

SSPOPULAR PERCEPTION ON COVID-19 ABOUT BEING A BIOENGINEERED WEAPON- A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Among many controversial claims on COVID-19 pandemic, one such claim is that the SARS-CoV-2 virus came from a lab, and is the result of an attempt to manufacture a vaccine against the AIDS virus. Another one was that the novel coronavirus may have been accidentally leaked by an intern working at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. These led to the claims that COVID-19 is really a lab-made bioweapon. An online survey was conducted with a self-structured questionnaire comprising 10 questions about the facts and claims of Covid-19 as a lab-made bio weapon. The results were analysed statistically with statistical software "SPSS version 20" and the result was represented in the pie chart form. In the present study, awareness of the pandemic outbreak, and claims of Covid-19 as a lab-made bio weapon were analysed among the responses of general population, 82.1% are of the perception that Covid-19 is a lab-made bio weapon and among them 80.2% of participants think Covid-19 is Chinese bio weapon. The study concludes that most of the people are of the perception that Covid-19 is really a lab-made bio weapon and the study concludes that claims of Covid-19 are a bio weapon that China has created holds ground among the popular perception.

KEYWORDS: Bio weapon, COVID-19, Lab made, Outbreak, Wuhan

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that gives rise to severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Zhang, 2020). The novel coronavirus was first detected in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and has since spread globally, resulting in a present pandemic (Hui *et al.*, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently announced coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) a public health emergency of international concern. As of February 25, 2020, a total of 81,109 laboratory-habituated cases had been registered globally. (Chu *et al.*, 2020). The common syndrome includes fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath. (Slawson, 2020) (Samuel and Thenmozhi, 2015; Sekaret *et al.*, 2019). The virus is mainly spreading between people during close contact, most generally via small droplets produced by coughing, sneezing, and talking. (Pratha, Ashwatha Pratha and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Sharma and Anderson, 2020). The droplets mostly fall to the ground or onto outward rather than travelling through air over long distances (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). Less commonly, people may become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then touching their face (World Health Organization, 2016). Recommended measures to prevent infection include frequent hand washing, maintaining physical distance from others (especially from those with symptoms), quarantine (especially for those with symptoms), covering coughs, and keeping unwashed hands away from the face (Paramasivamet *et al.*, 2020). The use of cloth face coverings such as a scarf or a bandana is recommended in public settings to minimise the risk of transmissions, with

some authorities requiring their use (Sekaret *et al.*, 2019). Medical grade face masks such as N95 masks should only be used by healthcare workers, first responders and those who care for infected individuals (Elkington and Morgan, 2020). Previously our team had conducted numerous studies and review on upcoming topics (Seppanet *et al.*, 2018) (Krishna, Nivesh Krishna and Yuvaraj Babu, 2016) (Nandhini *et al.*, 2018) (Subashri and Thenmozhi, 2016; Nandhini *et al.*, 2018) (Sriram, Thenmozhi and Yuvaraj, 2015; Subashri and Thenmozhi, 2016; Nandhini *et al.*, 2018) (Menon and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Hafeez and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Choudhari and Thenmozhi, 2016)

The Wuhan institute was already the suspect for the conspiracy theorists. It was already in discussion that the novel coronavirus was a bio-weapon that escaped or allowed it to escape the lab (Samuel *et al.*, 2009). This gained further currency from reports of a Chinese scientist couple being expelled from a centre of virology in Canada, which denied the link between its disciplinary action and spread of Covid-19 (Munshi, 2020). French Nobel prize winning scientist Luc Montagnier has sparked a fresh controversy by claiming that the SARS-CoV-2 virus came from a lab, and is the result of an attempt to manufacture a vaccine against the AIDS virus. The scientists, including those from The Scripps Research Institute in the US, said they did not find any evidence that the virus was made in a laboratory or otherwise engineered (Chawet *et al.*, 2020). Previously our team had conducted numerous studies and reviews on upcoming topics (Keerthana and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Hafeez and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Samuel and Thenmozhi, 2015) (Johnson *et al.*, 2020) (Sekaret *et al.*, 2019) (Johnson *et al.*, 2020) (Subashri and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Thejeswar and Thenmozhi, 2015; Subashri and Thenmozhi, 2016) (Kannan and Thenmozhi, 2016) Among the confusing altering and opposite claims, this study aims to read the perception of the general public on this particular topic involving Covid-19 and lab made bio weapons.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

