490 (49%). The details of the demographic data of participants are shown in table 1.

Regarding perceptions and believes of health care professionals, majority (86.5%) of the HCPs believe that they have enough knowledge about covid to guide the general public. According to HCPs the PPE provided by the government to them were not according to who guidelines (64.8%) and government had not provided proper guidelines to hcps (60.7%).HCPs strongly disagree that they were reluctant in treating the covid patients (75.9%).The telemedicine service started by different universities of Pakistan was effective in covid pandemic (32.4%).HCPs believes that the

most effective way of preventing from covid is by social distancing (31.1%) and avoid handshake (30.5%),and the main cause of death was lack of government strategy (20.6%) during this pandemic. The details result of perceptions and believes of hcps are shown in table 2.

Majority of HCPs increased frequency of hand wash (62.6%) and avoided handshake and hugging (69.7%) after the covid outbreak but many still didn't know about significance of changing hospital clothes before entering their home (78.3%). The results of attitude of HCPs are shown in table 3.

Majority of HCPs (68.9%) thought that the role of Pakistani media was not positive in covid pandemic and were unsure (52.8%) that the news circulating on electronic media were reliable or not. Many thought that many media channels sensationalize the covid pandemic (46.3%) and government hide the actual no of death to prevent the panic situation (52.8%).However majority (73%)were satisfied with the national action plan of government .Media news were considered to be the source of chaos, anxiety (62%) among the general public. Details are present in table 4.

TABLE NO 1: - Demographic data of the participants.

			FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1.1	GENDER	MALE	650	65%
		FEMALE	350	35%
1.2	AGE GROUPS	LESS THAN 25 YEARS	245	24.5%
		25 TO 40 YEARS	431	43.1%
		MORE THAN 40 YEARS	324	32.4%
1.3	MARITAL STATUS	MARRIED	445	44.5%
		UNMARRIED	555	55.5%
1.4	PARTICIPANTS PROVINCE	PUNJAB	490	49%
		KHYBER PAKTUNKHWA	173	17.3%
		SINDH	153	15.3%
		BALUCHISTAN	56	5.6%
		ISLAMABAD	128	12.8%
1.5	PARTCIPIENTS PROFESSION	DOCTORS	510	51%
		NURSES	230	23%
		PARA MEDICAL STAFF	260	26%

TABLE NO 2: - Perceptions and believes of Health Care Professionals

	PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEVES	AGREE	DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW
PB1	I think Health care Professionals have enough knowledge themselves to guide the general public regarding COVID 19	86.5%	8.3%	5.2%

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PB2	I think COVID 19 is a bio weapon used by government/terrorist organization	18.1%		38.4%		43.5%
PB3	PPE provided by the Government to Health care professionals are according to WHO guidelines	10.5%		64.8%		24.7%
PB4	I think receiving a parcel from China will put me at risk of getting COVID 19	26.7%		37.6%		35.7%
PB5	I think health care professionals are reluctant in treating every patient due to the fear of COVID19	6.3%		75.9%		17.8%
PB6	I think general public is taking advantage from telemedicine source of different universities of Pakistan	32.4%		19.6%		48%
PB7	I think every patient with flu, fever, headache should be suspected as COVID19	22.6%		73.6%		3.8%
PB8	I think government has provided proper guidelines and equipment to health care professionals to treat patients of COVID 19	22.2%		60.7%		17.1%
PB9	I think Health Care professionals are in stress, anxiety and fear of getting COVID infection while treating COVID patients	25.1%		36.7%		38.2%
PB10	I think wearing facemasks 24/7 will help me in preventing from COVID 19	27.2%		33.0%		39.8%
PB11	I think many patients are getting neglected because healthcare professionals are suspecting every patient with COVID 19	40.0%		41.3%		4.8%
PB12	I think Health care professionals are working under pressure of Government despite unavailability of PPE from government	21.2%		74.0%		4.8%
PB13	I think the most effective way of	Wearing facemask	Wearing PPE	Social Distancing	Avoid Handshake	Using hand sanitizer

	preventing yourself from COVID 19 is	23.0%	9.1%	31.1%	30.5%	6.3%
PB14	I think this COVID 19 start spreading in Pakistan from	Dirty places	Chinese restaurants	Frequent handshaking	Travelers from abroad	others
		2.1%	15.8%	11.8%	66.3%	4.0%
PB15	I think the actual cause of death due to COVID 19 in Pakistan is	Lack of ventilators	Lack of knowledge of public about covid	Reluctance of HCPs to treat patients	Lack of government SOPs	Lack of knowledge of HCPs
		7.2%	11.4%	9.0%	20.6%	1.2%

TABLE NO 3: - Attitudes of Health Care Professionals

	ATTITUDES	YES	NO	NOT SURE		
A1	I increased the frequency of hand washing after COVID 19 spread in Pakistan	62.6%	33.8%	3.6%		
A2	I avoided handshake/Hugging and kept Social distancing after COVID 19 spread in Pakistan	69.7%	21.3%	9.0%		
A3	I think i will stop eating from Chinese restaurants even when this pandemic will over	63.3%	20.6%	16.1%		
A4	I change my hospital clothes before entering my home	12.5%	9.2%	78.3%		
A5	My course of action will be if i suspect myself of COVID 19	I will keep my routine	Isolate myself	Google symptoms and treat myself	Inform concerned authority	Will not inform anyone
		12.9%	15.6%	8.1%	41.3%	22.1%

