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COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE AGED OF LUCKNOW: THE SCENARIO AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL VENTURE

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ABSTRACT

The entire world, after being seriously infected by Corona virus, is in the grip of pandemic. World Health Organization (WHO) and the government have identified elderly people as especially vulnerable to the novel coronavirus outbreak. The present intervention has been done to know about the condition of aged persons during Corona pandemic of Lucknow district and to recognize the efforts made by HelpAge India to aware the elderly population about the Covid-19 Pandemic and help them. The research includes an online survey through 'Google Form' of the randomly selected 41 non-institutionalized aged persons of 55 years age or above, including 32 males and 9 females. The survey was conducted in the month of June and July. Apart, the researchers have collected information about HelpAge India's COVID-19 Awareness Program for older people through various primary and secondary sources of data collection as they have also participated in it. It is found that during the Corona phase, many elderly people, especially those who live alone, feel isolated and vulnerable to depression. It has become very important to connect them with their close persons through virtual mediums. HelpAge India is continuously making efforts in this direction and trying to help the older persons under the guidelines of the Government and hence proved its aim to care about the aged.

Key Words: Covid-19, Pandemic, Aged, Awareness

1. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus outbreak came to light on December 31, 2019 when China informed the World Health Organization of a cluster of cases of Pneumonia of an unknown cause in Wuhan City in Hubei Province. Subsequently the disease spread to more Provinces in China and to the rest of the world. The WHO has then declared it a 'Pandemic'. The virus has been named 'SARS-CoV-2' and the disease is now called 'COVID-19' (Prasad, 2020).

Now the entire planet, after being seriously infected by Corona virus, is in the grip of pandemic. World Health Organization (WHO) and the government have identified elderly people as especially vulnerable to the novel coronavirus outbreak. Covid-19 has been found to have more fatal among elderly people with existing health problems such as those related to lungs, heart, kidney or if they have diabetes or have had cancer and HIV infection (Dutta, 2020).

India is struggling to survive during the COVID 19 lockdown. Senior citizens have been the hardest affected because they are the most fragile, particularly those over 80 years of age who are at high risk of succumbing to COVID 19.

However, the Government of India is taking a variety of steps to fight against Corona. Despite, there is so much still to be done, as number of infected persons is increasing continuously. Presently, in November 2020, India is on second position in the Global Corona Virus Index, as here total caseload has become the world's second-largest. So far, a large chunk of India's Covid-19 cases have come from five states: Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, followed by Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh (The New York Times, 2020).

The virus is not just threatening the lives and safety of older people, while it is also threatening their social networks, their access to health services and their livelihood. The aged, especially those who are over 80 years of age or are living alone, are at risk of being affected by physical distancing measures. Prolonged periods of isolation may have a serious effect on the mental health of older persons, as they are less friendly with digital world.

The present intervention has been done to know about the condition of aged persons of Lucknow district during Corona pandemic and to know about the efforts make by HelpAge India to aware them about the Covid-19 Pandemic and help them in this critical period.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research includes an online survey of the elderly in the month of June and July, when prolonged Corona lockdown in India has been affected the daily life and mental and physical conditions of elderly population. The survey has been conducted online as any fieldwork could not be possible due to the threat of the pandemic. The sample of the survey was randomly selected 41 non-institutionalized aged persons of 55 years age or above of Lucknow district, including 32 males and 9 females. During the survey, firstly the telephonic conversation has been done with aged persons to convey the purpose of the study, than 'Google Form', an online free survey administration application, was sent to the respondents. The form included twenty four questions related to their personal information, present condition during Corona period and their awareness regarding the pandemic. Since, most of the aged are not friendly with virtual platforms; the researchers had helped them telephonically to fill the online survey form. Apart, the researchers have collected information about HelpAge India's COVID-19 Awareness Program for Older people through various primary and secondary sources of data collection.

