

NEW MEDIA: USE OF HOME REMEDIES FOR IMMUNITY BOOSTING BY COVID-19 PATIENTS IN PAKISTAN.

Jamil Ahmed Sheikh

Department of Sociology, University of Wah,
jamil.sheikh@uow.edu.pk

Zakia Batool

Department of Sociology, University of Wah,
zakia.batool@uow.edu.pk

Shehla Nazmeen

Department of Sociology, University of Wah,
shehla.nazmeen@uow.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is caused by a novel coronavirus that was first discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Globally, the pandemic has resulted in significant mortality. There are many reasons why it could wreak havoc in developing countries like Pakistan. Such as demographic characteristics, an inadequate healthcare system, poverty, religious belief system, carelessness, and socio-cultural characteristics. The in-depth (N = 30) interviews were carried out with a purposive sampling technique to collect data from patients, their families, and peer groups. and 5 interviews with experienced healers were also included to further supplement the study. This research demonstrates that these underlying mechanisms that may make people more insecure in the face of an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may include carelessness, misperception and confusion, multiple forms of health care, and importantly, some of the home remedies, etc. The new media is one of the main sources of such misunderstandings and misinformation. People become addicted to this type of media, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The new media spread traditional remedies to counter COVID-19 and these remedies are being tested to treat COVID-19 patients because the country has a long history of using them to cure a variety of illnesses in the past. Moreover, critical information about coronavirus and preventive measures to improve immunity by using homemade, easily available ingredients is widely disseminated and the public receives and circulates the information through new media.

Keywords: Home Remedies, social media, Immunity Boosting,

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that has spread across the world, infecting over 150 million people and killing over 3.1 million people by the end of April 2021 (WHO, 2021). Unsurprisingly, cities are at the epicenter of the pandemic, and systemic and institutional inadequacies in megacities in low- and middle-income countries could enable the virus to propagate rapidly with a higher probability of population transmission (Ahmed, 2020, p. 2). On February 11, 2020, a virus was referred to as severe acute respiratory coronavirus 2 (SARSCoV-2) by the International Committee for Viral Taxonomy (Atif, 2020), and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as the sixth public health emergency of international significance (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, and COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). To date, numerous COVID-19 issues, including epidemiology, dissemination, clinical manifestations, pathophysiology, and prevention and control, have been quite ambiguous. According to the study (Atif, 2020), the clinical presentations of COVID-19 were very similar to those of SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV infections.

COVID-19 affected both developed and developing countries, and countries tried to deal with the situation through lockdown strategies, contact tracing, and quarantine. However, in developing countries, including Pakistan, the effect is more pronounced, as there is a shortage of adequate public health and medical facilities to resolve this issue. Furthermore, the medical disinformation epidemic intensified the spread, treatment, and mitigation of the outbreak. The misinformation problem in developing countries is also complicated by a lack of health facilities, a lack of gerontological skills in

health services, a lack of confidence in governments, and a lack of media and health awareness among the general public, both of which are significant determinants in supporting people according to WHO guidance (Ittefaq, 2020). Similarly, the COVID-19 epidemic presents a serious threat to Pakistan for a variety of reasons (Atif, 2020). Such as carelessness, misperception and confusion, multiple forms of health care, and importantly, some of the home remedies etc. On February 25, 2020, Pakistan received the first reports of a novel coronavirus contamination. Later, thousands of people in Pakistan have reported positive for COVID-19 following the first local case being reported, which illustrates the magnitude of this public health issue (Mansoor, 2020). The magnitude of positive cases increases due to inconsistent interaction on a uniform policy on how to curb the spread of COVID-19 and an inability to comply with WHO guidance (Ittefaq, 2020, p. 76).

