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ABSTRACT Rapid spread of COVID-19 pandemic and control measures influenced the health consciousness, knowledge, attitudes and practices of the public. The main aim of this study was to determine the levels of knowledge, attitude and practices towards COVID-19 among the residents of Nellore Town in Andhra Pradesh. An online survey was conducted on 200 residents of Nellore Town, during 16 th July and 25 th July 2020 using KAP questionnaire to assess the levels of knowledge, attitude and Practice towards COVID-19. Majority of the participants' knowledge towards COVID-19 was at acceptable level and majority of the respondents had positive attitude in overcoming the pandemic, whereas the willingness to adopt the safety measures was at low range. Conducting specific health education programs periodically and continuously would bring a positive behavioral change among the public in the coming days.

KEYWORDS : Lockdown, Pandemic, Corona virus, social distance, sanitization.

INTRODUCTION

The Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by a novel corona virus emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It has been declared a global pandemic by WHO. It has spread to more than 200 countries. COVID-19 is highly infectious, and the main symptoms are fever, dry cough, sore throat, fatigue, breathlessness and loss of taste or smell or both. But most of the people who fall sick with COVID-19 will experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without special treatment. The virus spreads through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or exhales. These droplets are heavy to hang in air and quickly fall on surfaces around. One can be infected by breathing in the virus if the person is within the close proximity of someone who has COVID-19, or by touching a contaminated surface and thereby touching one's eyes, mouth or nose. Precautions include, regular cleaning of hands with sanitizer, maintaining 1m distance ie social distancing, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth unnecessarily, follow good respiratory hygiene, wear mask, prefer to stay home, avoid unnecessary outing.

Lockdown measures were perceived as necessary to curb the spread of the virus. There has been a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about the virus itself, as this is a novel virus. Vast amount of disinformation and misinformation shared on social media becomes increasingly challenging on people's understanding of COVID-19. Older persons and persons with pre-existing high blood pressure, diabetes and heart or lung disease appear to develop serious illness more often than others. Some traditional or home remedies may provide comfort and alleviate symptoms of COVID-19, but there is no evidence that the current medicine can prevent or cure the disease.

However, there are several ongoing clinical trials that include both western and traditional medicinal procedures. Possible vaccines are under investigation and are being tested through clinical trials. The incubation period for COVID-19 estimates ranging from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days. Studies say that corona virus may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days, of course this may vary under different conditions. (ie., type of surface, temperature or humidity)

Testing is regarded as a key part of the battle against the corona virus. The most commonly used test globally is a PCR test (polymerase chain reaction), which isolates genetic material from a Swab sample. But this test is expensive in India and take up to eight hours to process the samples. To increase the testing capacity, Indian government has been switching over to a cheaper and quicker method called a Rapid Antigen Test, which can give a result in 15 to 20 minutes. However these tests are less reliable, with an accuracy rate in some cases as low as 50%.

A corona positive test result is only tentative, and will be reconfirmed by retesting. The positive cases in India as on the first day of this survey (16 July 2020) were 32,695 and there was a rapid increase within 10 days and by the last day of the survey (25 July 2020) it reached 48,916 positive cases.

To facilitate outbreak management of COVID-19 in India, there is an urgent need to understand the public awareness and health consciousness. The objective of this study was to investigate the level of knowledge, attitude and practice KAP study on COVID-19 among the residents of Nellore Town during the rapid rise period of the COVID-19 outbreak.

METHODOLOGY:

A cross-sectional online survey was conducted to achieve the objectives of this study. The call for participation was made in social media. The survey was conducted during 16 th – 25 th July 2020 in Nellore town. Persons residing in Nellore town aged above 18 years were participated. Convenient random sampling technique was used to select 200 participants.

Questionnaire on knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) towards COVID-19 developed by a researcher in China was adopted. The questionnaire consists of demographic variables such as age, gender, religion, occupation income category.

The questionnaire consists of 13 items to measure the level of knowledge about COVID-19 and 3 items each on attitude and practice respectively. Participants were given options to choose 'true', 'false', or 'not sure' on each item of knowledge and practice questionnaire, whereas 'agree', disagree', or 'not sure' options were given to choose on items of practice.

RESULTS:

A total of 200 residents of Nellore town were participated in the study. The average age of the respondents was 46 years, 43% were men and 57% were women. 70% of the population belongs to Hindu religion. Majority of the population are employed and 74% of the respondents belong to higher income group.