An Online survey was conducted with a self structured questionnaire with a sample size of hundred participants comprising the general population. The questionnaire consists of questions that help in collecting socio-economic data, questions that help in provoking awareness among the participants and the questionnaire also consist of questions related to facts. The questionnaire was validated through internal and external validation methods. Measures such as selection of participants randomly, placing restrictions over the participant population and age groups are taken to minimise the bias occurring in sampling. The questionnaire was circulated using the online platform "google forms". Descriptive analysis was carried out using the statistical "SPSS software version 20". The collected data was represented in the form of pie charts and bar charts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the survey data the result was collected and analyzed. From (figure 1) 69.81% of participants knew the origin of Covid-19. From (figure 2) 79.25% of participants aware of risk factors of Covid-19. From (figure 3) 80.19% of participants responded that Covid-19 virus came from animals. The researchers said previous coronavirus outbreaks emerged in a similar way, with humans contracting the virus after direct exposure to civets (SARS), and camels (MERS). They proposed that bats are the most likely reservoir for SARS-CoV-2 as the virus is very similar to a bat coronavirus. However, they said there are no documented cases of direct bat-human transmission, suggesting that an intermediate host was likely involved between bats and humans. French Nobel prize winning scientist Luc Montagnier has sparked a fresh controversy by claiming that the SARS-CoV-2 virus came from a lab, and is the result of an attempt to manufacture a vaccine against the AIDS virus (Munshi, 2020). From (figure 4) 82.08% are aware that Covid-19 is a lab made bio weapon and 17.9% are not aware. From (figure 5) 42.45% are aware of Covid-19 virus spread through animals and 57.55% are not aware. But in an exclusive report, based on unnamed sources claimed that though the virus is a naturally occurring strain among bats and not a bioweapon, it was being studied in Wuhan laboratory. The initial transmission of the virus was bat-to-human, the news channel said, adding that the "patient zero" worked at the laboratory. (Schwartz *et al.*, no date; García-Morales, Badano and Moreno, 2013) The lab employee was accidentally infected before spreading the disease among the common people outside the lab in Wuhan city. (Research and Case Medical Research, 2020). From (figure 6) 80.2% of participants responded that China is creating a battle against other

countries. Bar chart representing association between gender and China is creating battles against other countries. Out of 80.19% of the participants responded that China is creating a battle against other countries, 53.77% constitutes females and 26.42% constitutes males, chi square test was done, hence it found to be statistically not significant. UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has called this pandemic the biggest crisis since World War II and some, like Bill Gates, have termed it a World War by other means. Most leaders around the world refer to their strategies to prevent and respond to COVID-19 as an existential war and see themselves as health and biosecurity generals(Ontedduet *al.*, 2020).

From (figure 7) 80.2% of participants responded that Covid-19 is Chinese weapon. Bar chart representing association between gender and Covid-19 is a lab made weapon, Out of 80.19% of the participants responded that Covid-19 is a lab made bio weapon, 55.66% constitutes females and 24.53% constitutes males, chi square test was done, hence it found to be statistically not significant. From figure 8: 58.5% of participants responded that one of the scientists confirmed the covid-19 came from the lab. The novel coronavirus that has caused the COVID-19 pandemic is not artificially made, but the product of natural evolution, a new study says, ending widespread speculation and rumours that the virus may have been engineered in a lab. The scientists, including those from The Scripps Research Institute in the US, said they did not find any evidence that the virus was made in a laboratory or otherwise engineered(Ontedduet *al.*, 2020). Bar chart representing association between gender and has any scientist confirmed that Covid-19 came from a lab, Out of 62.26% of the participants responded that has not any scientist confirmed that Covid-19 came from the lab, 44.34% constitutes females and 14.15% constitutes males, chi square test was done, hence it found to be statistically significant. From figure 9: 68.9% of participants responded that Indian can win the battle against China. “It’s an ideal weapon because it only destroys people. It’s a virus-airborne, indestructible, self-perpetuating, multiplying beyond our calculations and all life will cease to exist everywhere. From this study we concluded that Covid-19 is a lab made bio weapon from Wuhan , China, But still many more scientists have not confirmed.

