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Welfare economics and public health issues and option in India: A study with special reference to COVID-19

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***Abstract*---**This paper will review and do critical analysis of the welfare economics and public health issues and options in India during COVID-19. A welfare and normative analysis have been followed to write this paper. Normative analysis of people and government on various health issues and options in Covid-19 are the goals and aims to determine the desired health facilities and its availability at time. Government of India had prepared various policies to cure the COVID-19, but due to high level of pandemic the situations were uncontrollable. People desired many heaths related facilities but due to large population it was impossible to cure each and every patient in hospitals. The whole world was suffering with the same problem but due to less population health facilities were not a big problem. Indian model which relates to economic activities with infectious disease epidemics was highly focused on welfare economics. In many nations lock down also affected the economic activities at large level. There is no systematic study which has been conducted about covid-19 and its consequences on the society at our best knowledge. Government should realise the vision and mission of public health facility which is actually maintaining and holding the opportunities in the changing world and adopting the issues and options in the appropriate time. Covid-19 period was very dangerous and horrible for everyone, public, patients, their families, doctors, nurses, other medical staff and rest of the world was so much depressed and nervous about the disease.

***Keywords*---**Public Health, COVID-19, welfare economics, pandemic.

Introduction

An outline for assessing the health issues and options during COVID-19 has been discussed on the basis of normative approach of welfare economics. Government's role in the pandemic has to be discussed and how government faced all the

challenges in the second largest populated country. Since India is a welfare economic country and does lots of welfare economics activities for public health issues and provides sufficient funds to run those schemes by which public is getting continuous benefits. It is true that during any pandemic period, behaviour of government should be more centric towards public welfare especially in developing nations because many people do not have any savings, so they cannot afford private health services. Public health facility is a very significant facility which leads to a healthy, fair-minded and sustained society. Public health facilities are promoting the ethics, values, equality, equity as well as social responsibility towards common people residing in developing nation.

Government should realise the vision and mission of public health facility which is actually maintaining and holding the opportunities in the changing world and adopting the issues and options in the appropriate time. Natural destruction and human in development for better society are ruining the self and if public health care is not ready to meet such destructions, the whole world will suffer. Preparations before any mishappening is a better strategies for a nation, especially in case of large populated countries, because spread of any disease becomes more faster in such countries.

India is a country of variations, where many religion, caste, language, culture and colour are exist, so it is very much challenging to prepare a common policy for all. Health sector in India have two models for functioning, first pure government health sector model, which provides cheapest health services and another is private health model and this is somehow not affordable by poor population. In many nations, PPP or public private partnership model has been adopted and such models follow middle path strategies for providing their services. During the covid period, many digital applications and software have been made by ministry of health and other ministry to update and share the right information among the public regarding covid and available public health facilities.

Before discussing more about covid, it is necessary to understand the public health system in India. After the independence of India, there was a very poor health care services and it was an urgent need to develop a proper public health care system. In this regard, government of India had started to open hospitals in each district and towns to prevent the people from mass diseases. Female and child mortality rate was very high, so government had started vaccination movement in the whole country. To control the communicable diseases, government had opened specialized hospitals. Presently National Health Mission, National Mental Health Mission and Ayushman Bharat are good examples of public health services in India. Presently, dual health care system is running in India, first for urban region population and another is for the rural region population. Both have different mechanisms to manage the health care system. Government's mechanism has developed a standard model for its implementation and management. This five-stage model is as per following;

Stage	Action
First Stage	Problem Identification (Public Health)
Second Stage	Formulation
Third Stage	Adaptation
Fourth Stage	Implementation
Fifth Stage	Evaluation

