

College Youth and Their Response during COVID-19

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In India the first case of COVID 19 was reported on 30th January 2020 and as of now has the third highest number of confirmed cases in the world after the United States and Brazil. India's case fatality rate 2.49% is among the lowest in the world and recoveries exceeded active cases for the first time. In Maharashtra there are nearly one-third of the total cases in the country with fatality rate of nearly 3.55%. Nagpur in Vidarbha witnessed the first case on 11th March, and on 31st July 5392, confirmed cases with fatality rate of 2.33%. The Prime Minister appealed for public curfew on 22nd March and was followed by nationwide lockdown in three phases till May 31. Phase wise unlocking with barring affected areas started from 1st June. The purpose of the paper is to understand the problems faced by the people during COVID-19 and to present challenges and learnings for Social Work Practice through personal experiences and observations. This paper is based on observations and personal experiences during COVID 19 work with affected people through National Service Scheme programmes (NSS) conducted and coordinated in four districts under the jurisdiction of the University. The main observations are that in the beginning there was less awareness among the people, more fear of Corona and less infection. After two months from the declared onset, people became more aware of Corona, less fearful and more infected cases surfaced. I held an additional duty as part of the university's National Service Scheme volunteer program. This paper is the result of working with the Volunteers and through them with the communities, through both online and offline responses in prevention and mitigation work around Covid 19. The challenges in this work were identified as non-cooperation from the general public, duplication and multiplication of the services, lack of ICT skills in the masses, lack of resources and limited response from Social Work Institutes. All participants which includes myself, were participant volunteers in the government program. Our personal experiences and observations taught us that usage of networking, collaborative team work and application of social work methods are very important in reaching the pre-set goals in a crisis driven pandemic community re-organisation.

Key words: *COVID-19, NSS, Social Work Practice, College Youth*

Introduction

The following paragraphs introduce chronological occurrence of Covid 19 cases and its spread in India, Maharashtra and in the district of Nagpur. The quick spread of the Covid is also brought out. The first case of COVID-19 was reported on 30th January 2020 in India. India currently has the largest number of confirmed cases in Asia, and has the third highest number of confirmed cases in the world after the United States and Brazil with the number of total confirmed cases breaching the 16,667,460 mark with 656,978 deaths on 28th July 2020 (WHO). India's case fatality rate as of 23 July 2020 with 2.49% is among the lowest in the world. Six cities, i.e. Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Pune and Kolkata account for around half of all reported cases in the country. India's recoveries exceeded active cases for the first time (India, 2020).

The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in Maharashtra was confirmed on 9 March 2020. Maharashtra is a hotspot that accounts for nearly one-third of the total cases in India and about 40% of all deaths. As of 31 July, Maharashtra has 422118 confirmed cases with 14994 deaths and fatality rate is nearly 3.55%, which is lower than the global average but significantly higher than other Indian states (Chaudhary, 2020).

On 11 March, Nagpur, witnessed first COVID-19 confirmed case of a person who returned from the United States. On 13 March, his wife and friend were also diagnosed with the virus. On 27th March there were 14 cases in Vidarbha region which includes 11 districts and the first COVID-19 death on 5th April 2020. As on 31st July 2020 there were 14975 confirmed cases and 4062 active cases with 387 (2.58%) deaths in Vidarbha. In Nagpur district on 31st July there were 5392 confirmed and 1915 active cases with 126 (2.33%) deaths. On 10th of July the fatality rate was 0.95% and within next 20 days it has reached to 2.33% (Chaitanya, 2020).

On 22 March, India observed a 14-hour voluntary public curfew at the instance of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was followed by mandatory lockdowns in COVID-19 hotspots and all major cities. Further, on 24 March, the Prime Minister ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, affecting the entire 1.3 billion-person population of India. On 14 April, the Indian Government extended the nationwide lockdown till 3 May which was followed by two-week extension starting 17 May with substantial relaxations. From 1 June, the government started "unlocking" the country barring affected areas ("*containment zones*") in three different unlock phases. Containment zones were defined by the affect and spread of COVID-19 cases found in those geographical areas. Natural movement was restricted for people (The Indian Express Service, 2020). This national definition was utilised in the State of Maharashtra. To curb the rising number of coronavirus cases in Nagpur city a 2-day 'Janta curfew' a self-imposed lockdown or public curfew meant to encourage people to practice physical distancing, and to keep away from crowds and stay at home as much as possible began on Saturday with people displaying acceptable levels of compliance. Establishments such as standalone shops,



neighbourhood shops and the Government Machinery of fire, law & order, emergency services, institutions including Non-Governmental Institutions dealing in essential items like food, medicine, masks, surgical masks, sanitizers, fertilizers etc were permitted to open (Times Now Digital, 2020).

