

STRESS ISSUES AND ITS MANAGEMENT AMIDST COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Dr. Almas Sultana, Assistant Professor Department of Commerce Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh
: almassultana89@gmail.com

Dr. Mohammad Imran Ali, Assistant Professor Jamia Urdu College of Education, Aligarh
imranprudent@gmail.com

Abstract

Stress is a natural physical and mental reaction to life experiences. Anything from everyday responsibilities like work and family to serious life events such as illness, accident, pandemic or death of a loved one can trigger stress. Millions of us are experiencing high level of stress and it is damaging our health as stress is one of the great public health challenges in this time. The present paper focuses on the stress issues during Covid-19 outbreak for professionals including academicians as well as doctors & healthcare workers, students and migrant workers. The paper also gives suggestive measures for coping with stress in the current scenario. Individually, we need to understand what is causing us stress and learn what steps we can take to reduce it for ourselves and those around us.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, migrant workers, professionals, Stress and students.

Introduction

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension which is a part of everyone's life. It is a natural feeling of not being able to adapt to explicit demands and events. It can emerge out of any event or thought that makes you feel baffled, angry or anxious. It's your body's response to a challenge or demand ("Stress and your Health"., n.d.). We can encounter stress from our environment, body and thoughts. Indeed positive life events such as promotion, marriage, the birth of a child, etc. produce stress ("Stress: Signs, Symptoms, Management & Prevention", 2020). Stress can be positive when it helps you avoid danger or fulfill a time constraint however when stress goes on for quite a long time, it may harm your health ("Stress and your Health"., n.d.). Positive stress keeps us ready, spurred and prepared to dodge threat. Stress becomes negative when a person faces continuous challenges without relief or relaxation between stressors. As a result, the person becomes exhausted and stress-related tensions build ("Stress: Signs, Symptoms, Management & Prevention", 2020).

Stress that proceeds without relief can lead to a condition called distress- a negative stress reaction. Distress can disturb the body's internal balance equilibrium, leading to physical symptoms

such as headaches, an upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, sleep deprivation, etc. Emotional problems can likewise result from distress. These problems include depression, panic attack, or some other type of uneasiness or worry (“Stress: Signs, Symptoms, Management & Prevention”, 2020).

Stress is related to both external and internal factors. External factors include the physical environment, including our work, our associations with others, our home and all the circumstances, challenges, difficulties and desires we are confronted with on daily basis. Internal factors determine our body’s ability to respond to and deal with the external stress-instigating factors (“Stress: Symptoms, Causes and Stress Management”, 2020)

There are two main types of stress- Acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress happens to everyone. This is a momentary stress that disappears rapidly. It helps us managing dangerous situations. It also occurs when we do something new or exciting. Therefore, all people have acute stress at one time or other. However, stress can become chronic if a person does not find ways to manage it. Chronic stress lasts for a more extended timeframe as it continues for weeks, months or years. We may have chronic stress if we have financial problem, unhappy marriage or inconvenience at work. Some people become so used to chronic stress that they don’t even realize that it is an issue and if they don’t discover ways to manage their stress, it may lead to serious health problems (“Stress and your Health”., n.d.).

Main Causes of Stress:

- Getting married or divorced
- Starting a new job
- The death of spouse or close family member
- Getting laid off
- Retiring
- Financial problems
- Serious illness
- Problems at work
- Problems at home, etc. (“Stress and your Health”., n.d.).

If we tend to get stressed out frequently, in the same way as many of us in today's demanding world, our body may exist in a heightened state of stress most of the time and that can prompt serious health problems like depression & anxiety, pain of any kind, sleep problems, autoimmune diseases, digestive problems, heart disease, weight problems, reproductive issues, thinking & memory problems, etc. In this manner, we can say that chronic stress disrupts nearly every system in our body. It can even rewire the brain, leaving us more vulnerable to anxiety, depression and other emotional well-being issues ("Stress Symptoms, Signs and Causes", n.d.).

Fear, worry and stress are normal responses to perceived or real threats, and at times when we are confronted with uncertainty or the unknown. So, it is normal and justifiable that people are experiencing fear in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. A lot of stress among the people all over the world can be seen nowadays and it is not unnatural to feel increasing stress and panic in such a pandemic. We may have anxiety and fear because of a great deal issues such as dealing with at-risk family members or patients, trying to keep kids occupied while being indoors all day, figuring out how to get work done while at home, home-schooling of children, temporary unemployment, absence of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues, or simply acclimating to the new situation (Narayana Health, 2020; WHO, 2020). However, these actions are necessary to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Coping with stress in a healthy way will make us, the people we care about and our community stronger ("Mental Health and Coping during Covid-19", 2020).