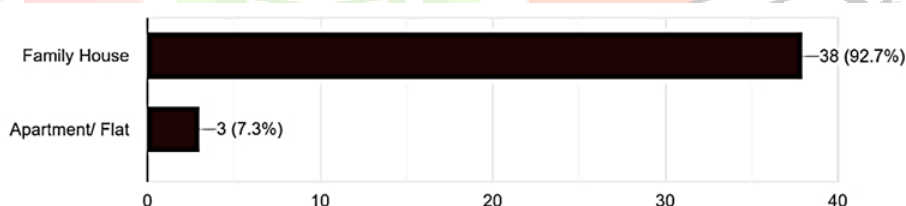
3. DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS OF ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey has been done to get information about the emotional, health and financial conditions of the aged, their awareness about pandemic and strategy to fight with this contaminated life threatening disease –Corona -19, so that to know about the present situation of older people.

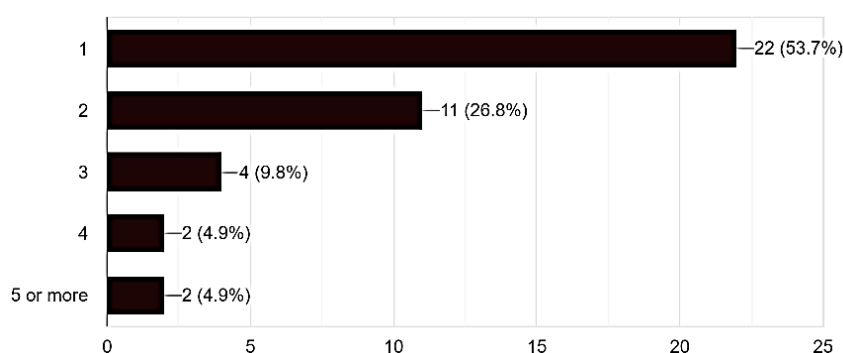
Forty one elderly people participated voluntarily in this survey, in which 78% were male and 22% were female. Of these, 68.3% people were living in the city and 31.7% were the residents of the villages.

Figure 1: Home Situation

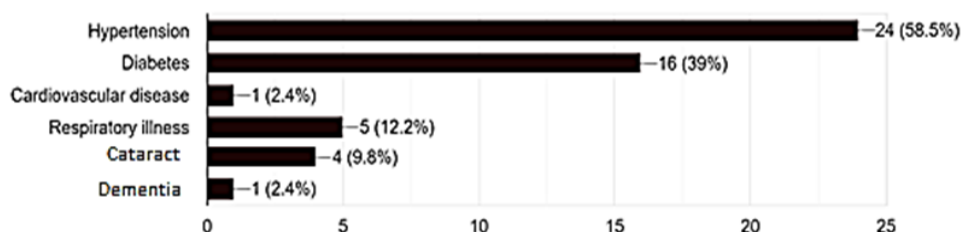


According to the Figure 1, 92.7% aged respondents were living in family house, either own or rented, while 7.3% were living in in flat or apartment.

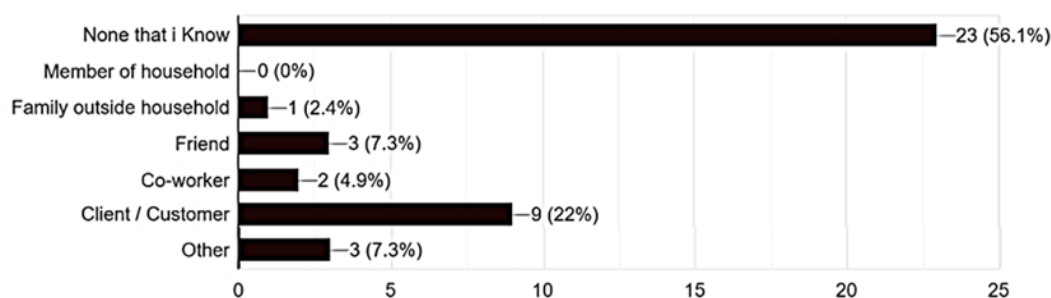
Figure 2: Number of Aged Person in the Family