Structure of the paper

This paper presents an overview of the problems faced by the people during COVID-19 and deliberates on learning for social work practice through personal experiences and observations. It narrates personal experiences while working with CORONA affected people in Nagpur and the adjacent rural districts in Maharashtra namely Bhandara, Gondia and Wardha. Following the context and initial introduction to the onset of Covid in India, and Maharashtra, the paper presents its first section on the NSS program and its objectives.

1.0 National Service Scheme (NSS):

The National Service Scheme (NSS) is a Central Sector Scheme of Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. NSS was started in 1969 and completed 50 years of its establishment. Today, NSS is the largest network of youth in the country and whole world and celebrating its fiftieth year of existence by involving various universities, colleges and Institutions of higher learning that have volunteered to take part in various community service initiatives. Through NSS opportunities are provided to college going young adults in the age group of 15- 25 and studying in grades 11 and 12 and others who are undertaking tertiary studies in colleges and universities.

Including post graduate students in the university systems, the young have various government led community service activities & programmes for their personality development. The sole aim of the NSS is to provide hands on experience to young students in delivering community service and provide opportunities for their personality development. The grand design and Motto of the NSS is “Not Me But You” and to exhort the youth through NSS as volunteers available 24*7 in nation’s service and in diverse situations. The goal of the provision of hands on experience to the youth consists of (1). Regular Activities and (2). Special Camps is executed throughout the country (India, National Service Scheme, 2020).

Under the banner of regular activities of NSS the young people spend a minimum 240 hours in a period of two years to receive certification from NSS. Regular activities are conducted by the Institutions and Colleges where they are studying may include celebration of various days of social importance such as the International Yoga Day, World Environment Day, Gandhi Birth Anniversary, Communal Harmony Day. Target base Sapling Plantation, Digital India Awareness Campaign, Mass Pledge Programmes on Tobacco Free Youth, Spitting Free India Movement, Health Check-up, Dental Check-ups in the neighbourhoods, Blood Donation



campus, Health Awareness camps, Energy Conservation, Road Safety, Open Defecation Free, Self Defence Training, Organ Donation Awareness, Save the Girl Campaign, voter awareness etc are the other activities conducted under regular activities of the NSS.

Every year 50% of volunteers enrolled in a unit are expected to take part in 7-day residential Special Camps to be organized in adopted villages/slums/areas and undertake community development programme/ creation of durable assets/awareness campaign/Medical Camps/Construction of Vanrai Bhandara/Agriculture Ponds. Special Camps are organized on main themes like Clean India Campaign, Education, Health, Environment, disaster management, rural development, water management etc. Adventure Camps, Summer Mega Camps, Workshops on Life Skill Development and Career Counselling, Republic Day Parade Selection Camps are organised at State and National levels (RTM Nagpur University, 2019). Since the inception of the NSS in the year 1969, the number of students increased from 40,000 to over 4.0 million and more than 50,000 Programme Officers from more than 40,000 colleges coordinate this program through 12 Regional Directorates in the country. (India, National Service Scheme, 2020). Maharashtra State comes under NSS Regional Directorate, Pune. In each state head of the NSS is the State NSS Officer (SNO) under control of the Higher and Technical Education Ministry of the state of Maharashtra, and is at Mumbai. At University level, the Programme Coordinator (in Maharashtra State is designated as Director) reports to the Vice Chancellor of the University (Government of Maharashtra, 2017). District Coordinators at each district level do the NSS activity coordination and under them Area Coordinators per 10 -12 colleges are appointed for proper monitoring of the NSS work. At College or Institute level an academic is appointed as a NSS Programme Officer to oversee the conduct of NSS activities under the guidance of Principals or rectors of the colleges and with the involvement of college youth (Government of Maharashtra, 2019).

At Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University level, I (author) am the Director of National Service Scheme and report to the Vice Chancellor, Registrar and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University. In Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, there are 26800 NSS volunteers and 350 college teachers (NSS Programme Officers) in 244 Colleges from four districts (Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia and Wardha). Major NSS programmes conducted by the NSS are, National Integration Camp (NIC), Adventure Camps, Republic Day Parade, National Youth Festivals at all India level. **AVHAN** (Disaster Management Training Camp) on behalf of His Excellency, the Governor of Maharashtra State, is organised during the begins in the first week of June and is held for 10 days. More recently around 1400 college youth, 30 youth from each district of the state took part in the camp. The camp trained youth then are now attached to the Disaster Cell of each district and are expected to contribute and support the District Disaster during calamities of floods, fires, earthquakes or any other forms of disasters, **PRERNA**-(Leadership Development Camp for 5 days more recently saw 200 volunteers from the state of Maharashtra and were given instruction and coaching in self-awareness, confidence building, motivation, effective communication, public speaking, life

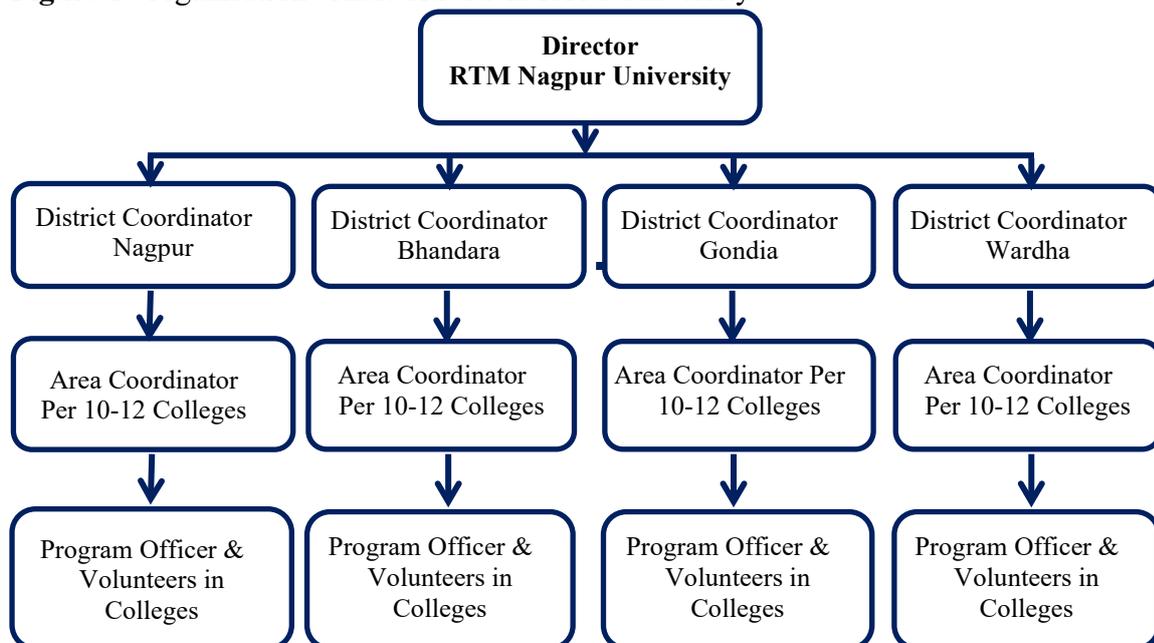
skills development by distinguished and successful people. Yet another activity of NSS is UTKARSH – an Interuniversity Socio-Cultural Competition where 9 boys and 9 girls with 1 Contingent leader from each University take part in a larger state wide event.

Each year 16-18 Universities as a team take part in various cultural events. Solo and group performances based on some social messages are performed and through these platforms that draw on the latent talents of youth (RTM Nagpur University, 2019). NSS always works in collaboration with the Government, Non-Government systems and support them in delivering their services to the community. NSS support these systems in creating awareness among the masses about various services available for them. In emergencies NSS volunteers are always ahead in rendering their services in actual fields. In the next section, I will explain the management of volunteers and the sequence of events through the university administration and in consultation with the district administration.

NSS districtwide organisation in Covid 19

The educational institutions such as colleges in the four districts of Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia and Wardha come under the working jurisdiction of the Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University. Beginning in the last week of March and moving into April COVID-19 cases surged in the state of Maharashtra and affected these four districts s as well as detailed in (Figure.1) below.