As indicated by a survey of Express Scripts enumerating how the pandemic has prompted a distinct rise in mental health prescriptions that were previously on decline, stress can profoundly effect on a myriad of population. Its continuous association with sleep deprivation, wretchedness and anxiety are now more noticeable than ever before. In the survey titled "America's State of Mind Report", researchers highlighted that from February 16 to March 15, prescriptions filled per week for antidepressant, anti-anxiety and anti-insomnia medications expanded by 21 percent. Prior to the pandemic, use of anti-anxiety and anti-insomnia medications were both on decline from 2015 to 2019. However, during pandemic, the new prescriptions for anti-anxiety medications exhibited a 37.7 percent expansion, stressing the vital need for therapeutic intervention (Gavidia, 2020).

The present paper focuses on the stress issues during Covid-19 outbreak for professionals, students and migrant workers. The whole paper is divided into five parts. Part I presents the challenges faced by professionals during Covid-19. Challenges faced by students during home-learning are given in

Part II. Part III deals with the hardships faced by migrant workers. Strategies to combat with stress are discussed in Part IV. Part V concludes the paper.

I. Challenges faced by Professionals during Covid-19

Academician

When educational institutions were shut at the beginning of corona virus pandemic in the nation, nobody envisioned that it would totally change the face of education. From no smart phones permitted in schools, to leaving children only with such gadgets at home, it has been a gigantic change that everyone involved is still getting acquainted with. With uncertainty still surrounding the reopening of schools and colleges, almost all the institutions have begun online classes [9]. Consequently, with education worldwide being thrown into disarray by corona virus, more and more educators are being compelled to teach their students from home (“5 Challenges of Online Teaching and how to rise above them”, n.d.). From offering online classes and dealing with anxious parents & students over the phone to simultaneously doing household chores and fearing or confronting pay cuts, the Covid-19 situation has presented its own set of challenges for teachers. A typical day in the lockdown includes recording video lectures, cleaning the house, taking live classes with students, cooking, gathering back to next class and attending calls from restless students and parents (NDTV Report, 2020).

The problem is that students as well as teachers were not used to this sort of teaching-learning process. So, they had to put in lot of efforts only to deliver the lectures and giving feedback to each and every student remains a challenge which is much easier in classroom teaching (NDTV Report, 2020). Although development in technology over the past decades have made prospects of online teaching a lot less daunting, but there are still issues that we all need to be aware of. Many are not that proficient when it comes to handing unfamiliar software or app (“5 Challenges of Online Teaching and how to rise above them”, n.d.). These days, teachers are occupied in recording video lectures so that students can return to them at whatever point they need, sending power point presentation for notes and then taking an online session for questions and feedback. Doing this in the midst of all the cooking, cleaning and other household chores is a different challenge altogether.

Insomnia, backaches, fretfulness, stress and anxiety are among the side effects people are facing from prolonged work from home to prevent the spread of novel corona virus. They are required to invest greater part of their energy before their laptop screens or on mobile phones because of which back

problems have sprung up and headaches have gotten continuous. Work from home has not just obscured the line separating personal and professional life but has additionally made people insomniac (The New Indian Express, 2020). In contrast to regular teaching, working hours are not defined anymore. Anxiety and nightmare have now become basic issues. All the time teachers are required to check their whatsapp groups for any important notification from the institute or queries from students' side. Situation is exceedingly difficult for female teachers in light of the fact that there is a restricted chance of having a proper routine and keeping up work-life balance ((NDTV Report, 2020).

Internet connectivity and a proper place at home to attend online classes is another issue. Some students often forget to mute themselves which creates a lot of distraction due to personal conversation or the background noise of kitchen or TV. Therefore, maintaining discipline online is really a challenging task for teachers (Fernandes,2020).

Doctors and Healthcare Workers

While the entire nation is battling against Covid-19 emergencies, the ones on the frontline, doctors and healthcare workers, are working excruciatingly hard for the welfare of patients and to limit the damage to the society due to pandemic. They are working day and night to minimize the damage due to pandemic with constant checks on the patients. The absence of definite cure for the infection makes their work additionally tough and there is also the added pressure of calming the nerves of the patients and their families. For this, doctors not only have to attend the patients in person but they also need to remain associated with them over phone and through video conferencing (Bagchi, 2020; Business Standard, 2020).