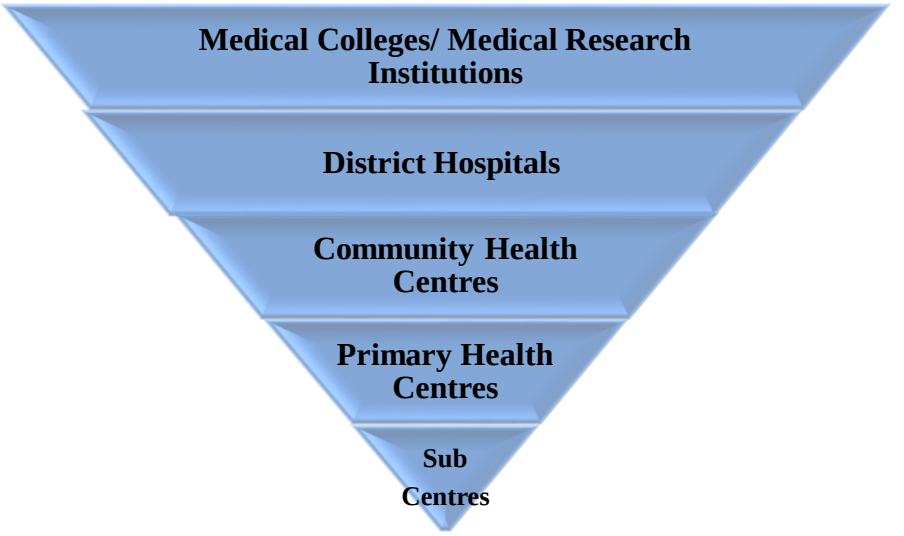
Under the first stage government takes interest to identify the actual problem and conduct a survey with the help of various stakeholders which are associated with the identified problem. After identification of the problem in the second stage, government forms a core team as technical team to formulate the action and policies for the problem. In the third stage, adaptation of formulated action or policy is done and in the fourth stage it is implementation at small levels. In the fifth stage evaluation of policy is done by the government. Feasibility and accessibility of policy evaluated and it's impact and feedback analysis is also checked by expert team.

If, everything is found suitable and correct then it becomes a regular policy for implementation and monitoring. Between these periods, it is being presented in the parliament for discussion and feedback. So, there is a long-term process in its formulation and implementation. During the whole period following questions are resolved in different stages;

During Problem Identification Stage
i. What is the problem or issue?
ii. What will be the role of the government?
iii. Issues come to the attention of related organization?
iv. What are the challenges?
During the Formulation Stage
i. What are the options which will be taken to resolve the problem?
ii. What will be issues and challenges?
During Adaptation Stage
i. What is the course of action?
ii. What is the ultimate action?
iii. What are challenges during adaptation?
During Implementation Stage
i. How will the new policy be implemented?
ii. How will the government make it a public policy?
iii. What is important for public?
iv. What are the challenges in implementation?
During Evaluation Stage
i. What are the positive changes required?
ii. What are the unexpected problems and what is the cost of effectiveness?
iii. What are the challenges in evaluation?

Above model is followed by government system because public health policies cannot be applied in exclusive approach as India is a highly populated country, so inclusive approach has been adopted. During COVID-19, there were lots of challenges at different issues but public health was the major challenge. To handle this challenge, government had given much emphasis on it but in the

second wave this model was not successful and there was no time to prepare for a new mechanism. So, many people lost their lives in India but same was happening worldwide. Following is illustration of health care services in India.



The above pyramid is showing that, how Indian health system is serving the public at large level. Welfare economics always considers those things which are essential for common people and public health is one of them. Indian government spent about 2.1 percent of the total GDP on public health according to economic survey 2022, during the financial year of 2021-22. In previous year 2020-21, government spent 1.8 percent of the total GDP, which was lower from this year. This is showing that government is much emphasising on public health issues and providing lots of alternate options for its betterment. Pandemic of any nation or worldwide cannot be controlled immediately as it is new for everyone and even scientists take time to understand the actual problem. Naturopathy may be an option as it is a conventional methos of treatment and there is no side effect but it takes time to control the diseases. Moreover, according to National Health Policy 2017, government of India is moving to enhance the public health budget up to 2.5 of total GDP by 2025.

Sometimes welfare economic policies may not work during adverse conditions but in long term they can be very much impactful. If you see the NAREGA Scheme, it was not very much effective before pandemic but after pandemic, it was the only policy which has supported the public in terms of employment during lockdown.
Welfare economics basically designs and develops on consumer sovereignty and it can differ from one nation to another nation. There is huge disparity among the countries in terms of income and expenditure, health expenditure, education expenditure and many more and according to the need and demand of public, government prepares and implements their welfare economic policies. So, it is not justifiable to treat each nation as equal and comparison between welfare public policies are also not good.

