

Are the Diagnosed Cases of Tuberculosis Just the Tip of Iceberg? Comments on “Syndemic of Tuberculosis and COVID-19 in Bangladesh”

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Sahjid Mukhida, MBBS¹, Shahzad Mirza, MD¹,
Sriram Kannuri, MBBS¹, and Nikunja Kumar Das, MD¹ 

Dear Editor,

We recently read the article titled “Syndemic of Tuberculosis and COVID-19 in Bangladesh.”¹ In this article, they nicely wrote the situation of tuberculosis cases in Bangladesh during the covid-19 pandemic. The severity and mortality of current Covid-19 pandemic cases have taken over the legend of tuberculosis. As per the global tuberculosis report of World Health Organization (WHO) 2021,² during the covid-19 pandemic, diagnosing and reporting of new tuberculosis cases reduced, but this is not the real picture. Current cases which are being reported are not acute cases, they may have been infected a long time ago but not diagnosed on time due to immune response.³ We want to highlight that we are underestimating the annual risk of tuberculosis in high-burden countries. We also want to reveal some of the reasons behind the underestimation of case reporting.

Both Covid-19 and tuberculosis belong to the infections of the lower respiratory tract and some symptoms like fever, coughing, and others are present in both these infections. During the pandemic period, humans feared Covid-19 more as compared to tuberculosis mostly due to a panic situation created and after SARS-CoV 2, tuberculosis was in second place in the list of high mortality rating diseases due to a single infective agent.²

Multiple reasons could have contributed to this unlikely scaling down such as underreporting of cases as a result of false perception; reduction in seeking medical attention due to lockdown; fear of quarantine, scarcity of diagnosis and therapeutic services after being directed solely toward dealing with covid-19. The use of PPE which came as a blessing in disguise could have been one of the reasons. Using Mask (surgical and N95), PPE and social distancing also contributed to the reduction of tuberculosis incidence but the real incidences may be still high as compared to current figures and it may be the tip of the iceberg.⁴

Tuberculosis prevalence rate is still high and we are required to more efforts to achieve the WHO goal of tuberculosis elimination. During pandemic waves, most health care

task forces of high burden and low-income countries were engaged in managing the covid-19 patients. As we aim for normalcy there could potentially be a steady surge in the number of cases again, and as WHO recently announced “Invest to End TB, and Save lives” a more aggressive way of diagnosis and treatment is warranted toward the elimination of tuberculosis.⁵

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ORCID iD

Nikunja Kumar Das  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2368-5260>

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¹Department of Microbiology, Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune, Pune, India

Corresponding Author:

Nikunja Kumar Das, Department of Microbiology, Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune, Pimpri, Pune 411018, Maharashtra, India.
Email: nikunjdas3085@gmail.com

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