COVID-19 pandemic: impacts and controversies

EDITORIAL

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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) refers to the pneumonia caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).¹ On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic. As of 15 July 2020, more than 13 million cases have been reported globally, resulting in more than 572,500 deaths.² The rapid spread of COVID-19 means that people are facing high levels of risk, and this risk is not confined by national borders but spans countries, areas, and territories.^{3,4} There is limited knowledge about the origin, nature, and exact features of this disease, and every country is struggling to curb the spread of the virus through a trial-and-error approach.²

Everyone is affected by this global challenge but older adults appear to be more vulnerable to COVID-19. Those with poor physical or mental health and those aged >80 years are associated with an increased mortality rate. Clinical presentations of organ damage and a higher risk have been reported in older adults who rate their health as poor or fair or have four or more chronic conditions or comorbidities; an increased rate of suicide among this population has been estimated.^{1,5-8}

The whole world has been shaken and is now in risk-management mode, as countries experience second and third waves of outbreaks. The concept of a new normal with continual risk management has been introduced to cope with continuing needs to adjust responses.^{2,9} Four controversies are observed¹⁰⁻¹⁴: (1) Whom should we trust? Shall we trust authorities or professionals? Should we trust the media? (2) How should we communicate with and engage communities? At the global, regional, local and family levels, how should we communicate the risks of this disease? (3) How can we balance economic impacts and outbreak prevention? and (4) What optimal measures in regard to testing, diagnosing, treating, and social distancing could be sensitive to diversified communities? Although we do not have answers for all these, I believe that our joint pursuit for a contextualised understanding with an international perspective will play a role.

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