

Original Article

Attitude and Behavior Towards Covid-19 Among Attendants of Patients in a Tertiary Care Hospital of Azad Kashmir

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Abstract

Objective: Assessment of Attitude and behavior of local population towards Covid-19 after 18 months of pandemic in Muzaffarabad.

Methods: Prospective, randomized, cross sectional survey was conducted in the Attendants of Patients in the tertiary care hospital of Muzaffarabad.

Results: 84% respondents considered Covid-19 as potentially fatal disease and believed that face masks can provide protection against Covid-19. Among the participants of the study, 94%% were using face masks, 81% were avoiding public gatherings and 82% were scared of Covid-19. The acceptance of Covid-19 vaccine was 74%.

Conclusion: There is still persistent skepticism towards preventive measures and social distances in the pandemic. A significant majority of society in this region has acceptance for these measures and vaccination.

Keywords: Covid-19

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Introduction

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei province of China, on December 12, 2019.¹ There was rapid escalation of cases outside China and by January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced it as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). On February 12, 2020, the disease caused by this novel coronavirus was designated as coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19.

There were widespread controversies and skepticism about the origin of the virus (natural, lab modified, bioweapon) right from the beginning of the pandemic.² The scale of pandemic and its effects on health systems and societies are unprecedented. There were large scale lock downs, social isolation and use of masks and social distances almost all over the world. The rapid progress in the vaccines development was historical and within few months of pandemic first vaccine was ready for clinical trials. These effective vaccines, and the genetic mutations of the original viral strain, are now reshaping the pandemic. While, the controversies of the origin

of SAR-CoV-2 were not over, there was even more skepticism and controversies for the vaccines.^{3,4} As most of these mRNA vaccines are developed by using novel technologies, the acceptance of these vaccines is a global problem.^{5,6}

The pandemic effected the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir as well. The capital city Muzaffarabad was one of the worst affected areas. The study was conducted to evaluate the attitude of local population towards Covid-19 as the region is going through the pandemic. Therefore, objective was to evaluate the attitude and behavior of local population towards Covid-19 after 18 months of pandemic.

Methods

This cross sectional, prospective study was conducted in Abbas Institute of Medical Sciences Muzaffarabad. The participants of the study were the attendants of the patients coming to the hospital. A study Performa was designed and used for data collection for the purpose of the study (attached). The participants were asked to fill the Performa if they were literate in Urdu

or English language, otherwise questions were asked and verbal responses were recorded on the study Performa. The data was analyzed by IBM-SPSS Statistics 23 software.

Results

A total number of 150 participants were included in the study. There were two questions for perception of Covid-19 as serious and fatal disease. The 82% of the participants considered it as the potentially fatal disease while 11% didn't. 78% participants were considering it a real problem, while 19% still believed it a media hype. There were three questions from the participants for protection being provided by the face masks. 86% responded positively and convinced that face masks provide protection while 12% were not convinced of the efficacy of face masks. 94% of the participants were using face masks while 81% reported that their family members were also using facemasks. 81% of participants were avoiding public gatherings due to risk of covid-19 while 19% were not. 93% of participants were regularly practicing hand wash with soap and water with an average frequency of 6-8 times daily. 82% were scared of Covid-19 while 17% responded that they

| Question | Yes % (total) | No % (total) | Don't know % (total) |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Do you think Covid-19 is a potentially fatal disease? | 88 % (132) | 11% (11) | 1% (1) |
| 2 Is Covid-19 real, or is it a media hype? | 78 % (117) | 19% (25) | 3% (4) |
| 3 Do mask provide protection against Covid-19? | 86 % (129) | 12% (18) | 2% (3) |
| 4 Do you use Mask? | 94 % (141) | 6% (9) | |
| 5 Do your family members use masks? | 81 % (121) | 19% (29) | |
| 6 Do you avoid public gatherings due to Covid-19? | 81 % (121) | 19% (29) | |
| 7 Do you wash your hands with soap and water? | 93 % (139) | 7% (11) | |
| 8 How many times you washed hands in last 24 hours? | 6-8 times | | |
| 9 Are you scared of Covid-19 | 82 % (123) | 17% (25) | 1% (2) |
| 10 Do you think it can cause death? | 74 % (111) | 25% (37) | 1% (1) |
| 11 If offered, would you get covid-19 vaccine? | 74 % (111) | 25% (37) | 1% (1) |

were not scared of it. 74% believed that Covid-19 can cause death while 25% were not considering it as the cause of death. When asked about the acceptance of Covid-19 vaccine, 74% were willing to get vaccination while 25% were reluctant.

