Social Inclusion of older adults During COVID 19 pandemic

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Abstract

Many people, during this COVID – pandemic 'forced lockdowns', are currently restricting themselves in their indoor areas. Though all age groups are affected, elderly people are suffering more severely with this infectious pandemic. As social distancing is the new norm, 'distanced-socially' is a new threat to the seniors or elderly people. When young adults and working professionals remain busy in their daily activities, done mostly through internet, the elderly people in same family feel isolated and distanced.

The present paper examines the social inclusion issues of elderly people, particularly during COVID pandemic, and discusses the role of internet based social applications, in helping social inclusion of elderly people.

Keywords: Social Inclusion, COVID pandemic, mobile applications, digital inclusion

Introduction

The Corona-Virus Infected Disease, 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is believed to be the worst global health calamity of the century and a great challenge for human civilization. World Health Organisation, WHO, named this respiratory disease, with reported origin from Wuhan (China) as COVID-19. (Chakraborty, I et.al 2020). According to the World Health Organization, as end of May 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak affected over 5.5 million people of 216 countries of the World. There is no report of any clinical

approved vaccine for this virus which is effective to cure this COVID-19.[1]

In response to this COVID-19 pandemic, the Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modi has declared lockdown on 24th March 2020 and forced almost 1.3 billion people to work effectively by using electronic tools and maintaining social distancing to fight with COVID-19. (Lee, K. et.al 2020). Many people are currently restricting themselves in their indoor areas. Though all age groups have been affected, elderly people are suffering more severely with this infectious pandemic. (Baker, S. R et.al 2020). According to UNICEF Report (2020) In Europe, 95 percent of people from among the age group of 80 years and above died due to this COVID-19.[2] 80 percent of deaths were from the 65 age group in the United States.[3] In China, approximately 80 percent of deaths occurred among adults aged 60 years and older.[4] In India, 42 percent elderly died due to this disease. This report shows direct as well as indirect challenges for the elderly people.[1]

Impact of Social Distancing on elderly:

Social Distancing is a key measure to fight with this COVID-19 outbreak. For this reason, People are restricting themselves in their homes and communicating with their nearest one through different technological tools. This social distance has affected mostly to the elderly people. The elderly people are less comfortable with this virtual solution as compared to adults.[5] At the same time, physical distance makes elderly socially isolated and this social isolation among the seniors brings depression, stress, anxiety and decreases the anti-immune response. (Lambert, N. M et.al 2013). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) older adults those in isolation and with cognitive decline became more anxious, angry, stressed and restless.[1] The effect of it may further increase the susceptibility to COVID-19. Health care system and physician's advice to maintain social distancing to the elderly people. (Drageset, J, et.al 2011) Social distancing itself can represent

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[1] "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - World …." https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[2] The Impact of COVID-19 on older persons - United Nations …." https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Policy-Brief-The-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Older-Persons.pdf. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[3] "CDC: 80 percent of US coronavirus deaths are people 65 and …." 18 Mar. 2020, https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/public-global-health/488305-cdc-80-percent-of-us-coronavirus-deaths-are-people-65. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[4] "LitCovid - NCBI - NLM - NIH." https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/research/coronavirus/publication/32214079. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[5] "The impact of social distancing on older adults during COVID …." 23 Apr. 2020, https://news.csu.edu.au/opinion/the-impact-of-social-distancing-on-older-adults-during-covid-19. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

a huge hazard for the physical and mental disorder for them. As the elderly people have previous chronic health conditions, it becomes more complex due to this virus. (Fokkema, T. et.al 2017)