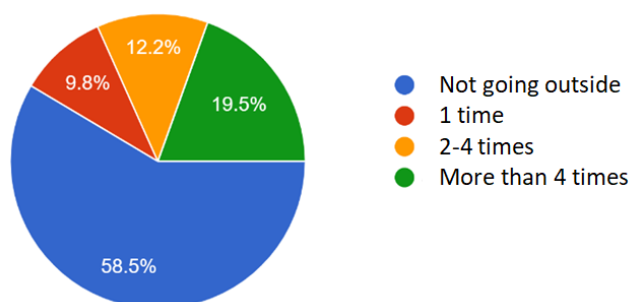
In 53.7% families of the respondents only 1 aged person was living, followed by 26.8% with 2 older people and 9.8% with 3 aged persons in their family. The percentage of the families with 4 aged persons and 5 or more aged persons was the same i.e. 4.9% (Figure 2).

Figure 3: The Aged with High Risk

Overall, 78% aged were at the high risk of health problems due to Covid-19 infection as they were suffering from some ailments and diseases. Of these, majority of the aged were the patient of hypertension (58.5%), followed by those who were diabetic (39%) and were suffering from respiratory illness (12.2%); while, 9.8% respondents had reported the problem of cataract, 2.4% reported cardiovascular diseases and 2.4% reported dementia (Figure 3). Even, of these all 78% aged persons, 7.1% were used to smoking. Only 22% respondents not informed any serious health issue, hence were not at high risk.

Figure 4: Physical Contact with Corona Infected Person

According to Figure 4, majority of aged people (56.1%) reported that they or their family had no physical contact with any person suffering from Covid-19, but according to 22% of the respondents, their client or customer had infection with Corona virus and they had also come in contact with them or their family members. 7.3% persons reported Covid-19 infection in their friends and 4.9% in co-workers to whom they or their family came in physical contact. Only 2.4% aged were come in contact with someone infected person from their family who is living outside the household. No one had reported corona infection in his/her household.

Figure 5: Daily Outside Visit during Lockdown

Majority of the elderly people (58.5%) did not go outside of the home during the lockdown. 9.8% went outside 1 time in a day and 12.2% went 2-4 times in a day; while 19.5% elderly said that they go outside for 5 or more times in a day, as of these, mostly were living alone, that's why they had to go several times outside from home to fulfill their needs (Figure 5).

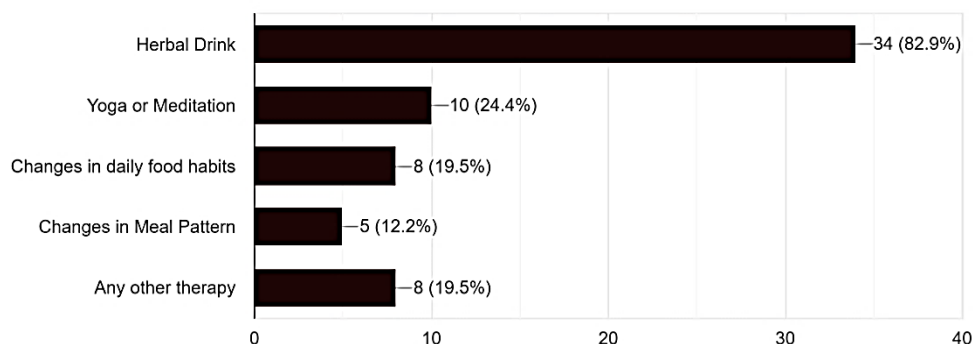
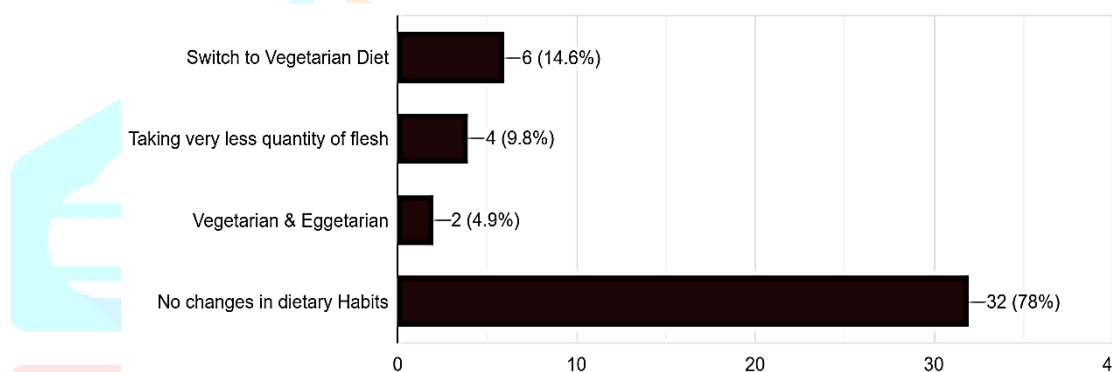
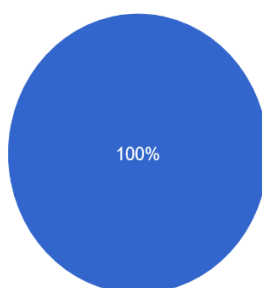
Figure 6: Changes in Life Style to Improve Immunity

