

Impact of COVID-19 on private practice of dermatology in Pakistan

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Abstract

Background The SARS-CoV-2 virus and the disease it causes, termed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), has rapidly swept across the world since its first known human manifestation on December 8, 2019. Confirmed cases are present in over 160 countries. This article summarized the impact of COVID-19 on Dermatology private practice. The purpose of this study was to assess the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of dermatologists across the country through a survey.

Methods A questionnaire, containing fifteen questions was created through Google forms and sent to the dermatologists practicing in different cities of Pakistan through WhatsApp or email and data was collected.

Results 122 dermatologists from all over Pakistan participated in the survey out of which 78.6% Dermatologist's private practice was completely affected by COVID-19 outbreak.

Conclusion Dermatology private practice greatly affected by COVID-19 outbreak.

Key words

COVID-19, private practice, dermatology.

Introduction

COVID-19 or Corona virus disease is caused by severe acute respiratory response syndrome Corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Reported to the WHO regional office from Wuhan, China on 31st December 2019, the virus has spread to involve almost every country. The novel corona virus outbreak was declared a global pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020.¹

According to WHO, around 7.8 million confirmed cases are reported, of which 4.3 million have died of the disease in 216 countries all over the world so far.² Since first case reported on 26th Feb. lockdown was imposed across the country for almost two months. We had observed an exponential increase in cases and the number has raised to 147000 from just 20000 cases after the lockdown was raised.³ The impact of COVID-19 is beyond the health system. It has devastating effects on education, religious practices, social norms, and slowdown the world's economy as a whole.⁴

Along with other effects this pandemic affected

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the clinical practice of consultants and general practitioners as well primarily because of the lockdown and the fear among the patients to catch the disease from the health care providing facilities. The clinical work and consultation of patients is limited to phone calls and WhatsApp sharing.⁵ Dermatologists have a close contact with their patients while examining the skin and performing various procedures like fillers and botox injections. To observe the impact of COVID-19 on dermatology outdoor patients Chen et al conducted a study in Wuhan China, the epicenter of the pandemic.⁶ But no such study has been conducted in our country and particularly the impact of the pandemic on the Private practice of dermatologists has not been assessed worldwide so far according to our knowledge. In Pakistan the private practice contributes a major chunk of the burden of dermatology. The purpose of this study was to assess the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of dermatologists across the country.

Materials and methods

A questionnaire, containing fifteen questions was created through Google forms and sent to the dermatologists practicing in different cities of Pakistan through WhatsApp or email and data was collected.

Results

Almost all registered dermatologists with PAD (Pakistan association of dermatologists) were approached but 122 have participated in the survey. Female were 61.5% (n=75) while 37.7% (n=46) were male. Designation wise data showed that 57% (n=69) were consultant dermatologists whereas associate professors were just 6.6% (n=8). Area wise distribution showed that majority of doctors participated were from Punjab, 62.5% (n=75) while from

Balochistan province not a single dermatologist participated in the survey (**Table 2, 3**).

Private practice of 79.3% (n=96) of dermatologists was affected completely. The number of patients visiting clinics also dropped. The survey showed that 53% (n=62) had not received an appointment call from their clinic attendant. According to survey 74.2% (n=89) of dermatologist's majority of dermatological visits were non-emergent. Therefore 67.5% (n=81) believed that the non-emergent visits should be cancelled for indefinite time. However, to attend the emergent cases 95.9% (n=116) believed that PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) should be used (**Table 1**).

During lockdown situation patients were using other means for consultation. WhatsApp was the preferred medium in 90.6% (n=106) of cases (**Table 1**).

Discussion

Coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) also known as 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2' (SARS-CoV-2) has spread to involve the five continents and more than two hundred countries. SARS-Co-2 is an RNA virus of Coronaviridae family. It causes zoonotic infection in humans, most probably transmitted from bats in this case in Wuhan China.⁷

COVID-19 spread is far more extensive than SARS which took place in 2002 in China. SARS infected 8422 people worldwide, of which 916 died globally.⁸ Reasons behind this extensive spread may be increased communication and travelling, early spread of virus in COVID-19 even if patient has not developed symptoms as compared to SARS where the viral shedding occurs late in the course of the disease when respiratory symptoms appears, COVID-19 may be less virulent as compared to SARS.

