
Community Perceptions on Corona Virus- A Survey of Garhshankar Block of Hoshiarpur district, Punjab

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Abstract: Nature's forces seem to have rallied around on reclaim their upset balance. Humans have disturbed the natural forces by exploiting Earth's resources in an irresponsible manner. The history of our planet has witnessed several pandemics that threatened to successively decimate mankind some examples are the Antonine Plague (165 AD), Leprosy (11th century), the Black Death (1350), the Goat Plague of London (1665), First Cholera Pandemic (1817), HIV/AIDS (1981), and the most recent COVID-19 or Corona (2021) that is coming in several phases. All these geographically widespread epidemics have led to millions of deaths around the globe. The Corona virus appears to have mutated in India in 2021 after the world had paid its toll in 2020. Lives everywhere have been experiencing an almost complete lockdown to contain this viral disease. The focal point of this research paper is to determine the awareness levels of the population with respect to the COVID-19 crisis. Do people believe in the existence of Corona? What precautions are they taking to protect themselves? How confident are they of the effectiveness of the vaccine? The study was carried out in the Garhshankar block of Hoshiarpur district in Punjab among 305 respondents through an online questionnaire methodology to ascertain their views on the ongoing pandemic. The findings of the study are expected to be the pre-cursor of launching programs to address the needs of the community in facing the pandemic situation successfully.

Keywords: garhshankar,hoshiarpur

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is attributed to a novel corona virus (SARS-CoV-2). Its outbreak was witnessed in 2019, which rapidly progressed to pandemic levels across the world bringing global economies to a virtual standstill in 2020. There have been over 150 million people infected with this virus and 3.15 million have died because of it. It has dispersed to no less than 180 nations worldwide, with the United States of America (USA) being at the top with respect to number of positive cases of Corona, followed by India and Brazil. The antecedents of the corona virus can be traced from the time of its first impact to the current position in the world. Its unprecedented spread has confounded governments on Earth. The very first case of Corona was unacknowledged in the Hubei province of China on 17th November 2019 after its reportage. More cases came to light but the researchers could not identify the virus. It was due to Dr. Li. Wenliang's (a Chinese ophthalmologist) bravery and humanism which resulted in the world becoming aware of this virus as he shared the sensitive information with other doctors. Consequently, the Chinese government had to report this incident to the World Health Organization (WHO) and held Dr. Li. Wenliang accountable for the crime. Dr. Li. himself died a month afterwards succumbing to the COVID-19 fatality. It took only 4 months for this epidemic to transform itself into a full blown pandemic. WHO declared Covid-19 to be a pandemic on 11th March 2020 as it had spread to 114 countries and infected more than 0.12 million people by then. It was just the beginning and has not come to an end even at the time of writing in 2021. In fact the virulent virus has mutated and created several new strains have made it increasingly difficult to be detected. It is virtually resistant to most known vaccines. There has been a drastic change in the symptoms as well. Earlier it was recognised through fever, cough, and respiratory problems, but now it can be manifested in diarrhoea, sore throat, body ache, etc. too. The latest presentation of the virus in being called the Black Fungus which is lethal. Its treatment along is cost prohibitive and exclusive with guarantee of stability and cure. In India alone it has claimed the lives of over 0.2 million people with the conditions being reported as worst at Delhi NCR and Mumbai.

Reaction to Pandemic

The reaction to this pandemic was quite different from one location to another as it virtually strikes at and tests the consciousness of the citizens. The prolonged exposure to the toll of the virus has struck at the very psyche of the population as spiralling numbers of casualties are demoralising and scaring the lay public. The current paper

examines the reactions of the people of Block Garhshankar of district Hoshiarpur in Punjab. The objective is to understand what percentage of people are aware of the impact of this viruses in general and to what extent they are ready to protect themselves from Corona, whether they agree or not with the way to government is handling the pandemic situation besides the confidence reposed by them in the vaccine. The responses were collected through online and telephonic questionnaire methodology.