Many people believe that health and sickness are acts of God. Therefore, it is assumed that someone would be healthy or sick as predetermined by Allah. This part of the belief can cause people to be less careful towards COVID-19 in terms of preventive measures. The government and ministry of health have utilized all resources (media, police, and armed forces) during the pandemic to restrict the mobility of people and avoid crowds, but people are congregating, planning weddings, and celebrating religious days (Ali, 2020). According to one study, people who take precautionary measures, such as wearing masks and gloves as a disease precaution, are either thought to lack faith in religion or are associated with old age and sickness. Moreover, the masses considered wearing face masks to be "scuffling," because of the breathing problems one faces due to hot weather (Mansoor, 2020, p. 159). Others believed that the disease harmed those with weak immunity. Immunity boosts are the only hope and way out to protect humans during the latest COVID-19 pandemic. As there were no vaccinations or curative medicines available at the spot at that time, self-immunity was the only option. Several studies have shown that people believe such pandemics have occurred in the past and will occur in the future only by those who have survived and protected those with a strong immune system (Nayak, 2021).

Traditional herbal remedies can help boost a person's immunity and keep COVID-19 symptoms under control. According to a statement issued by the AMCD of Bangladesh health department, drinking warm water with ginger and clove extracts, black cumin seeds, honey, and vitamin C-rich fruits will help keep the symptoms at bay (Azam, 2020). The Ministry of AYUSH in India is guiding various trials of herbal medicines that have been used safely for other ailments, for prophylaxis or treatment of COVID-19 (Charan, 2020). For several reasons, ranging from time limitations to financial constraints, most of the population does not seek treatment from a legitimate healthcare practitioner for common respiratory tract infections. They often attempt to self-medicate with home remedies or over-the-counter medications (Atif, 2020, p. 1046). According to a study conducted on providing disinformation to Pakistanis on how to combat the proliferation of COVID-19, Misinformation is disseminated to the masses through social media. As a result, most individuals post unverified claims that contain inaccurate and deceptive information ranging from the sources of the infection to false information about symptoms and hoax remedies (Ittefaq, 2020, p. 77).

Objective

The objective of the study is to collect information about the attitudes of people towards COVID-19 and traditional medicines and homemade remedies that people use or share via social media for treatment or to minimize the risk of COVID-19 by encouraging people to boost their immunity.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative research, in-depth interviews (n = 30) were undertaken with patients (both recovering and suffering from COVID-19, as well as their families and peer circle, through a purposive sampling technique from the Taxila and Wah Cantt communities of Rawalpindi District. In addition, in-depth interviews (n = 05) were conducted with conventional and experienced healers who had been recommended to seek health-facility-based treatment by a COVID-19 patient, their families, or peer group.

FINDINGS

In this section, Covid patients and their caretakers were interviewed, after their recovery by following SOPs defined by WHO (WHO, 2021) and Government (Pakistan, 2021). The most reported symptoms

among the COVID patients were high fever, cough, and shortness of breath. These symptoms were found in every age range, i.e., elderly, young, etc., and health status, i.e., low immunity and healthy people. However, how one is infected by COVID-19 is a different case. For instance, some patients believed that they interacted with infected COVID-19 patients and that the virus was transmitted through coughs or sneezes, referred to as "direct contact." A large group of COVID survivors believed that it was a viral infection triggered by COVID-19 due to their traveling, grocery shopping, and offices.

In response to herbal home remedies utilized by patients in a time of COVID-19 symptoms, they either utilized homemade ingredients or recommended herbal cures from their friends/relatives' circle specifically to treat their respiratory-related issues and as an immunity booster. These remedies include *Inspri*ne tablet, *Haldi* (Turmeric), *Khushk Adrak* (Dry Ginger) and *Munakka* (Raisin), *Senna Makki* (Eunza), *Long* (cloves), *kalonji* (fennel), *Soaf* (Fennel Seeds), *Ginger tea*, *Origanum vulgare*, *Oregano* oil, hot water, saltwater, lemon water, organ juices, and steam, etc., were used.