Table 1 Statistical Analysis of Questions Asked from Dermatologists

Questions (N= 122)	Female N (%)	Male N (%)	Total N (%)	X ²	P-value
1. Are you doing private practice during lock down					
No	63 (84.0%)	33 (71.7%)	96 (79.3%)	2.615 ^a	.106
Yes	12 (16.0%)	13 (28.3%)	25 (20.7%)		
2. Did patients visit your private clinic during lock down					
No	41 (56.9%)	21 (46.7%)	62 (53.0%)	1.174 ^a	.279
Yes	31 (43.1%)	24 (53.3%)	56 (47.0%)		
3. Do you think as a dermatologist that the majority of our outpatient visits are non-emergent					
No	5 (6.8%)	7 (15.2%)	12 (10.0%)	2.457 ^a	.293
Yes	56 (75.7%)	33 (71.7%)	89 (74.2%)		
May be					
4. You feel it is prudent to cancel all non-urgent visits indefinitely					
No	9 (12.2%)	8 (17.4%)	17 (14.2%)	1.505 ^a	.471
Yes	53 (71.6%)	28 (60.9%)	81 (67.5%)		
May be	12 (16.2%)	10 (21.7%)	22 (18.3%)		
5. You think emergent consultations should be done with proper personal equipment and an emphasis on social distancing					
No	2 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.7%)	3.199 ^a	.202
Yes	70 (93.3%)	46 (100.0%)	116 (95.9%)		
May be	3 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.5%)		
6. Do you suffer from economic repercussions or financial burden due to closure of private practice					
No	25 (33.3%)	21 (45.7%)	46 (38.0%)	3.251 ^a	.197
Yes	38 (50.7%)	22 (47.8%)	60 (49.6%)		
May be	12 (16.0%)	3 (6.5%)	15 (12.4%)		
7. Did closing private clinic affect you psychologically e.g. depression, anxiety, stress etc.					
No	54 (72.0%)	27 (58.7%)	81 (66.9%)	2.281 ^a	.131
Yes	21 (28.0%)	19 (41.3%)	40 (33.1%)		
8. Do the patients seek online consultation from you					
No	8 (10.8%)	4 (8.7%)	12 (10.0%)	.141 ^a	.707
Yes	66 (89.2%)	42 (91.3%)	108 (90.0%)		
9. Do you answer online consultations					
No	4 (5.4%)	3 (6.5%)	7 (5.8%)	1.926 ^a	.382
Always	47 (63.5%)	34 (73.9%)	81 (67.5%)		
Sometimes	23 (31.1%)	9 (19.6%)	32 (26.7%)		
10. Which preferred social media tool do you use for your online consultations					
Whats App	64 (37.7%)	42 (95.5%)	106 (90.6%)	2.676 ^a	.444
SMS/Audio Call	2 (2.7%)	1 (2.3%)	3 (2.6%)		
Facebook	3 (4.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.6%)		
Other	4 (5.5%)	1 (2.3%)	5 (4.3%)		
11. Do the patients call/message you at odd times for online consultation					
No	8 (10.8%)	5 (10.9%)	13 (10.8%)	.063 ^a	.969
Often	29 (39.2%)	17 (37.0%)	46 (38.3%)		
Sometimes	37 (50.0%)	24 (52.2%)	61 (50.8%)		
12. Do the patients demand instant answers to their problems when they consult you online					
No	10 (13.5%)	8 (17.8%)	18 (15.1%)	.846 ^a	.655
Often	44 (59.5%)	23 (51.1%)	67 (56.3%)		
Sometimes	20 (27.0%)	14 (31.1%)	34 (28.6%)		
13. Do your patients get angry or aggressive with you, if you do not respond to their online messages or pictures					
No	42 (57.5%)	29 (64.4%)	71 (60.2%)	5.428 ^a	.066
Often	2 (2.7%)	5 (11.1%)	7 (5.9%)		
Sometimes	29 (39.7%)	11 (24.4%)	40 (33.9%)		
14. Do you get irritated by frequent online consultation by patients					
No	15 (20.3%)	15 (33.3%)	30 (25.2%)	2.920 ^a	.232
Often	14 (18.9%)	9 (20.0%)	23 (19.3%)		
Sometimes	45 (60.8%)	21 (46.7%)	66 (55.5%)		
15. Do the patients having undergone procedures like Botox, fillers, lasers etc. are asking you to repeat the procedures during lock down					
No	37 (50.7%)	18 (40.9%)	55 (47.0%)	1.053 ^a	.305
Yes	36 (49.3%)	26 (59.1%)	62 (53.0%)		

