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Health seeking behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic among general population in urban areas of Chengalpattu District: A cross sectional study

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Abstract---Introduction: COVID-19 pandemic has severely impaired the essential services delivery like elective care, outpatient services besides the lockdown, financial constraints led to decreased utilization of health services. India being the most affected country. Assessing the changes in health seeking behavior and recommending the necessary changes in the health care utilization during COVID 19 outbreak is very important. Hence the current study aims to assess the health seeking behavior and its associated factors among Urban adults in Chengalpattu district during COVID 19 Pandemic. Methodology: A Community based Cross Sectional study was carried out among adults of age group (19 yrs. and above) in field practicing area of urban health training center from October 2020 to December 2020. After obtaining written informed consent data was collected by house to house hold survey using semi-structured pre-tested questionnaire and information like socio demographic variables and health seeking behavior were obtained. Statistical analysis software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), v21.0 was used for the analysis of data. Results: Among 126 participants during covid-19 pandemic 33.3% preferred private healthcare facilities for their first step of treatment, while 30.2% participants choose to visit government hospitals, 20.6% and 15.9% participants took their initial treatment through OTC drugs from pharmacy and by self-medicating themselves

with drugs from previous prescriptions. Statistically significance was obtained for education ($p < 0.001$), and socio-economic class ($p < 0.001$). Conclusion: Health seeking behavior of patients were different as the pandemic developed. Healthcare utilization was markedly reduced during the local rise of COVID-19. The policy makers should encourage the use of Telemedicine/ Online consultation. Mobile clinics can be encouraged in rural areas to get people adhere to their treatment.

Keywords---Health seeking behaviour, COVID-19, Urban area.

Introduction

Health seeking behavior is an action taken by an individual for remedy from a health problem. There are many factors which influences this health seeking behavior like disease status, perception of the individual, socioeconomic factors etc., ¹ COVID-19 pandemic has severely impaired the essential services delivery like elective care, outpatient services besides the lockdown, financial constraints led to decreased utilization of health services². India being the most affected country ³assessing the changes in health seeking behavior and recommending the necessary changes in the health care utilization during COVID 19 outbreak is very important. Hence the current study aims to assess the health seeking behavior and its associated factors among urban areas of Tamil Nādu during COVID 19 Pandemic.

Methodology

A Community based Cross Sectional study was carried out among adults of age group (19 yrs. and above) in field practicing area of urban health training centre from October 2020 to December 2020. Taking the prevalence of negative health seeking behavior as 71.2%⁴ the estimated sample size was 126. Adults who are permanent residents of study setting and willing to participate were included in the study. After obtaining written informed consent data was collected by house to house hold survey using semi-structured pre-tested questionnaire and information like socio demographic variables and health seeking behavior before and during COVID-19 were obtained. Statistical analysis software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), v21.0 was used for the analysis of data.

Results

Table 1 showed the socio demographic distribution of the participants, majority 36(28.6%) belonged to the age group of 19-32 years, 34(27%) and 70(55.6%) were male. Most of the participants 38(30.2%) belonged to class III of socioeconomic group

Table: 1 socio demographic distribution

| Characteristics | Number | Frequency (%) |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------------|
| Age | | |
| 19-32 years | 36 | 28.6 |
| 33-46 years | 34 | 27 |
| 47-60 years | 31 | 24.6 |
| >61years | 25 | 19.8 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 70 | 55.6 |
| Female | 56 | 44.4 |
| Marital status | | |
| Unmarried | 38 | 30.2 |
| Married | 88 | 69.8 |
| Religion | | |
| Hindu | 104 | 82.5 |
| Christian | 22 | 17.5 |
| Type of family | | |
| Nuclear | 85 | 67.5 |
| Joint | 41 | 32.5 |
| Education | | |
| Postgraduate | 32 | 25.4 |
| Undergraduate | 24 | 19 |
| Diploma | 48 | 38.1 |
| School | 22 | 17.5 |
| Occupation | | |
| Professional/semi-professional | 25 | 19.8 |
| Skilled/semi-skilled | 47 | 37.3 |
| Unskilled | 26 | 20.6 |
| Unemployed | 28 | 22.2 |
| Socioeconomic class | | |
| Class I | 26 | 20.6 |
| Class II | 30 | 23.8 |
| Class III | 38 | 30.2 |
| Class IV | 32 | 25.4 |

Figure.1 shows the distribution of the participants by chronic disease. 69% of the participants had chronic disease like diabetes mellitus, Hypertension, Coronary Artery Disease.

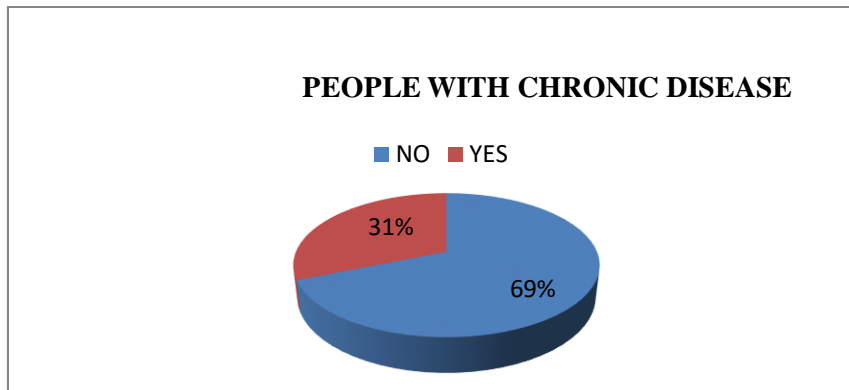


Figure.1

Figure.2 shows the health seeking behavior of the participants before and during COVID-19 pandemic. There is significant changes in availing services in private hospitals, self-medication and OTC drug utilisation.