Moreover, patients and their caretakers, who were mostly patients' family members, used Dettol (anti-bacterial liquid) solution with water to clean their houses. Hand sanitizers were also used as a preventive measure in outdoor work. After they returned home, their clothes were sprayed with a Dettol water solution. These measures were inspired by social media posts and news shared by friends and relatives' circles. An in-depth analysis of the conversation with some patients is discussed in detail.

Patient-1

A 42-year-old male with more than 18 years of education and no major health issues was diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus along with his cousin after their visit to a nearby city, Islamabad, roughly 30 kilometers from his residence. Both experienced discomfort and temperature after some hours, and they took two Ponstan tablets (a pain killer) as a remedy on their own and slept in comfort that night. However, the next day, they had rashes, cough, and fever with no other COVID symptoms, as defined by WHO (WHO, 2021). Their wives developed the same symptoms, with shortness of breath, confirmed by their cousin on the next morning. Their children developed no symptoms since they precautionary asked their parents to move them to another part of the house, limiting themselves to one room.

His cousin and cousin's wife were reported positive. The patient also tested positive while his wife was considered positive, but she was not tested through the Covid testing kits. They decided to treat themselves through home remedies, advised by a friend circle, which included hot showers twice a day, healthy fruit intake (Vitamin C enriched fruits, specifically), lemonade, and ginger tea, while using Ponstan as a painkiller and azomax as an antibiotic. Their condition got much better within a week.

Patients with COVID-19 and others have used natural ingredients and home remedies to improve their immune systems. Any herb or home remedy is extremely beneficial and can supply vitality, mitigate or heal illness, and provide comfort to those who are afflicted. The uses of these herbs and home remedies are greatly exaggerated in herbal classical pieces of literature, and they have been used for many centuries to treat fever, shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, and to help strengthen the respiratory system and improve immunity. The healed patient felt that allopathic medicine had done its job, but that what he added as home remedies helped him a lot in two ways: it provided immediate relief for the time being, and it gave him the energy to survive and heal sooner.

Patient-2

A 35-year-old male infected with COVID-19 was quarantined at home. His immune system was so disturbed that he was barely able to speak a few words, leaving his family deeply concerned and worried. He lost his consciousness after two days, was hospitalized after his family rushed him to the nearby hospital, and doctors kept him on a ventilator within hours of his admission. His first movement was turning his head after three weeks. Afterward, he was moved to the Intensive care unit for two weeks. COVID made him dependent to a full extent upon others because of his weakness.

During hospitalization, he was treated with different medications, including iron and vitamin pills. In discussion with his brother, he stated that 'we referred to a UK-based doctor, who claimed that he treated various patients. He believed that herbal therapy could boost immunity and the body could defend itself against the deadly virus.' The family treated him with tea (*Senna Makki*) on a daily basis to strengthen his immunity.

Specifically, in response to the remedy question, his brother replied that they consumed onions, *kalonji* (fennel) or ginger tea, boiling water, and lemon water, inspired by news circulating through social media. *"We were left with no choice but to apply these remedies, a hope since there was no treatment or vaccine available,"* he added.

Patient-3

A 41-year-old male was among the few who contracted COVID during the first wave when the government placed a country-wide restriction/lockdown. However, due to the nature of his job, he had to be at his office for eight hours. During his interview, he told me that he was in his office and his subordinate, along with a few outsiders, came to his office. He initially refused to shake hands with them, but one of them mentioned that *'sir, we are poor, thus you are not shaking hands with us?'* So he did. He said, *I noted one of them was infected. I stayed in my office for the next 3-4 hours, and I sneezed multiple times during my stay.* He arrived at his home after a one-hour tiresome drive, took a shower, but still felt exhausted with a minor cough. That is when he asked his family to leave him alone. However, his wife stood up, took care of him, and started to give him medication; ponstan, hot water, Vicks bam solution with hot water (to clear his nasal passages). But his health deteriorated, and no recovery patterns were observed. His weight dropped by 8–10 kg within four days, with strong symptoms of fever, sneezing, cough, weakness, and breathing.

