Observation of COVID-19 its effect on the Old, Blacks and Women

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In recent months, we have been overwhelmed by Coronavirus and its destructive nature. Every day, every hour, every minute; we are frozen by shock of the staggering numbers of infected people and their subsequent death; no single continent is spared from the calamity of a virus known as COVID-19. Although this invisible genie "escaped" from Easter China, Wuhan, it spread at a ‘speed of light’ across Europe, with so much ferocity when Europeans least expected it or were least prepared.

Since the beginning of March 2019, what we call COVID-19, made Europe its 'epicentre'. Italy became the first country badly affected, followed by Spain, France, UK etc. The Doctors, Nurses and Politicians of this countries couldn’t calm or reassure their people; they had no logical answer nor the ability to provide ‘Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)’ to hospitals and places as most essential items. People in Europe died in ten’s and thousands, the dead couldn’t even get decent burials, ill alone, died alone with no family at bed side.

Scientists were convinced what worked in China should be tried in Europe to mitigate the spread of the virus; they convinced governments to take emergency measures, then came restriction of movement now known as, ‘lockdown’ also the prohibition of close social interaction known as ‘social distancing’. The virus introduced new terminologies to our dictionary; it also forced new life style, new psychology and new socio-economics; technology faced a new test. Our old lives become distant memories, staying in distance from our families and friends also from our work and leisure became a rule; we are lockdown since March 2019 we don’t know when we would be FREE from this nightmare.

Also, our busy sky’s, the roads and highways started being empty, not only in Europe, also in Asia and the US; TV started showing images of ‘empty’ towns; closed shops; beaches and holiday resorts, places were deserted. As a consumer of several News sources during this lockdown, observing images of empty roads felt surreal and apocalyptic. What made it more unreal is, citizens being prepared to compromise their personal liberty; obeyed to the commands of their governments on the restriction their movement’s, their economy and lively hood. They readjusted to ‘new life’. Going to work, to school, college, run businesses, going to pubs, gym or any ordinary daily routine, became the ‘thing from the past’.

No Mercy
The Coronavirus pandemic showed that nothing, neither economic prosperity, educational status, nor control of power ‘grants immunity’ from COVID-19. This wicked disease, has no fear even to those who treated the infected in hospitals. Many health professionals, Doctors, Nurses, Paramedics, became the very victims of the disease they were treating their patents against. It shows no mercy to anyone and anywhere; American, Chinese, Iranian, Spanish etc, the only truth is the virus is invisible also deadly!

We heard even Prince Charles was isolating himself at one point. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who gave briefing every day at the beginning of the lockdown, had to isolate himself of suspected infection; then came the shock that he was admitted to hospital followed by admission to Intensive Care Unit. These two incidents spread fear in UK. No one has a magical power, even when one is nearer to the Throne. What a relief that Boris Johnson recovered now in convalescence, while many like him never made it!

Age
Although encouraging to hear people of 100 years of age have been infected by coronavirus and recovered from it, when a pandemic like this happen, the old would be the first likely victims.
In China where the corona virus first manifested, it was reported that 80% of people infected, were people of age 60 and above. World Health Organisation (WHO), China Joint Mission on COVID-19, stated, 21.9% death rate in China were people of age 80 and older, while in Italy, it was 20.2% for the same age group. Italy has 23% of its population above 65 years.

'First we should emphasize that while older people are at highest risk from COVID-19, all of us, at all ages, need to act in solidarity to prevent the further community spread of the virus’ WHO Regional Director to Europe

We have seen society’s attitude of acceptance for older people dying, as long as younger people are spared. Younger people are thinking youth will save them, in reality, the virus doesn’t. The most heart-breaking example for this, is the story of the 13 years old boy; he was the first child to be infected later to die in London hospital. He was in hospital alone and died alone on 1st April 2019, and got buried without his parents being around him. This is the viciousness of this virus for anyone any age.

Men
It is suggested more than a third of patients ill from the virus, both in China Wuhan, or Italy, Spain, France, US, UK etc, are men, also those who died from the virus.
The pattern across countries affected proved similar. Some scientists have attributed these differences to women and men having different chromosomes, XX and XY. Also, the hormones, Testosterone, and estrogen, the former inhibiting and the later stimulating the body’s immune system.

