

# Analysing People's Perceptions about Government Interventions for COVID-19 in India

Jayesh Raj

University of Delhi

**Abstract:** *COVID-19 pandemic is imposing a threat on the health and well-being of the individuals and has affected the life and livelihood of people unexpectedly. Since its outbreak medical and public health experts have offered different guidelines to slow down the virus's transmission. Government of India has been active since the beginning by various measures from following social distance, compulsory wear of masks to closure of educational institutions or nationwide lockdown to combat COVID 19. Despite various safety measures taken by the Indian Government from time to time to limit the spread of COVID-19, the second wave of COVID is here with more drastic impact. To combat this health emergency, the Government has to continue its interventions but efficacy of such interventions depend on peoples' acceptance. The present study analysed people's perception towards the government intervention during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic for its effective implementation. A total of 216 participants from India, randomly volunteered to participate in this research. The questionnaire consisted of items related to government measures during the pandemic and demographic details. The results of an online survey (N=216) highlighted lack of adequate medical facilities, equipment as the major cause of worry among respondents. The study also establishes that the Coronavirus pandemic has made the individuals worried in terms of cure, medical facilities, death and quarantine which had adverse effects on respondents. Majority of respondents supported all the government interventions but only half of the respondents agreed for the statement that The central government is doing enough in managing the outbreak or in providing financial/material support to citizens during this epidemic period for their livelihood.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Health and Well-being, Nationwide Lockdown, Social distancing, Government Interventions, Peoples' Perceptions

## 1. Introduction

The ongoing pandemic caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has led to a major global crisis affecting billions of people. COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. WHO first learned of this new virus on 31 December 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 Are-Fever, Dry cough, Fatigue. Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include:- Loss of taste or smell, Nasal congestion, Conjunctivitis (also known as red eyes) Sore throat, Headache, Muscle or joint pain, Different types of skin rash, Nausea or vomiting, Diarrhoea, Chills or dizziness. Symptoms of severe COVID-19 disease include: Shortness of breath, Loss of appetite, Confusion, Persistent pain or pressure in the chest, High temperature (above 38 °C) [WHO, 2020]. COVID-19 pandemic is imposing a threat on the health and well-being of the individuals and has affected the life and livelihood of people unexpectedly. Since its outbreak, medical and public health experts have offered different guidelines to slow down the virus's transmission. The commonly offered measures are social distancing, travel restriction, regular use of sanitizer, compulsory mask etc. Scientists around the world are working to find and develop treatments for COVID-19. The only way humanity seems to be able to fight back was to impose lockdown. Almost all countries globally restricted movements, announced lockdowns in their own way. Indian government imposed nationwide lockdown for the first time starting from 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 which was extended till 31st May, 2020 (in phases). The government's sudden enforcement of the lockdown seemed hastily prepared and immediately disadvantaged Indian populations. The lockdown impacted different sectors

harshly as during the lockdown, approximately 71.31 percent of the businesses dealt with reduced cash flows with the manufacturing sector being the worst hit. Additionally, delay and cancellation of projects have also been a major cause of concern, especially in the tertiary sectors, particularly retail, non-profit, consultancy, education, and financial services. Social distancing and night curfew rules were employed in India, which however had an additional impact on the economy, human living, and environment. Over 1.5 million schools and universities across India closed down due to the pandemic and a switch to large-scale digital education was not possible. Only 24 per cent house-holds have access to the internet (according to a 2019 government survey.).

Studies showed that the lockdown had slowed the growth rate of the pandemic by 6 April 2020 to a rate of doubling every six days, and by 18 April, to a rate of doubling every eight days. As the end of the first lockdown period approached, state governments and other advisory committees recommended extending the lockdown. On 14 April, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended the nationwide lockdown until 3 May, with a conditional relaxation after 20 April for the regions where the spread had been contained or was minimal. On 1 May, the Government of India extended the nationwide lockdown further by two weeks until 17 May. The Government divided all the districts into three zones based on the spread of the virus—green, red and orange—with relaxations applied accordingly. On 17 May, the lockdown was further extended till 31 May by the National Disaster Management Authority. On 30 May, it was announced that lockdown restrictions were to be lifted from then onwards, while the ongoing lockdown would be further extended till 30 June for only the containment zones. Services would be resumed in a phased manner starting from 8 June. It was termed as "Unlock 1.0".

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Modi later clarified that the lockdown phase in the country was over and that 'unlock' had already begun. The second phase of unlock, unlock 2.0, was announced for the period of 1 to 31 July, with more ease in restrictions. Unlock 3.0 was announced for August. Similarly, unlock 4.0 was announced for September and Unlock 5.0 for the month of October. In the same way, unlock 6.0 was announced for the month of November, unlock 7.0 was announced for the month of December.