Discussion

The scale of pandemic is a major health problem in the most developed as well as developing countries. There were large outbreaks in Europe, North America, India and Brazil. There were 12,18,748 cases in Pakistan with 33,628 deaths till September 17, 2021.⁷ The State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir was also affected and there were 27,072 case with 728 deaths.

The acceptance of changes in social behavior due to covid-19 are variable in different societies.⁸ There are wide spread and extensive media campaigns for wearing masks and social distancing as health facilities are overwhelmed with increasing number of covid-19 patients. An early, population-based cohort study from China by Pan A and colleagues during the current pandemic supported the efficacy of social distancing measures and home isolation in decreasing the number of Covid-19 cases.⁹

Simultaneously, as the pandemic is lingering on, there is phenomenon of "caution fatigue" and less adherence to precautionary measures.^{10,11} There is, but partial acceptance of changes in social behaviour in this region.

The 88% participants considered it a potentially fatal disease. According to 78 %, the problem is real but 19%, still believed that it was a media hype. This media hype of pandemic had ever been there ever since it was declared by the WHO as a Global Public Health Emergency.¹²

The significant majority of participants were practicing personal protection measures. 86% believed that wearing face masks would provide protection against being getting infected and 94% were using masks. 81% reported use of masks in their families as well. A survey study by Shaheen et al showed 64% of patients between the ages of 50-64 years were wearing masks in United States.¹³ The use of protective measures was more common in those who perceived to be more vulnerable to Covid-19.

There were extensive lockdowns all over the world to contain the spread of covid-19. Public gatherings, especially indoor crowding in closed spaces are more dangerous. 81% of participants were avoiding public gatherings due to the risk of covid-19, while 19% were not concerned and had been attending normally. Studies by Chen H and Kraemer MUG revealed that social distancing had played a pivotal role in containing the first wave of covid-19 in China.^{14,15}

Personal hygiene measures in the form of hand washing with soap and water were practiced by 93% with an average frequency of 6-8 times per day. The significant number of patients were doing it as a part of ablutions before offering prayers five times a day. Similarly, they were washing hands before and after taking their meals.

82% reported them being scared of covid-19 while 17% were not. A study by Sadia Malik in Pakistani population also found significant workplace fear of covid-19 in participants.¹⁶

Acceptance of vaccine was found in 74% of the participants while 25% were reluctant for vaccination and 1% were indecisive. A study by Yosor Al Qudeimat and colleagues in Kuwait showed 53% acceptance rate of covid-19 vaccine, where physicians were the most willing group for vaccination.¹⁷ A survey study of 655 participants in Pakistani population showed 62% vaccine acceptance.¹⁸ Another cross sectional study of 5,237 responses, 3,679 (70.25%) accepted COVID-19 vaccination in Pakistan.¹⁹ In our study higher acceptance rate (74%) of covid-19 vaccination may be attributed to more awareness and higher literacy rate in this area.

Conclusion:

There is still persistent skepticism towards preventive measures and social distances in the pandemic. It is however, encouraging that significant part of society in this region has acceptance for these measures. The pandemic has become the most significant health problem and needs perpetual advocacy and efforts for preventive measures. The knowledge of social behaviour in the local population will help in planning for more effective strategies and interventions to contain the pandemic

Recommendations:

There is need to plan and target that segment of society that is still reluctant to accept the vaccines and preventive measures.

Conflict of Interest None

Funding Source None

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