Bar chart representing association between gender and India can win the battle against China, Out of 68.86% of the participants responded that India can win the battle against China , 48.11% constitutes females and 20.75% constitutes males, chi square test was done, hence it found to be statistically not significant. Limitations are since the minimum articles were used and also done on a limited study population.This study helps to find out the knowledge of Spreading of Covid-19 among people.

CONCLUSION

With startling claims that the novel coronavirus may have been leaked by an intern working at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China from some media houses, the debate on the bioweapon angle of COVID-19 has started. The study concludes that most of the people are aware of Covid-19 is really a lab made bioweapon and the study concludes that the general public are of the opinion that Covid-19 is a bio weapon that China is creating in a battle against other countries. The authors insists on clarity and transparency from reliable sources, preferably from government, in such controversial matters to contain chaos and spread of wrong informations at the earliest

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Conflict of interest: The author has none to declare.

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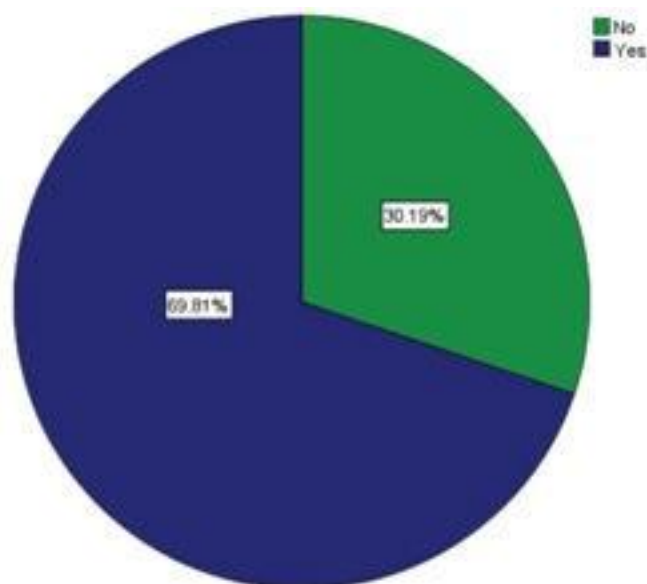


Figure1: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of responses about the origin of Covid-19. A vast majority of the respondents of about 69.81% were aware (blue) and 30.19% were not aware (green) about the origin of Covid-19.

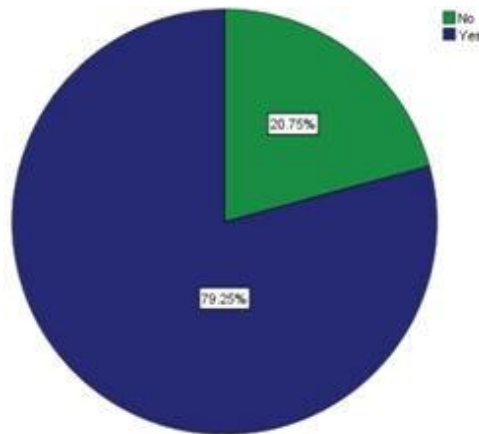


Figure 2: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of responses on the risk factors of Covid-19. A vast majority of the respondents of about 79.25% were aware (blue) of the risk factor of Covid-19 and 20.75% were not aware (green) of the risk factors of Covid-19.