He was reported to be positive for COVID-19 upon examination. Since, during the initial stages, there was no exact medication for patients while widespread rumors suggested hospitals were not returning. Due to his family's deep concerns, they decided to get help from Hakeem's homeopaths, and allelopathic doctors. They, based on the doctor's suggestion, started consuming Vitamin C-enriched fruits, Panadol tablets, and Azomax (anti-biotics). The purpose of these suggestions was to avoid a bacterial attack since the body is weak because of the virus. *Senna Makki* tea, *they started using it*, as per herbal doctor, Dr. Nazir Ahmed, based in England. It is an excellent solution, and they have started using it. Moreover, dry ginger and honey were also on the food schedule. Meanwhile, his caretaker, his wife, tested positive, and they relocated their children to a separate room while providing them with food with precautions. Their conditions improved after four weeks, and they both came out for the first time for their family to see them from a distance. ‘

However, after receiving their first COVID vaccine dose from a reputable hospital, both (husband and wife) tested positive in a third COVID wave. They lost their sense of taste and developed breathing issues. As per their doctor's recommendation, they went for a chest x-ray and a COVID test. Both started medications that were initially suggested in the first wave. They recovered in two weeks.

During the interview with other patients, they also reported the same symptoms and treatment. The most commonly reported symptoms among the COVID patients were fever, sneezing, coughing, weakness, and breathing issues. Patients used allopathic medicine along with herbal home remedies utilized by patients in a time of COVID-19 symptoms. They either utilized homemade ingredients or recommended herbal cures from friends/relatives' circle specifically to treat their respiratory-related issues and as an immunity booster. These remedies include *aspirin* tablet, *Haladi*, *Khushk Adrak*, *Munakka*, *Senna Makki*, *Long*, *kalonji*, Ginger tea, saltwater, lemon water, organ juices, and steam, etc., were used.

Government SOP's and Masses Attitudes toward SOP's

In response to COVID-19, the Pakistani government issued instructions on how societies and businesses should be structured and operated. The structures and thinking patterns of a society may be altered as a result of these directions. Such changes may include working from office to home, social distance, closure of earlier businesses, prohibition of social gatherings, even shutdown of educational institutions, and religious and social events are examples of such measures that will have an impact on public health. The measures taken aim to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

As a result of the lockdown, many businesses have changed their marketing strategies, and some have gone out of business. Others will develop in response to new possibilities as if they had appeared. Many individuals have lost their jobs as a result of the lockdown, and many individuals have refused to accept the government's policies of lockdown and social isolation. For example, the transportation sector refused to adopt social distancing and shut down its services in the evening. In an interview, a conductor stated that petrol costs are high and that they are already making a marginal profit from transportation. Due to competition, fuel prices, traffic penalties, and ongoing costs, they are making a lower profit. Thus, it is impossible to follow the government's social distancing strategy in

these circumstances. He also said that the customers were not asking for social distancing and that if someone did, he would be told to exit the vehicle. The following is the perception and attitude of the mass media towards COVID-19:

A. Personal identity

Wearing the face masks has two interlinked conceptions: strength and vulnerability; the non-wearer is assumed as careless, rebellious, and believes that he does not love his and his family's lives. A television anchor asked, "Why don't you wear a mask?" "When an animal starts biting someone, we put a mask over the animal's face," he explained, "so masks are for animals, not for humans." People who wear the mask are assumed to be weak and vulnerable, and it is also difficult to put the mask on every time.

Those who have experienced and suffered from COVID-19 took additional measures, such as restricting their movements except in an emergency. They restricted their contact with other sick people, washing their hands with soap for up to 20-30 seconds after entering the home, and limited meetings. Furthermore, follow the SOPs, keep a social distance from other people, wear masks in public, and avoid touching their mouth, eyes, nose, or other body parts.

