
NCHRO Survey Report:

Introduction

The crisis due to Covid-19 is the biggest health, social and economic catastrophe we are living with. People live differently, and in many ways, think differently. What kind of support people need is not always clear as the members of the scientific society are learning gradually how to treat the novel virus. We face what may well be a prolonged period of physical isolation. By this survey NCHRO intends to identify the impact of the pandemic on Indian society. The information collected will help us understand the impact of Covid-19. In particular; it will also be useful in identifying what has been protective and what has been more damaging for the society.

Pneumonia of unknown aetiology was first reported in Wuhan in China last year and later the infectious disease identified as caused by a novel (or new) corona virus. It spread in different parts of the world soon and was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The first case of COVID-19 in India was reported on January 30th, 2020.

In order to support the nation’s recovery, we need to know the ways this pandemic has affected people’s lives and livelihoods.
Summary results are as follows:

1) About 9 in 10 Indians report wearing a mask in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The survey found that mask-wearing was generally popular. Have a high compliance rate with an astonishing 94% of respondents saying that they wear a mask when leaving the house.

**Observations:** Masks are no more shameful nor will it be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Latest science affirms the virus that causes COVID-19 is most commonly spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or talks. Survey reveals, majority of people, when in public wore a mask or some improvised means covering the nose and mouth. This could help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community, especially because some people with COVID-19 have no symptoms and don’t know if they are infected.

2) Physical distancing

85% of the population is aware of physical distancing recommendations.

**Observations:** Though some over reaction from the security forces has been reported in curfew areas, people generally have never been forced to stay back in their homes, lest they should infect others or get infected themselves. The distance might not have been kept absolutely as per instructions (2 metres). It seems that most people understood the principle behind physical distancing.
3) Food insecurity, a real concern

NCHRO survey uncovered increase in households’ reporting worries about food or experiencing food shortages since the advent of pandemic. 30% reported their family had run out of the food in the last month.

Observations: A family is food secure when its members do not live in hunger or have fear of hunger. As pandemic continues, with no end in sight, people who already face food insecurity, as a result of the loss of their traditional jobs, face even graver challenges in accessing food. A developing country like India, where most of the population depends on the informal economy for their livelihood, is extremely vulnerable to any disruption. Given the fact that many people will have no income or substantially reduced income in the coming months, a very large number of Indian households will be unable to survive even for relatively short periods without additional assistance. Low-income families and those with large number of unemployed members were hit the hardest during the pandemic. Hunger is going to be a major challenge for the country demanding extraordinary measures from the authorities. The fallout from the pandemic is already felt in rural areas, where there is an almost three-fold rise in the number of people requiring food assistance. Immediate action must be taken to provide prompt and direct food aid.

4) Attitudes and behaviour response related to Covid-19

One important question was how people went about preparing for the pandemic. Altogether respondents were asked about seven different practices such as frequent hand washing, wearing of facemasks, physical distancing, minimizing contact with sick, stocking up of food and medicine, and avoidance of social gatherings and communal prayers. 65 percent of people indicated taking five actions and 90 percent of respondents made at least one behavioral change in response to COVID-19. 34%, stocked up home supplies and medicine. Around 3% of respondents agree with the statement ‘Nothing done or Skip / Refuse to answer’.

Observations: Specific protocols against Covid-19 at a larger scale could not succeed until the vulnerable have enough resources to cop up with. For instance, frequent hand wash with soap was a luxury to many that have no access to adequate water and cleaning materials.
5) Nearly nine in 10 have financial stress

85% of respondents felt stressed about their finances.

Observations: Given the low baseline income of many households across all states, Covid-19 is causing an economic crisis for almost all. The national crises created by the pandemic and subsequent economic lockdowns are severely affecting the livelihoods of low-income people all around.
6) More than half of the people surveyed were not ready to interact with the Covid-19 cured

52% reported that they would prefer not to interact with a person who was cured of the disease.