Review of Literature

There were many studies available on public health issues in India as well as on other countries but Covid related studies are very limited. During 2020-2022, some studies have been done by various researchers but they are based on secondary data provided by different agencies. Some of the data are not very much reliable and consistent. Any disaster is a serious happening which affects negatively to health, social structure and economic consequences in long term. Developing nations does not have appropriate resources and additional infrastructure to cope with such unfortunate challenges, so there is lack of readiness (Watson JT et.al. 2007). The whole world is fighting for employment, food, shelter and other basic necessities and such disasters destroy everything.
Due to increase in population, poverty and high degree of urbanization in several nations, many people have started to live in highly disaster-prone areas and multiple their public health issues (Kouadio IK et.al. 2012). So, it can be said, increase in population could not be a better option for any nation and population control should be mandatory at universal level. World Health Organization may be good option to prepare such policies by which international law could be framed and imposed at all nations.

There is an unequally chain between demand of public health care services and supply of public health care to individuals at the time of any disaster therefore public health care services are not enough and effective during disaster periods which resulted to deaths and injuries (Lippi G et. aal, 2010). It is natural that during disasters no government is prepared for such a condition so such happenings are called disasters but there should be a vision with each government to handle such disasters in an effective manner. Public health is most important essential for human beings and it would always be the first priority for government.

There is no systematic study which has been conducted about covid-19 and its consequences on society at our best knowledge. Most of the studies are based on hospital reports (Klein MG et al., 2020), international and national public health responses towards covid-19 (Tabari P et.al, 2020), police responses regarding covid-19 (LaufsJ,et/al/2020) and mental health illness responses during covid-19(Pappa S,et.al.2020).

Covid-19 has created a threat and risk of life everywhere including India. This pandemic was not just a challenge but also taught us to unite the world. This was not a matter of one country; it was a matter for the whole world. Public risk perception regarding pandemic was one significant factor which contributed to increase the public participation in promotion of self-protection habits development (Khosravi, 2020). Public risk perception also taught the society that all the physical things come after the health, so health should be our first priority in life. Moreover, it also teaches that first you should take care of yourself then about others. Risk perception means that how public is evaluating the possibility and consequences in a hostile situation (Sjoberg, 2000).

Normally in an adverse environment, most of the people started negative process about self and their near and dears. It is natural and common psychological

process and such situations are also responsible for illness of public. Risk perception is a self-regulating mechanism which teaches us what to be avoided or how to reduce risky behaviour and promoting health care behaviour (Cori et al., 2020; Dryhurst et al., 2020). Risk perception is a good sign with regard to health issues because it teaches the public to avoid those things which may affect a person and it also reduces the public behaviour to not do those things which can spread the disease and encourage for good health behaviour with others.

Critical Analysis and Discussion on Issues and Options

Present days, in low and middle-income countries should adopt a joint health management committee of common people and local public health service authorities regarding health services. Now it is a duty and responsibility of both to work together for better health performance in upcoming days. This will develop a sense of belongingness, responsibility and coordination between both. It will give a multiple result and health services will improve but accountability should also be ensured for both.

If we look in the past decade, Indian health services did not have advance technology but now there is huge development. Now public health services are very much effective and affordable. There are medical health insurance which are also supporting to those whose family members are diseased but they are unable to avail and get good health services. After the independence, lots of development has been done in health sector but presently after covid much advancement has been done in this sector.

There are several social and economic factors that are associated with effective health services such as during covid-19, due to lockdown in the whole country; many people became unemployed which had affected their health services. In the view of Covid-19, public health system has been strengthening a lot and a new learning has been started among health practitioners. The effect of modernization of health is greatly visible during the mass immunization and mass vaccination in India, where more than 100 crores has been vaccinated. The wide spread of covid-19 was a very serious issue for public health and it had brutally affected the human beings at global level and India was also one of them. The whole world economy was severely affected, many of the industries had been finished but Indian government was tremendous which took care of everything including the public health concerns.

Indian government and other state governments were very much active to provide fast and quality health services to common people as government ambulance services reached within the right time to the patients after getting a call. There were lots of challenges during the first phase of covid pandemic, such as; people, doctors, government and every human stakeholder of the country were in much fear from covid but they supported each other. Many rumours were also created, lots of problem before government but government was putting in a lot of effort to control all such things and created a positive environment for the citizens. Covid-19 was a new challenge to the whole world, and every nation was fighting with it. There were problems but community participation in helping each other was

excellent. Journalists, police, doctor, engineer and others did a great job to control the spread of covid.