Despite various safety measures and actions taken by the Indian Government from time to time to limit the spread of COVID-19, the second wave of COVID is here with more drastic impact and no one knows where it will end. Due to the second wave of infection in the country, several state governments like Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and other states have announced partial lockdowns in April 2021 and this may continue for coming months. The COVID infection rate is making new records every coming day due to unavailability of the oxygen bed and medical equipment as of now the COVID cases counts 3.36 crore in India and death rate tolls to 4.47 lakh on 27 September.

To address this health emergency, the Government has to continue its interventions but efficacy of such interventions depend on peoples' acceptance. Analysing people's perceptions for government decisions will provide better insight for its effective implementation. Researchers have examined the factors affecting the use of Self Protective Measures. Perception of COVID-19 self-protective measures (Mehroliya, et al., 2021) however, studies analysing people's intentions about actions taken by Government related to COVID-19 are limited. The purpose of this study is to understand the people's perceptions about government interventions for COVID 19 in India for its effective implementation.

## 2. Literature Review

The present study is an attempt to understand how people perceive various government actions which may influence the acceptance of government interventions / actions by individuals. This paper offers different contributions to the literature. Firstly, it improves our understanding how the people of India have dealt or faced /taken the government involvement during the pandemic. Secondly it will help the policy makers in framing new and different policies for the latest impact of coronavirus. Finally, based on the framework, this paper develops a list of research questions that will help scholars to gain insights into government norms in light of the pandemic. Study results can help policy makers make the right decisions in a timely way/ on time, even with the uncertainties about COVID-19.

The literature has linked people perception about COVID-19 government norms and regulation during the pandemic. Conversely, other applied research did not involve in the direct responses of the individual towards the government intervention but they had known their perception and attitudes towards the coronavirus pandemic and it revealed that the general public in the United States and United Kingdom appears to have important misconceptions about COVID-19 and Correcting these misconceptions should be

targeted in information campaigns organized by government agencies. (Geldsetzer, P. (2020). Knowledge and perceptions of COVID-19 among the general public in the United States and the United Kingdom: a cross-sectional online survey. *Annals of internal medicine*, 173 (2), 157-160). Prior research shows that though the social distancing aims to slow the transmission of the virus and help with public health, it has devastating implications for service employees and their health. (Tuzovic, S., & Kabadayi, S. (2020). The influence of social distancing on employee well-being: A conceptual framework and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management*.)

This paper reviewed how lifestyle patterns, perception of viral infection and practices have been found to have improved due to the awareness rose during COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. (Kandel, S., Lamsal, M., Yadav, S. A., Bhandari, D., Adhikari, G., Poudel, S., . . & Gautam, S. (2020).). Moreover, some paper reviewed that how the good knowledge of the residents regarding the high infectivity of the COVID-19 virus, which can be easily transmitted between people via invisible respiratory droplets, most residents took precautions to prevent infection by COVID-19: not going to crowded places and wearing masks when going outside. (Zhong, B. L., Luo, W., Li, H. M., Zhang, Q. Q., Liu, X. G., Li, W. T., & Li, Y. (2020). Knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards COVID-19 among Chinese residents during the rapid rise period of the COVID-19 outbreak: a quick online cross-sectional survey. *International journal of biological sciences*, 16 (10), 1745).

Prior research shows as the long-term implications of COVID-19 are currently unknown, there is little reason to believe its impact on well-being and health of individuals will be short-lived (Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak, I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 183-187.). More specifically some paper reviewed that these factors voluntariness, knowledge, visibility and trust appears crucial in planning communication actions suitable for the next delicate phase of the coronavirus as these elements increases or mitigate the worriedness and risk perceptions of individuals. (Cori, L., Bianchi, F., Cadum, E., & Anthonj, C. (2020). Risk perception and COVID-19).