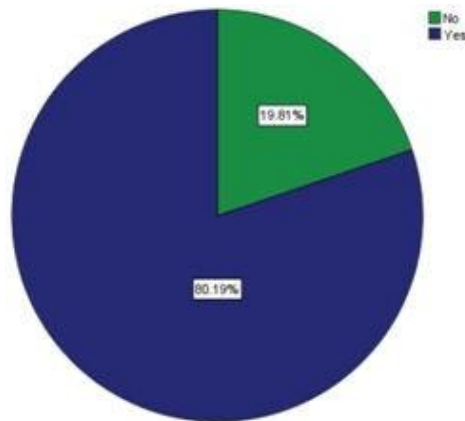


Figure 3: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of responses on the covid-19 virus came from animals. A vast majority of the respondents of about 80.19% were aware (blue) Covid-19 virus came from animals and 19.81% were not aware (green) Covid-19 virus came from animals.

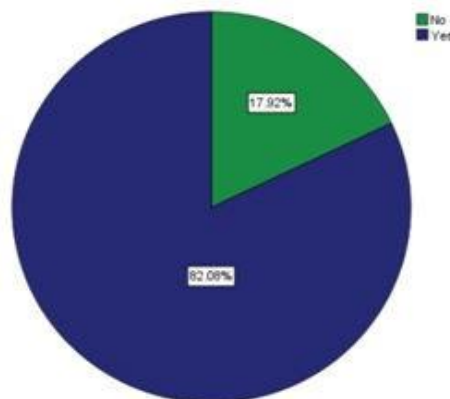


Figure 4: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of responses Covid-19 is a lab made bio weapon. A vast majority of the respondents of about 82.08% were aware (blue) Covid-19 is a lab made bio weapon and 17.92% were not aware (green) Covid-19 is a lab made bio weapon

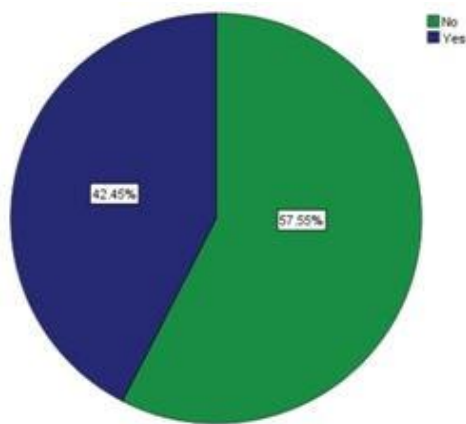


Figure 5: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of responses Covid-19 virus is spread through animals. 57.55% (green) of participants were aware Covid-19 is not spread through animals and 42.45% (blue) of participants responded that Covid-19 virus is spread through animals.

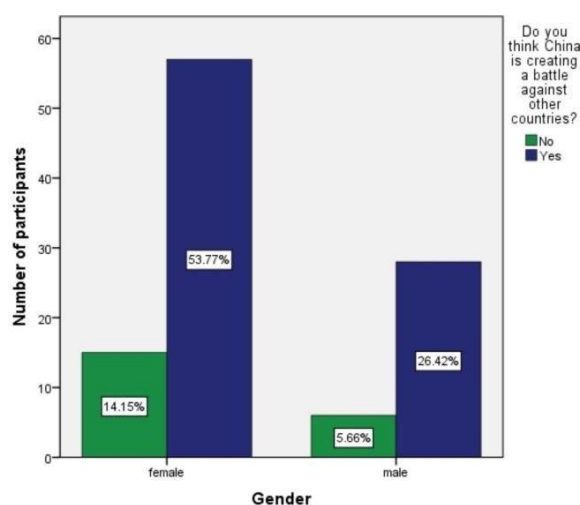


Figure 6: Bar chart representing association between gender and their opinion about China creating a bio-war against other countries. X-axis represents gender and Y-axis represents the number of participants.

Though females are more affirmative of opinion than males that China creates bio-war against other countries, association between the variables was tested using chi square test, Pearson's chi square: 0.148, DF: 1, p value: 0.701 (> 0.05) and found to be statistically not significant. Hence males and females are of the same levels of opinion in accepting that China creates bio-war against other countries.