Table 2

Question (N= 122)	Professor N (%)	Associate Professor N (%)	Consultant Dermatologist N (%)	Assistant Professor N (%)	Others N (%)	Total N (%)	X2	P- value
1. Are you doing private practice during lock down								
No	7 (70.0%)	7 (87.5%)	56 (81.2%)	18 (75.0%)	8 (80.0%)		1.275 ^a	.866
Yes	3 (30.0%)	1 (12.5%)	13 (18.8%)	6 (25.0%)	25 (20.7%)			
2. Did patients visit your private clinic during lock down								
No	6 (60.0%)	3 (42.9%)	36 (53.7%)	12 (50.0%)	5 (55.6%)		.610 ^a	.962
Yes	4 (40.0%)	4 (57.1%)	31 (46.3%)	12 (50.0%)	4 (44.4%)			
3. Do you think as a dermatologist that the majority of our outpatient visits are non-emergent								
No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (10.1%)	4 (16.7%)	1 (11.1%)	12 (10.0%)	4.571 ^a	.802
Yes	8 (80.0%)	7 (87.5%)	50 (72.5%)	18 (75.0%)	6 (66.7%)	89 (74.2%)		
May be	2 (20.0%)	1 (12.5%)	12 (17.4%)	2 (8.3%)	2 (22.2%)	19 (15.8%)		
4. You feel it is prudent to cancel all non-urgent visits indefinitely								
No	4 (40.0%)	2 (25.0%)	6 (8.7%)	4 (17.4%)	1 (10.0%)	17 (14.2%)	9.097 ^a	.334
Yes	4 (40.0%)	5 (62.5%)	49 (71.0%)	16 (69.6%)	7 (70.0%)	81 (67.5%)		
May be	2 (20.0%)	1 (12.5%)	14 (20.3%)	3 (13.0%)	2 (20.0%)	22 (18.3%)		
5. You think emergent consultations should be done with proper personal equipment and an emphasis on social distancing								
No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.7%)	8.180 ^a	.416
Yes	10 (100.0%)	7 (87.5%)	67 (97.1%)	23 (95.8%)	9 (90.0%)	116 (95.9%)		
May be	0 (0.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	3 (2.5%)		
6. Do you suffer from economic repercussions or financial burden due to closure of private practice								
No	3 (30.0%)	4 (50.0%)	28 (40.6%)	7 (29.2%)	4 (40.0%)	46 (38.0%)	13.069 ^a	.109
Yes	3 (30.0%)	2 (25.0%)	34 (49.3%)	16 (66.7%)	5 (50.0%)	60 (49.6%)		
May be	4 (40.0%)	2 (25.0%)	7 (10.1%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (10.0%)	15 (12.4%)		
7. Did closing private clinic affect you psychologically e.g. depression, anxiety, stress etc.								
No	6 (60.0%)	7 (87.5%)	46 (66.7%)	18 (75.0%)	4 (40.0%)	81 (66.9%)	5.732 ^a	.220
Yes	4 (40.0%)	1 (12.5%)	23 (33.3%)	6 (25.0%)	6 (60.0%)	40 (33.1%)		
8. Do the patients seek online consultation from you								
No	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	7 (10.1%)	3 (12.5%)	1 (10.0%)	12 (10.0%)	1.422 ^a	.840
Yes	10 (100.0%)	6 (85.7%)	62 (89.9%)	21 (87.5%)	9 (90.0%)	108 (90.0%)		
9. Do you answer online consultations								
No	1 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (5.8%)	8.309 ^a	.404
Always	6 (60.0%)	5 (62.5%)	48 (69.6%)	15 (62.5%)	7 (77.8%)	81 (67.5%)		
Sometimes	3 (30.0%)	3 (37.5%)	19 (27.5%)	5 (20.8%)	2 (22.2%)	32 (26.7%)		
10. Which preferred social media tool do you use for your online consultations								
WhatsApp	9 (100.0%)	8 (100.0%)	63 (92.6%)	20 (87.0%)	6 (66.7%)	106 (90.6%)	19.743 ^a	.072
SMS/Audio	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (2.6%)		
Call								
Facebook	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)	1 (4.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.6%)		
Other	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)	2 (8.7%)	1 (11.1%)	5 (4.3%)		
11. Do the patients call/message you at odd times for online consultation								
No	0 (0.0%)	1 (12.5%)	6 (8.7%)	3 (12.5%)	3 (33.3%)	13 (10.8%)	9.291 ^a	.318
Often	5 (50.0%)	1 (12.5%)	28 (40.6%)	10 (41.7%)	2 (22.2%)	46 (38.3%)		
Sometimes	5 (50.0%)	6 (75.0%)	35 (50.7%)	11 (45.8%)	4 (44.4%)	61 (50.8%)		
12. Do the patients demand instant answers to their problems when they consult you online								
No	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (14.5%)	3 (13.0%)	3 (33.3%)	18 (15.1%)	7.339 ^a	.501
Often	3 (30.0%)	6 (75.0%)	40 (58.0%)	14 (60.9%)	4 (44.4%)	67 (56.3%)		
Sometimes	5 (50.0%)	2 (25.0%)	19 (27.5%)	6 (26.1%)	2 (22.2%)	34 (28.6%)		
13. Do your patients get angry or aggressive with you, if you do not respond to their online messages or pictures								
No	5 (55.6%)	6 (75.0%)	40 (58.0%)	14 (60.9%)	6 (66.7%)	71 (60.2%)	2.539 ^a	.960
Often	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (5.8%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (5.9%)		
Sometimes	3 (33.3%)	2 (25.0%)	25 (36.2%)	7 (30.4%)	3 (33.3%)	40 (33.9%)		
14. Do you get irritated by frequent online consultation by patients								
No	3 (30.0%)	1 (12.5%)	20 (29.0%)	4 (17.4%)	2 (22.2%)	30 (25.2%)	6.394 ^a	.603
Often	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (17.4%)	7 (30.4%)	2 (22.2%)	23 (19.3%)		
Sometimes	5 (50.0%)	7 (87.5%)	37 (53.6%)	12 (52.2%)	5 (55.6%)	66 (55.5%)		
15. Do the patients having undergone procedures like Botox, fillers, lasers etc. are asking you to repeat the procedures during lock down								
No	5 (55.6%)	5 (62.5%)	28 (42.4%)	11 (45.8%)	6 (60.0%)	55 (47.0%)	2.282 ^a	.684
Yes	4 (44.4%)	3 (37.5%)	38 (57.6%)	13 (54.2%)	4 (40.0%)	62 (53.0%)		

