

Leprosy and Covid-19 Co-infection: Interesting Observations

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The world faced onslaught of Corona virus/Covid-19 pandemic with second highest numbers in India. Leprosy has not been mentioned among the co-morbidities enlisted for showing high risk of clinical gravity and mortality associated with Covid-19. Over 200,000 new leprosy cases are registered globally every year of which Indian contribution is about 60%. We should, therefore, be alert to the possibility of leprosy patients getting co-infected with Covid-19 in India. This is also particularly important due to the fact that high number of leprosy cases coming from low socio-economic class of the community generally dwell in the urban/rural congested areas, the situation conducive for Corona transmission. Moreover, leprosy patients with Reactions and with Nerve involvement receive immunosuppressive drugs like Corticosteroids, for fairly long period (12 to 16 weeks) which might make them more vulnerable for catching fast growing Corona infection.

So far, the countries having more than 1000 annual new cases, reported no evidence of increased vulnerability among leprosy cases for Corona infection (Ref. - IADVL publication on "Leprosy Management in context of Covid-19"). Oral communication with NGO and Govt. NLEP field staff working in Mumbai and Leprosy

colonies revealed that there was negligible number of Covid-19 cases among leprosy affected persons. To authenticate correlation between Covid-19 and Leprosy, if any, we attempted to collect relevant data from leprosy endemic districts of Maharashtra where ALERT-INDIA is closely involved in implementation of NLEP.

ALERT-INDIA field staff were working and providing services to leprosy patients through LRCs even during the "Lock Down" period. They collected data from 8 districts (Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia, Bhandara, Thane, Raigad, Palghar and 3 wards of Mumbai) of Maharashtra regarding occurrence of Covid-19 infection among leprosy patients registered at LRCS from January 2019 to June 2020 by personal contact or contact through ASHAs or by telephonic enquiry. The data collected as on 30th June 2020 is being shared in Table 1.

The similar pattern of very low proportion of Corona infection amongst TB patients has also been observed in Mumbai (i.e. Out of 3,640 TB patients contacted in 3 wards, 312 developed symptoms suggestive of Covid-19 and tested with RT PCR of which 11 were found to be positive and no deaths)(The observations among TB patients are being reported separately)

Table 1 : Covid positivity among general population and leprosy cases

S. No	Gaps	
1	Area covered	8 districts
2	Mid-year population	3,58,93,043
3	Covid-19 positive registered as of 30th June 2020	1,25,763
4	Covid-19 deaths recorded as on 30th June 2020	5,724
5	No. of leprosy cases registered from Jan. 19 to June 20	3,154
6	Leprosy patients contacted including 616 cases with lepra reaction and neuritis	2,858
7	Covid-19 infection among leprosy cases	Nil
8	Covid-19 deaths among leprosy cases	Nil
9	No of family contacts of leprosy cases contacted	11,844
10	Covid-19 infection among family contacts	Nil

The observations suggest that the concomitant Mycobacterial infection or anti-mycobacterial drugs may be conferring some sort of protection in Leprosy and TB sufferers against Covid-19 infection. Relevant data with reference to Covid-19 and Leprosy Co-infection from other parts of India is appreciated.

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