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“Herpes zoster in the era of COVID 19: A prospective observational study to probe the association of herpes zoster with COVID 19 infection and vaccination”

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Sir,

Thank you very much for letting us know about the interest shown by Li Y et al in our article.<sup>1</sup> We do agree in principle with the opinion expressed by the authors, and are privy to the fact that COVID 19 pandemic has lead to exponential rise in mental illnesses. However, this disproportionate sudden increase is not just limited to those directly affected by COVID 19. But, has been seen across the board, even amongst those not directly affected by the virus through infection and/or vaccination against it.<sup>2, 3</sup> Which was largely due to the immense mental stress caused by the severe inhibitory restrictions (lock down) enforced by the various governments globally, on advice of their respective health regulatory authorities from time to time to limit the spread of the virus early on in the pandemic, due to the lack of any other effective tool to control the spread of infection, available at that time.

Also, we do know that psychological stress is one of the described factors in reactivation of herpes viruses. However, in spite of it being such a common dermatosis, and almost everyone being affected mentally due to COVID 19. We would have witnessed a steep rise in cases of reactivation of herpes viruses, which does not seem to be the case. The disproportionate rise in incidence of cases of herpes zoster being reported in literature are mostly limited to the those directly linked with COVID 19 virus infection, which is presumably due to the lymphopenia induced by COVID 19 virus, leading to deficient cell mediated immune response, which is supposedly considered to be the most important defense mechanism protecting against the reactivation of Herpes viruses.<sup>4, 5</sup> Thus, we are not very confident if psychosocial stress had a major role to play. According to the data available in the literature, the strongest link is found with COVID 19 infection, and psychosocial stress may have a minor role, in conjunction with Coronavirus infection, and not just by itself. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to investigate this aspect little deeper, to know exactly the extent to which it may be actually responsible.

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