

## **FACING CHALLENGES AND UNCERTAINTIES IN WORK DURING COVID-II**

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**ABSTRACT-**COVID-II has attacked India with a vengeance and we are all paying the penalty for our collective carelessness. This article traces the changes in our work culture during COVID-II and also throws light about how we are facing upto COVID-II. Experiences and suggestions for the future are also discussed.

### **INTRODUCTION**

i start with my experiences during COVID-I. I already published an article in this regard. This article is in continuation of my previous article. As we all know, COVID-I started in India seriously in March,2020 when we faced our first lockdown.Everyone was confused and in fear about the future and work went on in an uncertain manner for at least 5 months.Then,the Government decided to partially lift the lockdown and work became more normal for faculty.Off course,students all over the world weren struggling to cope up with the new normal and faculty had to step in do some counselling too. Luckily,teaching aids like Zoom, Googlemeet and MS-Teams helped the faculty a lot and most ofthe colleges in India completed one year of online classes and laboratories, without any major hitch. However, colleges, which failed to invest in infrastructure had to face the music and ultimately this resulted in decrease in new admissions.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Methods to evaluate psychological responses to COVID have been discussed in a study by Amir.H.Pakpour et al.[1]The authors feel that both the CSS ( COVID stress scale) and the FCV (Fear of COVID)models are useful for a study of the psychological aspects of COVID. Characteristics of all patients with suspected COVID symptoms were studied in detail in a study by Thomas Rogier et al.[2] Relationships between countries have changed due to this pandemic and this change in relationship has been investigated by Nian Peng.[3]Computer models have been used extensivley by I.I.T,Madras, University of Washington and by Khalid Reza et al.[4]

### **IMPROVEMENTS IN WORK DURING COVID-II**

Compared to COVID-I, faculty are well prepared to meet the challenges posed by COVID-II.It has now become known that this virus and its mutations are here to stay and we have to cope up. It has now become a do or die situation worldwide. It helped that there were some direct classes in between and we were always prepared for the next set of online classes. Buses ,cars and two wheelers were well sanitized at the entrances of colleges and this in fact led to the discovery of

new heroes. For example-There is now a team, which sanitizes the whole college daily. This, in fact could be a new way of employment generation, where people are specifically tasked with sanitization. This is definitely a win-win situation. Our college held a virtual International Conference in February, 2021 and it became clear that schools and colleges could work from home ,except for some essential work ,which required coming to college or school. An offshoot of this lockdown and work from home dynamics is that the earth's environment has automatically become cleaner, compared to a year back.

Another improvement according to me is flexible work timings. During physical classes, one was constrained to work from 8.00 to 4.00 P.M in most college sin India. After 4.00 P.M, it was rare for faculty to work, except if they had some ongoing research work, which in any case is mostly done by the research scholars. During work from home, it is possible to work the same 8 hours, say from 9.00 A.M to 12.00 P.M, 2.00 to 4.00 P.M and again from 7.00 to 9.00 P.M. These working hours could be adjusted from day to day. Faculty have more freedom to attend webinars and workshops when they are not bound by rigid rules. If ,for example, some particular faculty is not able to work during any day of the week, he/she can safely make up during the weekend, namely Saturday or Sunday.

Mental preparedness plays a very important role in the success of any endeavour. Writing exams need mental preparedness. Facing the challenges of life needs mental preparedness. When COVID attacked the world for the first time, most of us were mentally unprepared for the forthcoming lockdown and the associated hardships. But this time around, many of the faculty are in a better position to face challenges associated with work from home. Many research scholars already have some data ,using which research papers can be written. Faculty are now familiar with online platforms like zoom, googlemeet and Microsoft Teams. Off course ,it has come as a shock to all of us that the second wave is far more serious than the first wave. At the same time ,the second wave is a lesson that complacency in any walk of life is dangerous and has devastating consequences.

On another note, lockdown has helped us to become more spiritual and improved our mindset. The home atmosphere has created bonding between family members and has also made people more efficient. I daresay that colleges that have prepared themselves during the first COVID wave have become more productive during the second COVID wave.