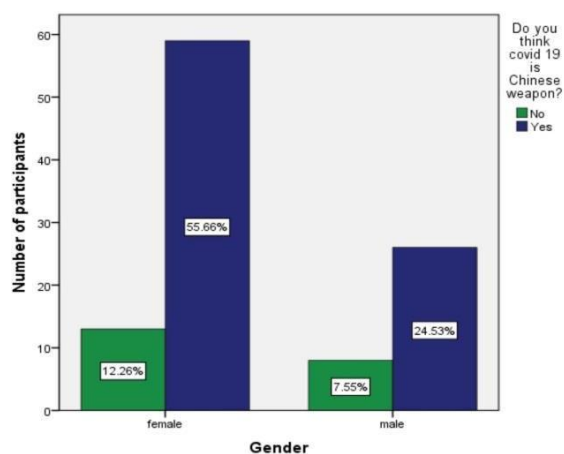


Figure 7: Bar chart representing association between gender and their opinion about Covid-19 being a lab made weapon. X-axis represents gender and Y-axis represents the number of participants. Though females are more of the opinion that Covid-19 is a lab made weapon, association between the variables was tested using chi square test, Pearson's chi square: 0.436, DF: 1, p value: 0.509 (> 0.05) and found to be

statistically not significant. Hence males and females are equally of the opinion that Covid-19 is a lab made weapon.

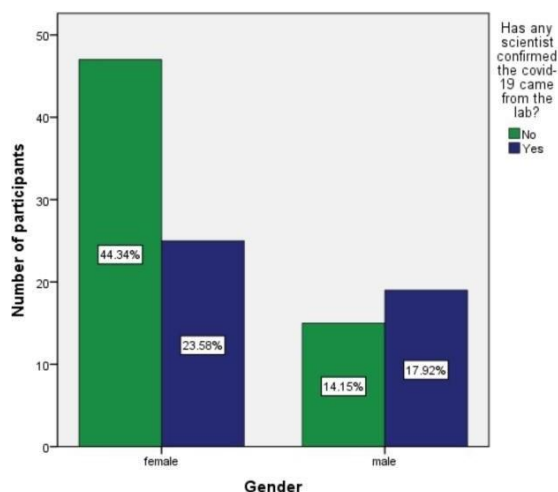


Figure 8: Bar chart representing association between gender and the opinion about whether a reputed scientist confirmed that Covid-19 originated from a lab. X-axis represents gender and Y-axis represents the number of participants. The females are more of the opinion that no reputed scientist has confirmed Covid-19 originated from a lab than males. Association between gender and the responses was tested using chi square test, Pearson’s chi square: 4.259 , DF: 1, p value: 0.039 (> 0.05) and found to be statistically significant. Hence females are more likely to be of the opinion that no reputed scientist has confirmed that Covid-19 originated from a lab.

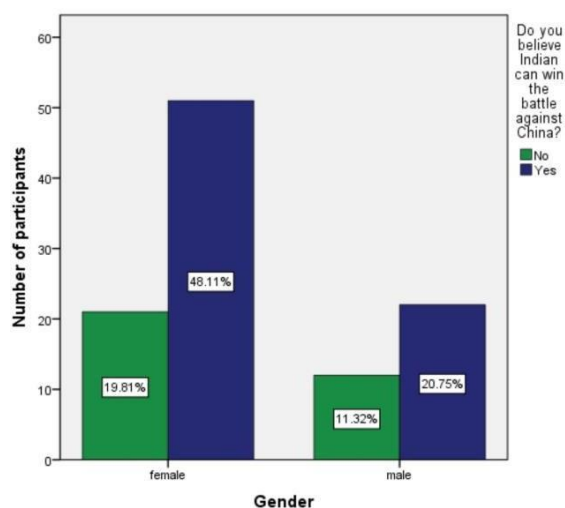


Figure 9: Bar chart representing association between gender and their opinion about whether India can win the battle against China in any forms including a biowar. Though females are more aware than males about the topic in the study population, association between variables was tested using chi square test, Pearson’s chi square: 0.404 , DF: 1 , p value: 0.525 (> 0.05) and found to be statistically not significant. Hence Males and females are more likely of the same affirmative opinion on whether India can win any form of war against China.