

COVID-19 GRASSROOT LEVEL FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKERS' SURVEY THE SOCIAL LISTENING SYSTEM

CASE STUDY

#voicesfromground

INTRODUCTION

The severe acute respiratory syndrome 2 (SARS-CoV-2), also known as novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) has caused a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic that has affected approximately 7.31million people and caused 111,000 deaths as of October 15, 2020. In India, COVID-19 has spread across all the states with Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh & Karnataka running in the front. But nevertheless, apart from search and development of 'right vaccinations', the response of the communities also has strengthened.

The second wave of novel coronavirus cases have become a major concern for healthcare providers and the authorities and measures are being taken to reiterate precautions.

Frontline healthcare workers are valuable and irreplaceable resource in efforts to combat the pandemic. They play indispensable role in strengthening the national health systems and health care delivery, especially reaching out to the vulnerable population. The three main cadres of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), 2005 i.e. Auxillary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) aims to increase community engagement with health care system and support the community in provide access to the public health services.

ASHA workers are the first port of call for any health-related issues specifically for women and child. They deliver a range of preventive and promotive services effectively to issues like reproductive, maternal, infant and child healthcare, infection disease, non-communicable diseases, etc.¹ Anganwadi workers are the functionary of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). They provide pre-school education, nutrition and health education focusing on women and adolescent girls. Whereas, ANMs's responsibility involves family planning, immunization, generating awareness regarding infection and water-borne diseases, the protective & preventive measures, in addition to maternal and infant healthcare.

During COVID-19 crisis the community healthcare workers are working as front-end warriors through performing various tasks like identifying suspected COVID-19 cases, contact tracing, generating awareness about the symptoms, risk agents and preventive & protective measures such as maintaining social distancing, personal and social hygiene, hand washing etc. Additionally,

¹ WHO guideline on health policy and system support to optimize community health worker programmes, 2018

community health care workers are taking care of psychological and psychosocial well being of the community.

However, they are experiencing acute challenges while performing their duty of delivering care services and while protecting themselves and their families from COVID-19. Globally, approximately 7,000 of health workers have died after infected with the virus, in India this tally goes up to 573.²

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/amnesty-analysis-7000-health-workers-have-died-from-covid19/>
September 3, 2020, Amnesty International

CASE STUDIES

PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE OF THE SOCIETY

Since the beginning of COVID-19 Pandemic, the community is in fear. The uncertainty related to the crisis and its management has been the most difficult thing to deal with. According to the front line health workers, the issues related to the pandemic like its extent, mortality and morbidity rate, its effect on their income and on their loved ones, etc are what people are concerned about. Moreover, the misinformation, false rumors and the stigma related to the ongoing pandemic has grave psychological implications on the community.

During these difficult times, the front line health workers are encouraging people to digitally connect with their loved ones and have family interactions more often rather than reading or listening information about the COVID-19. Health care workers are taking care of comprehensive well being of the community as they are mobilizing people to relieve their stress, fear and bringing positive vibes by performing yoga, physical exercise or even exploring new hobbies.

Guiding the women to maintain positiveness, and also to keep our mind in healthy frame was essential.

***Radhika Rao,
ANM,
Aurangabad***



MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

COVID-19 has exposed health workers and their families to unprecedented levels of risk. In addition to physical risks, the pandemic has placed extraordinary levels of psychological stress on health workers exposed to high-demand settings for long hours, living in constant fear of disease exposure while separated from family and facing social stigmatization.

However, in these challenging times, the front line health workers are working tirelessly to provide essential and other health care services to the society without caring about their own mental well-being as well as their families.

I everyday help & guide young mothers and children to take care of their requirements, even during COVID-19, I have worked hard.

*Sheetal Pawar, ASHA,
Aurangabad District*



UNDERTAKING HOUSE VISITS AND UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

Front line health workers have a duty to care for sick. During the pandemic they are performing the challenging task of house - to - house visits keeping their occupational safety in mind for tasks like contact tracing, identifying the suspected cases, collection of samples and providing essential services such as ensuring maternal and infant care, immunization, and vaccination. Not only this, but they are providing counselling and psychological support to the people.

However, due to COVID-19 related stigma and misconception, many communities treated front line health care workers as 'Corona Carrier/ Spreader'. Though, with times and health care workers efforts there is community-level behaviour changes and FLWs were able to continue their work.



Earlier access to some community households was tricky as they would not allow us to interact and socialize with womenfolk, of their community, but later when things settled down, we could continue our services.

Shivani, ASHA, Aurangabad

KEY PREVENTIVE BEHAVIOURS TO PROMOTE

To contain the spread of virus, health authorities have provided guidelines about the protective and preventive measures in the public notice. In the country like India, world's second largest country in terms of population, it is very difficult to reach to the last mile. The front line health workers have worked hard and communicated about the risk and preventive measures like wearing masks, gloves, washing hands with soap regularly, maintaining social distance, sanitizing hands, and disinfecting the surrounding time to time, etc.

Nevertheless, there is a need of the community level behavioural change.



Making people follow precautionary behaviour is difficult, even after repeated dissemination bringing a behavioural change is a challenge, they still fail to understand the risk they carry.

Titika Tai, AWW, Daman

ACTIVITIES/PROGRAMMES AFFECTED BY COVID-19 RESPONSE

Front line health care workers play a key role in provide public health services to the household. They act as a medium between government and the community. Therefore, they are so known as the 'agents of change', as they reach out to the last mile.

During COVID-19 response and management, the health care workers must perform additional tasks like contact tracing, sample collection and case identification along with risk communication. Due to this shift, it is evident that the routine health care services are being affected. However, the front line health workers are taking care of the routine/ongoing programmes so that no one is left out without the required service.



We have not only provided them continued services, but also counselled them that essential services like vaccination should not be stopped due to COVID-19, as that will bring greater problems to the community.

Rachna Yadav, ASHA, Faridabad



COVID-19 response is our priority but this affects our other programmes too. But we are taking care of all.

Sukh Yashwant Shalore, ANM, Faridabad

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION BY FAMILIES OR COMMUNITY

Initially, there was stigma and people were afraid to come near us or bring their children, but now with time and awareness, people are not panicking.

Medhu, ASHA, Daman

Health workers are being stigmatized and discriminated by the community and their families. According to many reports the health care dealing with the COVID-19 patients are facing substantial social discrimination such as being attacked during working hours, not allowed in the RWA/Community centers. Moreover, they are facing challenges in their household as they have to stay away from the family members and are unable to take care of their loved ones. Due to the mandatory precautionary measures like maintaining social distancing as well as their duty to care for the community, the front line health workers must stay isolated - away from their family and friends. Additionally, the hostile behaviour by the community have worsen the situation.

However, in few cases, the community and family has appreciated the health care workers' contribution and have welcomed them. However, the community sensitization and behavioural change is the need of hour.





For Further details

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