

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN COMBATING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: ROLE OF LOCAL CLUBS IN MANIPUR

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The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unrivaled global crisis affecting countries and territories across the world. It has affected every aspect of our livelihood. India, with the second-largest population, is at a huge risk of the COVID-19 pandemic. It requires cooperation and collective preparedness from all strata in society. The transmission of COVID-19 could be reduced by a joint effort of the government and the community. In Manipur, local clubs play a vital role in the social well-being of the community. These voluntary and service-oriented bodies work towards the development of communities, empowerment of people, shaping youths, improving the quality of life, raising awareness in different realms, promotion of games and sports, preservation of culture and extending solidarity, etc. Considering the importance of local clubs, the present study investigates the role of local clubs in fighting the pandemic. The descriptive survey method was adopted to conduct the research. Data collection was done through telephonic and personal interviews. The findings revealed pivotal roles played by the local clubs ranging from the distribution of essential commodities to spreading awareness or helping the government isolate the individuals with travel history. The study suggests that working hand in hand with the community is the need of the hour. The government can control the spread of the COVID-19 transmissions with the nearby club's help.

Keywords: Community participation, global crisis, local club, pandemic, social well-being

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unrivalled global crisis and affected every aspect of livelihood. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization pronounced it as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The pandemic affected almost every nation and region around the globe and has caused a worldwide interruption. COVID-19 spread quickly and has lower casualties than MERS and SARS (Petersen, et al., 2020). The whole world is facing its consequences today. The first COVID-19 case in India was reported on 30 January 2020 in Kerala, the patient with a travel history to Wuhan, China (Vaman, et al., 2020). As per the most recent report of the Ministry of Health and Family

Welfare, Government of India, the COVID-19 active cases in the country are 1,43,625 on 9 February 2021, the total number of recuperated cases is 1,05,48,521, and the total death is 1,55,158.

The central and state governments took several measures in fighting the pandemic. The nation was forced to lockdown completely beginning from 25 March 2020 to control the transmission (India coronavirus lockdown, 2020). The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India took necessary actions to control the spread of COVID-19 (Kumar, et al., 2020). Efforts were made to decrease contact, including shutting schools and organisations, forcing travel limitations and curfews, and restricting the size of gatherings (Favas, et al., 2020). WHO and other organisations

issued several guidelines and protocols to be followed from time to time to fight the pandemic.

Community Participation

The pandemic threatens to affect the poor and widens the existing disparities in access to instruction, human services, and social administrations (OCHA, 2020; Vegas, 2020). India, the second largest population globally, will require a huge workforce and resources to control this disease's transmission. The transmission of COVID-19 could be decreased by the deliberate accomplishments of the government and the community. The community's involvement is the key factor and is extremely indispensable to support the exercises of reconstructing the shattered community life (Bhagat, 2016). Community cooperation spurs individuals to cooperate where people feel a sense of belongingness and perceive the advantages of their inclusion (Hossain, 2013). Communities are the best adjudicators of their weakness and are equipped for settling on the best choices for their prosperity. The engagement of the community could be a vital aspect of pandemic control as learned from the experience with Ebola and SARS (Lau, et al., 2020). Community engagement in fighting the COVID-19 is very significant as it can reduce the spread and curb the frequency of cases, giving time to the health workers to prepare to respond systematically and effectively (Blake and Ngo, 2020).

Local Clubs in Manipur

The importance of community participation is always valued and recognized. However, the

efforts and approaches of effective community participation in the COVID-19 crisis may vary in different societies and regions. In the context of Manipur, different clubs in almost every locality play an indispensable role in the social prosperity of the community. Social Development Club, the New Young Sporting Club, Youth Sporting Club and Juvenile Educational and Sporting Association, etc., are some of the clubs in Manipur. The local clubs are a social body that comprises the local people working for the welfare of the people. Forming a club with proper infrastructure that has an office, library, ground and a hall has become a norm (Ningthoujam, 2011). These voluntary and service-oriented bodies work towards the development of communities, empowerment of people, shaping youths, improving the quality of life, raising awareness in different realms, promotion of games and sports, preservation of culture and extending solidarity, etc. The club's governing body consists of youths as members and the senior members of the community as advisors. The administrations and services are provided voluntarily by the local individuals with no compensation. Contributions and donations from the inhabitants/community members are made to raise funds for carrying out different tasks. The clubs also support the government in association with *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, (Total Literacy Campaign) of the National Literacy Mission, National Health Mission, Total Sanitation Campaign, and *Bharat Nirman* started by the Government of India to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals. Considering the importance of local clubs, the present paper highlights the research finding of the role of community participation through clubs in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Focus of the Study

In Manipur, the local club acts as a medium for fostering a sustainable community. These social capital institutions are registered bodies under the Cooperative Societies Act, rendering social and selfless service during any calamities. The study has been taken up to explore the extent of local club's participation in controlling and combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method and Procedure

Manipur is one of the Indian states located in the north-eastern part of the country. Total active cases of 85 with 28672 recoveries from the disease were reported on 9 February 2021 in the state as per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. For the present study, the descriptive survey method was adopted. A self-constructed interview schedule was employed to collect data. Telephonic interviews were conducted. Secondary data were collected from journals, newspaper articles, blogs, and YouTube.

The purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from five clubs in the Wangoi constituency, Imphal west district of Manipur. All the local clubs in Manipur constituted the study population, and five clubs were selected as samples according to the purpose of the study.

Results and Findings

The findings revealed pivotal roles played by the local clubs ranging from the distribution of essential commodities to announcing a speculated case or helping the government isolate the individuals with travel history. The

study found remarkable roles played by the clubs in battling the pandemic.

