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Role of Health Workers in the Covid Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 Pandemic has again reminded all the people of the country and the world of the importance of health workers and it has again sought the question of the safety and health of the health workers during the Pandemic. The main issue in the country is the problem of Human Resources stretched in the Health Sector as only about 40 percent of health workers serve in the rural region where the most population of India still lives. It presents a situation where low workers and the high number of patients in a time of pandemic is high which causes bouts of violence. The anxiety, fear, and misinformation regarding the Covid treatment and how it is spread is rampant and the frustration regarding the lockdown has put a stopper in the patient mobility which has led to frustrations which in turn brings out the violence in the situation. It is also the responsibility of a citizen of India to not do any violence towards doctors and to not obstruct any kind of practices be it vaccines or treatment of covid-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) first raised international concern and alarm on covid-19 on 30 January 2020 and declared it a Pandemic on 11 March 2020. The first case of coronavirus in India was discovered in Kerala at the end of January by a student who have returned from Wuhan, China the origin city of Covid-19 infection.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has again reminded all the people of the country and the world of the importance of health workers and it has again sought the question of the safety and health of the health workers during the Pandemic. Health workers are key to the health infrastructure of the society as they are the one who keeps the Hospitals and other health-related infrastructures working.

World Health Organization has repeatedly called the Policymakers to make policies related to health infrastructure in the view of Health workers' situations. Health workers are much more vulnerable to infectious or any type of diseases as compared to a civilian. Health workers take care of patients until the vaccination and discharge. Throughout the Pandemic the health

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workers termed as “Covid Warriors” have sacrificed almost everything for their duties towards the patients.

Health workers have been working tirelessly to spread awareness about the hygiene methods and to bust any myth related to vaccines that might hinder the community from protecting themselves and the treatment of covid-19. ASHA workers and youth volunteers like Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (National Adolescent Health Programme) worked tirelessly by doing door-to-door campaigns to remind people about vaccination and to teach them basic hygiene.

(A) Review of literature

Current situation with doctors and healthcare workers during COVID-19 pandemic in India² In India, there are both Private and Government sectors are involved in Health infrastructure for providing medical care. Doctors and other health workers like nurses and hospital staff has found themselves facing not only pandemic but also trying to protect themselves from the unexpected violence faced by them from the grieving relatives of the patient. The government needs to come up with better policies for the protection of health care workers.

How women health workers took India’s Covid vaccination program to remote corners³ ASHA workers or Accredited Social Health Activists have played a vital role during the nationwide lockdown as well as during vaccination drive by the government. They are often the first responders during an emergency. They are the ones who went to remote and tribal areas spread awareness and bust myths related to vaccines.

Community Health Workers Play Key Role in COVID-19 Response⁴ Health workers working in non-clinical areas are as important as their clinical counterparts as most of the time they are first responders. They are working tirelessly to combat the spread of coronavirus.

Essential health services face continued disruption during COVID-19 pandemic⁵ Health sector is continue to face significant challenges in almost all sectors be it pharmacy or disposable products like gloves and PPE kits. Almost all the countries have adopted some measures and policies to monitor and smooth the situation for the supply chain. The situation of essentials bottleneck is faced by 50% of the countries in the world. Small disruption in the health

² Iyengar KP, Jain VK, Vaishya R, Current situation with doctors and healthcare workers during COVID-19 pandemic in India. Postgraduate Medical Journal.

³ Sengupta, H., 2022. How women health workers took India’s Covid vaccination program to remote corners | VIEWS.

⁴ Heath, S., 2022. Community Health Workers Play Key Role in COVID-19 Response.

⁵ WHO

infrastructure can lead to massive consequences.

(B) Research Objectives-

The research aims to understand the Role of Health Workers in the Covid Pandemic in India and to understand how to combat them. What Schemes and initiatives have been provided by the government in order to Protect the Health Workers

(C) Research Questions

- Role of Health Workers
- Violence against Health Workers during Pandemic
- Mental Impact
- What Should be done

(D) Research Methodology

Descriptive Research was carried out through secondary data to understand the Role of Health Workers in Pandemic. Several secondary data sources (including books, research papers, journals, news articles, etc.) were referred, to have the most accurate findings.

II. ROLE OF HEALTH WORKERS (WHO ARE HEALTH WORKERS)

Health workers are people who take care of other people when they are sick or injured. They are the people who are working to enhance the conditions in the health sector. According to CDC Health Worker “refers to all paid and unpaid persons serving in health care settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials.” It means that individuals like parents taking care of their children are also classified as health workers as they are in direct exposure to patients. World Health Organization defines health workers as “all people engaged in actions whose primary intent is to enhance health.”