The threat of catching the disease and infecting their own families likewise poses a potential threat over them, because of which most of the doctors have given up going homes and have shifted to solitary accommodations when they go to rest after their duty hours which could stretch to 15 to even 18 hours per day. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is an essential gear that health workers have been mandatorily instructed to wear to shield themselves from harmful biological agents or contaminated surfaces (Bagchi, 2020; Business Standard, 2020).

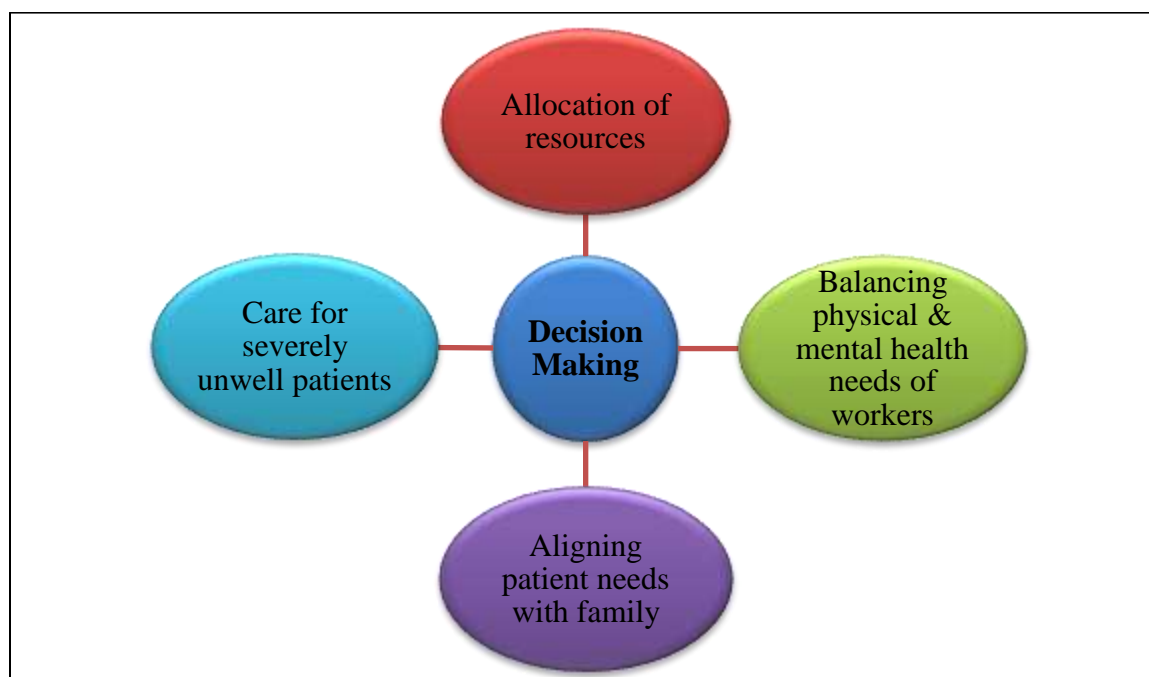
Dr. Suresh, Nodal Officer, Head of Special Task Force (STF) COVID-19, LNJP & Maulana Azad Medical College, said that, “given the present weather conditions, wearing PPE for more than 5 to

6 hours is unendurable. It is not possible to wear PPE kit for more than 7 hours. One cannot even use toilet with this kit, but wearing it is must for our safety” (Bagchi, 2020; Business Standard, 2020).

In the words of Dr. Rakesh Garg, Additional Professor, Department of Onco-Anaesthesia & Palliative Medicine who is working at Covid-19 facility, National Cancer Institute, AIIMS Jhajjar’ “The disease is very contagious and till now we do not have any concrete solutions on how to manage it effectively which for us is a primary challenge. We always have to keep in mind that whatever we are doing for the patients should not be harmful, if it is not beneficial. We had to remodel the infrastructure into Covid ward keeping in mind various aspects” (Bagchi, 2020; Business Standard, 2020).