India became the example for many countries in terms of effective management of covid-19 and providing health services to poor and marinized sections of the society. Somewhere the role of the media was questionable when there were highlights about the fake news and showing negative images of pandemic. There were many deaths due to the fear in minds. Human psychology says that as you think about yourself, you will become the same. There were lots of challenges before the government, one of them was slow GDP and Indian economy was slowing down but government of India took a very strong measure to prevent and control the covid-19.

There are many reports and data available in public domain that are showing that pandemic situations hampered a lot of activities including essentials but during the same time when covid-19 was new to everyone and no scientist or research organization came in front to public to speak the facts and realities behind it, Indian government managed perfectly the whole nation including public health. Any disaster is a disastrous procedure for health loss, social destruction and economic failure of the society. Developing countries do not have extra budget and facilities for such effects of disasters and governments do and manage such disasters by the pre-allocated funds.

Governments provide all such facilities including public health services to common people at free of cost in such situation. Indian government was in same problem but still they did a great job towards health sector especially during lockdowns. There were many disparities between the expectations of public health care facilities and capacity of available public health facilities during the pandemic but government take care of everyone as per their capacity. Disasters always expose multiple challenges in health care system and negatively impact health services.

Mental health of individuals was another big problem during covid-19, as many people lost their employment and every one was in his or her home. There was no physical interaction among the people and those who lost their jobs suffered with financial crisis. Such loss of individuals created lot of tension among so many people, and later this tension converted into depression which resulted into mental health problems. There was no proximity among mental health, allied health and social service across individuals and similarly government was looking to control the spread of covid-19. At the societal level, people were helping each other but it was not sufficient, there was a need to accelerate the public health services.

Apart from government, many other organizations were supporting public with respect to public health and other allied services. Psychiatrists and psychologist were offering their services through digital facilities but all this was not enough as per the requirements and demand. Perception of the various groups such as family, community, friends etc. have different opinion on covid-19, so there was an ambiguous situation about covid-19. It has also accelerated the psycho-social problems among the public. Rumour and fake news affected at large level and

people became so much negative about their lives, everyone was in dilemma and fear.

Since 2020, human population is fighting with covid in their day-to-day life (Choi et al.). Scientifically it is proved that covid-19 virus is changing its variant very fast and infecting from one individual to other individuals at a large scale. There are several severe health problems which come due to infection such as coughing, sneezing and high degree fever. Chest infection was a serious issue during covid-19, and many people lost their lives due to this problem. No one was expecting that covid-19 will be so much influential during the second wave of covid-19.

Normative economics for public health may be a good option for its betterment and it can also be justifiable in terms of demand and supply of health services. India is a welfare country and this provides various types of services to public at free or minimum and subsidized rates, health is one of them. Public health is an important service so; government is spending more than two percent of the total GDP on health. If a cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) is done on health budget, there will be no return but government is spending such huge amount on public health, which is proving that there was no failure from the government. It was a pandemic which has destroyed the whole health care mechanism.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper is to do a critical analysis of welfare economic policies for public health care facility during covid-19 that how government performed during this period. There were lots of criticisms about the government but most of them were one sided. In this paper both the sides have been evaluated and discussed that what were the limitations of the government and what were the expectations of the public regarding public health. Covid-19 period was very dangerous and horrible for everyone, public, patients, their families, doctors, nurses, other medical staff and rest of the world was so much depressed and nervous about the disease.

Everyone tried to save their lives and only thought about precautions to save from corona. Although, situation was challenging but corona warriors were in front and saved the lives of lacs of people who were admitted in hospitals. On one side private hospitals were charging lots of fees but on the other side government hospitals provided free services to the patients. Many problems came in day-to-day life but the government was standing with the public and supported everyone. New oxygen plants were opened to fasten the services and new appointment of health staff was also done to manage the hospitals.

So, it can be said that public health services during covid-19 did a good performance and saved the lives of lacs of people. Some people and authors criticized the government but they were seeing only the half empty part of glass not half full of the glass. Such pandemic occurs once in hundred years and definitely do the losses of us but efforts for improvement should always be continued.

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