Methodology

The study was conducted collaboratively by the teaching faculty from the Department of Science Zoology, Chemistry and Environmental Conservation of the B. A. M. Khalsa College situated in Garhshankar, district Hoshiarpur, Punjab. The Methodology used to collect data from the respondents included multiple choice questions (mostly close-ended) pertaining to Corona virus. The targeted area was the rural and urban area of Garhshankar block of Hoshiarpur district. The online and telephonic interviews were the basis of the primary data. Both the qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for the analysis of the data.

The field survey was conducted in the rural and urban areas of Garhshankar Block of Hoshiarpur district in Punjab. The total participants in the survey were 305.

Demographic Details

Table 1: Gender Distribution of the Sample

Sr. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Female	205	67
2	Males	100	33

The participation of the female respondents in the survey was much more (almost double) that of the males. This was probably because most of the males declined talking about the issue.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample on Basis of Age

Sr. No.	Age Distribution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	18-25 years old	223	73
2	26 – 50 years old	73	24
3	above 50	9	3

The age distribution of the sample showed that the maximum proportion of survey participants belonged to the age category 18 to 25 years old. They comprised 73 percent of the sample while the next category was the 26 to 50 years old. They form 24 percent of the sample. Similarly those who were above 50 years old were least 3 percent represented forming only of the sample. It is interesting to note that the younger age group participants and especially the women were most vocal on the issue.

Table 3: Distribution of Sample on the basis of Residence

Sr. No.	Location	Frequency	Percentage
1	Rural	143	47
2	Urban	162	53

When examined on the basis of the residential location of the sample it was observed that the distribution of the sample was almost equal with 47 percent belonging to the rural and 53 percent belonging to the urban background. Thus, the sample was almost equally distributed.

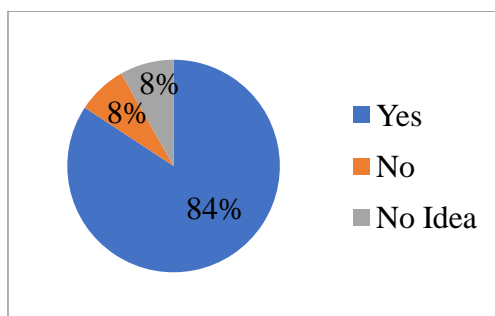


Fig.1: Information about the Corona virus.

When asked if the respondents had any idea about what a virus is, and how it works around 84 percent answered in the affirmative and 8 percent in negative. The remaining 8 percent were not sure about their responses. It was intriguing to come across the results that although a high proportion of the visible majority were aware of what a virus was but were not exactly aware of its virulence. They all associated a viral with viral fever which they had all experienced to a greater or lesser degree. The current virus, i.e. the Covid 19 virus, however, had them confounded. The accuracy of the people about the virus had only recently began to impact upon the consciousness of the people.

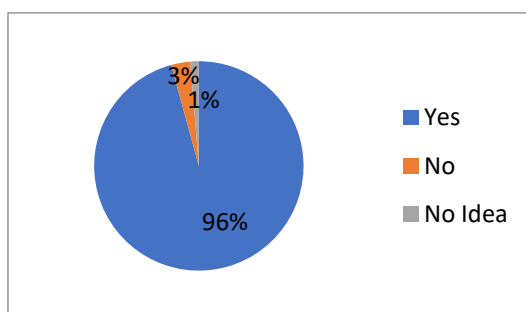


Fig.2: Information about Corona virus among the people.

There were 96 percent of the people who responded affirmatively on whether they knew about the Corona Virus or not. A very small percentage 3 percent did not know about the Corona virus and 1 percent were not sure about their knowledge regarding the same. This reflects the general awareness of the community about the corona its virulence was very ignorant of the way the virus worked. In fact most of their awareness was based on the social media and the news network. They were all appalled at the wide spread impact but were confused about what they could do to save themselves.