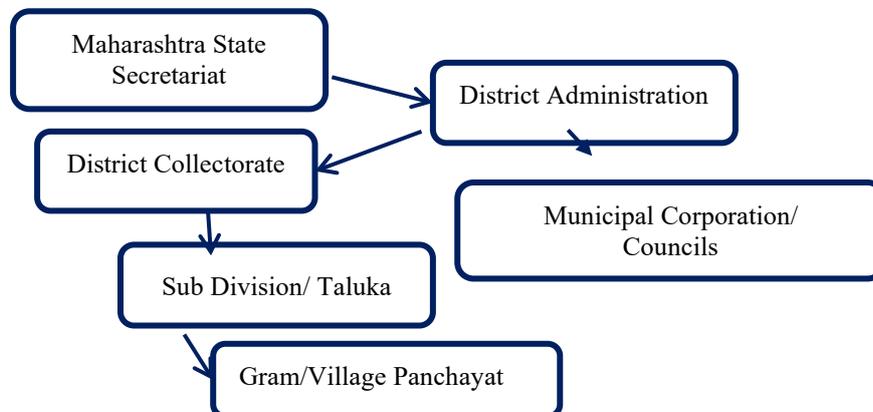
Figure 1. Organisation Chart of NSS in RTM University



District Collectors are responsible and accountable for handling the COVID-19 situation in their districts via Disaster Management Cells (Disaster Management Cells attached to District

Collector Offices. Disaster Management Cell is an independent system available at every district level for handling any natural calamities such as floods, fires, earthquakes etc and pandemic situations, e.g. COVID-19). In Nagpur district, being a Local Government body, Nagpur Municipal Corporation has been made responsible for handling the COVID-19 situation and entrusted with taking decisions regarding Nagpur City. The rural part of the Nagpur district was under control of the Nagpur District Collector. A network of young volunteers in these four districts was considered a big blessing by the people and the district administration. The district administration in the State of Maharashtra is depicted in Figure 2 as follows.

Figure 2. The district Administration in Maharashtra



The above figure explains the way these volunteers percolate down to the coal face to the block or village level and reach the masses for undertaking awareness promotion schemes and serve people in need. Consequently, during the current Pandemic, the local administration (District, requested NSS for their services. Officers from Nagpur Municipal Corporation held online meetings and discussions on what the college youth could do (NSS Volunteers) in prevention and mitigation of COVID-19. Likewise, meetings with local administration in all four districts were also held.

Similar meetings with the University Officials were held and around 350 college lecturers (NSS Programme Officers) from nearly 245 colleges were contacted online for these briefings and tasks assigned. The NSS volunteers were deployed voluntarily with written parental consent as many of them are also under the age of 18, a legal age under which it is a requirement to obtain parental consent. As the pandemic was spreading, informed consent was obtained twice at the beginning in the month of March and April with information to parents and the larger community of the risks involved in taking part in the campaign. Additionally, it was also decided to involve volunteers online for creating awareness about COVID-19 through messages, posters and videos in social media of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram etc. and also offline message platforms where physical involvement of the volunteers is not needed and they need not work directly on the field. For those working in the field proper orientation on social distancing and related precautionary hygienic measures were imparted. In the following



section, I present a descriptive account of the activities and observations made (NSS Director within the University), as I was personally involved in implementing. My observations are divided into five categories 1. Urban Communities; 2. Rural Communities; 3. Tribal/Indigenous Communities; 4. Communities Affected with Wildlife Projects and 5. Migrant Workers.

2.0 Observations during COVID-19:

2.1 Urban Communities:

Urban communities were impacted by loss of employment, livelihood and businesses. Schools and colleges were closed and their examinations were postponed and most of the students and their parents were at a loss about when they could ever be opened and when they could return to classes. Rumours, and confusion was let loose in the area. University Grants Commission (UGC) at the national level advised the states to conduct examinations of final year students but the state governments in the country were making their local decisions based on their efficacies and the ground level realities of the spread of the virus. Maharashtra State government was unwilling to conduct the examinations due to the risk of infection among the students and the fear of further spread into the community. Due to the lockdown, only those who work for the state government received wages or salaries. All others in small businesses and local level employment faced loss of employment and loss of wages. The daily wage earners (inter-state migrants) managed to remit left over amounts to their families and dependants in their native villages. Most of these migrant workers were attached to the hospitality industry such as hotels in addition to working as cleaners. Migrant Women who work as house maids and in building industry as construction workers, were also asked to not return to work anymore. Life for them without wages has become hell. They began facing difficulties in getting food rations due to a variety of reasons. As there were no wages, they could not afford to buy their groceries from small commercial outlets. Additionally, as they do not possess a ration card that serves as an identity to purchase food items with government recognised shops, they could not avail any government subsidies.

