

A Word about Infodemic during COVID-19 Pandemic among Healthcare Professionals

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ABSTRACT

In December 2019, the first coronavirus case was detected in Wuhan, China. On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared coronavirus a pandemic (COVID-19) due to the rapid spread of the SARS-CoV virus. Common folks using smartphones and social media to access health information create health crisis scenarios. The study's purpose was to see how healthcare workers got information and fake news through social media during the COVID-19 outbreak. In a country like India, receiving an unregulated flood of incorrect information on social media adds to the confusion and turns a pandemic into an infodemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, HCWs, Healthcare professionals, Infodemic, SARS-CoV virus.

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In December 2019, the first coronavirus disease (COVID-19) case was reported in Wuhan, China. World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 virus a pandemic on 11th March 2020, due to its rapid spread.¹ People have been feeling a lot of emotional disruption and stress since the epidemic began in late 2019, which leads to mental health illnesses like anxiety, sadness, and depression. In long run, the entire lockdown of cities across the globe resulted in posttraumatic stress disorder. COVID-19 pandemic posed a global hazard to humans in over 200 countries.² During the second wave of the COVID-19 epidemic, many countries instituted lockdowns and restricted social gatherings, affecting many people's daily lives.^{3,4}

GLOBAL EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In March 2020, India was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in thousands of daily deaths due to a lack of reliable information on the spread of illness and sickness treatment. In contrast to other regions of the world, India has seen a substantial increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths because of its large population during the first and second waves.^{5,6}

SOME FACTS ABOUT COVID INFODEMIC

At the Munich Conference in the year 2020, WHO's chief remarked that "We are not only fighting a pandemic; we are also fighting an infodemic, which has emphasized the risk of bogus information during this epidemic."⁷ As individuals express their viewpoints and unsubstantiated news information on the internet, social media is also criticized for promoting fear and terror among people. Government officials have discovered an alarming number of bogus news items about COVID-19 circulating on social media since the outbreak began. Globally, social media has billions of users. At the moment, the most popular social media networks used were WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.^{8,9}

At the pinnacle of the COVID-19 epidemic, the government imposed social segregation to restrict the spread of the virus. Social media platforms serve as effective means of disseminating knowledge and information about the pandemic as well as connecting people with their families and friends. Another survey

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reported that more people presently use social media as a first-hand source of knowledge regarding COVID-19. Nowadays, COVID-19 can be referred to as a social media infodemic. Many governments were battling during the peak of the COVID pandemic with people's reluctance to follow COVID standards due to the spread of misleading news on social media. Another challenge for governments apart from the health crisis was ordinary people using fake health information related to COVID-19 on their smartphones and using social media.^{10,11}

Social media has become a platform for easily available information and a primary source of news around the world for family, friends, and healthcare workers. Social media flashes of disinformation must be addressed as a threat and challenge for healthcare workers (HCWs) when they are confronting never-ending obstacles. HCWs that work in COVID-19 environments have been documented to experience stress, depression, and anxiety. In view of growing worries about fake news propagating on social media, the impact of social media during this epidemic was significant.¹²

CONCLUSION

The bad side of social media platforms is that anyone can broadcast information on COVID-19 without a trustworthy source as soon as they hear about it. Family members, close friends, and phony-biased

news websites are the key sources of information on social media. People's trust in news stories is influenced by social navigation features such as the display of likes, shares, and comments. Although many researchers confessed that they do not trust social media platform information as much as they do mainstream media, social media has become the preferred method of information transmission among users.¹³ Constantly getting an unchecked stream of false information on social media adds confusion and converts a pandemic into an infodemic in a country like India.

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