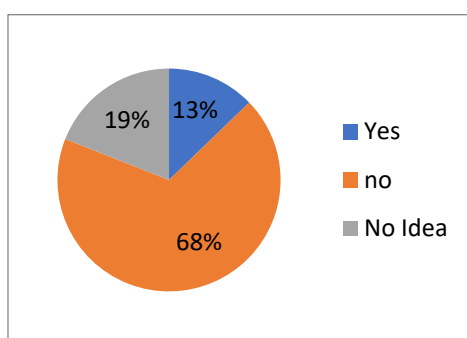


Fig.3: Corona virus myth or scientific propagation.

When enquired about whether incidence to Corona spread is a myth. There were about 68 percent who responded that it is not a myth and 19 percent were neutral with respect to their responses. The remaining 13 percent were affirmative and believed the spread of the Corona virus to be a myth than a real pandemic being perpetuated for economic and political gains. Many blamed the pharmaceutical industry for capitalizing on the miseries of other. This line of reasoning gives glimpses of the presence of a scientific temperament prevalent among the respondents.

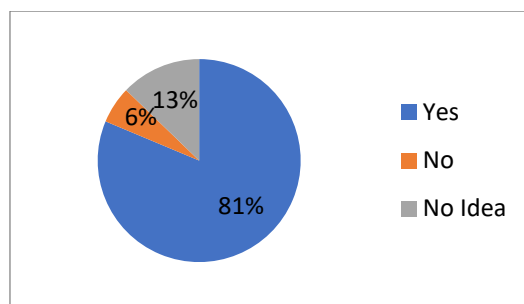


Fig.4: Effectiveness of Wearing Mask as Protection against Corona Virus.

A clear majority of almost 81 percent believed that wearing masks was an effective barrier against the propagation of the Corona virus, whereas 6 percent were against this belief. A minority of 13 percent were undecided on this matter. They were unclear whether masks of certain types were efficient against the virus if worn properly, for instance the N95 and the surgical masks, or even their combination with a cloth mask, etc

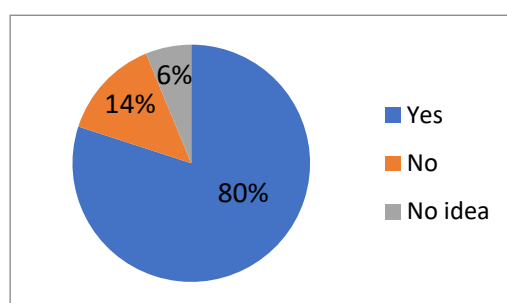


Fig.5: Efficiency of Hand-sanitizers against Corona Virus

Talking about the effectiveness of hand sanitizers against Corona Virus, 80 percent of the respondents think that it is effective, near about 14 percent are in opposition to this statement and 6 percent were not sure. Hand sanitizers are helpful to kill or merely check the virus and that too only if they have the right amount of alcohol in it, can be used to sanitize hands and other inanimate surfaces like door handles, etc. These opinion were wide and varied among the respondents. The people were reasoning about the efficacy of the frequent use of the sanitizers. In fact many were complaining of dry skin and wetness of the sanitizer picking up other vectors.

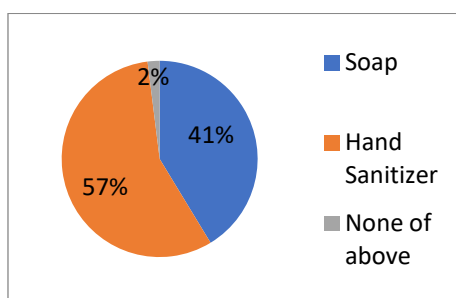


Fig.6: Preferences to use Soaps or Hand-sanitizers

In order to protect oneself against Corona virus, 57 percent used hand-sanitizers, and 41 percent used soaps liquid or solid. There were around 2 percent of people who use neither soap nor hand sanitizer. The larger consensus was that soaps are the best way of getting rid of the corona virus and hand-sanitizers are effective too, depending on the alcoholic content of each. Most of the respondents were undecided on the intensity and continuity of use of the sanitizers. Many of them had even stopped using the hand sanitizers as they said this facility was available everywhere in the market, offices and most public places.