Consequently, the Government, voluntary agencies and the NSS entered in. Those that had no means to purchase food were served food packets from voluntary organization and local administration. No one was sleeping hungry or without food. Nearly 72 community kitchens were run by the voluntary organizations and nearly 100, 000 people were receiving food packets. In the beginning the food distribution system was chaotic and there was an oversupply and also over distribution, but this was soon corrected. Due to lockdown and loss of employment, people also resorted to taking as much as they could get as they were worried about the next day and day after. One could read fatigue, anxiety and stress which is also recognised across the world in the urban scenario. Although, there were plenty of food and essential goods and materials, due to loss of employment among the low-income earners there



was very little that they could buy and thus turned to places where the food packs were being distributed.

2.2 Rural Communities:

Rural communities during COVID-19 were less CORONA infected and more affected. Landless farm labour was impacted as the landed gentry had no more work to offer due to failure as they could not take their produce to the markets. Local farmers were able to cultivate in the field but due to lockdown were unable to sell. Much fruit and vegetable produce had to rot in the field. The interstate migrants that went to the cities and towns for employment were unable to stay in those cities due to lack of guaranteed employment and began returning to villages as an exodus. They feared the 14-day Quarantine regulation and its dreadful consequences on their life. They also nursed a fear of villagers to which they belong, on whether they would accept them naturally as they were returning from Nagpur, Mumbai and even the interstate capital. To exacerbate further, employment within the villages was thinning down as producers' markets were shut down and the local villagers themselves were looking for help.

2.3 Tribal Communities:

Tribal Communities that dwell in forest regions were not infected by CORONA however, like the rural residents they too were affected. Tribal communities are dependent on Minor Forest Products (MFPs). Due to the lockdown, their livelihood and economy went down. They pick and collect Tendu leaves and are expected to trade them. Tendu, locally known as Indigenous to India, also known as Coromandel ebony or East Indian ebony, a medicinal plant popularly used in natural medicine. Picking and collecting of these leaves in the forest areas is not an easy task as women mostly, are exposed to attacks by wild animals and tropical insects. The lockdown stopped the town contractors from visiting the forest dwellers or for the forest dwellers to bring their produce to the farmer's markets. The tribal elders also did not wish this that their communities were exposed to CORONA.

It is estimated that every year the tribal people and forest dwellers collect two trillion Rupees worth (roughly 27,070,962,000 US Dollars' worth of non-timber forest products (NTFP) from the country's forests (Joshi, 2020). Each year during March to June (4 Months) the communities collect forest produces such as Tendu leaves, Mahua Flowers etc. These four months are also crucial for them as the income accrued from any sales will see them through the whole year. Unfortunately, this year it has been a write-off for their forest economy and consequently, has led to social economic distress for the communities.

2.4 Communities living in Wildlife Projects areas:

Communities living in the precincts of Wildlife Project areas were also affected but were not infected. Although marked for resettlement there are communities that actually live in the core zones of the wild life project or designated sanctuaries. There are also tribal families that live in buffer zones. Certainly, families in the Core Zone areas had lost their livelihoods further more they are also unable to access to the government services as they are marked to be resettled in future. Without adequate compensations, and inordinate delays in the wheels of bureaucracy the lockdown had a heavy toll on their existence.

People from the Buffer Zone have also experienced loss of livelihood, however, being closer to the rural habitats and as they come under the jurisdictions of the state government revenue departments, hence they had received some remedial assistance. The political representatives and elites and the forest officials are attending to the concerns of families in the buffer zones. The Wildlife Projects Area Reserves are closed due to Covid and until September due to monsoons. No employment is likely to occur before October 2020. These families both in the core and the buffer zones, would survive only if assistance is maintained.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the communities affected in these areas had no idea with regards COVID-19, and are certainly lacking in access to health facilities and testing kits. That they are not affected yet is a blessing in disguise, however their food insecurity and livelihood stares at them. Due to poverty, they are on the verge of returning to unscrupulous private money lenders and this must be prevented by discerning citizens, activists and social work institutions.