Various forms of Social connections are associated with the many well being measures. A study report shows that the social support and intimation (social inclusion) make older people's life meaningful whereas social exclusion and banishment have shown to reduce the insight which makes one's life meaningless. (Hacihasanoğlu. R et.al 2011).The spread of COVID-19, not only increases the loneliness and social isolation feeling but also creates another disease among the elderly people.(Baker, Ö. E.et.al 2011). At the age of 60-80 most of the elderly are physically not abled and using drugs. (Hawkley, L. C. et.al 2010) They are physically not active with various illnesses, loss of close ones, mental illness, lack of income, (Van Deursen, A. J et.al (2015), staying away from their daughter and son, neighbours, low self-respect, not being comfortable with the living space and being completely dependent on others. (Niehaves, B. et.al 2014).These are the factors, which help to promote or increase the level of stress or tension among the elderly people during this pandemic. This social isolation and loneliness create the feeling of social exclusion as well as physical distance fetch the mental disorder, low self-esteem, sleeplessness and hopeless among the elderly.(Şar, A. H et.al 2012)

Social Inclusion of elderly through Internet during the COVID-19 outbreak:

According to Hawkely and Cacioppo (2010) Social distancing increases social isolation, but it is more rising when we will find the absenteeism of social networks or the Internet. (Joan M Kiel (2005). During this pandemic with having social-physical distancing, ICT (Internet communication and technology) became an Actor. Though elderly persons are not much capable and find it more difficult to use advanced technology in comparison to adults, the elderly people are much interested to learn to use it. (Ryan, T et.al 2011) But during this time, the elderly as well as the other group people are using it continuously to increase social inclusion and decrease the negative thoughts that come into their minds. (Şar, A. H et.al 2012)

Sar Ali Haydar et.al (2012) stated that there are many ways to reduce the feeling of exclusion, but the use of computer and internet is the best way to increase the potential of friendship and interaction and reduce the feeling of exclusion or the negative thoughts. Through the internet they get important and valid information from the internet via e-mail, and from different social network sites, the lives of older people become more efficient. Francies and Jin Jiang (2017). Another study report analyses that older people mostly access social network like Facebook, those who are basically deprived from others and socially isolated. (Ryan and Xenos (2011)

The Internet helps to get cognitive therapies through online which decrease the feeling of loneliness and improve wellbeing. (Cotten, S. R et.al 2013). The internet enhances quality of life and involves elderly in the social activities of those who use it.(Bond et.al (2010). With this Francis and Jinjiang (2015) define that socialisation is the activity of mixing socially with others. Since social participation relates to socialisation, they specifically focus on the ICT media which involves socialisation or participation of the elderly people. The Internet is a unique solution to take care of problems that elderly are facing during lockdown.[6] (Choi, M.et.al 2012). During this pandemic, older adults are using video chat because of social distancing. Use of video conferencing apps like skype, WhatsApp video call which significantly helps them to reduce the risk of mental and psychological disorder than those who do not use the advanced technology. It helps them to connect with their close family members, daughter and son who specifically staying far away from them and enhances the well-being of older population moving forward (Flip Laneiro and et.al (2016)They also use Google duo, WhatsApp video call to increase their interpersonal communication skills which enhance the social inclusion or social support. Elderly get regular contact, care and companionship over the internet.

(Tsai H,H. et.al 2010) The use of the internet and advanced technology e.g.- telecare or telehealth are helping in maintaining or establishing social contact. The effect of social media, high technology apps like skype, WhatsApp, Snapchat etc help them to increase the social inclusion feeling and reduce social exclusion of elderly. (Chen and Schulz 2016).Because of this advanced technology many elderly people have changed their lives and have more opportunities to use computers in their daily lives by communicating with their old friends through various apps like banking, shopping, health maintenance and seeking leisure activities. (Forsman, L.R (2018). There might be physical distancing, but the internet performs the effective way for the promotion of their health condition and through different internet based applications and also helps to promote social contact. (Dirk Richter et.al (2013). Many literature based studies identified that internet may help to increase the social inclusion feeling among the elderly by becoming a part of social group, and getting cognitive behavioural therapy by different video conferencing by the health care group. (Olga Stavrova et.al 2016)

Although there might be a difference among the elderly to use or to access the advanced technology they mainly use frequently telephone contact to their close family members, friends, and this intercommunication provides