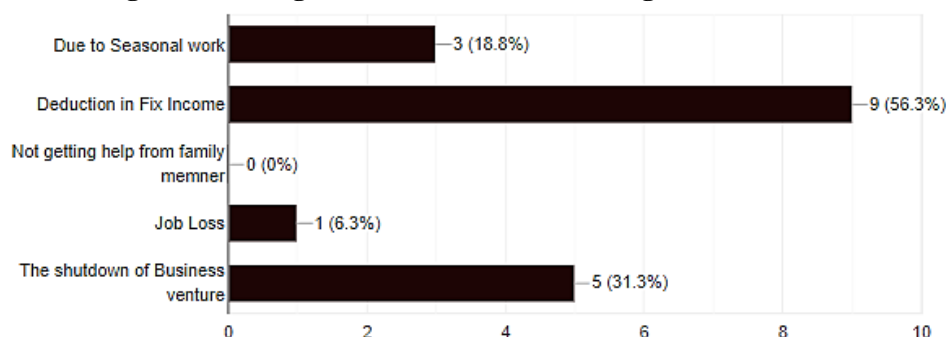
Figure 6 reveals the changes opted by the aged respondents to improve their immune system with special reference to Covid-19. According to it, overwhelming majority of the aged persons (82.9%) had started intake of herbal tea/*Tulsi* tea in their daily routine, followed by 24.4% respondents who had started yoga and meditation to strengthen and improve their immune system. While, 19.5% and 12.2% of elderly people changed their daily food habits and meal pattern respectively. 19.5% had started other therapies, such as use of Ayurveda medicine like *Ashwagandha* and *Giloye* etc. to improve their immune system.

Figure 7: Changes in Dietary Habits in Last Three Months

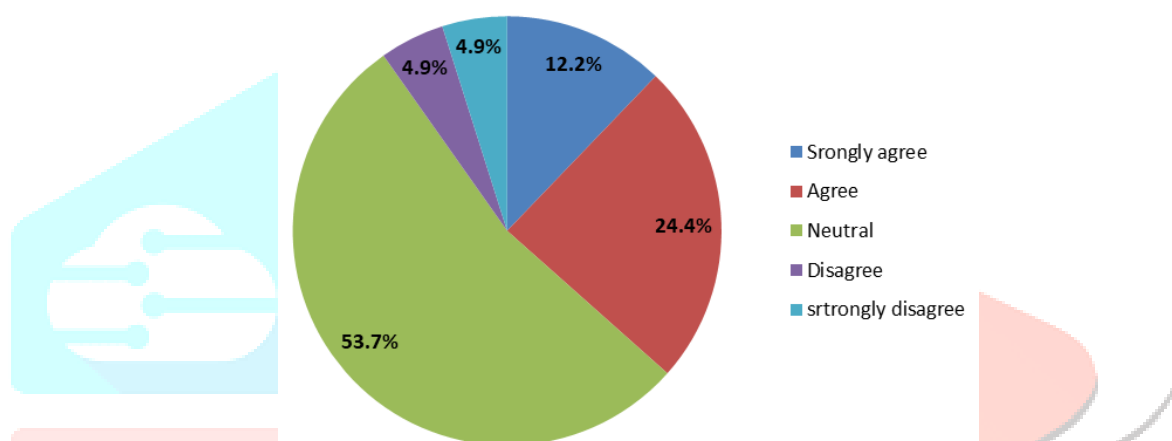
According to Figure 7, in the last 3 months, many elderly people had made changes in their dietary habits. 14.6% aged persons had switched to vegetarian diet and 9 % reduced the intake of non-vegetarian food to reduce the risk of Corona infection. 4.9% have opted vegetarian diet with egg intake. While, maximum aged people (78%) did not make any changes in their diet.