Table-	l Knowledge	Of	Participants	About	COVID-19	(N =
200)						

S.No.	Test items on Knowledge	Correct	
		Responses	
		n	%
1.	The main clinical symptoms of COVID- 19 are fever, fatigue, dry cough and body aches.	168	84
2.	Unlike the common cold, stuffy nose, runny nose and sneezing are less common in persons infected with the COVID-19 virus.	136	68
3.	Currently there is no effective cure for COVID-19, but early symptomatic and supportive treatment can help most patients recover from the infection.	172	86
4.	Not all persons with COVID-19 will develop to severe cases. Only those who are elderly and have chronic illness are more likely to be severe cases.	180	90
5.	Eating or touching animals would result in the infection by the COVID-19 virus.	76	38
6.	Persons with COVID-19 cannot infect the virus to others if they do not have a fever.	150	75
7.	The COVID-19 virus spreads via respiratory droplets of infected individuals.	160	80
8.	The COVID-19 virus is airborne.	80	40
9.	Ordinary residents can wear face masks to prevent the infection by the COVID-19 virus.	156	78
10.	It is not necessary for children and young adults to take measures to prevent the infection by the COVID-19 virus.	188	94
11.	To prevent the infection by COVID-19, individuals should avoid going to crowded places and avoid taking public transportation.	184	92
12.	Isolation and treatment of people who are infected with the COVID-19 virus are, effective ways to reduce the spread of the virus.	196	98
13.	People who have contact with someone infected with the COVID-19 virus should be immediately isolated in a proper place. In general, the isolation period is 14 days.	192	96

Table-2 Attitude Of Participants Towards COVID-19 (N=200)

S.No.	Test items on Attitude	correct responses	
		n	%
1.	Do you agree that COVID-19 will be successfully controlled?	174	87
2.	Do you have confidence that INDIA can win the battle against the COVID-19 virus?	186	93
3.	The Government of India is handling the COVID-19 health crisis very well.	172	86

Table-3 Practice Of Participants Towards COVID-19 (N=200)

S.No.	Test items on Practice	correct	
		responses	
		n	%
1.	In the week before the MoHFW guidelines, did you avoid going to	136	68

	crowded places such as marriages and functions?		
2.	In the week before the MoHFW guidelines, did you wear a face mask when leaving the home?	74	37
3.	In the week before the MoHFW guidelines, did you practice proper hand-hygiene using hand sanitizer?	64	32

Knowledge of the respondents about COVID-19 was shown in table-1. The results show that 84% of the population knew about the symptoms of COVID-19 and 86% of the participants believed that early symptoms can be recovered with supportive treatment. 90% of the participants expressed that only elderly persons and people with chronic illness were high risk group. Only 38% answered correctly when asked 'eating and touching animals could result infection', majority of the participants had exact information on the spread of COVID-19, but 60% believed that COVID-19 is airborne. The overall correct answer rate of items on the knowledge questionnaire was 78%, representing that the respondents had an acceptable level of knowledge on COVID-19.

The attitude of participants towards COVID-19 was shown in Table-2. A majority of respondents (87%) agreed that COVID-19 would successfully be controlled and 93% of the population had confidence that INDIA would win the battle against COVID-19. About 86% agreed that the Government of India was handling the COVID-19 health crisis well.

Practice of the respondents towards COVID-19 was shown in table-3. For the first question 68% of the population reported that they were avoiding crowded places whereas 32% did not avoid crowded places. Only 37% of the participants were wearing masks when outside the home during the week before MoHFW guidelines, the remaining 63% did not wear a mask. Lastly, when asked about hand sanitization, a very few (32%) reported that they were practicing hand hygiene frequently before MoHFW guidelines, the remaining 68% of the population were not practicing proper washing of their hands using sanitizer.

DISCUSSION:

The present study found that a majority of the participants had acceptable levels of knowledge on COVID-19 virus. Majority of the population held positive attitude towards overcoming COVID-19. Approximately nine out of ten participants were confident that India would be able to win the battle against the virus. Participants' willingness to take precautions such as avoiding crowded places was at acceptable range, whereas the willingness to wear mask and hand sanitization was comparably low.

CONCLUSIONS:

The findings suggest that the residents of Nellore town have an acceptable level of knowledge on overcoming the pandemic. Consistent public health programs by the Government authorities could benefit the public to raise the levels of knowledge on COVID-19 and could bring a positive behavioral change in practice. Limitations of this study included a small geographical area with a limited number of participants. Further, the residents of Nellore Town only were included due to lockdown restrictions.

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