2.5 Migrant Workers:

When news arrived through print and visual media that interstate migrants were passing through Nagpur City. Being a social work practitioner, and an academic, I was curious to find out what their issues are. However, I did not imagine that I would be caught up in organising food and relief for them for over a fortnight. Initially, I began visiting Kapsi Dhaba on the Nagpur- Jabalpur outer ring road in the evenings with some food packets for the migrant labourers. I saw a group of more than 100 workers moving together towards Jabalpur that is nearly 300 kilometres away, and perhaps they must walk further to reach their villages. None of them were asking for food but were busy walking as much as they could before the sun set. The food stall volunteers were asking them to stop, eat and walk again. When I enquired from those brisk walkers, I was told that they have information of a truck waiting some 30 kilometres away, and they need to reach that somehow as it would travel towards Jabalpur and if the truck driver has space, they could go for 200 kilometres. Men, women, and children with their limited baggage can walk just about 30 kilometres per day. When food packets were given, they would take but not stop to eat as they wanted to cover as much distance as possible. with them for the night. A group slept a night near Mansar. I saw some people, around 50 on cycles. One

thing I noticed was that all of the cycles were new ones. Then I saw people on trucks. There were many trucks moving on that road but I could only see four trucks with people sitting on the top of packed goods that the trucks were carrying. At the food stall, I talked to the people having a bite. During discussions I learned that they are travelling from Hyderabad (which is 500 kilometres from Nagpur!) and their intention is to get to villages beyond Jabalpur. There were only three categories of migrants (1) those that were walking and crossing 30 kms in a day; (2) on the new bicycles attempting to cycle distances of up to about 100 kms in a day and (3) there were more than 40 people seated over the loaded trucks and risking their lives to reach their destination.

I began driving my own car towards the Mansar outer ring road and stopped wherever the migrant workers stopped for rest and talked to them. Some of them began their journey, some ten days ago. Those on bicycles have been on their journey for the last 4 days and want to reach Uttar Pradesh, and a place called Gorakhpur. They said:

‘There was no option, we had to leave, Hyderabad, we paid more to buy these bicycles more than the normal price. No option. We paid 8 to 9 thousand rupees. (About 125 US dollars)’

Some of them were also worried about the forest that they were supposed to cross in the night. As I am familiar with the area, I have suggested to them to retire at Deolapar and gave them some local names and numbers and my own identity so that my contacts would provide the assistance. The people who were traveling on trucks, particularly those seated on goods and were clinching to the ties and ropes that were holding the goods, were at high risk.

They were able to convey to me their hope about reaching home and seeing their own families and their kin through their facial expressions. There was joy in their rendering. They revealed that they have been motivated to take this risk by others who have already reached their homes. The first lot of them who reached their homes were giving directions and advise as to how to reach home, and how to reach safely. I was worried about their travel. What if one of them or many of them have already contracted Covid? , They ran out of cities without being medically tested. What if enroute, they had met others such as their family members and villagers. If a single positive person reaches a village, a whole village as well as all of them who were walking/traveling together, maybe contaminated with the virus. On my part, I helped the migrant workers in getting food and other needed things such as water, medicines, and sometimes footwear etc and also supported some of them in arranging for transportation to reach their respective villages.

Response to COVID-19:

At country level, about 70% of the total NSS volunteers enrolled took part in COVID-19 related online and offline activities. More than 1.0 million ex-volunteers also got involved in

CORONA Prevention and Mitigation (Kumar, 2020). Based on the observations during my interactions and discussions with COVID-19 affected people and with the administration responsible for providing services during the pandemic, on the kind of activities to be conducted and the nature of NSS volunteers' involvement was taken. As per the decisions it was decided to respond online and offline to the COVID-19 situation under the jurisdiction of the University. Accordingly, more than 20000 NSS volunteers and 350 college teachers (NSS Programme Officers) in 244 Colleges from four districts (Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia and Wardha) were in the field to provide relief to the affected people.

The NSS volunteers' and POs' engagement in online and offline activities for CORONA prevention and mitigation are described below.

A. Online Response:

- a. ***Awareness through Social Media:*** About 20000 volunteers were involved in online awareness through social media, e.g. self-made WhatsApp messages, posters and videos on CORONA prevention and mitigation and this could reach more than 0.8 million people.
- b. ***Arogya Setu APP Downloading:*** Arogya Setu App was of much helpful in self-assessment and knowing the risk level of getting infected by the CORONA. Nearly 23000 NSS volunteers and programme officers downloaded the App and helped more than 0.125 million people in downloading the App.
- c. ***Online Training on Mask Making:*** With the help of UNICEF Maharashtra, NSS Regional Directorate and State NSS Officer state level online training on Mask Making through Zoom Webinar was organised and around 4000 volunteers got involved in face-mask making activity and were able to distribute more than 0.17 million masks free of costs.
- d. ***State level Online Webinar:*** In the society, it was noticed that the corona infected and the Corona worriers were stigmatized and discriminated. For creating awareness among the NSS volunteers and programme officers, state level online webinar on "Stigma and Discrimination" in collaboration with UNICEF, Maharashtra and 5 Universities in the region was organised. Vice Chancellors from all of the five Universities attended the webinar and guided the participants. State NSS Officer, Regional Directorate, more than 300 POs attended the webinar on zoom & more than 600 NSS volunteers attended the webinar on YouTube.