Figure 7: Downloaded 'Arogya Setu App'

In the present survey, it is found that all the elderly respondent had downloaded the 'Arogya Setu App' in his mobile phone as per government instruction (Figure 7).

Figure 8: Facing Economic Problems during Covid-19 Phase

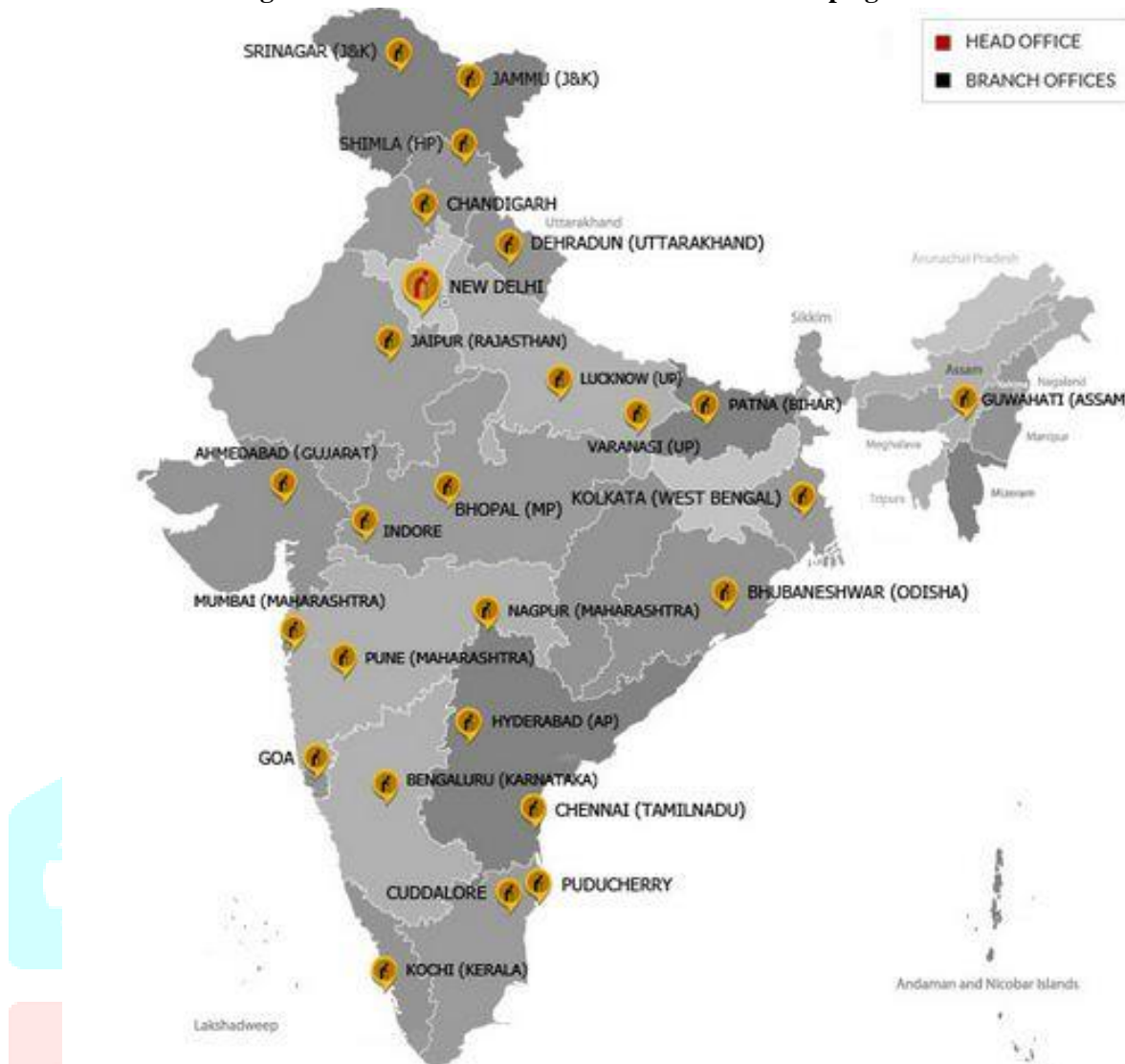
During the COVID-19 lockdown, many older people were facing financial problems. It is found that 56.3% of elderly people were experiencing deduction in income problems and 31.3% of the respondents were experiencing high losses in their business venture and because of it they had to close their business. 18.8% respondents are related to seasonal work which is now totally affected by Corona phase. While, there was only 1 older person who lost his job (Figure 8).