Race
While COVID-19 can affect everyone, how health information, interpreted and perceived can differ by community, religious belief also health literacy. One pattern that is apparent though is those individuals with underlying conditions like, Coronary Heart Diseases (CHD), Diabetes, Hypertension to be at higher risk; these are mostly people of ‘colour’, mainly people of African and Asian heritage.

Many people from this background who live in the US and Europe survive on the edge of poverty; overcrowding and obesity are common among them; they suffer race discrimination and are likely to work on risky jobs. They have a high level of stress and financial insecurity that exposes them to diseases like CHD including Coronavirus.

The US ‘The Pew Research Centre’ on health concerns, found that 43% of Hispanics; 31% of Blacks, being concerned about the virus while it was only 13% for the White adults. Despite the fact that African American population is only 13% of US population, the death rate from COVID-19, for African Americans is higher. It has been reported those affected in Chicago, Las Vegas, New York, New Orleans, South Carolina are mostly African Americans. In Chicago, 30.12% of the population are African Americans, yet, the death rate of COVID-19 among them is said to be 68%. (Chicago Department of Public, BBC/11th April 2020).

In the UK, the information from ‘Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre, reported 30% victims of COVID-19 to be from Black, Asian and other minorities, while they are only 13% of the population.

Two thirds of National Health Service (NHS) death in UK, were from Black, Asian and other minorities. Among those who died were, Doctors, Nurses, Bus drivers, Care workers including the recent 28 years old pregnant Nurse from Africa.

It is not the intention of this article to discuss the racial disparity, inequality and the racial injustice of corona virus, but to draw attention racial minorities disproportionately suffered from COVID-19 death.

COVID-19 and violence against Women
The UN reports that there is 25% increase on violence against women after COVID-19. The virus and the lockdown have been used to threaten women yet women have no place to hide; abusers and the victims are forced to stay together because of the restriction that has exasperated the situation.

As a result of the heath emergency, there is limited resource also shifted resource from helping women who are suffering violence.

Shortly after the virus first started In Wuhan, the Police reported 50% increase in domestic violence cases. The UN statistics shows, the COVID-19 lockdown causing a surge in sexual and physical violence against women and girls.

For example, in Singapore 30%; France 30%; Spain 18% and in the US 35%. Also, in the first two weeks of lockdown in UK, a disturbing 700% increase of calls concerning domestic violence was reported by ‘Refuge’, A UK Charity. A separate helpline also reported 25% increase from perpetrators or abusers after the start of the lockdown.

The emergence of coronavirus has exposed the dysfunctional nature of various infrastructures and stark inequality in society. We saw the richest nations in the world, struggling to cope and curb the disease. In the US, 27 million Americans, have no medical insurance and they are the highest casualties, that doesn’t mean the rich with medical insurance are spared.

The death in US from COVID-19, has now surpassed 40,000, the highest in the world (40,461 people, by Johns Hopkins University 19th April 2020). After US are Italy, Spain, France and the UK

The global COVID-19 death has now reached 164,925, (19th April, Worldometer Coronavirus).

Despite other COVID-19 variables, violence against women is preventable. Tigray should learn from the experience of other countries and setup a National Multiagency Task Force led by women.

Women are the frontline workers in many parts of the world, be it teaching, nursing, looking after children, the elderly and the disabled; if women are affected by violence also COVID-19, everything will collapse as a consequence.

There should be a systematic prevention mechanism set up sooner than later. prevention is better than cure.

No man should use COVID-19 and the state of emergency in Tigray, to coerce and abuse women or girls. Tigray should keep women safe, free from any form of abuse. Government and civil society should have a stronger will to enforce solidarity and gender equality more than anytime. The Police should apprehend abusive criminals with no mercy and reassure women justice and safety they deserve.

One should keep in mind that women are our mother’s, sisters, nieces, aunts and grandmothers. Women, are the binding glue of society everywhere, also, in Tigray. Keeping them safe would keep the country safe.