**Observations:** Fear made people ostracize the Covid-19 cured or keep away from them. However a lot of fear was created by fake news which in turn stigmatized those cured. People need better education against rumour mongering and political slugfest about any medical emergencies including pandemics.

7) People experienced a pandemic of hate, discrimination and vilification

Despite the pain and suffering the pandemic has caused, 32% of the respondents said they experienced hateful messages, actions, or discriminatory behaviour. Many have endured verbal and physical assaults, and at times, institutional exclusion.

**Observations.** It is mostly due to the virulent hate campaign, xenophobic remarks and attacks, posting of fake pictures and videos etc. on social media.
8) How did people meet personal/family expenses during the pandemic?

Most survived with borrowings from friends and relatives (46%). 22% got help from either local aid groups or other community assistance programmes. 12% relied on loans and only 18% of people felt financially secure as they reported having enough reserve. 9% of people got support from government.

Observations: For most of the people the top problem was the sudden fall in regular income. They had no saving either. Most of the respondents have no specific idea to tide over the crisis and they just wrestled with fall in income. Results from the survey indicate that many were not well prepared to withstand financial disruptions.

9) Everybody needs good neighbours

More than half of the respondents expressed concern about others.

Observations: The survey reveals people’s sense of community, attachment to the society and neighbourhood.
10) Disruption in jobs and business.

Nearly half of the respondents reported losing their job or closing their business (48%) and a 31% reported as partially affected. Only 16% said they could survive.

Observations: There is growing uncertainty about mass closure, future employment, reductions in salary and long furloughs.

11) Health in general.

The survey shows that there is some decrease in the people’s normal concerns about their own health. 57% felt their health was good and 31% claimed excellent health status. The poor health condition was reported by 3% and 8% reported ‘Don’t know’.
12) Increase in interpersonal communication.

54% said they started now communication with friends and family more than before the start of the pandemic.

Observations: Before the lockdown people were preoccupied with their jobs and daily chores and could not spare enough time for their family members, friends or acquaintances. But quarantine changed everything.

13) News and Information about Covid-19

A clear majority of respondents depended (82%) on conventional sources and social media for the news and information about the disease. About 2% stated that they didn’t have the information they needed about the authorities’ handling of the coronavirus. For 59% the medium was either SMS/WhatsApp and 40% relied information from family, friends, neighbours etc.

Observations: Lack of mobile phone, access to the Internet and level of education might have kept some people away from potentially life-saving information. The survey reflected multiple uncertainties about the dynamics between the disease and treatment, public health policies, the economy and society.

13) Where from are you getting information or advice about the Covid pandemic? [Please tick all that apply]

- No information at all or Skip / Refuse: 2%
- From family, friends, neighbours etc: 40%
- Received by SMS/WhatsApp: 59%
- Media (e.g. social media, television, radio or newspaper): 82%

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14) Volunteering.

More than half of the respondents (73%) were ready to volunteer for organizations or associations engaged in relief work.

Observations: The pandemic seems to have brought out the best and the worst of humanity. Many organizations voluntarily came forward to support the poor, the needy and the indisposed. The survey has shown heartwarming acts of resilience, inventiveness and solidarity.

14) Did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association that assist poor and needy?

15) Online education and the digital divide.

41% responded that they did not have necessary facilities in place for online education for their children.

Observations: The digital divide has far-reaching consequences when it comes to education. Children who could not afford the technology-focused education, widen inequalities. In practice the online classes undermined the concept of “Education for All”. The pandemic forced most of the public schools to temporarily shut down and many private schools switched exclusively to virtual teaching. This has exacerbated the education gap between rich and poor.

15) Did your children have necessary facilities in place for online education?
16) The state of public facilities to treat the patients.

44% responded that their states didn’t have adequate treatment facilities.

Observations: The survey underlines the chronic underfunding of public health programmes. The poor people experienced a high degree of discrimination at Covid-19 hospitals. Lack of access to adequate health and social services was also reflected in the survey.