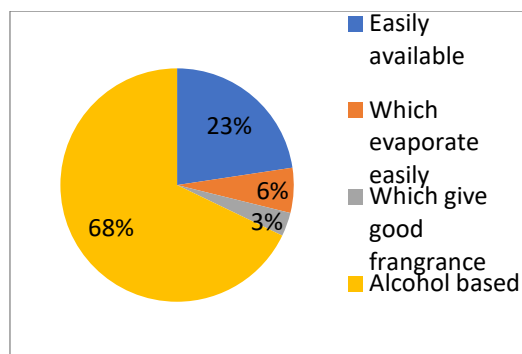


Fig.7: Preference Over Different type of Hand-sanitizers Being Used

When asked about which sanitizer they would like to use, the respondents gave their preference as 68 percent chose alcohol-based sanitizers, 23 percent went for the one which was easily available, 6 percent preferred the one which evaporates easily, and 3 percent were wanting the one that had a good fragrance. As discussed in detail the alcohol-based sanitizers are the most efficient against the Corona virus according to most of the respondents.

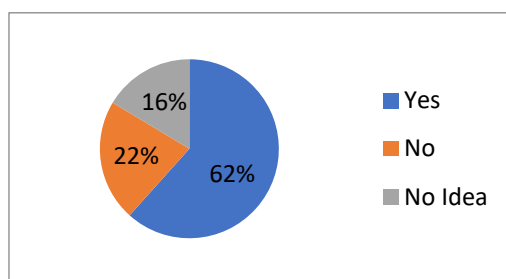


Fig.8: Lockdown was a Wise Decision or not

Regarding whether they considered the lockdown to be a wise decision or not, there were 62 percent responses that were in the affirmative and 21 percent were in the negative, and the remaining 16 percent were not sure about their viewpoints. The respondents were largely of the view that the lockdown has proven to be the most rational way to control the spread of corona all over the world, especially in areas where no vaccines are available. The respondents applauded it as a successful strategy in which the entire country had participated but they also felt that the lockdown had proven to be a very difficult period for everybody.

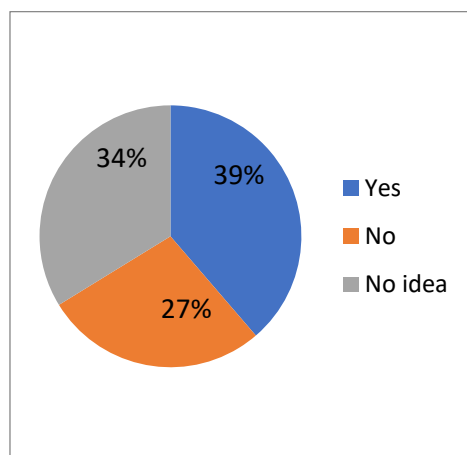


Fig.9: Whether One year is Sufficient to Design a vaccine for the Corona Virus

When the participants in the survey were asked if, ‘One year is sufficient to design a vaccine for Corona Virus’, a small majority of 39 percent agreed, 27 percent disagreed, and 34 percent were not sure. Given the rapid widespread of the Corona virus and the resultant high mortality rate, the sooner the vaccination is available the better it will be for mankind. This was the commonly held viewpoint. It was the most lamentable that almost all the participants in the survey were unaware of the actual time required for the successful production of a vaccine.