Table 3 Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables (N= 122)	KPK N (%)	Punjab N (%)	Sindh N (%)	Islamabad N (%)	Total N (%)	X2	P-value
1. Are you doing private practice during lock down							
No	7 (87.5%)	59 (78.7%)	20 (83.3%)	9 (69.2%)	95 (79.2%)	1.379 ^a	.710
Yes	1 (12.5%)	16 (21.3%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (30.8%)	25 (20.8%)		
Did patients visit your private clinic during lock down							
2 No	5 (62.5%)	34 (46.6%)	17 (70.8%)	6 (50.0%)	62 (53.0%)	4.607 ^a	.203
Yes	3 (37.5%)	39 (53.4%)	7 (29.2%)	6 (50.0%)	55 (47.0%)		
Do you think as a dermatologist that the majority of our outpatient visits are non-emergent							
3 No	1 (12.5%)	8 (10.8%)	3 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (10.1%)	13.097 ^a	.042
Yes	7 (87.5%)	58 (78.4%)	16 (66.7%)	7 (53.8%)	88 (73.9%)		
May be	0 (0.0%)	8 (10.8%)	5 (20.8%)	6 (46.2%)	19 (16.0%)		
4 You feel it is prudent to cancel all non-urgent visits indefinitely							
No	2 (25.0%)	12 (16.2%)	2 (8.3%)	1 (7.7%)	17 (14.3%)	4.130 ^a	.659
Yes	6 (75.0%)	49 (66.2%)	16 (66.7%)	9 (69.2%)	80 (67.2%)		
May be	0 (0.0%)	13 (17.6%)	6 (25.0%)	3 (23.1%)	22 (18.5%)		
5 You think emergent consultations should be done with proper personal equipment and an emphasis on social distancing							
No	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.7%)	3.669 ^a	.721
Yes	8 (100.0%)	73 (97.3%)	22 (91.7%)	12 (92.3%)	115 (95.8%)		
May be	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (7.7%)	3 (2.5%)		
6 Do you suffer from economic repercussions or financial burden due to closure of private practice							
No	1 (12.5%)	30 (40.0%)	11 (45.8%)	4 (30.8%)	46 (38.3%)	5.066 ^a	.535
Yes	6 (75.0%)	34 (45.3%)	12 (50.0%)	7 (53.8%)	59 (49.2%)		
May be	1 (12.5%)	11 (14.7%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (15.4%)	15 (12.5%)		
7 Did closing private clinic affect you psychologically e.g. depression, anxiety, stress etc.							
No	6 (75.0%)	50 (66.7%)	16 (66.7%)	9 (69.2%)	81 (67.5%)	.254 ^a	.968
Yes	2 (25.0%)	25 (33.3%)	8 (33.3%)	4 (30.8%)	39 (32.5%)		
8 Do the patients seek online consultation from you							
No	0 (0.0%)	8 (10.7%)	3 (13.0%)	1 (7.7%)	12 (10.1%)	1.229 ^a	.746
Yes	8 (100.0%)	67 (89.3%)	20 (87.0%)	12 (92.3%)	107 (89.9%)		
9 Do you answer online consultations							
No	0 (0.0%)	6 (8.1%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (5.9%)	7.036 ^a	.317
Always	7 (87.5%)	46 (62.2%)	15 (62.5%)	12 (92.3%)	80 (67.2%)		
Sometimes	1 (12.5%)	22 (29.7%)	8 (33.3%)	1 (7.7%)	32 (26.9%)		
10 Which preferred social media tool do you use for your online consultations							
WhatsApp	8 (100.0%)	65 (91.5%)	20 (83.3%)	12 (92.3%)	105 (90.5%)	4.956 ^a	.838
SMS/Audio Call	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.8%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.6%)		
Facebook	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (7.7%)	3 (2.6%)		
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.2%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (4.3%)		
11 Do the patients call/message you at odd times for online consultation							
No	2 (25.0%)	5 (6.8%)	4 (16.7%)	2 (15.4%)	13 (10.9%)	5.127 ^a	.528
Often	3 (37.5%)	32 (43.2%)	7 (29.2%)	4 (30.8%)	46 (38.7%)		
Sometimes	3 (37.5%)	37 (50.0%)	13 (54.2%)	7 (53.8%)	60 (50.4%)		
12 Do the patients demand instant answers to their problems when they consult you online							
No	0 (0.0%)	9 (12.3%)	6 (25.0%)	3 (23.1%)	18 (15.3%)	6.072 ^a	.415
Often	6 (75.0%)	40 (54.8%)	13 (54.2%)	8 (61.5%)	67 (56.8%)		
Sometimes	2 (25.0%)	24 (32.9%)	5 (20.8%)	2 (15.4%)	33 (28.0%)		
13 Do your patients get angry or aggressive with you, if you do not respond to their online messages or pictures							
No	5 (62.5%)	39 (54.2%)	17 (70.8%)	9 (69.2%)	70 (59.8%)	9.360 ^a	.154
Often	2 (25.0%)	4 (5.6%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (6.0%)		
Sometimes	1 (12.5%)	29 (40.3%)	6 (25.0%)	4 (30.8%)	40 (34.2%)		
14 Do you get irritated by frequent online consultation by patients							
No	2 (25.0%)	14 (19.2%)	9 (37.5%)	4 (30.8%)	29 (24.6%)	6.423 ^a	.377
Often	2 (25.0%)	18 (24.7%)	2 (8.3%)	1 (7.7%)	23 (19.5%)		
Sometimes	4 (50.0%)	41 (56.2%)	13 (54.2%)	8 (61.5%)	66 (55.9%)		
15 Do the patients having undergone procedures like Botox, fillers, lasers etc. are asking you to repeat the procedures during lock down							
No	3 (37.5%)	32 (43.8%)	13 (59.1%)	6 (46.2%)	54 (46.6%)	1.871 ^a	.600
Yes	5 (62.5%)	41 (56.2%)	9 (40.9%)	7 (53.8%)	62 (53.4%)		