17) Difficulties in getting treatment for other ailments during the period

Almost 80% responded that it was difficult to get treatment for other ailments during the period. The elderly people who have chronic diseases have been abandoned, due to the announcements that they should not come out of home. Instead of healing words or giving confidence, they were left alone. More than the medical treatment, the lack of support of family members, might be the cause of death for many elderly.
18) People’s expectations from the government

When asked what kind of government support they needed, almost half of individuals ticked off a combination of better health care support, price control of food stuff, deferring of payments of utilities, loans or taxes, free supplies of essential food items and access to cash / short-term finance.

Observations: Access to cash/short-term finance was an important measure people expected. But there was concern about default in timely repayments.

18) What Government support do you need? [Please tick all that apply]

- Access to cash / short-term finance: 47%
- Free supplies of essential food items: 52%
- Deferring payments of utilities, loans or taxes etc.: 63%
- Price control of food stuff: 69%
- Better health care support: 71%
- Other: 14%
- Skip / Refuse: 3%

19) Thoughts on post Covid era.

45% of respondents believe a return to normal, whenever it comes, will be a different normal. And nationally, 22 percent of respondents felt hopeless about the future. 18% are optimistic, see a bright future after pandemic. 6% reported a sense of depression.

19) What are your thoughts on post Covid era?

- Felt depressed: 6%
- Skip / Refuse: 9%
- Positive: 18%
- Felt hopeless about the future: 22%
- Will recover but not like before: 45%

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20) Lockdown Lessons

71% respondents felt the lockdown could have been implemented with better planning, coordinated exodus of migrant labourers and listened to the people.

Observations: On 24 March 2020, the country was placed under a national lockdown without proper notice and people started to leave for their villages which sparked a mass migration, with millions of migrant labour rushing for their homes. They were invisible to most of the state institutions and policy discourses.

21) Free Food Kit distribution.

55% reported they didn’t receive free food kits from government.
22) The reasons for people getting stranded in a foreign country.

Around 23% reported that the main reason was ‘the non-availability of transportation’, while 19% reported the high cost of transportation. 17% reported ‘other reasons’. Around 41% skipped the question.

Observations: Work, earn and sent home whatever left at the month end. That is the usual practice followed by majority of expatriates. The decision to stay back or return home was based on health, savings, social and precautionary restrictions in the home country.

23) The impact of government packages.

58% believes government intervention had no positive impact on the day to day lives of people.

Observations: Not sure whether this was due to bureaucratic hassles or difficulties in fixing eligibility criteria.
24) If central and state governments using the pandemic as a cover up to suppress democratic protestors and rights activists?

77% of people surveyed believed, central government and many state governments have used this pandemic as an opportunity to widen repressive measures and take advantage of executive authority to implement their hidden agenda.

25) Failure to address difficulties faced by the migrant labour, the poor and the marginalized.

75% respondents in the survey agreed that as a country India has failed to address difficulties faced by the migrant labour, the poor and the marginalized.

Observations: The workers and their families were forced to walk home hundreds of kilometers on empty stomachs. The Supreme Court took cognizance of labourers’ plight only after more than 60 days.
26) Transparency of relief work and support packages.

62% felt that some political parties/ NGOs/ associations used state institutions or funds to promote themselves while distributing government aid.

27) Promotion of organised hate filled propaganda.

81% of respondents agreed with the question and said deep-seated hate filled propaganda continue to plague the nation.
28) Care of the elders and the differently-abled.

66% of people responded that the elderly and the differently-abled faced neglect during the pandemic period.

![Pie chart showing responses to whether the elderly and differently-abled faced neglect in times of crisis.]

29) Awareness and regard for health workers.

When it comes to the pandemic, polls suggest people have immense gratitude (85%) to the people involved in medical help, sanitation and care.

![Pie chart showing responses to awareness of health workers' work during the pandemic.]

30, 31) The handling of the pandemic by the Central and State Governments.

77% of survey respondents felt central government handled it poorly. They have reported dramatically low levels of trust in the Central government. The state governments ranked much better.

