

Correspondence

Collection of data on indigenous communities this Covid-19 pandemic

To the editor

Indigenous peoples suffer higher infection rates, greater severe symptoms and death compared to the general population during pandemic due to the social and cultural determinants of health and lack of political power.¹

Once the 2019 novel coronavirus disease or COVID-19 is introduced in indigenous communities, it may be difficult to contain. They live in isolated communities with multigenerational households with shared bathrooms limiting options for social distancing and quarantining family members.² Most of them lack medical posts, doctors and basic medications. They likewise do not have regular access to clean water, soap, alcohol and disinfectants, which are preventive measures against the spread of the virus.

In times of sickness, they rely on the use of traditional medications which are not yet clinically proven to cure COVID-19. An infection against one member will bring dire and drastic consequences to the whole community.

In addressing these concerns, the author in a recent correspondence in this journal, states that a multisectoral strategy of intervention and a preferential option for the indigenous peoples during this global pandemic is needed.³ This paper affirms it and suggests that for a successful intervention to happen there is a necessity to accurately collect and report data regarding the current social, cultural and health status of these communities.

It imperative that accurate data be readily available as basis for designs to effectively implement countermeasures against the pandemic. Data have become indispensable as medical practitioners and public officials find solutions to improve their response.⁴ Numbers are also crucial as they affect the ability of the people to care, to empathize and to contribute relief in the effort to put an end to the spread of the virus.⁵ Moreover, numbers provide how, when and why the means needed by the government to save its people.

There is a long history of lack of data pertaining to indigenous communities. In the Philippines, it was only in the year 2010 when an ethnicity variable was included in the national census. At present, their number remains to be unknown but is estimated to be between 10 and 20% of 102.9 million national population.⁶

The spread of COVID-19 likewise knows no boundaries, thus, it is imperative that the needs of the indigenous population must be brought to the consciousness of the entire world. It should start with diligent efforts of the government to get an accurate data regarding the plight of the indigenous peoples most specially in the issue of public health while ensuring the privacy of such information. It is only in the availability of accurate data that one can understand the situations, make informed decisions and ensure that all plans will not be futile.

References

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