**Perspective/Letter**

**Risk Communication and Community Engagement During COVID-19: Future Prospects of New India**

Paridhi Gupta, MPH1, Ashok Gupta, MS2

1 Senior Research Fellow, Indian institute of Public Health Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

2 Principal Specialist Satellite Hospital, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

**Corresponding Author-**

Paridhi Gupta

Senior Research Fellow,

Indian institute of Public Health Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

E-mail: drparidhigupta@gmail.com

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**Abstract-**

During COVID-19 pandemic risk communication allows the decision-making ability, positive behavior change, and transparency with the community. The aim of this paper is to address the current situation of risk communication, current threats or negative behavior of the community, and future opportunities. The opportunities suggested would play an important role in building a new India. Few of them are improvement in the current medical education system, promoting small-scale industries, the involvement of the community, and religious leaders to communicate with the community to sensitize for COVID-19 facts, etc.

**Future Prospects of New India-**

Currently, COVID-19 is one of the major public health emergencies affecting millions of people in the world. India has reported more than 35000 confirmed cases until 01/05/2020 (1). But the future course of this virus is indefinite as the susceptibility of infection at all ages is high (2). Prevention is the only cure at this point in time where the world is fighting against an unknown organism. Based on the large number of people infected in the world WHO proposed eight pillars of the public health response. The pillar two talks about risk communication and community engagement emphasizing the importance of recommended actions and transparency of communication with the community (3).

The purpose of such communication is to enable the community to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their family (4). The community make decisions based on their perception of the risk and government of respective countries make decisions based on actual risk (5). Risk communication during the COVID-19 pandemic is an integral part that allows the community to understand the threat and adopt protective behavior or measures (6).

The aim of this brief communication is to talk about the current situation in India about COVID-19 risk communication with the community and its engagement; threats or negative behavior; and future opportunities to combat the pandemic crisis.

Whenever risk communicated with people it comes with great challenges in terms of accepting the terms and conditions. There are three types of challenges related to risk communication: 1. Phenomenology of the risk, 2. Quantification of risk and, 3. Emotional response (7).

It was observed in a few communities where religious beliefs are imposed in such a way where dissemination of information and all other intervention fails badly. The virus affects not just a particular local community, caste or religion, and place but community as a whole.

Community-based prevention is the prime focus of the Indian government to stop further spread of infection. However, antisocial behaviors were observed from the community members against healthcare providers. Following negative behavior, assaults by one or many people either verbally or physically bring the provider’s morale down, especially during this COVID-19.

Now, the question is what to do about it and how to deal with it? So, strict law enforcement should take place in such a pandemic situation where saving lives is the fundamental principle. Global cooperation from top to bottom is mandatory during such pandemics. Also, risk communicators and community leaders should help people and communities with their health fears which empowers them with vital facts (8). Sensitization of community through local political leaders, religious leaders of respective community, and local health workers in shaping the information government is trying to get across and building trust during COVID-19 pandemic (9).

Risk can be seen as a threat (negative condition) or opportunity (positive aspects). While in such a COVID-19 pandemic situation, the opportunity should be emphasized more, although awareness of risk is important. Both are related to the external environment. It was documented that uncertainty is everywhere. Two sources of opportunity were very well pointed out as “potential opportunities for which innovation may be appropriate, and which risks should be mitigated” (10). Also, for bringing forward new ideas (11)to improve and grow the economic state of the country. In that case, the role of experts and a strong political will plays a vital role in determining activities related to risk management and proactively seeking opportunities (11).

In future time, not only India but the whole world would face a recession in terms of manpower and financially. Therefore, it is time to move with a holistic approach to build a new India.

Till 2030, India is expected to have the youth share (age 15-34) in total population at around 32.3% (12). “Youth is the window of opportunity that sets the stage for healthy and productive adulthood” (13), hence their physical and mental strength can be used in the exhilaration of the country. A population amendment bill should pass in the parliament to have control over the population. Preservation of the natural system is an urgent need of today (14). This pandemic offering crisis to the “epidemiological environment” which consists of population sizes, climate, availability of resources, and other socio-cultural factors is exposed to high risk (15). However, to learn from an uncertain condition again can be regarded as a positive opportunity for India in context to the utilization of humans and other socio-environmental resources. The following are the suggestions which can be used for future relevancy:

* To pursue a career in medical sciences (e.g. MBBS in India) it costs around 1.4-1.6 million/year and a total of 7-8 million to complete a full degree, excluding accommodation and academic books which are other expenses. Whereas the same study from China/Russia would cost around 3.1 million including all other expenses. Therefore, the Indian government should reconsider the quality and fee structure to save foreign currency and also to provide better education to the needy which definitely will improve India’s economic status.
* Secondly, to encourage small-scale industries as a sound path for manufacture, development, and production of commodities rather requesting such materials from China. This will be helpful in the employment of people and “contributes almost 40% of the gross industrial value-adding in the Indian economy” (16).
* Thirdly, strong quality management of Rupay Debit and Credit cards to ensure sharing of data within the nation only as Visa and Mastercards facilitates international transactions system also which might be responsible for extra processing charges and risk of data fraudulent and theft is greater.
* Another way of securing economic conditions in the country’s favor as reducing international cost on diesel and petrol. India has a surplus power generation however adequacy is questionable. If properly managed automobile industries would take an advantage to meet with Nation’s demand. Other benefits include reducing the environmental pollution in terms of zero production of direct emissions aiding air quality (17) and recovering human health.

**Conclusion-**

The purpose of this article was to provide recommendations to prevent confusion of risk communication in the community and also to use this pandemic situation as an opportunity for the future growth of the country in terms of a social, behavioral, and economical context. Although a detailed discussion of concerned departments is still needed to make recommendations practical with more balanced process.

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