B. Community

The masses are well informed by the government and other agencies that COVID-19 is spread through coughs, sneezes, and direct or indirect contact with an infected person is a simple mode of transmission. According to the reports referred to above, people worldwide have been harmed by COVID-19 because of its transmission from one person to another and mainly due to mass gatherings. A mass gathering may cause a fear of harmful consequences. However, in Pakistan, where the joint family and Baradari system still exist and have the least knowledge of the virus, it has resulted in an opinion that it is not spread from one person to another, and the masses do not take it as a cause for panic, fear, and stigmatization. Thus, the masses are divided into two groups: the large group is unconcerned with consequences, while the smaller group is following SOPs.

Masks are also related to conceptions of responsibility, with the wearer being responsible for protecting himself, his family, and the community. Those who do not wear masks are thought to have a foolish, defiant, and unloving attitude towards themselves and their families' existence. In this regard, the government has issued an order to the police that "those who do not wear a mask should be punished, whether they are in public or in their private vehicles."

C. Religion

Not wearing a mask may also be linked to religious beliefs, such as the faith that the affiliation of disease or death comes from ALLAH. Therefore, the government hired a team of several religious scholars to motivate individuals to take preventive measures. A scholar narrated a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) *"If you hear of a plague in a land, then do not go into it. If it happens in land where you are, then do not go out of it."* Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5396, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2218

D. Stigma

A few of the videos were also shared through new media, which shows that wearing a mask may be regarded as implying infection or disease in the wearer. Furthermore, the country's climate is hot, making it tough to keep it on all the time while contacting the outside world. Such beliefs may cause mask users to avoid wearing masks.

Masses perspective about healthcare

Covid-19 changed people's perspective on the allopathic health care system. During the interviews, people shared their opinions regarding governmental statistics on COVID-19 that they do not trust, have confusion regarding the disease, have put faith in Allah SWT, and have majorly relied on natural and home remedies to treat themselves or at least boost their immune systems with no side effects. However, the possible reason for this perspective is the loss of business and jobs, etc. leaving them financially paralyzed. Another reason is that the COVID-19 test was too costly, their treatments and costs for quarantine period were too high, which resulted in the opinion that hospitals have discovered a new source of revenue. These beliefs were mainly due to the news bombardment on social networks, especially on WhatsApp, YouTube, etc. As a result, the majority of people posted unverified claims, exacerbating the issue. These statements gradually spread as mass-forwarded WhatsApp messages. The messages may contain inaccurate and misleading information ranging from the virus's origin to symptoms and cure, or herbal remedies (Ittefaq, 2020, p. 77).

During interviews with local alternative health care practitioners, they emphasized that there are many herbal products and plants at home that can help to strengthen the immune system naturally. “Many common household ingredients are combined in such a way that they improve an individual's immune system and help them combat disease”. According to a local practitioner (healer), Oregano Oil, *Origanum vulgare* and Ajwain leaves are very useful during COVID-19. It reduces the activity of Murine norovirus, which is infectious and the main cause of stomach flu, prevents coughing, improves circulation, and has anti-inflammatory properties. Another practitioner said that if we ate a balanced diet, we would have all of the nutrients, our body would combat the coronavirus. For example, we see our immune system, which demonstrates the strength of our body. Therefore, our digestive system is the first line of defense against disease through our immune system. According to the doctor, vitamins are a vital ingredient for strengthening the immune system. Vitamins A, C, and D are found to be beneficial to COVID-19 patients in this respect. As a result, they advised the patient to eat fruits because they contain all the necessary vitamins.

