

How to Cite:

Saoji, P., Jha, R. K., & Zilate, S. (2022). COVID-19: The positive side. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 557–563. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.5043>

COVID-19: The Positive Side

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Abstract--The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives like never before. However, its unprecedented scale has also forged greater cooperation between nations. We are learning from each other and trying to contain this dreaded disease. Though, the negative impact outweighs the positive attributes that are brought forth by the pandemic, there have been definite advantages that were observed during the pandemic. The mortality from other dreaded diseases and road accidents reduced dramatically. Healthy lifestyle became a regular norm. Health awareness at individual and household levels attained new heights. Environment and wildlife also experienced rejuvenation and air quality improved significantly all over the world. The support provided by the government to the startups for manufacturing masks and other necessities through the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan provided a boost to the failing economy. This article describes the positive impact brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic on the Health, Environment, Social-behavioral and Economic aspects of our lives.

Keywords--COVID-19, pneumonia, positive impact, review, SARS-CoV-2.

Introduction

“Can we uninstall 2020; this version has a virus in it”

“Staying inside is the new going out”

Memes like this are being circulated in the social media with the COVID -19 pandemic. With countries and cities getting into lockdowns and lives pulled into a

International Journal of Health Sciences ISSN 2550-6978 E-ISSN 2550-696X © 2022.

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Manuscript submitted: 27 Nov 2021, Manuscript revised: 09 Feb 2022, Accepted for publication: 18 March 2022

standstill, Coronavirus, or more sophisticatedly titled as COVID-19, which is caused due to the SARS- CoV- 2 has made communities stay away from each other for survival.⁽¹⁾

These weeks of self-isolation and social distancing are tough to deal with. The world definitely is feeling more fragile right now. But, as people across continents and time zones are practicing social distancing, barriers are breaking, people are reaching out to each other, bonds are strengthening, and we are all coming together as one global community. The world is certainly changing, and even through the feelings of fear and uncertainty, the current global COVID-19 crisis is helping us re-emerge as better humans. ⁽²⁾

It's easy to lose your hopes and brood over the negative side effects of any event, especially when as a community we're battling a global pandemic. But for every low, there's a high and it's true that even this current scenario has a silver lining to it. If we look through an optimistic attitude, World Health Organization said that there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that SARS-CoV-2 is airborne, which is good news as far as transmission is concerned. ⁽¹⁾ Though millions of cases have been reported from worldwide, and thousands have died; but on the contrary millions of cases have been recovered from this disease. The advent of effective vaccine has given a new hope that the pandemic can be controlled early.

Doctors and researchers are noticing some curious and unexpectedly positive side effects of the abrupt shifts in human behavior in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Skies are clearer, fewer cars are on road causing lesser accidents, crimes are falling, and some other infectious diseases are fading from hospital. ⁽²⁾ Overall, the pandemic has caused huge global disruption, which directly or indirectly affected favorably in many ways on health, environment, health infrastructure, social and behavioral patterns among population and future preparedness for such crisis. The unprecedented scale of COVID-19 has forged higher cooperation between nations. Therefore, this study intends to explore the positive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, by reviewing the available scientific literatures.

Methods

A systematic literature search of databases was conducted to identify research articles describing the positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The keywords like positive effects, impact of COVID-19 were utilized to search the literature. Additionally the observations made by the authors were also included in the review. After systematically reviewing the available literature, the positive effects elicited by the pandemic were described under several heads like impact on health, environment, and economy, social and behavioral aspects.

Positive impacts

With the enforcement of social distancing norms and compulsive use of face mask over the last year and increased emphasis on maintaining good hygiene have played their part in bringing about some positive changes.

Health impact

Along with better air quality, measures such as wearing mask and social distancing (that are important) practiced to restrict Corona virus infection, have also greatly reduced the incidence of other respiratory diseases. There is substantial reduction in mortality due to chronic lower respiratory diseases and childhood infectious diseases. ^(2, 3) Social distancing norms along with the compulsive use of face masks enforced during this period lead to reduced rates of infectious diseases particularly, pneumonia and influenza. It was reported that the Tuberculosis cases declined by 30% in Mumbai, Maharashtra. ⁽⁴⁾

In a recent survey conducted by the Foundation for a smoke-free world, it was reported that around 66.0% of the surveyed population in the age group of 18-69 years expressed a strong desire to quit smoking mainly for health reasons, others being unavailability of cigarettes and inconvenience to smoke while staying at home. ^(5, 6) Another positive impact of the pandemic seen on women's health was reduction in the anxiety and stress related conditions due to better work life balance as a result of working from home. ⁽⁷⁾

There is an increase in the awareness about the importance of health insurance in addition to following the health precautionary measures. This was evident by the progressive rise in the number of persons taking health insurance and several health insurance companies expanding their cover for COVID-19 related health expenditures. ⁽⁸⁾

Social and behavioral impact

The Greek philosopher Aristotle said that human beings by nature are a social animal; they love to live in a society and have a close interaction with each other. A complete isolated life is unbearable for humans and they can't develop into a normal individual in isolation. This pandemic of COVID – 19 has forced the mankind to remain indoors and has adversely affected the social life as well as the behavioral pattern of mankind. Though this is one side of the coin we need to study the other side also. COVID-19 has not only disrupted the social life but has also taught some good lessons leading to improvement in overall human life.

Social changes

The pandemic has blurred the lines between nations. The world has come together to fight this deadly enemy of mankind. The world and country as a whole has come closer electronically as internet has gained a huge importance due to social distancing. Transactions have become digital, enabling further reduction of unnecessary contacts beyond their homes. The offices and schools have come home enabling social cohesion at homes and society at large. We are coming closer via social media to break the blues arising from social distancing. ^(8- 10) This pandemic has made us retrospect our behavior and made us willing to accept the changes in lifestyle and behavior required for fighting this critical period. The social distancing norm which is still assimilating among population has proved to be a boon for curbing many other problems.