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[6] "LRJJ present at the ICICKM Conference at Hong Kong Polytech." http://www.lrjj.cn/en/news/lrjj-icickm-conference-hong-kong-polytech/. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

peer support throughout the period of isolation.[7] Cacioppo. S et.al (2016) stated that involvement in social media and the internet which provides cognitive behavioural treatment helps to decrease the perceptual changes that go with the sentiment of depression. Lindra Reneland forsman (2018) found that social inclusion can be understood as a self-sufficiency and the part of the society and Community arrangement model which helps to access knowledge to use the internet and it promotes social inclusion among them.Dirk Richter and et.al (2013) study result shows that social inclusion is associated with both internet use and social networking sites. Because of these two reasons, elderly people are more socially included and their mental depression can be converted into positive wellbeing as a part of the society.

Older adults use the internet and communication applications more than adult people and the internet provides better services regarding health and education. It helps to build a social cohesion among the elderly people. However, ICT has potential to increase social interaction and also improve quality of life. It also helps them to access learning activities, gives them evidence and provides a new way to communicate with friends and family members. (Banskota, S et.al 2020) A survey conducted by Vodafone Spain foundation on "ICT and older people-connected to the future" shows that the age group between 57-70 years prefer to use new technologies which implies them to reduce exclusion. (Singh A et.al 2006) Another Study report shows that elderly people are very much acquainted with the Facebook applications. With this, they mostly prefer to use health related applications and also home care, everyday job-related apps etc. (Francisco J. et.al 2013).Therefore, mobile technologies and apps can be useful to the elderly people, by fulfilling their needs like contacting their loved one and also have access to meal delivery service, and help them to access the healthcare provider to see their chronic health conditions. Loneliness and isolation can be a risk of depression and factor for cardiovascular disease for the Older adults (OAs).[8] Most older adults are using Video-chat including skype and FaceTime apps which help them to decrease their symptoms of depression, stress and unease. Nursing homes and health care systems frequently contact them through this virtual solution.[9]

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[7] "The Little Data Book on Information and Communication ... - ITU." https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/ldb/LDB_ICT_2013.pdf. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[8] "Medicare Telemedicine Health Care Provider Fact Sheet - CMS." 17 Mar. 2020, https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/medicare-telemedicine-health-care-provider-fact-sheet. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[9] "Blog | Digital Divide in the Time of COVID-19 - United Nations ...." https://cs.unu.edu/news/news/digital-divide-covid-19.html. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

Conclusion

Digital divide splits its ugly head within the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. With this situation most of the people are looking for information through internet communication and technology (ICT) to connect uncertainty and work with negligible disturbance. All the companies and institutions are forced to do work by various productivity and conferencing tools. School classes are converted into online classes. More specifically the current situation shows that the change of these extraordinary circumstances is far different from the earlier life. It is significantly difficult for those who have no knowledge to access internet.[7]

In this perspective, the older people face so much difficulty to access the internet because of their lack of knowledge and unaware about the advanced technology. Due to the age-related cognitive problem, physical decline and other health issues they may not be comfortable or being complex to use ICT. Those who do not have knowledge to access the internet they frequently use telephone to contact significantly others as well as to their family members.[10] The impact of digital dividebecomes a disadvantage for the older adults than the younger one. Due to this digital divide older adults might be excluded from society, because of quarantine and isolation life.[7] According to TechCrunch around 40% older adults do not have the basic knowledge regarding the internet.[11] Due to this COVID-19 pandemic, most of the older adults are to maintain distance from the other people and also from their close friends, relatives. With this perspective, those who are familiar with the internet get advantage from this virtual solution. But those who are not able to access the internet might suffer from depression, anxiousness, and also sorrowfulness over their loss of independence and connection to the family and friends. Due to this it increases the feeling of social exclusion which may result in different types of diseases. (Francisco J et.al 2013)

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[10] "Older Adults Perceptions of Technology and Barriers to ... - NCBI." 4 Oct. 2017, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5649151/. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

[11] "COVID-19 Updates | TechCrunch." https://techcrunch.com/pages/covid-19-updates/. Accessed 17 Jul. 2020.

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