30) Overall, how do you rate the handling of the pandemic by the Central Government?

- Poor (77%)
- Good (14%)
- Excellent (3%)
- Skip / Refusal (6%)

31) Overall, how has State Government dealt with the pandemic?

- Poor (46%)
- Good (38%)
- Excellent (11%)
- Skip / Refusal (5%)
32, 33) Is as a society the people should be more empathetic and unified during post-Covid period?

Most of the respondents (81%) continue to think that people should be more empathetic during the pandemic as well as the post-Covid period and despite their financial strain, many (81%) were ready to help someone outside of household.

32) Do you feel as a society we should be more empathetic and unified now as well during post-Covid period?

33) Did you provide help or support to someone outside of your household
34) Domestic violence against women/children.

42% of the respondents felt an increase in domestic violence against women/children.

Observations: isolation, restricted movement, economic and job losses have an acute impact on women and children, with the poorest and most vulnerable people with the greatest risk.

35) The effect of the pandemic on mental health and well-being.

When questioned about issues related to mental health and well-being, 62% recorded worries about the health of friends or family members, about job and/or financial security. 34% respondents felt they had mental health issues resulting from isolation and loneliness. 31% were more anxious about personal health.

Observations: Data indicated a substantial impact on mental health by the pandemic and associated control measures.

35) Do you feel that the pandemic has affected the mental health and wellbeing of you or your family? [Please tick all that apply]

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<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know or Skip / Refuse</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I worry about my own health</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel isolated</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I worry about my job or financial security</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I worry about the health of friends or family members</td>
<td>62%</td>
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36) The use of ‘fake’ or unproven ‘corona cure’ medicines.

Most of the respondents were against taking “unscientific or unproven” medicines (87%) with only 4% disagreeing.

37) Respectful last rites

53% said denying dignified funeral for the people who died of Covid-19 was due to unnecessary scare. 18% attributed this to mere negligence.

37) Did you or family members use fake or unproven ‘corona cure’ medicines?

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<td>Yes (4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't Know or Skip/Refuse (9%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No (87%)</td>
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37) Did you feel many people who died of Covid did not get dignified funeral due to

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Superstitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skip/Refuse</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negligence</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unnecessary scare</td>
<td>53%</td>
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Conclusions

Covid-19, has transformed people’s lives on an unprecedented scale in just a couple of weeks. What we do right now will define the future, and yet making decisions and acting with assurance has never been more challenging. In light of this health emergency and new reality, the priority is to protect the health and safety of people. The authorities must have taken quick decisions, and emergent actions, to protect and support the people. Health workers have done a wonderful job with very rare exceptions. As is often the case, the biggest brunt of this downturn is being borne by those with lower educational and income level, people with disabilities, Dalits, Tribals, minorities, and individuals who have other morbidities. Survey with a much larger sample size can only describe a range of possibilities – possibilities to make the world better and safer.

Methods adopted

The 37-question online survey was finalized on July 22nd, 2020 using available recommendations and posted online on July 24th, 2020 to the public. The main survey ran in 8 languages Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Kannada, Urdu, Telugu, and Malayalam apart from English. Fieldwork to cover the poor and the marginalized that rarely have digital access was organized adhering to all Covid protocols. The survey conducted online in google forms.

The data was collected anonymously and does not allow identification of individuals. Respondents came from different states. **Acknowledging the limitations of this survey is also important.** The respondent states are not equal, and we received only a few responses from certain states. The limitations of our respondent base mean that aggregate results from the survey are not likely to be representative of particular state as a whole. Responses less than 1% for an item either discarded or merged with appropriate group. The multi answer responses recorded as a combo were analysed individually.

Acknowledgments

The success of this survey is driven by the commitment of the volunteers of the NCHRO and other organizations. The online tool data wrapper.de helped to draw charts.

NCHRO would like to thank and acknowledge contribution of Popular Front of India for their data collection support in the remote areas.

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