As this pandemic has affected almost every field of life but healthcare workers are affected particularly more, and dermatologists are not exempted.⁹ In our survey female dermatologists participated more than males, reason behind this may be there are more females incline towards this field or females are affected more because of the social constrains of our society.

In our study 78.6% dermatologists stopped doing private practice during lockdown. Bhat et al.⁹ published that during lockdown dramatic decline was seen in dermatological consultation through out India. Litchman GH⁵ reported similar decline in consultation in United States as well. As dermatology outdoor in public sector hospitals were shutdown to prevent the spread of the disease. In this situation the flow of patients should have increased on private clinics. But we observed 54% reduction in number of patients visiting private clinics. Giacalone et al.¹⁰ observed above 50% reduction in dermatological consultation in Italy during lockdown which supports our findings.

As majority of dermatological consultation are non-emergent therefore 68% of dermatologists in our study supported complete closure of dermatological clinics for indefinite time in current situation, while 95% doctors recommended the use of PPE (personal protection equipment) for emergency cases to prevent the spread of the disease and to protect the health care workers. It is in accordance with the recommendations given by Tao et al.¹¹

During this period 88.5% patients consulted their physicians using different online means, of which WhatsApp was the preferred medium in 92.1% cases. Gisoni et al.¹² observed shrinkage of face to face consultation in 80-90% of patients in Italy and emergence of teledermatology is observed. Litchman GH⁵ and Bhat et al.⁹ observed similar findings.

Conclusion

It is mandatory to make new guidelines for such situation to prevent transmission of the disease and to help the needy patients. Its very important to develop teledermatology as a separate entity throughout the country.

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