## 3. Objective

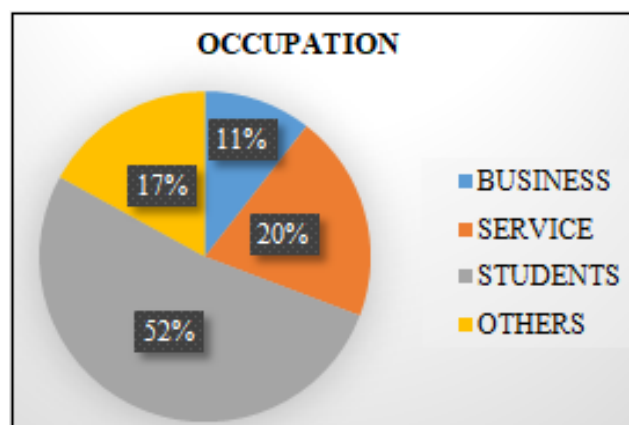
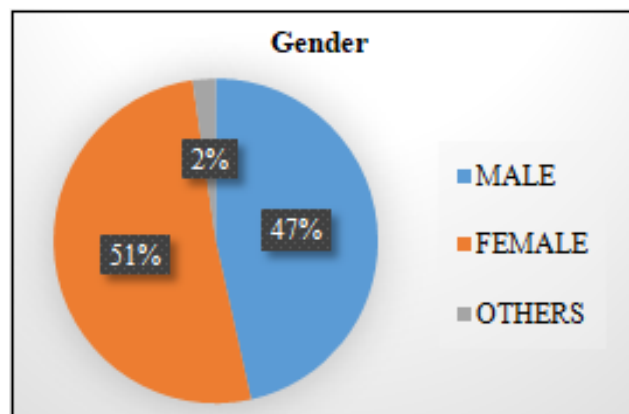
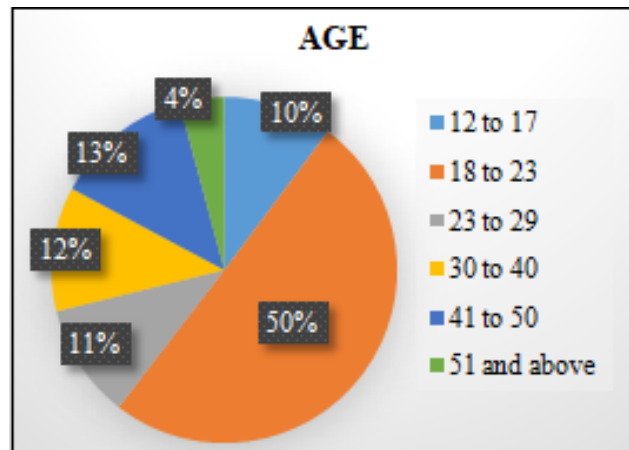
Because of pandemic conditions and other considerable factors everyone have now been aware of coronavirus widely named as COVID-19. A lot of research has been done to know the impact of this deadly virus on different sectors of the economy. The aim of this paper is to gain an understanding of those previously researched papers and highlight the key areas that require more attention for further research. The purpose of this paper is to understand.

- The perception of people about the government intervention during COVID 19 for its effective implementation and
- To provide specific insights for public health policy makers useful for planning and implementing more effective regimes.

#### 4. Method

The present paper is a cross-sectional, descriptive study that employed a questionnaire for data collection among a convenience sample of respondents. The questionnaire was designed specifically for the study, consisting of 13 items related to safety measures and Government interventions for COVID-19, measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 = "Strongly disagree" and 5 = "Strongly agree." Respondents were also asked about the cause of their worry during COVID-19, and demographic details such as gender, age and occupation.

For the collection of primary data, the questionnaire was randomly circulated online in the month of April 2021. Social networking sites have been a significant source of reaching out to our respondents. Microsoft excel software is used for the analysis of data collected. 216 valid responses were recorded that qualify for data analysis. Demographical data concluded that 51 % of the participants were female and 47% of the participants were male. The mean age of participants was 26.76 years, with a standard deviation of 11.15 years. Most of the respondents (52%) were students, (11%) were from business, (20%) were from service and the remaining 17% were others. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented below. The target populations were all age group people of India.



## 5. Results

When asked about their perception of COVID-19 as a public health problem, all respondents were aware of the virus as they responded to their cause of worry during the pandemic and lack of adequate medical facilities/equipment was the major worry among the respondents.



