

Review Article

Covid 19 and Stigma

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Abstract: Stigma is a discrimination against an identifiable group of people, a place, or a nation. A lack of knowledge about how COVID-19 spreads, fears about disease and death, and gossip are the major cause for rumors and myths. These leads to prejudices against people and communities. Such behavior may culminate into increased hostility, chaos and unnecessary social disruptions. There is an urgent need to counter such prejudices and to rise as a community that is empowered with health literacy and responds appropriately in the face of this adversity.

Keywords: COVID-19, Stigma, discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

Stigma is a negative attitude and beliefs towards people, places or things. Public health emergencies, such as COVID 19 pandemic, are stressful times that cause fear and anxiety among people and often lead to discrimination, stereotyping and other negative behaviors toward others. The misinformation, rumors' during this time creates more stress and can also hamper recovery.

Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger towards other people. It can also make people more likely to hide symptoms or illness, keep them from seeking health care immediately, and prevent individuals from adopting healthy behaviors. This means that stigma can make it more difficult to control the spread of an outbreak (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020).

There are three main factors that are associated with COVID 19 stigma:

1. Lack of information
2. Fear of the disease
3. Misinformation/Rumor's (World Health Organization. Novel-coronavirus. 2019)

Many cases have been reported from frontline health care providers, people affected with Covid/ their

families, those who are in quarantine and those who get recovered, facing stigma and discrimination.³

Effects of Stigma and Discrimination:

This has negative effect on emotional, mental, physical health of stigmatized group. These people may experience isolation, depression, or anxiety, lack of self-esteem and confidence. These groups may often be deprived of the resources they need to care for themselves and their families during a pandemic.

People start concealing their symptoms, shows Hesitancy in seeking medical care, not adhere to interventions like home quarantine, making management of the pandemic more difficult (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. 2020).

Things we should know and remember about COVID-19:

- Although COVID-19 is highly contagious, we can protect ourselves by adopting preventive measures such as physical distancing, washing hands frequently and wearing a face cover / mask.
- Despite precautions, if anyone contracts COVID-19, it is not their fault. Anyone is susceptible to contract the disease; no one needs to be blamed.
- Be a well-wisher to those in isolation/ quarantine and their families. Testing, isolation and quarantine are meant to protect the family and community.

- Respect all the warriors who are working very hard to combat this disease.
- Celebrate persons who have recovered from COVID-19 as WINNERS. They do not have the virus & there is no risk of transmission (Dr M Wasim Ghori 2020).

Governments, citizens, media, key influencers and communities have an important role to play in preventing and stopping stigma surrounding people. We all need to be intentional and thoughtful when communicating on social media and other communication platforms, showing supportive behaviors around the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (<https://home.iitd.ac.in>).

As responsible citizens we can do the followings for reducing stigma:

- Getting the facts about COVID-19 from reliable sources such as Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organisation and share them with your family and friends.
- Cross check any information related to CoVID-19 from reliable sources before forwarding any messages on social media.
- Be appreciative and supportive of efforts made by frontline workers.
- Share positive stories of those who have recovered from COVID-19.

What to avoid reducing stigma

- Never spread names or identity of those affected or under quarantine or their locality on the social media.
- Do not target healthcare and sanitary workers or police. They are there to help you.
- Avoid spreading fear and panic

- Do not label any individual, group or area for spread of COVID-19
- Avoid addressing those under treatment as COVID victims. Address them as 'People recovering from COVID.'³

CONCLUSION

We will overpower this pandemic too by following the preventive measures and replacing the fear and rumors by facts, proper action and a showing support for one another.

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