

## Healthcare Information Seeking Behaviour among the Unaffected Indian Population during Covid-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Mental Health: A Cross Sectional Study.

**Introduction** COVID-19 information has played a vital role in anxiety and fear emerging during the pandemic.

**Significance** This study explores the relation between COVID-19 awareness, anxiety, fear, precaution taking behaviour and recreational practices, identifying the role of healthcare communication in it.

**Methods** This online survey based cross sectional study was conducted with the general Indian population excluding COVID-19 patients. A validated Google form assessing Generalised anxiety (GAD-7), COVID-19 awareness, fear & phobia, precaution taking behaviour and recreational practices was administered through snowball sampling.

**Results** Among n = 834 participants, internet (90.89%) and social media (75.78%) were the dominant sources. 45.56% had anxiety (25.54% mild, 12.95% moderate, 7.07% severe) and 8.52% had phobia. Awareness among anxious and phobic participants was significantly more ( $Z = 7.156, 26.87 > 1.96, p < 0.05$ ), while the precaution taking behaviour was significantly less among anxious ( $Z = 2.41 > 1.96, p < 0.05$ ) and more among phobic participants ( $Z = 31.31 > 1.96, p < 0.05$ ). Number of sources, frequency, contact with confirmed cases, COVID-19 symptoms, employment and recreational practices correlated with awareness, anxiety, fear, and precautions to varying degrees.

**Conclusion** Preferred information sources among Indians like other countries indicated that availability rather than reliability dictate usage of a source. Anxiety and phobia directly correlated with awareness while less anxiety and more phobia were associated with less precaution taking behaviour. Recreational practices (exercise, yoga & meditation) reduced anxiety and fear. Availability and accuracy of online healthcare information need to be regulated to overcome its effect on mental health.

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