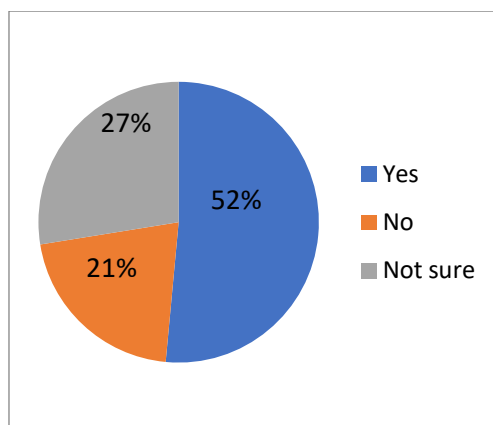


Fig.10: Perception about taking vaccine being developed by Indian Government.

Out of 305 responses, a majority of 52 percent people were in favour of taking the vaccine being developed by the Indian government, 21 percent would not take it, and 27 percent were still undecided. It is easier to make the government-developed and mandated vaccines accessible to every class in the society, be it rich or poor, as it is free of cost. For example, COVAXIN, Covishield etc. However, the larger volume of the respondents were totally unaware of the usefulness of the vaccine, its experimentation and production.

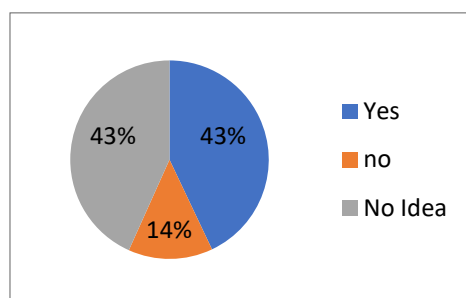


Fig.11:Perceptions on Risk Factors of Corona virus and Tobacco Use

When discussing the relationship between taking tobacco and being at risk of complications of the Corona virus, near about 43 percent responses were unclear about the relation between the two, 43 percent responded with direct relationship, while 14 percent reported that there was no relation at all. This draws a picture of how ill-informed the public is with respect to what can or cannot infect you with Corona virus. This high level of ignorance can prove to be very harmful in the long run when such pandemic are imminent.

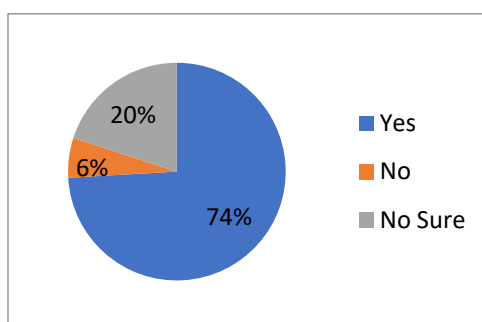


Fig.12: Asthma Patients or Other Patients are Chronic Vulnerable to Corona virus

The majority of 74 percent thought that the patients of asthma and other diseases were more prone to Corona, whereas around 6 percent did not think the same, and the remaining 20 percent did not have any idea about it. People with serious conditions like kidney and heart diseases, diabetes, cancer, etc. were presumed to be more vulnerable to Corona. The maximum danger was thought to be to the patients of asthma as the virus adversely impacted upon their health and survival. The virus seemed to be dangerous for the elderly as well.

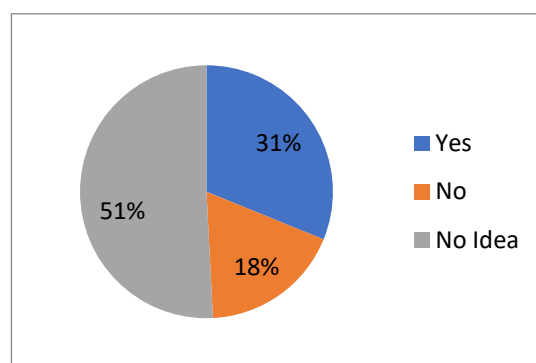


Fig.13: New Strain of Covid-19 is a Man-Made conspiracy

With respect to the question, whether the new strain of Corona is a man-made part of a conspiracy, 51 percent did not have any knowledge of it, 31 percent answered yes to it, and the rest 18 percent said 'No'. So far, many new strains of Corona Virus have been detected, for instance – B117, 501.V2, P681H, VOC202012/01, and so on. Therefore, COVID-19 cannot be pandemic considered as a man-made conspiracy. However, the manner of its spread and the measures being put in place for its control and stoppage of propagation.