Figure 9: Satisfaction about Government Efforts towards Corona Pandemic

Overall 36.6% aged respondents were satisfied with the efforts made by the Government of to counter Covid-19, of these, 24.4% were agreed with the steps taken, followed by 12.2% who were strongly agreed. But, 9.8% elderly people were not satisfied in this direction, including 4.9% disagreed and 4.9% strongly disagreed. While, the response of 53.7% older people was neutral, i.e. neither they were fully satisfied nor fully dissatisfied (Figure 9).

3.2 HELPAGE INDIA

Help age India is secular, non-profit organization registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860. This organization was set up in 1978, and since then they have been raising resources to protect the rights of India's elderly and provide relief to them through various interventions. They advocate with national and local government to bring about policy that is beneficial to the elderly. They make society aware of the concerns of the aged and promote better understanding of ageing issues. Also help the elderly become aware of their own rights so that they get their due and are able to play an active role in society. HelpAge India has offices throughout India (Figure 10) and works in the fields of health, social protection and disasters. Its head office is at New Delhi (HelpAge India, 2017).

Figure 10: Head Office and Branch Offices of HelpAge India

Source: All About NGO. n.d.

3.3 PROGRAMS OF HELPAGE INDIA

Though over the last few decades the focus India has primarily been on the destitute elder, ensuring that the underprivileged elderly is reached through its various services in the areas of financial, health and emotional security, there is now a growing focus on the disadvantaged urban elderly people as well. HelpAge is also slowly moving from welfare to development services for the elderly in urban & rural areas (Figure 11). In rural India it is mainly concentrating on long term sustainability of programs, while in urban India it is focusing on active life of elderly population and urges them to ‘Get Active, Stay Active’.

HelpAge runs following various programs for the welfare and development of rural and urban elderly population in India:

- Mobile Health Care
- Cataract Care
- Cancer Care
- Elder’s Self-Help Group
- Disaster Response
- Specialized Geriatric Care
- Advantage – Active Ageing Centers
- Physiocare
- Advantage – Benefits Cards for Elders
- Digital Literacy Program for Elder
- SOS App for Senior Citizens

- Elder Helpline
- Rights & Entitlements Programs

Figure 11: Milestones in the Journey of HelpAge India



3.4 BRANCH OFFICE AT LUCKNOW

A branch of HelpAge India is located in 3/129, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (Figure 12). The branch is presently headed by Mr. A.K. Singh, State Director, HelpAge India. There are various staff members working for the welfare and development of elderly people including Deputy Director, Senior Programme Manager, Helpline Counselor, Physiotherapist and Assistant Physiotherapist etc.. Apart, several volunteers and interns always assist in providing services to the aged. This branch is Headquarter of Uttar Pradesh. HelpAge India, Lucknow branch, runs so many programs for the aged:

- Advantage Card Programme
- Associate Tie-ups for Elder
- Rescue Services
- Work against Abuse
- Physiotherapy for Elders
- Health Camps
- Organization of Events for Fund Raising
- Free Services in 'Lucknow Mahotsav'
- Digital Literacy Programme
- COVID-19 Awareness Programme

Figure 12: Branch Office, HelpAge India, Lucknow



3.5 ROLE OF HELPAGE INDIA DURING PANDEMIC

On 24 March, 2020, firstly the Government of India declared a nationwide lockdown for twenty one days. After that, lockdown was continued in five phases and then the unlock phases have been started. With each phases rules and regulation were changing to prevent the 1.3 billion population from Corona virus. HelpAge India is always ready to help senior citizen at any time. In this critical situation of pandemic, HelpAge India is continuously distributing the essential items like mask, sanitizer, health kit, ration and other food items to institutionalized aged, migrant and older labourer and other needy persons with maintaining social distancing (Figure 13, 14, 15, 16).

Figure13: Distribution of Ration and Other Essential Items to Slum Dwellers at Community Center, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, April 24, 2020



Figure 14: Distribution of Ration and Other Essential Items in Old Age Home, Sarojini Nagar, Lucknow, May 6, 2020



Figure 15: Distribution of Hygienic Kits to Migrants & Elderly people at Madiyon Village, Jankipuram, Lucknow, June 21, 2020.



Figure 16: Distribution of Ration to Elderly Persons at Vimla International School, Lucknow, July 10, 2020.

To help the elderly population in other ways, HelpAge India initiated COVID-19 Awareness Program for Older people. Under this programme, firstly online surveys of elderly people were conducted. This awareness program was operational from home with seven days a week. Awareness programme is operated by trained helpline counselors supported by volunteers and social work professionals and interns. They also connected the doctors, psychologists and dietitians in their online programmes. Several healthcare and digital literacy webinars have been organized. For instance, 'COVID-19 & Health of Senior Citizens: Impact & Way Forward' was an online health care webinar which was conducted by HelpAge India on National Level. 'Corona, Senior & Health' online Webinar conducted by the Lucknow branch of HelpAge India (Figure 17). In which Chief Physician and Dietitian from KGMC, Lucknow, and several elderly people participated. Every member, volunteers, interns and related personnel of the organization, including the researchers, directly or indirectly, contributed to aware the elderly people about different dimensions related to Covid-19 Pandemic through different virtual platforms. All the success in COVID-19 Awareness Programme was based on the Digital Literacy Programme of the organization (Figure 18). The NGO has a toll-free HelpAge Senior Citizen Helpline (1800-180-1253) which offers assistance to older persons in need of care and protection. Through the toll-free Helpline the outreach has been possible. Through this helpline number, older people address their emergency needs during the quarantine and lockdown, such as groceries, medicines and other daily needs. Through Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms, efforts have been made to aware aged people.