Segregation: The clubs played a vital role in isolating the travellers to limit the outbreak's size and its impact on the well-being of the public. Records of the individuals with travel history were maintained and strictly monitored for any symptoms of the disease. Furthermore, travellers under home quarantine and community quarantine were supervised, and thermal checkups were done from time to time.

Distribution of *Arsenicum Album* 30: A prophylactic medicine called *Arsenicum Album* 30 was distributed to the locality of approximately three thousand people to boost immunity against COVID-19 after the recommendation of Ministry of AYUSH to use it as it enhances the defense mechanism of the body. However, the efficacy of this homeopathic drug is not tested nor has been developed specifically for the current pandemic (Sheikh, 2020).

Distribution of relief materials: Sanitizers and food items including rice, pulses, salt packets, sugar, and seasonal vegetables were distributed to the public as relief materials from the club fund and contributions from MLAs and other social workers of the community. The public was urged to contribute to the local club fund and Prime Minister's National Relief Fund or Chief Minister Relief Fund. Physical and social distancing was maintained while distributing the relief materials.

Volunteering at quarantine centres:

In addition to segregating travellers to quarantine centres, the club members volunteered in the community quarantine centres. They helped in the supply and distribution of food along with maintaining decorum at such centres. Reports of

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Some pictures taken with permission from the Social Development Club, Samurou' Manipur



Segregating travellers and monitoring home quarantine



Club members disinfecting public places



Packing relief materials for distribution in the club office



Assisting health workers in mass testing

extending self-less service in institutional as well as community quarantine centres without any financial assistance were expressed by the clubs.

Ban on *marup*, microfinance, and money lender's interest: The pandemic has an adverse impact on the economy. Almost every

aspect of society is disturbed. In this crisis, the club members played a vital role in restricting the payment of interest to the money lenders and micro-finance groups. There was a ban on *marup*, which is a type of micro-saving credit system.

Disinfection of public places: Spraying sodium hypochlorite to disinfect the locality was reported from time to time. Sodium hypochlorite is a very common disinfectant that is used for water purification, cleaning purposes, as well as removing odour. People were also made aware of the importance of personal and environmental hygiene in protecting against the disease.

Spreading awareness and solidarity: The club members, along with the local youth volunteers, spread awareness to the public by religiously reminding the dos and don'ts. The basic steps to protect from COVID-19 by following social distancing, wearing a mask, covering mouth while coughing and sneezing and frequent washing of hands were continuously reminded to people in general. Proper information and awareness about extending solidarity and not stigmatizing the infected individual, family, and frontline workers were imparted at the community level.

Airing important news and updates:

The clubs reported airing important announcements and updating the locals concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. The daily news was also aired for the public by installing speakers in the club offices.

Strict monitoring on price rise and opening of shops:

The clubs ensured that shops sell essential commodities at a fair price. Hoarding huge amounts of goods by the shopkeepers were also monitored to avoid inflation, which might otherwise cause difficulty to the whole community.

Checking substance abuse: Cases of substance abuse ascended in the wake of forcing lockdown in the state. The youths fall prey to such practices in the light of numerous reasons. The local clubs reported

drug seizures and a ban on the sale of alcohol in their localities.

Restrictions on public gathering: Public gatherings in the locality related to political, educational, social, cultural, and religious purposes were strictly restricted in the locality. People were made to understand the huge risk such gatherings have in virus transmission.

The imposition of Standard Operating Procedure:

The guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) given by the experts and government were imposed on the club's locality. The volunteers ensured that people in the locality followed the SOPs issued in public places. In addition to this, they assisted the frontline workers in maintaining the lockdown in their respective jurisdictions.

Tracing contacts and follow-up: The club members helped in tracing the contacts of the patients for isolation and testing. After identification of the contacts, they were informed to the concerned authorities for further process.

Discussions

The findings reveal that the efforts of the local clubs are commendable in fighting the spread of COVID-19. Steps taken by the clubs in segregating the travellers and monitoring them in-home or community quarantine are exceptionally fundamental in controlling the infection transmission. Hellewell, et al. (2020) in their study reported that effective tracing of contacts and isolation could reduce the magnitude of the outbreak. Isolation of travellers and segregating them for 14 to 28 days until the quarantine period at the quarantine centres were also advocated. Although, the Government of

India under *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana* (PMGKY) declared Rs 1.7 lakh crore relief packages during the COVID-19 pandemic, the clubs extended monetary assistance for the distribution of relief materials from their fund as well as urged the public to raise money to help the weaker sections of the community. The club took initiative in disinfecting the public places to control the widespread of the disease that helped in reducing the rate of transmission and secured the vulnerable population. He, et al. (2020) reported disinfecting public places as one of the most important steps to manage COVID-19. Further, the clubs' participation in the distribution of relief materials while maintaining the issued guidelines and SOPs guarantees the target population gets the maximum benefit. The findings of the study reveals the potential role a club offers in containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic thus highlighting the importance of community participation. Bedford, et al. (2020) found the importance of community participation in controlling the COVID-19

pandemic, which is in tune with the findings of the current study.

Conclusion

The current investigation sheds light on the significant roles played by the local clubs in battling the pandemic. Different tasks were carried out selflessly by the clubs for the welfare of the community at the grass-root level before and during the pandemic. The service extended by the club members should be recognized and appreciated. Furthermore, the clubs should be empowered as they are often the ones on the ground level working relentlessly before, during, and long after a crisis is over. Community participation should be supported and encouraged for implementation of government programmes and policies. Working hand in hand with the community is the need of the hour. The government should consider the importance of community participation and involve the local people, youths, or local club in not only combating the pandemic but also in the future endeavours.

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