In India, Health Sector is divided between the Public sector and the Private sector, and the same workers are also divided into two categories Primary workers is Professionals like Doctors, Nurses, and other lab technicians, and Secondary workers like hospital administrative staff, and workers like Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), Anganwadi Workers (AWW), etc. In India first responders are ASHA and AWW workers especially in rural areas.

Health workers are much more vulnerable than an individual in case of disease spreading and the same can be said for their families as they also come in vulnerable positions. During the raging Pandemic, many hospitals closed their doors for normal patients as the virus might put

them as well as the treating doctor at risk. During the Pandemic from doctors to ASHA workers, all have been working tirelessly to raise awareness and treat the disease and save lives as best possible.

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), Anganwadi Workers (AWW), etc were and still are some of the most reliable and efficient in vaccination drive throughout the country. They skillfully succeeded in vaccination awareness in rural and tribal populations. Throughout the Pandemic, one thing which becomes clear is the lack of knowledge and the safety equipment provided by any government organization to local level workers as well as many doctors themselves were found to be using cloth masks and no other protective equipment.

India also faced a severe shortage at the start of the Pandemic of PPE kits and N95 masks in the country. It forced many doctors to reuse used kits repeatedly. Local volunteers suffered the most due to supply chain breakouts as they were the first connection between suspected patients and isolated individuals. National level stock management supply change is the need of the hour for better facilities to be provided to health workers. The most common problem faced by the health workers is ineffective knowledge of the products and how to use them. IPC measures or Infection Prevention and Control measure provided by the World Health Organization for the proper disposal of the used PPE kits, gloves, mask, or any product that has come in contact with a covid patient. In many South Asian Countries including India, it has been found that no proper precautionary meet or training took place regarding health workers protocol given by World Health Organization. After a study conducted in almost 50 private and government hospitals of Southern India, it was revealed that only about 25 percent or less of them were trained in the field of infectious disease control.

Community Health Workers and Volunteers are the backbones of Health infrastructure in India as Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), and Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) were the ones to work locally with the government and the Hospitals. As the nation was put under lockdown large throngs of migrant workers left their urban residences and moved towards their villages which created a crisis among health officials as it was hard to keep in contact and document everyone migrant worker returning to the villages and it was a scary situation as they might be a carrier of the covid-19 virus. To fight all these human resource management comes into play through community health workers. They were engaged in spreading awareness regarding hygiene, contact tracing of positive cases, and community surveillance. However, the main problems faced by them were lack of training and stigmatization faced by them in the society as they were being considered as the carrier of

infectious disease.

Additionally, in a survey conducted by National Sample Survey, it was reported that only 36 percent of people in India wash their hands before eating, and only 26 percent after using the toilet. Spitting in public is all common way in covid times for sharing your virus with the other persons even if you have not come in contact with them as the virus can be present in a dry surface if it has not been cleaned using a disinfectant.

III. VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTH WORKERS

People can say that the Pandemic might have brought the worst in Human beings in history. The circumstances are extraordinary but the same in every hospital across the country. Doctors and other health workers have been overstretched and overworked in almost all departments across hospitals emotions and tensions are running high between the health workers and patients and their relatives. Pandemic has increased violence against health workers by almost seventy-five percent across the country.

The main issue in the country is the problem of Human Resources stretched in the Health Sector as only about 40 percent of health workers serve in the rural region where the most population of India still lives. It presents a situation where low workers and high patients in a time of pandemic is high which causes bouts of violence. The anxiety, fear, and misinformation regarding the Covid treatment and how it is spread is rampant and the frustration regarding lockdown has put a stopper in the patient mobility which has led to frustrations which in turn brings out the violence in the situation. Government hospitals were and to some degree still are overwhelmed as the Private hospital had stopped taking non-emergency patients which in turn has made people aggressive in return they physically as well as verbally abuse the doctors and often damage the hospitals' properties.

The health workers who have been termed as "Covid Warriors" by the Prime Minister and the Media are facing the issue as they are regarded as Untouchables as in the society with the fear that they are the first contact of infected patients and they might be the carrier of the virus ravaging the country. One of the wide cases that were being done by the society to health workers was that many rentals where health professionals were living were asked to vacate the place immediately which pushed the number of them to find immediate accommodation in urgency which has put them under pressure which might have impacted their work-life balance.

The Hospital and the Patient's relatives and guardians need to have proper communication channels. The hospital needs to keep itself updated in the government-mandated app "Arogya Setu" which will help the patients in going to the right place with available facilities.