As a result, many people believe that various herbs and home remedies, such as *Sana Maki*, will help to improve the immune system. For example, the father of a patient told the researcher that he used garlic. Because he believed that garlic is an antiviral that can help with the symptoms of acute COVID-19, lower the risk of heart problems, lower blood pressure, and fight the common cold. Thus, he gave garlic to his son. In another case, a relative of the patient said that he added fennel, which boosts the immune system and reduces inflammation, which aids in the fight against viral infections and the regulation of blood pressure.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, fear has spread not only on an individual level but also on a societal level, particularly in developing countries such as Pakistan. The country has limited resources, and its healthcare systems are not highly developed or advanced enough to detect disease in a reasonable timeframe. So far, the vaccine is being tested, though it is unclear whether the vaccine or the medications can cure the patient of COVID-19. In this respect, home remedies and alternative medicine are used to treat diseases in Pakistan, since these traditional medicines have been used for many centuries and help with a wide variety of illnesses.

Each of the patients and family members stated that alternative medicine or home remedies are used during treatment. The patient, peer group, and patient's relative all stated that they had been told by different sources that the virus influences the body's immune system. A healthy immune system is important for avoiding numerous viral infections. According to the patient, their peers and family members said that home remedies are helpful in improving the immune system. Further, the patient's immunity was said to be boosted by the herbs and plant products they consumed during COVID-19, and they were able to recover quickly and protect themselves from infections. Various home remedies were used by the patients, such as *Senna Makki*, *Long*, *khalwanji*, *Khushk Adrak*, *Adrak* tea, Vitamin C-containing fruits, lemon water, streams from adding Bam into water, etc. Many of these ingredients, which are used for curative purposes, were disseminated to patients and the public through new media.

When using these natural medicines or home remedies, none of the patients experienced any serious or significant side effects. Most people used to believe that if none of the remedies worked, then it was also certain that no one would be harmed. These home remedies have been used and tested for many generations in the subcontinent and have been shown to treat patients with a variety of illnesses. Some of the respondents claimed that the infectious disease had progressed to the point where no amount of medicine (allopathic or alternative) could prevent it alone. The combination of both drugs results in the production of the desired outcome.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. E. (2020, July 29). Impact of the societal response to COVID-19 on access to healthcare for non-COVID-19 health issues in slum communities of Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan: results of pre-COVID and COVID-19 lockdown stakeholder engagements. *BMJ Glob Health*. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003042
- Ali, I. (2020). Why May COVID-19 Overwhelm Low-Income Countries Like Pakistan. (*Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*) doi:10.1017/dmp.2020.329
- Atif, M. (2020, September). Why is Pakistan vulnerable to COVID-19 associated morbidity and mortality? *International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 35, Issue 5, 1042. doi:10.1002/hpm.3016
- Azam, M. N. (2020). Some home remedies used for treatment of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. *Journal of Medicinal Plants Studies*, 8(4), 27.
- Charan, J. C. (2020). Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Home Remedies by COVID-19 Patients: A Telephonic Survey. *Ind J Clin Biochem*, 36(1), 109. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12291-020-00931-4>
- Grønseth, A. S. (2009, February). Three approaches to the study of health, disease and illness; the strengths and weaknesses of each, with special reference to refugee populations. Oslo Universitetssykehus, HF, avd. Ullevål. Retrieved April 27, 2021, from <https://www.fhi.no/globalassets/dokumenterfiler/rapporter/2009-og-eldre/three-approches-to-the-study-of-health-nakmi-skriftserie-2-2009.pdf>
- Ittefaq, M. H. (2020). COVID-19 and social-politics of medical misinformation on social media in Pakistan. *Media Asia*, 47, 75. doi:10.1080/01296612.2020.1817264
- Mansoor, T. E. (2020). 'Surviving COVID-19': Illness Narratives of Patients and Family Members in Pakistan. *Annals of King Edward Medical University*, 26(special issue), 157-58. Retrieved from <https://www.annalskemu.org/journal/index.php/annals/article/view/3630>
- Nayak, D. S. (2021). A Critical Review Of Ojas: An Ayurveda Immunity Booster. *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine*, 8(1), 232.
- WHO. (2020). Naming the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the virus that causes it. Retrieved April 28, 2021
- WHO. (2021, May 01). Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>