Recently there have been several reports from various parts of the country of medical staffers being assaulted and abused. Numerous healthcare workers have also been asked to leave their rented accommodations either by the landlords or by the people in their societies. Numerous doctors and healthcare workers have been infected with the virus while treating the patients (Bagchi, 2020; Business Standard, 2020).

Decisions making under condition of uncertainty can create significant psychological pressure. The decisions that healthcare workers will face broadly fall under four categories:



Source: Greenberg et al., 2020

Stressors for Healthcare workers during COVID-19 Pandemic

- Shortage of PPE kits.
- Isolation from loved ones.
- Fear of transmitting the virus to family and others.
- Rapidly expanding workload with an increasing number of suspected and confirmed cases.
- Progressively depleted workforce due to illness and isolation of staff.
- Incidents of hostility and aggression towards medical personal.
- Lack of effective treatment for un-well patients (Kang et al, 2020).

II. Challenges faced by Students during Home-learning

Universally, everything has halted due to Covid-19 pandemic. Projects have been postponed; workplaces closed and schools shut down. The world seems to have come to a standstill on account of the novel corona virus (Angdhiri, 2020). An enduring effect has been created by Covid-19 on all the sectors of the economy. The education sector has not been left out and the impact of Covid-19 on students' life is visible. Whether it is the personal life of students or the environment of schools and colleges, this pandemic has changed things that were never thought of before. Students continued their education through online learning and via video calls with teachers. The desperate need to continue with the college and school education has certainly benefited online alternatives to provide education such as Google classroom, Google meet, Zoom app, etc. ("Impact of Covid-19 on Students life, n.d.). Many countries have adopted this approach. This is the best alternative as keeping schools open poses a safety risk for students but at the same time it is quite challenging for the students (Angdhiri, 2020).

While the benefits of online learning are manifold, there are still numerous barriers in the way ahead towards making education an entirely digital phenomenon. Moving from traditional pedagogical methods to the digital one cannot happen overnight. Teachers as well as students require proper training and more user-friendly platforms to make them familiar with digital technology (India Today, 2020). Learning from home can be lonely. Without the buzz of classroom setting and the company of their peers, it's no surprise that some students began to feel a strong sense of isolation that gradually erodes their desire to learn. Many students found that they miss school when the alternative is to be desk-bound at home. Isolation can also undermine many of the instructional strategies like group work, classroom discussion and collaborative activity. All has disappeared from the program entirely. Therefore, there is

lack of motivation in online learners (“5 Challenges of Online Teaching and how to rise above them”, n.d.).

Many students participating in home-learning programs also say that the workload of online classes is larger than that of regular classes as it is a novel concept (Angdhiri, 2020). Things are fine for the families who can afford a laptop or a smart phone along with the monthly expenses of internet plus other variables but there are large section of the children whose parents are not in a position to get them such things for attending online classes (India Today, 2020).

The true sufferers are those who are in less fortunate situation and those who are in schools that are not well funded. This is because they lack the devices and internet access to be able to participate in online classes and the schools don't have the capacity to teach online. This leaves many students in severe pressure and anxiety where they are unable to receive an education (Angdhiri, 2020). Online classes affect the eyes of students as it requires them to sit for long hours in front of the mobile or laptop screens. The situation is exceedingly terrible for small children who have low concentration power and do not have the ability to sit for a longer period of time in front of the screens (Mallidi, 2020). Furthermore, it is not possible to instill the habit of discipline and decorum among students in such an environment. These are the times that will never come back. Students are devoid of actual work environment of a school or college. Numerous social and cultural activities are missed because of this. The life and future of the students are left in dilemma and there are no signs with regard to when things will get back to normal (India Today, 2020).

III. Migrant Workers during Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 impact on migrant workers cannot be overlooked or ignored. In India a large portion of the lowest paid jobs are in sectors like construction, hospitality, textiles and domestic workers. The vast majority of the labour force includes the informal or unorganized sector of the economy and migrant workers are a big part of it (Yadav, 2020). According to the World Bank (2020), amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, India's 40 million migrant workers are confronting major brunt of the situation. This pandemic has created major issues like starvation, being stranded away from the family, loss of jobs and so on (Yadav, 2020)..

Indian migrant workers have witnessed several difficulties with factories and workplaces shut down because of the lockdown imposed in the nation, a large number of them had to manage with the

loss of income, food deficiencies and vulnerability about their future (Slater & Niha, 2020). Following this, many of them and their families went hungry (Maria & Sameer, 2020). Thousands of them started strolling back home, without any means of transport because of lockdown (Omar, Jatin & Ajeet, 2020). More than 300 migrant workers died with reasons ranging from starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail mishaps and so forth (“Indian Migrant Workers during Covid-19 Pandemic”, 2020).

