



Intellectopinion on COVID19 Episode - 3

25th July 2020

COVID19 has been creating a Long Term Ripple effect in our

Personal, Professional & Social Life.

It's effect on our Psychological and Economic Status is widespread.

How we can tackle it and move ahead in the new World Order is the main theme of this

Series of Interviews of Eminent Personalities from different sections of Society.

In the 3rd Episode of the series, we are publishing a written conversation on

Psychological aspects of COVID19 with

Dr. Himabrata Das, a Psychiatrist from Barak Valley,

currently serving in Tezpur Medical College & Hospital

Ishan Kotha: There is a recent development being noticed among the people not to abide by or overrule the guidelines provided by the government regarding Corona pandemic. According to a senior psychiatrist of our valley, this behaviour has a lot to do with mental health. As lay men, we ask you to have some light upon the issue.

Dr. Himabrata Das: We are in the middle of the most unprecedented turmoil in our lifetime. A range of mental illnesses and psychological issues are coming to the fore as we grapple with the invisible enemy. The Government and the administration have put in place a set of restrictions to control the spread of the pathogen. Awareness about the pandemic has been generated among the citizens via various modes of unfortunately; COVID is not the only problem that our region is facing. The balance between life and livelihood has been grueling. So it would be unfair to attribute violating the rules as a purely psychological phenomenon.

Ishan Kotha: The pandemic has affected the poor at its worst. At the same time, the relatively financially sound sections of the society are also victim of mental illness like frustration, depression etc. It is obvious now that we have already entered into a live in relationship with the pandemic for a considerable period. In this connection, we are eager to know whether any specific research is going on worldwide, particularly in India to fight this unprecedented mental illness. If not, is there any need of the same?

Dr. Himabrata Das: This has been a bad year for everybody. The hardest to be hit has been the middle class. Household savings have gotten drained and financial liabilities have gone up. The affluent are also realising how immaterial material wealth can be in a unforeseen crisis. I am hopeful that the stimulus packages announced by different state governments and the central government will help those who need urgent attention. The alarming rise in the incidence of mental illnesses has prompted the Indian Psychiatric Society to take prompt action. Community Psychiatry and Telepsychiatry are helping us reach out to the most vulnerable. We need to talk about the mind in a language that our masses understand. The way forward is to open a dialogue with the common people regarding mental health.

Ishan Kotha: To secure our physical health, random Covid testing and various other activities are going on. Do you think, the Govt. should also take some initiatives to boost up or retain the mental health of its people?

Dr. Himabrata Das: Both the Central and the State Governments have realized the importance of mental health during this ongoing pandemic. In Assam, the MONON initiative has brought together a large number of mental health professionals who are involved in reaching out to those directly impacted by the pandemic. The toll free number is 104 for those seeking help during this period of distress.

Ishan Kotha: It is realized that to fight the pandemic, an all-round and all encompassing effort should be made. As we discussed earlier, it is clear that there are steps already being taken to settle financial hazards along with physical health crisis. But all depend upon mental wellbeing. So, do you think that some kind of random or massive counseling programs should be initiated at micro level to reach maximum number of people?

Dr. Himabrata Das: I think embracing technology has improved our mental health infrastructure as we have a shortage of skilled personnel. You are absolutely correct in saying that our goal needs to be to reach the last person in need of help. In our culture, the Para or the neighborhood is a very important social structure. It would be great if our elected representatives think about innovative ways to deliver mental health services at the micro-level. That would certainly go a long way in addressing the morbidity and mortality of mental illness.