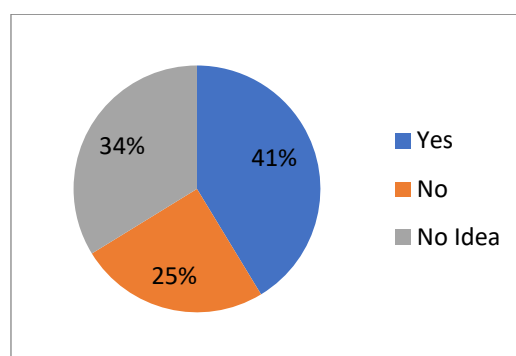


Fig.14: Corona virus is Deadliest Virus Known to Mankind

Whether COVID-19 is the deadliest virus known to mankind till now, 41 percent answered in the affirmative, 25 percent in the negative, and the remaining 34 percent were not sure. As a matter of fact, the planet Earth has witnessed more deadly viruses than this Corona virus in the past. For example, Spanish Flu (1918) caused more than 50 million deaths. The respondents spoke from their living memory that they had not heard of or known any virus to be as deadly as the dreaded Corona virus.

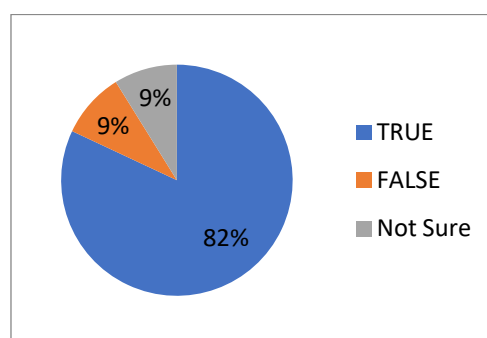


Fig.15: Perception About Closing of Schools

To the question, 'School were closed because children were most at risk during the pandemic' a very high percentage of the respondents (nearly about 82 percent) believed that schools were closed because children were most at risk during the pandemic. However 9 percent thought the above statement is false and 9 percent were not sure. Actually, 60+ age group and those suffering from chronic diseases as well as weakened immunity are an easy target for Corona virus was the general viewpoint. However, most respondents were glad that the

government was concerned about the safety of the children and therefore had closed down schools, postponed, examination, encouraged online classes and made several such arrangements all through the years 2020 and 2021.

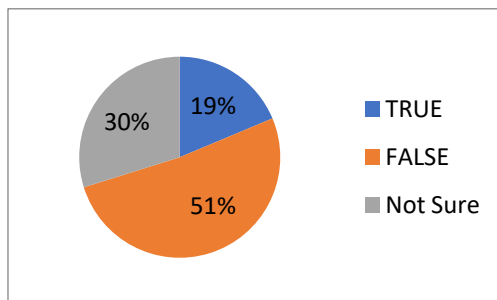


Fig.16: Alcohol Consumption Can Prevent Corona Infection

It was interesting to find out that 51 percent of the people did not think that consumption of alcohol could prevent the Corona virus infection. There were 30 percent who were not sure about the statement whereas 19 percent believed that alcohol was useful to prevent infection. In general, drinking alcohol in more than a moderate amounts was not considered good for health and it offered no protection against infections caused by Corona virus. Most of the older participants in the survey who were males said that it was their regular alcohol drinking habit that had ultimately saved them from becoming infected by the Corona virus!

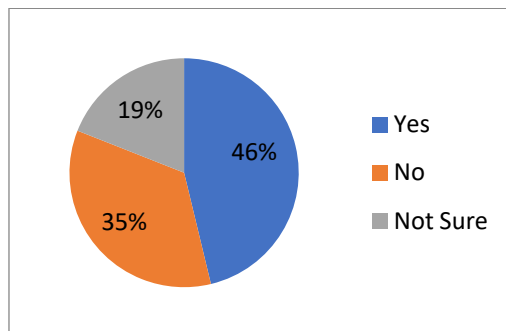


Fig.17: Perceptions About Necessary Hospitalization for Covid-19 positive.