Some of the major questionnaire are presented below for which the responses ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Social distancing norms was important to prevent infection of COVID-19	0.90%	0.90%	0.90%	19%	78.20%
2	Regular use of sanitizer promoted safety of the individuals	0.90%	2.90%	7.80%	33.80%	54.60%
3	Compulsory use of face mask is the most important defense against COVID transmission	0.90%	2.80%	4.20%	25.00%	67.10%
4	Fine for not wearing the mask is a good step from the government to prevent the infection of COVID-19.	4.60%	6%	8.30%	38.40%	42.60%
5	Restriction imposed on travelling by Indian government during COVID-19 was a good step	1.90%	4.20%	13.40%	34.30%	46.30%
6	Nationwide lockdown announced by government on 23rd march 2020 for preventing COVID-19 was mandatory.	2.80%	4.60%	9.70%	33.80%	49.10%
7	Night curfew been imposed does reduces the rate of infection of COVID	11.60%	22.70%	28.70%	21.80%	15.30%
8	Closure of all educational establishments (schools, universities etc.) was a mandatory step by Indian government.	4.20%	11.60%	10.60%	29.60%	44%
9	Do you think the closure of restaurant, gyms, swimming pools, theatres and salon was a good step for preventing COVID?	2.80%	4.60%	11.60%	40.70%	40.30%
10	Introducing aarogyaSetu app by Indian government is a good initiative	5.60%	11.60%	24.50%	37%	21.30%
11	Introducing COVID vaccination for specified age groups in one go is a right decision.	4.20%	3.70%	20.80%	45.80%	25.50%
12	"The central government is doing enough to manage the outbreak".	12%	13%	25%	32.40%	17.60%
13	The government is doing enough to provide financial/material support to citizens during this epidemic period for their livelihood.	11.10%	21.80%	30.60%	22.70%	13.90%

The WHO has advised various self-protective measures (SPMs) such as social distancing, washing hands regularly with soap or using alcohol-based hand sanitizers, avoiding mass gatherings and use of face masks etc. Studies indicate that SPMs are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19, however, the effective use of SPMs depends on an individual's mind set (Mehroliya, S., Alagarsamy, S. and S, J., 2021). Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that social distancing norms are important to prevent the infection of COVID-19, regular use of sanitizer promoted safety and face mask is the most important defence against COVID19 pandemic therefore imposing fine for not wearing the mask is a good step from the government to prevent the infection of COVID-19. According to the health ministry Indians have to learn to live with coronavirus and are

required to adjust to social distancing and sanitation as part of their everyday life in times to come. With some behavioural changes and community's cooperation and support India may be able to avoid the peak (Dey S., 2020).

Prior to the announcement of the nationwide lockdown, on 22 March, the government had announced that the Indian Railways would suspend passenger operations through 31 March. The national rail network has maintained its freight operations during the lockdown, to transport essential goods. (Nandi, Tamal (27 March 2020). "How Indian Railways continuing its freight operations post lockdown". Livemint. Retrieved 30 March 2020). However, people were seen travelling to their hometown on foot or some help provided by the strangers. More than 80 % of the respondents agreed



that travelling restrictions were required to stop the rising cases of COVID and Nationwide lockdown imposed by the government was mandatory as People were seen breaching the lockdown and not following social distancing by crowding in vegetable markets in some places. On 29 March, Prime Minister Modi advised against this, urging people to stay home in his Mann Ki Baat radio address. Night curfews were in effect from 9 p. m. to 5 a. m. in all areas and state governments were allowed to impose suitable restrictions on all activities during Unlock 1.0 (1–30 June). ("Govt releases lockdown 5.0 guidelines: Here's what's allowed and what's not". The Economic Times.30 May 2020. Retrieved 30 May 2020) Studies showed that night curfews could, in fact, worsen the COVID-19 situation, as it may lead to overcrowding during the day as people scramble to finish their tasks. (Beyond Optics: Are Night Curfews or 'Corona Curfews' Effective?) Therefore there was mixed responses for the night curfew suggesting that night curfew is not sufficient to curb the spread of COVID.

The government of India on Monday, March 16, 2020, announced closure of all the educational institutions before the Indian government announced nationwide lockdown including schools, colleges and universities where state Board and CBSE board exams were not being conducted till March 31 to control the spread of coronavirus infection. (Govt announces closure of all educational establishments across India till March 31), though the educational institutions are still closed relating this pandemic. As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases crossed the 130-mark in India during March 2020, the Centre proposed detailed measures on social distancing urging states to close down all theatres, swimming pools, gyms, cultural and social centres, and museums till March 31, 2020. However, in the later phases some restriction was uplifted but Physical distancing and sanitization was must to be ensured, the guidelines said. (MINISTRY OF HEALTH AFFAIRS), Majority of respondents agreed Closure of all educational establishments (schools, universities etc.) was a mandatory step taken by Indian government and closure of restaurants, gyms, swimming pools, theatres and salons was a good step for preventing COVID.

India began administration of **COVID-19 vaccines** on 16 January 2021. Two Indian vaccines received approval for emergency use in India, including Covishield (manufactured by the **Serum Institute of India**), Covaxin (developed by Bharat Biotech). As of 27 Sep, 21 India has administered 86 crore doses overall, including first and second doses of currently approved vaccine. People were being vaccinated in different phases like;

- **Phase 1**-Health workers and frontline workers including police, paramilitary forces, sanitation workers, and disaster management volunteers.
- **Phase 2**-This phase of the vaccine in February rollout covered all residents over the age of 60, residents between the ages of 45 and 60 with one or more qualifying comorbidities, and any health care or frontline worker that was not in phase 1. From 1 April, eligibility was extended to all residents over the age of 45.