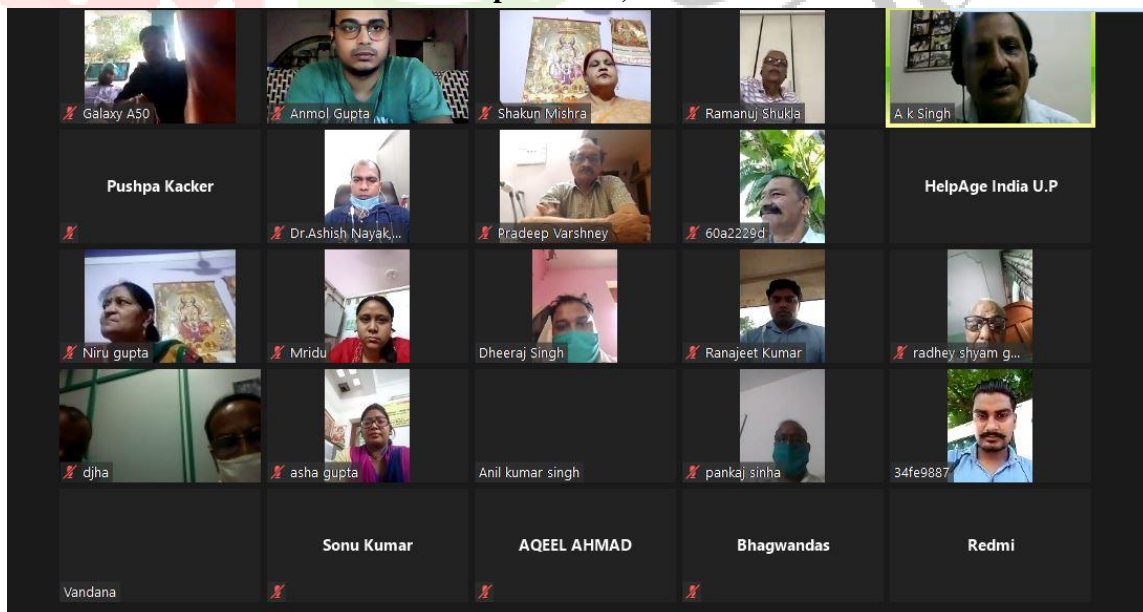
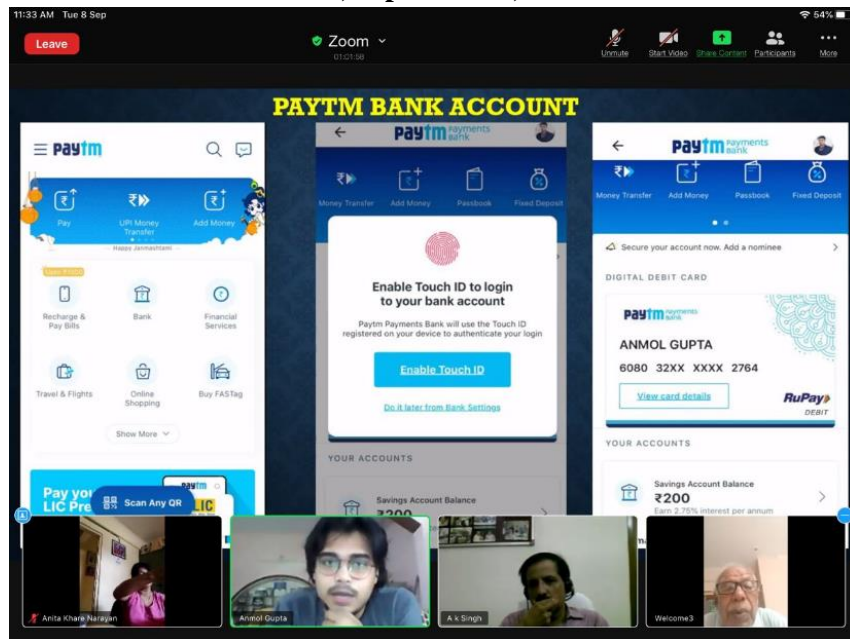
Figure 17: 'Corona, Senior & Health' online Webinar conducted by the Lucknow Branch of HelpAge India, September 3, 2020

Figure 18: Online Webinar under 'Digital Literacy Programme' conducted by the Lucknow Branch of HelpAge India, September 8, 2020.



4. CONCLUSION

During the Corona phase, many elderly people, especially those who live alone, feel isolated and vulnerable to depression. General activities like morning walk, shopping or meeting with grandchildren has become limited. In case of most of the aged, part-time daily help is also no longer coming to their homes, which is adding both physical and mental stress. Therefore, it is very important to connect them with their close persons through phone, email, Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meet and Facebook etc. Youngsters must be encouraged to spend time with their grandparents or elderly parents and to train them about digital literacy. This not only helps an elderly to be comfortable and independent in the long term, but it also helps to overcome the depression and mental stress. There is something that can be done better behind closed doors and HelpAge India is continuously making efforts in this direction. During the pandemic, the organization is trying to help the older persons through helpline number, awareness drive, distribution of family survival kit, and protective hygiene kit and supply of medicines under the guidelines of the Government and hence proved its aim to care about the aged.

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