## **CHALLENGES DURING LOCKDOWN-II**

Faculty members started working from home from April20th,2021 in Tamil Nadu, but this time, we were all better prepared to face wfh conditions. Many faculty members were carrying their laptops with them from home to office daily or had a separate laptop at home, expecting an impending wfh situation. The first few days were spent in completing our syllabus and completing our incomplete research papers.

Another challenge was to stay healthy, mentally and physically. Almost all of us lost some relatives or the other and most people were wondering who is going to be affected next. Some faculty in colleges also lost their valuable lives. So, it was a challenge not to go all out at work, keep up the balanced work style and also keep ourselves and our immediate friends, relatives and neighbours fit and healthy.

During the last COVID wave, which started during March end, 2020, faculty were facing nearly the end of the semester and the laboratory syllabus was completed. Only some classes of theory were left out, which we completed using online tools. Then during the odd semester 2020 (August-December 2020), when only staff members and technical staff were allowed to attend college, we recorded the laboratory sessions, made power point presentations and some faculty purchased new software tools to handle laboratories which involved simulation.

During this lockdown, it is a challenge to handle laboratory classes, since now the faculty do not have the assistance of the technical staff. So, more planning is needed now than ever before. Co-operation between faculty is of utmost importance. For example, one simple strategy, that all faculty members adopted is to prepare the power point presentation and video for one experiment each and share it in a common drive accessible to all. YouTube videos are also available nowadays and this helps in preparing material for our laboratory classes. In addition, faculty have already prepared lab manuals earlier, which are generally updated every semester.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

This COVID period has thrown at us various psychological challenges too. We are all used to moving about, meeting friends or going out to the cinema or malls. The last one year has severely curtailed all these aspects of life and the socially active people have been prone to depression, loneliness or other mental diseases. The elderly have been left more susceptible since their already lonely existence has been further exacerbated by the lockdown and other restricted movements.

During these psychologically distressed times, social media like Facebook and Whatsapp have come in handy. Spreading positive messages and prayers through social media makes positivity viral. News channels are not helping much in this regard as most of them are trying to sensationalize news. News channels do show interviews with Professionals and the situation on the ground, but mostly they are negative news and depressing. It is well known that prayer, a calm mind, a peaceful atmosphere, laughter and spreading positivity has a higher vibrational frequency, which prevents the onset of diseases. Ironically, hospitals are found to have lower vibrational frequency, as also jails and places with more noise. It is a good thing that during the various lockdowns that happened the world over, noise pollution reduced a lot, which in fact led to overall healing of our planet Earth.

## **FUTURE CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD**

It appears that the future is fraught with uncertainties. No one is sure when Corona will disappear forever or will it disappear at all. We have all seen this unprecedented situation for the first time and for most people, this type of situation, work from home, lockdown and subsequent loss of jobs has been unprecedented and the overall impact on the world economy as a whole and the Indian economy in particular is not entirely known.

There is talk of a two month lockdown in India and it is high time that all of us learn some permanent lessons from these Corona times. The most important lesson is managing tough times. The value of family members and close friends has been demonstrated. Till the present crisis, man has been fighting enemy after enemy, which seemed to be external in nature. Now, it is clear that in the quest for more power and dominance over others, mankind has created invisible enemies which can only be fought and demolished together.

It appears that the way forward is to cut down drastically on unnecessary materialistic ambitions. New tools and ideas to work from home are already in place and will have to be improved upon. It is the joint responsibility of various Governments, public sector, private sector and the citizens as a whole to chalk out a plan for futuristic living, which will take environmental concerns more seriously.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

COVID is here to stay and we all have to make some serious lifestyle changes in order to combat COVID and many of the future viruses and diseases. Facing upto COVID- 2 has proved to be equally challenging, but our lessons learnt from COVID-I are definitely helping us to face COVID-2. Psychological aspects of diseases are also equally important, if not more important. Hence, a holistic approach to tackle this problem is required.

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