LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The COVID-19 and Ageism in Social Media

Yadollah Abolfathi Momtaz1,*

1Iranian Research Center on Aging, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeing), Universiti Putra, Serdang, Malaysia

Abstract: The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was recognized as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. However, the median age of laboratory-confirmed cases is about 45 years and age is not a sole potential risk for catching COVID-19; unfortunately, some social media pretend that elderly people are more likely to be infected by COVID-19. Providing such information about the COVID-19 can increase the stress and anxiety among the elderly that may weaken their immune system. It is suggested that social media provide appropriate information to reduce public stress.

Keywords: Ageism, COVID-19, discrimination, elderly people, public health, social media, pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as an unprecedented global public health issue was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei, China, in December 2019 and recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020. As of June 1, 2020, more than 6,278,606 confirmed cases had been reported in the world, resulting in more than 374,158 deaths and around 2,852,761 recoveries [1].

According to the published scientific investigations, the majority (more than 70%) of the confirmed cases who died of COVID-19 had pre-existing health conditions such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes [2]. While males and females have the same susceptibility to COVID-19, males may be more prone to have higher severity and mortality independent of age [3]. It has been documented that about 80% of patients were asymptomatic or suffered mild pneumonia but excreted large amounts of COVID-19 viruses at the early phase of infection [4].

The median age of laboratory-confirmed cases is about 45 years, which means that all age groups can be infected by the COVID-19 [1]. Although elderly people with chronic illnesses like other age groups with chronic medical conditions are at greater risk, social media report age as the most important factor for COVID-19 [5]. To reduce public stress and anxiety caused by COVID-19, unfortunately, some social media portrayed that elderly people are more susceptible to be infected by the COVID-19 [6].

The ageism in relation to COVID-19 can contribute to feelings of worthlessness in older people [5]. Providing such information about the COVID-19 can increase the stress and anxiety among the elderly. It has been stated that fear can be more harmful than COVID-19 [2]. With regard to some studies which have documented that stress weakens the ability of the immune system to fight off antigens [7], it can postulate that age discrimination in relation to COVID-19 makes elderly people more susceptible to be infected by COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

In sum, people of all ages worldwide are at risk to be infected by the novel coronavirus COVID-19. With regard to the fact that at present, there is no specific treatment to combat COVID-19, other than non-medication interventions such as quarantine and social distancing, social media should provide appropriate information to reduce public panic. It should be stated by social media that not only chronological age, but also the presence of chronic medical conditions and comorbidities can make individuals more vulnerable to COVID-19. Additionally, age should not be considered as a sole potential risk factor for getting COVID-19.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

FUNDING

This study was supported by grant No 2470 in University of Social Welfare & Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Declared none.
REFERENCES