- **Phase 3**-On 19 April, it was announced that the next phase will begin on 1 May, extending eligibility to all residents over the age of 18

COVID-19 has also been a more serious and dangerous disease among older people. Now that the vaccines have been determined to be safe for adults, they are being studied in children. WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) has concluded that the Pfizer/BionTech vaccine is suitable for use by people aged 12 years and above. Children aged between 12 and 15 who are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 may be offered this vaccine alongside other priority groups for vaccination. Vaccine trials for children are ongoing and WHO will update its recommendations when the evidence or epidemiological situation justifies a change in policy.

70% of the respondents agreed that introducing COVID vaccination for specified age groups in one go is a right decision and half of the respondents agreed that Introducing AarogyaSetu app by Indian government is a good initiative. AarogyaSetu is an Indian COVID-19 mobile app, developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology for contact tracing launched in India on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020., syndromic mapping and self-assessment and now being used for the registration for COVID vaccination.

Only half of the respondents agreed for the statement that The central government is doing enough in managing the outbreak during this epidemic period and there were mixed responses for the statement that The central government is doing enough in providing financial/material support to citizens during this epidemic period for their livelihood as 14% strongly agreed, 23% agreed, 30% were neutral and so on. The results of an online survey (N=216) highlighted lack of adequate medical facilities, equipment as the major cause of worry among respondents. There is a need to scale-up public health facilities, the number of beds and doctors, medical supplies, medication and treatment packages for public health emergencies when looking at the severity of COVID-19 (Changoiwala P., 2020)

## 6. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major global humanitarian and economic crisis, creating service mega disruptions (Tuzovic, S., & Kabadayi, S. (2020). The influence of social distancing on employee well-being: A conceptual framework and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management*.). The present study analysed the perception of Indian public towards the government intervention during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The study also establishes that the Coronavirus pandemic has made the individuals worried in terms of cure, medical facilities, death and quarantine which had adverse effects on respondents. The unprecedented lockdown for Coronavirus remains a lesson and a warning to the entire world particularly those who are yet to embrace or adopt emerging learning technologies that support their livelihood or education. All of the respondents were aware of COVID-19 outbreak and majority consider it a serious public health concern but some took the threat posed by the outbreak not so seriously and were partially following recommendations

by government and health experts to always wear facemasks in certain settings and to practice social distancing. Gaps were identified in the knowledge of the respondents particularly in terms of the government rules and regulation during the pandemic as there were mixed responses to the government initiative taken during the pandemic.

## 7. Future Prospects

The lockdown across the country have shown that uncertainty is a big problem for policy making. However, some important policies can be made for development. India is facing a huge challenge in form of COVID. There should be proper articulation of government guidelines and advisories for policy framework. Each and every government office at local level should be proactive. As most people worried about the lack of cure during the pandemic, the vaccination program should be done on faster scale with proper precaution. India should establish a good infrastructure for better medical facilities and equipment following some of the advanced countries as Lack of adequate medical facilities/equipment was the most responded cause of worry during COVID-19. Indian government should build enough storage houses to store the food grains to deal with these pandemic as this pandemic forced millions of migrant workers to undergo an uncertain future without food. As majority of the people agreed that fine for not wearing the mask is a good step therefore strict rules should be made for following the norms of the pandemic like social distancing and compulsory mask wearing. Medical colleges should be increased and should properly train doctors so that they could contribute more during these type of pandemic as one of the worry among the respondents were the lack of adequate medical personnel.

## 8. Limitations

Limitations of the study include its cross-sectional design and relatively limited response rate, meaning that the full range of perceptions and concerns relating to the pandemic may not have been captured. Due to the nature of COVID-19 which imposes people to physically and socially distance from one another, we collected data using an online survey. These Google forms techniques have some limitations such as there is a possibility that participants might have not disclosed their true intentions and rather have responded in a more socially acceptable and desirable way. Government sudden response to the COVID-19 disadvantaged Indian populations. Sudden lockdown enforcement on 23rd March 2020 forced millions of migrant workers to undergo an uncertain future without family, food, and job. The lockdown had an additional impact on the economy, human life and the environment. Forced closure of school and colleges resulted in passing the students without the examination. Almost all the sectors faced downfalls during the implementation of lockdown during the pandemic.

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