B. Offline Response:

- a. ***Human Resources Support:*** Thousands of volunteers supported local administrations such as Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils, Panchayat Samithis and Gram Panchayats and worked as a Special Police Officer / Police Mitra, Arogya Doot for Health Survey. They supported local administrations in medicine distributions, mask distribution, sanitizer distribution, maintaining physical

distancing in Banks, Ration Shops and vegetable markets. Volunteers also rendered their services at Short Shelter Homes, Quarantine Centres. More than 25 villages had been fully sanitized by the NSS volunteers.

- b. **Blood Donation:** During the COVID-19 Pandemic, more than 2000 volunteers donated blood as there was a shortage of blood due to the lockdown.
- c. **Food Grain and Cooked Food Distribution:** Nearly 7000 volunteers were involved in grocery kit distribution and more than 0.04 million families benefited from the kits. Nearly 5000 volunteers were involved in cooked food distribution and were able to reach more than 0.132 million people.
- d. **Community Kitchen:** The NSS Community Kitchen was started in Collaboration with Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) which ran for 40 days and reached up to 50000 people. Daily 1000-1500 food packets were distributed through NMC. All this was possible only with the support from the Community people and services rendered by the volunteers. They supported with all needed raw materials. NMC supported with Rice, Atta, Veg Oil and Dal. Expenses related Spices, labour charges, vegetables and cylinders was borne by the University through the Disaster Management Fund. All safety measures were taken care off. About 15 present and ex-volunteers worked tirelessly and selflessly for 40 days in two shifts and were not in direct contact with the open community. Our responsibility was to prepare the food and pack them to be distributed. Distribution was done by trained teams from the Municipal Corporation to avoid duplication and triplications and also when calls were put through via NMC helpline number. It was mandatory to call two hours before the food was needed. A list of requirements for the community and food supplied was drawn based on three categories (1). Those in sheltered Quarantine centres of the NMC where a kitchen was available at the centre only. (2). Interstate migrants unable to their respective places due to lockdown and were caught by police and kept at the shelters created by NMC. There were more than 33 shelters in the city and the exact number of people in the centre is not known. 3. Third category was of the people who were in the community but do not have ration cards because they are not entitled to get ration from the ration shop and due to the lockdown, they could not manage from what they were having. So, they turned to the NMC helpline number monitored by the Deputy Commissioner of Revenue. There were 72 community kitchens including NSS Community Kitchen where as per their capacities they were preparing food and packing them into containers. As per the requirement, the team was collecting the packets. Our responsibility was to hand over the packets. The team which was involved in the distribution of food were sending photos to the control room for verification and confirmation that food has reached to those who are hungry. It was a unique example of partnership of the University and local administration. It was followed by other Universities in Maharashtra and acknowledged by the PMO Office as a Success Story from Maharashtra.

- e. ***Fulzari- Tribal Village Under-displacement:*** Help to the 23-wildlife project affected families from Tribal Village Fulzari in Nagpur District which is under the process of Displacement due to Pench Tiger Reserve. With the help of Ex- Volunteer and Others, they managed to mobilize Rs.50000 and made 23 food grain kits for families in crises. They were deprived from receiving ration from the Government departments. Each kit consisted of around Rs 2500 with 15kg Rice, 10 kg Atta, 3 kg veg Oil, Tea, 1 kg Sugar, 1 kg mung dal, 1 kg tuwar dal, 3 kg Onion, 2 kg Potato, Soyabean Balls, Haldi, Chilly, Coriander Powder, Masala, 12 Bath Soap, 12 Detergent Soap, 12 biscuit packs, masks etc. (Nearly 50 kg weight per kit)

Challenges Faced:

- a. ***Non-Cooperation from the general public:*** During the Covid-19 pandemic it was expected to help people who were in need as they were unable to buy or purchase to fulfil their needs on their own due to loss of employment, due to lockdown or were stranded. But sometimes some resourceful people who were able to manage their needs with the resources available with them were also expecting support from the administration. People were not abiding by the rules and regulations imposed by the administration and were creating hurdles in maintaining proper physical distancing at ration shops, markets and banks. It is observed during the month of March and April 2020, fear about CORONA was more and cases were less but in the month of May, June and July fear of Corona among the population was less and cases were more. In the process of unlocking of the lockdown, people started celebrations, with big gatherings and were breaking the rules and regulations or guidelines of the prevention and mitigations.
- b. ***Duplication & Multiplication of Service:*** In the month of March 2020 as it was the beginning of Corona, people were not much aware of many things. Many Voluntary Organizations (VOs) came forward to help the stranded migrant workers and the people who had lost employment due to the lockdown in the city. They were distributing grocery kits, cooked food packets, sanitizers, face masks etc. At the beginning every VO was working separately due to lack of networking among them. The same persons were getting food or other items from 3-8 voluntary organizations. Packets with tasty food was eaten by the person and other packets were thrown away and there was duplication and multiplications of the services. Local administration (NMC) in collaboration with more than 75 VOs were involved in networking through WhatsApp group and the problem of duplication and multiplication in services distribution was resolved.
- c. ***Lack of ICT Skills:*** Due to the lockdown and fear of spread of Corona infection, the NSS team started working online and tried to make people aware of the Corona disease Posters, messages and videos were created and used for spreading awareness among the masses through social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram etc. More than 60% of the volunteers and POs are from rural part and in

many villages power and internet network problems were seen. Some of them were not much familiar with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills and there were many villages with lack of availability of ICT tools. Many times it was getting difficult for networking among the volunteers and POs spread in four districts and to convey proper messages.

- d. **Lack of Resources:** In some villages there was no power, thus no network. Some village people did not have access to ration as they were in the process of displacement and were deprived of different basic services. In urban areas, COVID Centres and other healthcare related facilities were available and affected people were getting help from various VOs. But in rural and remote tribal areas, due to lockdown, there were problems related to transportation, lack of access to healthcare, loss of employment, less support or help from the VOs etc.
- e. **Less Response from Social Work Trainee/Institute:** In Nagpur City there are 8 (schools of social work) and in Vidarbha region there are more than 30 Social Work Institutes. During COVID-19, a few faculties from very few Institutes were seen involved in Counselling related activities at the Short Stay Shelter Homes. Social Work Institutes were not seen leading from the front in the field. Being a Social Work Training Institute, it is expected from society for leadership from the Social Work Institutes and to suggest intervention strategies in prevention and mitigation of COVID-19. Many Voluntary Organisations were seen in the field while meeting the needs of the communities, it was disheartening to note that social work Institute were absent from the scene. District administration has shown its displeasure for very less response from the Social Work Institutes during COVID-19. As the Institutes did not take lead very few trainees were seen on the field.

Conclusions

It is said that when we listen, we forget, when we see we remember and when we do, we understand. I was personally involved in planning to execution of the NSS activities and programmes. One of the purposes of getting involved in relief work during COVID-19 was to learn and understand the utility of social work knowledge and skills required in such pandemics. I experienced opportunities of doing the work, understanding the problems of the affected people and learned from life experiences. I was involved in online and offline work during COVID-19 and have the following personal learning to offer:

Instead of working alone, network and collaborative team work is always useful in handling such situations. I was able to apply Social Work Methods & Techniques such Community Organisation, Social Action, Counselling, Networking, Advocacy etc. There were new fields for Social Work Practice such as working with Displaced People those who Wildlife Affected, Migrant Workers, that were emerging. A need to impart Skill Based Training to the youth so that they will be able to financially survive in such pandemic situations is yet another takeaway.



The Government of India already has many different programmes for the youth which need to be accessed for the youth in such critical situations. A Mentee-Mentor Programme of Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Facebook, GOAL (Going Online as Leader), Atmanirbhar Campaign, Skill India, made in India are some of the programmes that ought to be fully utilised. Ironically leadership from the Social Work Training Institutes was not forthcoming during the current crisis. I could see therefore other social science students from Psychology, Sociology, Economics, Law and others undertaking the same work as social work trainees in crisis and in some case performing better than social work students, which is very heartening and they seem to be also hold potential for coming into schools of social work in future.

Acknowledgments

I own my gratitude to Dr Venkat Pulla for constantly being interested in this aspect of research in Covid and its impacts. He has goaded me to write my reflections and has mentored me throughout this phase of writing. I am grateful to the referees for considering this narrative and purely personal reflection as a research publication.

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