IV. Suggestive Measures for Coping with Stress

Our mind makes decision based on the raw facts that are based on the things that we easily remember. The easier it is to remember something, the more likely it is that we are get stuck with these thoughts and have a harder time coping with it. In case of corona virus the images that are coming up from the news are from the worst scenarios such as people being evacuated and dealing with it and also watching really scary movies where an outbreak is there and many people dies, those images are very easy to remember and causes a lot of stress and fear amongst people with the concern about getting sick and something bad happening to us. The other thing that fuels stress is the uncertainty about what is going to happen in future.

The very first thing one has to do to cope with the stress is to limit the media influence as much as we can. The more we watch news channels or go through social media, the more likely we see and create images that are scary. So, if you watch T.V. for news watch it once a day, if you go online in search of news, read it once a day. We should limit our social media or consider even muting notifications or muting our timeline for terms related to corona virus.

Media plays a very important role and has a great influence on the minds of people. So, media should also take a step forward and maintain a column in newspapers and magazines which helps people in dealing with stress by describing the stress buster techniques and its importance.

Secondly, we have to be compassionate towards ourselves and with the people around us. We should stick to our daily routine as much as we can. In case you don't have a routine then make some decisions regarding what you are going to do in the morning, afternoon and in the evening. All this requires a proper time management.

Talk to your friends, family and colleagues because talking about your issues helps in reducing stress. Get more rest and complete your sleep schedule. Keep doing stuffs that helps in dealing with the

stress and anxiety like exercise, meditation, playing videogames, watching TV and movies, listening to music, reading novels, doing prayers, gardening, etc. If even after all these things you are still struggling with stress and anxieties then talk to your healthcare provider or a psychiatrist.

Another thing in dealing with the stress is that we can look for the lessons we learnt in the situation. In any difficulty or problem, one thing we can do to eliminate the stress is to see as what we can learn from this experience.

There are some scientific techniques that can help people in dealing with stress such as autogenic training, cognitive therapy, fractional relaxation, cranial release technique, etc. One of the very famous is the Japanese technique which can be done anywhere in about five minutes. In this each finger of our hand represents the different feeling and attitude. Where the thumb helps combat anxiety and worry, the index combats fear, the middle finger helps control anger and resentment, the ring finger helps in fighting depression and sadness and the smaller one helps in calming anxiety and increases optimism and confidence. So, here what we have to do is to grasp each finger one by one with the opposite hand wrapping all the fingers and thumb around it. We have to hold each finger for 1 to 2 minutes. It starts working when we feel pulsating sensation. If we want to calm our mind then we should slightly press in the centre of the palm with the thumb of opposite hand and hold it for at least 1 minute.

If we talk particularly about the stress among students then here administration plays a major role in relieving the stress among them. In various universities student leaders plays a major role in conveying the students' grievances to the authorities.

V. Conclusion

The current situation is really a challenging one for all of us. As the corona virus pandemic sweeps across the world, it is causing widespread concern, fear, stress, all of which are natural and normal reactions to the changing and uncertain situation that everyone find themselves in. Insomnia, backaches, restlessness, stress and anxiety are among the side effects people are facing from prolonged work from home to prevent the spread of novel corona virus. The Covid-19 situation has presented lots of challenges for teachers, doctors & healthcare workers, students as well as migrant labour. Therefore, there is an urgent need to focus and talk about the stress related issues resulting from such a pandemic and find appropriate measures for coping with this situation immediately.

Individually, we need to understand what is causing us stress and learn steps to reduce it for ourselves and those around us. We should be nice to the people around us and look after ourselves as we all need to think more about self-care. Take time out of our day to relax or do something that we enjoy. We should not forget to exercise daily and eat well and if something has worked for us then it is good to share with others also.