TABLE NO 4: - View of Health Care Professionals towards role of media

	ROLE OF MEDIA	AGREE	DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW
R1	I think Pakistani media is playing a positive role in spreading awareness and education among general public in this pandemic.	17.1%	68.9%	14%
R2	I think news circulating on electronic and social media regarding COVID 19 are reliable	12.4%	34.8%	52.8%
R3	I find the attitude of general public on social media regarding COVID 19 as reliable	19.2%	37.1%	43.7%
R4	I think Media is spreading false rumors just to sensationalize this pandemic	46.3%	14.1%	39.6%
R5	I think Government is hiding actual no of affected patients and deaths by COVID 19 through media channels	52.8%	11.4%	35.8%
R6	I think Media is politicizing this pandemic	57.7%	21.6%	20.7%
R7	I think forward messages on Social Media is spreading more chaos and panic among general public.	62.0%	24.8%	13.2%
R8	I think NEWS/Messages on Social Media is creating more anxiety and depression among general public	29.3%	64.0%	6.7%
R9	I think there are different news about number of affected and dead patients on media.	12.1%	72.8%	15.1%
R10	I think National Action Plan for COVID 19 is updated regularly with latest information and is a reliable source of information	73.0%	15.0%	12.0%
R11	I think the display of pictures/videos of health care professionals wearing PPE and treating patients on social media is justifiable	28.2%	24.8%	47.0%

Discussion: -

Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic from the Wuhan province of China, there is a panic situation all around the globe. This pandemic has taken the whole world in its wings within no time[11]. Millions of people got infected with this deadly virus and thousands lost their lives. It has been estimated that there is a huge number of people which remained undetected being infected with this virus. This pandemic not only cost the precious lives but also financial and economic burden to developed and under developed countries in particular[12]. Developed countries had better system of health facilities and they coped with the situation to their best but this pandemic caused the collapse of health system of many developing nations including Pakistan[13].

Health care professionals (HCPs) including doctors, nurses and paramedical staff played the role of front-line soldiers in this pandemic all around the globe and even many HCPs died in their line of duty to save and treat patients with covid 19. This include many well renowned physicians of many countries[14].

Since the first case of covid reported in Pakistan on 26 February 2020 panic was observed in the people of Pakistan. Government at its own level done its level best to combat this deadly virus from spreading, but the number of COVID -19 cases kept on increasing day by day in Pakistan. Sudden spike in COVID-19 graph was seen in April and June of 2020[15]. Being a developing country with fully engaged and loaded health system, it became an emergency situation with all hospitals

fully occupied by covid patients. Pakistani government had to made separate hospitals and quarantine facilities for covid patients. In Pakistan, with already shortage of HCPs because of brain drain and other factors, many HCPs worked in the collapsed health system to save the precious lives. On the other hand, because of multiple TV channels, there was an aura of panic and anxiety among the general public[16].

Although there were many studies done already on COVID-19, we did this study to evaluate the perceptions, believes and attitudes of front-line soldiers, the HCPs all over the Pakistan, and their views regarding the role of Pakistani electronic media in this pandemic. Because it was first virus of its own kind the proper knowledge of its treatment was necessary to understand. About 86.5 % HCPs believed that they had enough

knowledge to treat COVID-19. Regarding false spread of rumors in Pakistan about COVID-19, many HCPs disagreed (38.4%) or did not knew (43.5%) that COVID-19 was a bioweapon used by some organization. About 64.8% HCPs thought that the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provided by the government to them were not according to the WHO standards. They rejected the false rumor that they were reluctant to treat patient due to fear of getting COVID-19 themselves and also every flu, fever and headache should not be suspected as COVID-19. HCPs thought that the effective way of prevention from COVID-19 was social distancing (31.1%) and avoiding handshake (30.5%). Many HCPs thought that the spread of COVID-19 was due to lack of government rules and regulations and SOPs from the start of COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding the attitudes of hcps in this pandemic about 62.6% of HCPs agreed that they increased the frequency of their handwash. As it is proven and recommended worldwide that frequent handwash with plain water reduces the chances of getting infected with COVID-19. It was also believed that covid virus can stay on fabrics and many studies proved this too. Our HCPs were not sure that changing the clothes from going back home to hospital has any role in decreasing the incidence of COVID-19 infection. The government of Pakistan devised an authority who looked after the corona infected cases and majority of HCPs agreed that if they get infected with the COVID-19 they informed the concerned authority and registered themselves in the database. This showed the trust of HCPs on government organizations.

The role of media in Pakistan in this COVID-19 pandemic was seemed to be provocative one. Many media channels reported different infective cases number, recovered patients and deaths. Also, the reporting and informative sessions done by non-medical personal was source of anxiety and depression among the general public. HCPs in Pakistan also disagreed that Pakistani media played a positive role in spreading awareness and education to the Pakistani people. Also, they were unsure that whether the news on electronic media were true or not. Due to opinions given by different non-medical personals HCPs thought that messages spread by different media channels created more chaos and panic among general public.

Conclusion: -

The HCPs of Pakistan treated patients without the fear of getting COVID-19 infection. They had adequate knowledge of COVID-19 source and treatment and its mode of spread. The perceptions and believes of HCPs were satisfactory according to the WHO standards. HCPs thought that the role of media in this pandemic was not satisfactory and it created much disinformation, chaos and anxiety among the general public.

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