There were 46 percent respondents who agreed that hospitalisation is recommended for anyone who tests positive for COVID-19, whereas 35 percent were against this statement. There were 19 percent who were not sure about it. In fact, home quarantine was recommend for 14 to 17 days. It is also recommended for all who were thought to be showing some types of symptoms of that were close to those of Corona but not actually Corona infection that could be blown up to become severe symptoms.

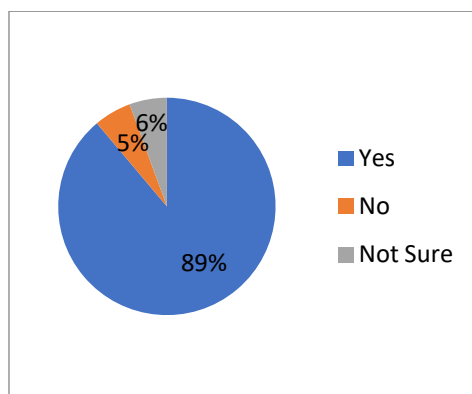


Fig.18: Relationship between Social Distancing and Spread of Corona

When it came to social distancing, 89 percent of the respondents were positive that it prevented the spread of Corona. Also 5 percent in each category responded negatively while 6 percent were not sure about the statement. In reality, physical distance of not less than 6 feet and covering of face with a mask are advisable steps to prevent the spread of corona and it is effective. There were very few who were aware of a contact-less

existence to prevent the spread of the virus. Thus, the concept of social distancing was not being followed nor understood to its fullest extent.

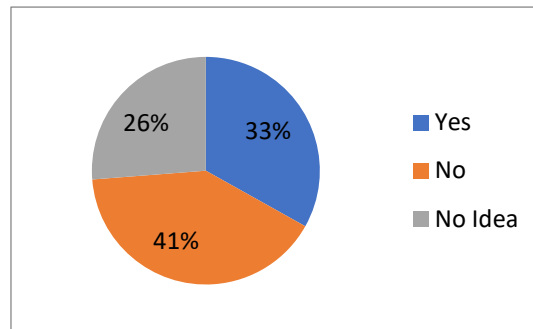


Fig.19: Vaccination is Permanent solution Against Covid-19 Infection

It was surprising to see the results that 41 percent people believed that the proposed vaccination is not a permanent solution against Corona. There were 33 percent who were positive that it is a permanent solution and 26 percent have no idea about it. Practically there were many who felt the vaccination is the most wise solution against the Corona virus as it offers some us semblance of immunity to fight against this virus. There is widespread scepticism against the efficacy of the vaccine. Also there was disbelief regarding its effectiveness that there were newer strains of the virus erupting in virulent manifestation across and an earlier vaccine could not possibly contain it to any great degree.

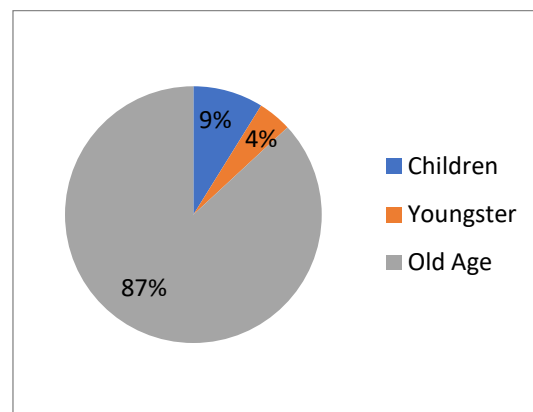


Fig.20: Relationship Between Age Group and Corona Infection.