References:

5 Challenges of Online Teaching (and how to rise above them). (n.d.). Retrieved October 7, 2020 from <https://www.3plearning.com/blog/5-common-pitfalls-distance-teaching-avoid/>

Angdhiri, R.P. (2020). Challenges of home learning during a pandemic through the eyes of a students. Available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/04/11/challenges-of-home-learning-during-a-pandemic-through-the-eyes-of-a-student.html>

Bagchi, J. (2020). Doctors, healthcare workers deputed at Covid-19 wards share their challenges, apprehensions as crises deepens. Available at <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/doctors-healthcare-workers-deputed-at-covid-19-wards-share-their-challenges-apprehensions-as-crisis-deepens/75135702>

Business Standard. (2020). Doctors, nurses share Covid-19 challenges, apprehensions as crisis deepens. Available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/doctors-nurses-share-covid-19-challenges-apprehensions-as-crisis-deepens-120041400150_1.html

Fernandes, S. M. (2020). Teachers face Challenges as Online Classes Gather Steam. Available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/teachers-face-challenges-as-online-classes-gather-steam/articleshow/76201847.cms>

Gavidia, M. (2020). How has covid-19 affected mental health, severity of stress among employees?. Available at <https://www.ajmc.com/view/how-has-covid19-affected-mental-health-severity-of-stress-among-employees>.

Greenberg et al. (2020). Managing mental health challenges faced by healthcare workers during covid-19 pandemic.

Impact of Covid-19 on Students life. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://www.cg.ac.in/impact-of-covid-19-on-students-life>

India Today. (2020). Covid-19 Impact: 4 major challenges faced by students of rural India. Available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/covid-19-impact-4-major-challenges-faced-by-students-of-rural-india-1709294-2020-08-10>

Indian Migrant Workers during Covid-19 Pandemic. (2020). Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_migrant_workers_during_the_COVID-19_pandemic#:~:text=Indian%20migrant%20workers%20during%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic%20have%20faced,and%20uncertainty%20about%20their%20future.

Kang et al. (2020). The mental health of medical workers in Wuhan, China dealing with the 2019 novel coronavirus". *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(3), 14

Mallidi, S.P. (2020). Covid-19 Effect on Student Life. Available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/covid-19-effect-on-student-life/covid-19-effect-on-student-life-23470/>

Maria, A., and Sameer, Y. (2020). India's coronavirus lockdown leaves vast number stranded and hungry. *The New York Times*. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/world/asia/coronavirus-india-migrants.html>.

Mental Health and Coping during Covid-19. (2020). Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Narayana Health. (2020). Managing Stress around Coronavirus Outbreak: How to Cope with Anxiety. Available at <https://www.narayanahealth.org/blog/coronavirus-outbreak-manage-stress/>

NDTV Report. (2020). From Technological Queries to Distress Calls, Teachers Struggle with Challenges Posed By Lockdown. Available at <https://www.ndtv.com/education/from-technological-queries-to-distress-calls-teachers-struggle-with-challenges-posed-by-lockdown-2208957>

Omar, R., Jatin, A., and Ajeet, M. (2020). India's coronavirus lockdown: Migrant workers and their long march to uncertainty. Available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-coronavirus-lockdown-migrant-workers-and-their-long-march-to-uncertainty/article31251952.ece>

Slater, J., and Niha, M. (2020). In India the world's biggest lockdown has forced migrants to walk hundreds of miles home. The Washington Post. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-coronavirus-lockdown-migrant-workers/2020/03/27/a62df166-6f7d-11ea-a156-0048b62cdb51_story.html.

Stress and your Health. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2020 from, <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003211.htm#:~:text=Stress%20is%20a%20feeling%20of,danger%20or%20meet%20a%20deadline>.

Stress Symptoms, Signs and Causes. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2020 from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-symptoms-signs-and-causes.htm>

Stress: Signs, Symptoms, Management & Prevention. (2020). Available at <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11874-stress>

Stress: Symptoms, Causes and Stress Management. (2020). Available at https://www.medicinenet.com/stress/article.htm#stress_facts

The New Indian Express. (2020). Work from home: Professionals complain of stress, insomnia, anxiety. Available at <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/apr/28/work-from-home-professionals-complain-of-stress-insomnia-anxiety-2136433.html>.

WHO. (2020). Mental Health & Covid-19. Available at <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/covid-19>

World Bank. (2020). Lockdown in India has impacted 40 million internal migrants. Available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/lockdown-in-india-has-impacted-40-million-internal-migrants-world-bank/articleshow/75311966.cms?from=mdr>.

Yadav, R. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 on Indian Migrant Workers. Available at <https://criticaledges.com/2020/07/12/covid-19-on-indian-migrant-workers/>