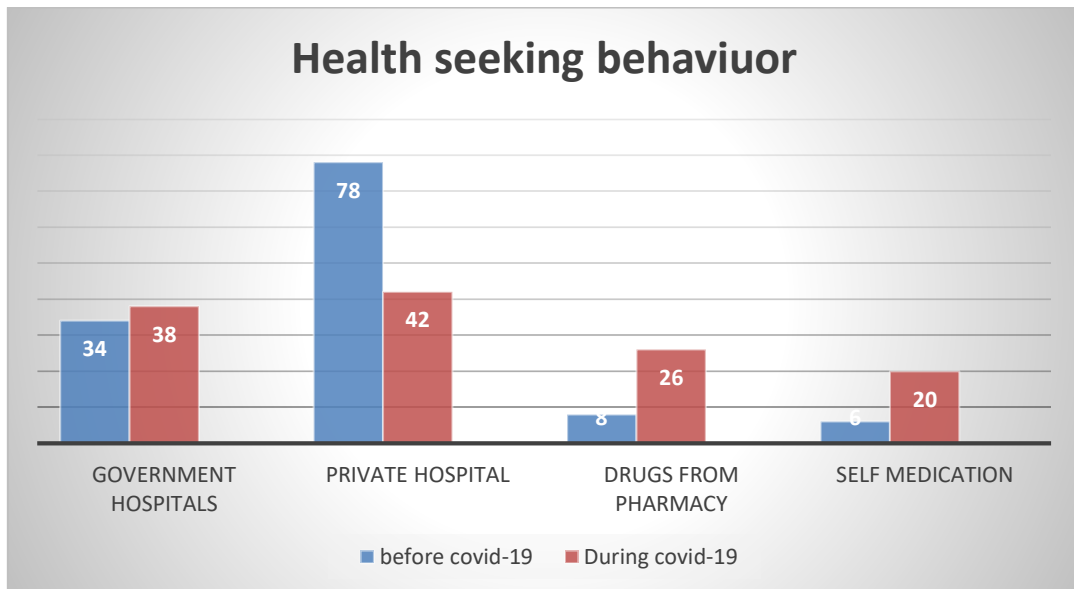


Figure.2

Table 2 shows the association between socio demographic characters and health seeking behavior there was a statistically significant association between health seeking behaviour and socio-economic class ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2: association between sociodemographic characters and health seeking behaviour

| | Government hospital | Private clinic/hospital | Drugs from pharmacy | Self-medication | p-value |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Age | | | | | 0.021 |
| 19-32 years | 10 | 17 | 2 | 7 | |
| 33-46 years | 9 | 17 | 12 | 1 | |
| 47-60 years | 13 | 6 | 5 | 7 | |
| >61years | 6 | 7 | 7 | 5 | |
| Gender | | | | | 0.639 |
| Male | 22 | 20 | 16 | 12 | |
| Female | 16 | 22 | 10 | 8 | |
| Marital status | | | | | 0.014 |
| Unmarried | 10 | 18 | 2 | 8 | |
| Married | 28 | 24 | 24 | 12 | |
| Religion | | | | | 0.715 |
| Hindu | 32 | 33 | 21 | 18 | |
| Christian | 6 | 9 | 5 | 2 | |
| Education | | | | | 0.001* |
| Postgraduate | 8 | 8 | 10 | 6 | |
| Undergraduate | 8 | 2 | 8 | 6 | |
| Diploma | 20 | 19 | 6 | 3 | |
| School | 2 | 13 | 2 | 5 | |
| Occupation | | | | | 0.007 |
| Professional/semi-professional | 7 | 6 | 2 | 10 | |
| Skilled/semi-skilled | 13 | 21 | 10 | 3 | |
| Unskilled | 9 | 10 | 4 | 3 | |
| Unemployed | 9 | 5 | 10 | 4 | |
| Socioeconomic class | | | | | 0.001* |
| Class I | 6 | 6 | 6 | 8 | |
| Class II | 14 | 6 | 4 | 6 | |
| Class III | 16 | 10 | 10 | 2 | |
| Class IV | 2 | 20 | 6 | 4 | |

*Statistically significant

Discussion

The present study conducted to assess the health-seeking behaviour of adults in Urban area of Tamil Nādu during COVID-19 outbreak showed that majority of the participants preferred self-medication and OTC drugs usage than utilizing hospitals services for ailment during COVID -19 pandemic.

The present study showed that the participants preferred private hospitals over government hospitals which is similar to a study conducted by Dominic ARet al

⁴ .In contradictory to the studies conducted by Kumar et al and Kumar Det al where the preferred type of health care preferred was Government health facilities.^{5,6} This may be due the easy accessibility and feasibility of the private hospital when compared to government settings.

The present showed a significant increase in the usage of OTC during COVID 19 pandemic similar to a study conducted by Kumar D et al⁶ ,this can be attributed which may be due the fear of visiting hospital, acquiring COVID-19. The current study showed that the first line of preference during illness was self-medication similar to a study by Dawood O et al⁷ . This may be due to the financial crisis and transport lockdown. In this Present study health seeking behavior was significantly associated with education and socio- economic status

Conclusion

Health seeking behavior of patients were different as the pandemic developed. Healthcare utilization was markedly reduced during the local rise of COVID-19. These mandates creating awareness among people pertaining to the availability of public health care services and discouraging practice of self-medication and OTC drugs. The policy makers should emphasis on Telemedicine/ Online consultation during pandemic situation. As well as mobile clinics can be established in hard-to-reach areas.

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Conflicts Of Interest: Nil

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