When asked which age group they thought was most vulnerable to the Corona virus the responses were varied. Concerning the age group at most risk due to Corona 87 percent responses were for those who were old aged, 9 percent were for children, and 4 percent were for youngsters. Anyone who is 60+ of age or has been suffering from a chronic illness, is at greater risk of getting infected with the Corona virus. Nowadays, however, even healthy people between the ages of 18 and 60 are becoming victims of this disease as well. This has greatly confused the population as old and young, sick and healthy were all falling victim to the wily virus that was not sparing anyone.

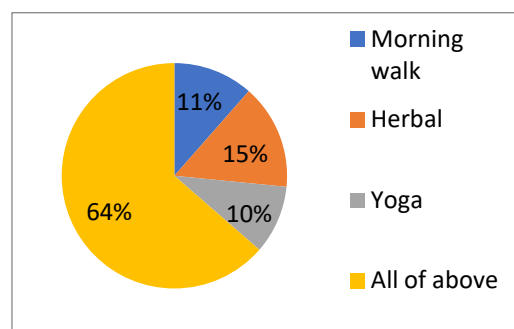


Fig.21: Changes in Diet or Habits to Fight Against the Covid Virus.

In order to boost their immunity against Corona, people have made changes in their diet or occupational habits. This is especially so because of the controls imposed by lock downs and social distancing. These include 11 percent responses for morning walk, 15 percent for herbal extracts and drinks, 10 percent for yoga, and an overwhelming 64 percent for all of the above. Doctors advise a regular intake of Vitamin D, Vitamin C, milk, fresh fruits, and vegetables or healthy home-cooked food in general to strengthen one's immunity against the Corona virus. There were some who had become vegetarians others had given up tea and a large majority had stopped eating outside.

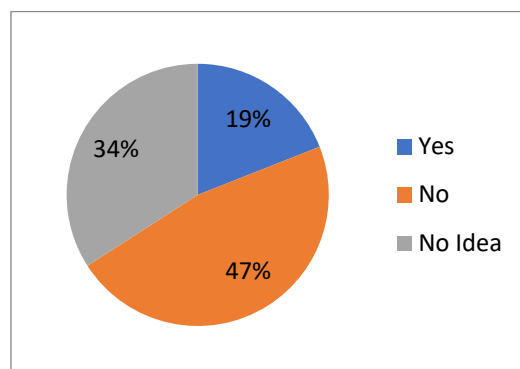


Fig.22: Perception on Donating Blood During the Pandemic.

With respect to receiving or donating blood during the pandemic, there were 47 percent who believed that it is not appropriate to do so, there were 19 percent who were fine with it, and 34 percent did not have any idea regarding this matter. As long as the blood is tested for Covid-19 and it is taken from a consistently healthy individual through safe medical practices it is considered safe. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that the hospitals in themselves were currently the most unhealthy place and should be avoided under all circumstances.

CONCLUSION

It has been more than a year now since the beginning of the Corona pandemic. Many parts of the world are still under lockdown. Specifically in India with the death toll of more than 0.3 million the impact of the pandemic is more worse than ever before, to the extent that international travel from India has been banned or suspended by nations like the USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Gradually, given the current scenario, the people are realising that the situation is most serious, unpredictable and vaccination is becoming increasing a necessary function. Most religions are restricting entry of non-vaccinated individuals. It is wise to wear masks in public and maintain social distance. It is highly recommended by the healthcare personnel that one should wash hands regularly and avoid touching the face. A balanced diet is recommended to boost one's immunity against Corona. It is better to be safe by following the guidelines to protect oneself against this deadly COVID-19. The pros and cons of exposure to the virus are many but the survey findings show that many of the population are even today unaware of the severity of the virus and its virulence. However, large gaps exist in the comprehension of the common man about the actual strength of impact of the dreaded virus. This study is a leading pointer to policy makers, health functionaries and lay public about the perils of being ill-informed on the potency of the bio-medical ramifications and long term impact of the pandemic in India specifically.

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