The government, corporate sectors and NGOs came together to fulfill the basic needs of the vulnerable populations during the pandemic by setting up community kitchens and helping the migratory labourers by providing them with food, water and masks. One of the famous actors from Indian films helped them reach their destination by making arrangements for transportation. Many women self-help groups came forward for providing essential requirements to quarantined elderly and other individuals.⁽⁹⁾

Due to lockdown most of the people had to stay at home and work from there and as the schools shut down the children were also at home, shifting their education to the online mode. This gave both parents and children opportunity to spend quality time with each other. This was the first time that families were together for a long time without having any other social obligations. The lockdown has favored a stronger familial bond to face the difficult situation and reducing the gaps among the family members.^(9, 12) The family members have also understood the fragile nature of elderly life highlighting the need to specially protect their health and wellbeing.

The lockdown gave a break from hectic schedules and deadlines and provided an opportunity to make time for nurturing hobbies.⁽¹²⁾ As a family the household work like cleaning, cooking, childcare was shared by both husband and wife equally due to lack of support from outside which has strengthened the marital bonds.⁽¹⁰⁾ The big fat Indian weddings and huge celebrations have been cut down to only family affairs of short duration. Respect towards the frontline workers like doctors, police and sanitation workers etc. has increased tremendously among the general population after observing their critical role and efforts delivered to curb this pandemic.⁽¹²⁾

Behavioral changes

Usage of mask which was never there has now been accepted by people as a part of life and will be followed ahead for many years to come. Spitting on road, loitering on road which was one of the most common habits in Indians has come down drastically in light of this pandemic era. The importance of hygiene is well understood now with escalated practices of hand washing and using handkerchief and from shaking hands to Namaste.⁽⁸⁾ The pandemic gave people time and space to pursue their hobby.⁽⁸⁾

People have reduced spending on non-essential things like cosmetics, jewellery, gadgets, eating out etc. Many have understood that for living minimum things are required and many have shifted to minimalist living. They have understood the importance of savings and emergency funds. Due to lockdown, internet use is trending as working population, students and youngsters are relying upon it for work, studies and entertainment respectively. Social interactions are mainly taking place through internet and social media platforms due to lockdown.⁽¹³⁾ The pandemic has acted as an eye opener for the mankind. Many people have shifted to healthy lifestyles and incorporated healthy habits in daily routine. Exercise, balanced diet, timely routine has become an integrated part of daily life improving overall health of the population.⁽¹⁴⁾

Environmental impact

The effect of lockdown imposed during COVID-19 pandemic resulted in favorable environmental effects like decline in pollution and greenhouse gasses emissions worldwide. This may result in positive impact on climate change due to less use of vehicles and industries. Since people stayed home, these last few months have paved significant improvement in air quality. Some studies revealed that air, sound and water pollution is reduced drastically. ⁽¹⁵⁾ A significant decline in smog & fog as evident by clear blue skies was seen in Delhi. Also, the Himalayan range was visualized from 200 kms distance from Jalandhar after a span of nearly three decades. (1) The water quality was impacted in terms of increased dissolved oxygen (DO) and reduced biological oxygen demand (BOD), reduced fecal coliform counts and nitrate (NO₃-) concentration. This resulted from limited industrial activities and reduction in agricultural run-off during the harvesting season. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The habitats for wild animals were rejuvenated. This led to restoration of the biodiversity of the flora and fauna during the lockdown which was evident by the animals observed on the streets. Dolphins were seen near the Mumbai shores, turtles were abundant on the Odisha beaches, whereas, sambhar deers and elephants claimed the Uttarakhand streets and leopards roamed over the Patna air force base.⁽¹⁷⁾ Decrease in the use of polythene and plastic at domestic level contributed to reduction in environmental pollution to a great extent.⁽¹⁸⁾

Economic impact

Though the initial phase of the pandemic brought about economic disruption, the later stages showed economic improvement with the support of the Government's "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" that helped to start up indigenous Mask manufacturing units, Pharmaceuticals, drug manufacturing unit, Ventilator and increased production and export of these to developed as well as developing countries.⁽¹⁹⁾ The 2021 Union Budget increased the spending on health care by 137% through the PM "Atmanirbhar Swastha Bharat Yojna" to improve and strengthen the health care infrastructure.⁽²⁰⁾ The health sector has shown improvement in the COVID-19 testing capacity with establishment of new tier I & tier II laboratories at district level and strengthening of the ICU facilities as seen by the massive increase in the ICU oxygen beds and critical care support systems at several health facilities. A new department for emergency medicine has been established at medical colleges to combat the situation. This has contributed immensely to our preparedness for pandemic situations at present and also in the future.

Conclusion

"You should never want a serious crisis to go waste"

History tells us that corona virus pandemic will not be the last pandemic. It is still too early to determine the pandemic's lasting effects, but the bottom line is that crises allows us to make decisions and implement policies that are difficult in normal times. Corona virus is not only a curse; but it is also a chance for capacity building of to improve health care professionals manpower, infrastructure and

above all, acquire knowledge required for preparedness to mitigate future (to learn how to be more ready for the next) crisis. The biggest mistake would be to not take advantage of this situation to resolve issues that will impact our future. We're a race of survivors, and we're going to win this too. Agreed that the battle is hard & long, but let's look forward and focus on the brighter side for all we have through these difficult times are these beneficial effects & nothing else.

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