IV. IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON HEALTH WORKERS

The recommended Doctor to Patient ratio needs to be 1:1000 according to World Health Organization. India the Doctor to Patient ratio is 1: 1511 and One Nurse for 670 Patients though India aims to achieve the standard ratio by 2024. It is still a strain on the Health Sector which has already been stretched thin in the Pandemic with the peak of the Pandemic almost two lacs patients being admitted to hospitals. The increase in the covid patient is overwhelming for doctors especially as they have to spend hours working non-stop in PPE suits which in itself is overwhelming and then isolating themselves from the rest of colleagues, family, and friends. It all takes a toll on all the health workers Mental as well as their physical health as well.

At the start of the Pandemic, the eviction threat given to various Health workers was strongly discouraged by the government. The eviction threat put mental and physical pressure on them with health workers already working in a high-pressure zone in the middle of infectious disease it becomes much more challenging for health warriors. The government of India strongly discouraged such incidents.

India needs to provide its health workers working in the frontline with immediate and capable mental health programs through which they may be able to relieve stress as well as the need of capable mental health counselors and other parties to help them in fighting mental fatigue. The government also needs to better its Primary and Secondary Health care units that primarily work in rural areas so that the burden on doctors in the center of the state can be lessened. The government and other organizations related to Health Sectors should also provide monetary incentives to motivate the health workers and also provide additional support of health insurance and other types of insurance as an assurance that will boost morale among the health workers. Though late on the central government as well as the state government announced many schemes to cover Health and its allied workers who are actively participating in frontlines to cover health insurance as well as other insurance.

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND OTHER WORKS

The Indian government amended the Epidemic Disease Act 1897 in 2020 and introduced The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 which made changes in existing laws and made violence against the health workers a non-bailable offense. The act classifies violence as any harassment, injury, obstruction of duties, and damage to the properties of health care organizations or units.⁶

⁶ PRS Legislative Research. 2022. The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 [Accessed 19 February

The Central government and the various State government has started operating various oxygen plants so that the scenario present during the second wave of Pandemic should never be replicated. The government of Tamil Nadu has started providing incentives to Private industries to help in meeting the oxygen needs of the states.

The government and the Prime Minister, to increase the morale of the health workers have asked the citizens to clap in their houses and to light lamps and even the Air Force showered them with flowers. It helped in raising the morale as well as established that the Health Workers are the Frontline Warriors in the fight against the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Some other measures that should be done by the government and other Health Sector Shareholders to Help:

- Providing Mental Health Support to the Health providers which might help them in fighting any oncoming infectious disease wave or any forthcoming covid -19 wave. Reports and Articles⁷ published by doctors and researchers have warned that anxiety and depression are gripping health workers and might become hindrances in the future.
- The Health Sector especially the Government Sector needs to recruit more doctors, nurses, and other Health Workers and increase its human resource build-up to help the increasing flow of the patients.
- The allowance of the volunteers be it professionals working in the hospitals or volunteers working directly in the field is low as compared to the other countries. The government and other organizations need to increase the incentive and allowance given to volunteers and to provide them with some health benefits as not only will it increase their morale as well as their participation.
- The government needs to increase spending in healthcare as India a nation with the second largest population uses a very small percentage of its GDP for the health sector as compared to other nations like Brazil and South Africa. The IMP has always argued that the government needs to better its spending in the health sector.
- There is a dire need to spend on health technologies as they are going to be most important in the future in fact at the start of the Pandemic it was revealed that many hospitals in the country even lack basic intensive care units as well as normal machines like CT scans. The government, as well as the Private entities in the Health Sector, need

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⁷SUPRIYA MAHANT AND OTHERS-MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS FACED BY HEALTHCARE WORKERS DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-A REVIEW

to churn out money for technological advancement. It will help in reducing burdens on Professionals.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Pandemic has taught us the meaning and role of Health Workers. Health workers are a godsend in the time of covid-19 waves, they have worked tirelessly and non-stop 24/7. Many health workers have lost their lives in fighting the covid-19 virus. India should also equip itself and its hospitals with better measurements in terms of infectious disease and supports its staff mentally and physically. The government also needs to pass and amend existing laws for black-marketing of medicines and needs to put measures in place to fight malpractices in medicines. It is also the responsibility of a citizen of India to not do any violence towards doctors and to not obstruct any kind of practices be it vaccines or treatment of covid-19. The government and Telemedia should also participate in busting any kind of myth related to treatment and vaccination drive.

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