The webinar 'COVID-19: The Role of the Media in Addressing Stigma' will start shortly.
Please mute your mic :)

COVID-19:
The Role of the Media in Addressing Stigma
06/07/2020

Agenda

- Introduction: Dr Viviane L. Fluck, IFRC

- The Role of Media in addressing Stigma – Indian experience: Sangeeta Barooah, The Wire

- Addressing rumours and connecting media and humanitarian organisations: Irene Scott, Internews

- How to use community voices to address stigma: Richard Lace, BBC Media Action

- Resources & Tools: Dr Viviane L. Fluck, IFRC

- Discussion

Stigma

stigma

noun

/ˈstɪgmə/

[uncountable, countable, usually singular]

negative feelings that people have about particular circumstances or characteristics that somebody may have

(Oxford Dictionary)

Stigma & COVID-19

Do you think a specific group is responsible for spreading COVID-19 in your community?
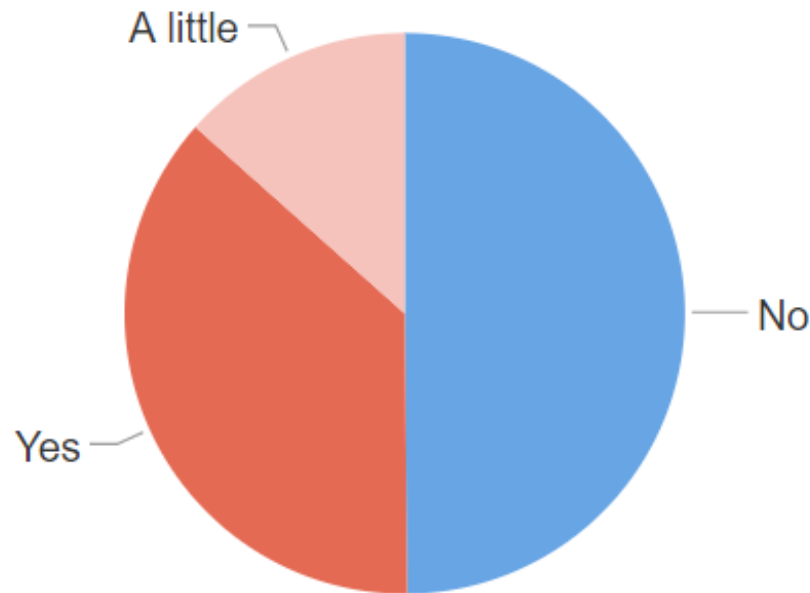
Yes: 36.71%; A little: 13.43%; No: 49.87%; N = 4543, Community Insight Dashboard

Stigma & COVID-19

The Role of Media in Addressing the Stigma around COVID-19

The Indian Experience

Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty

WIRE

CURRENT SCENARIO

India is the 4th country, after the U.S., Brazil and Russia, to cross the half a million mark of Covid-19 cases.

While it has crossed the mark of over 20,000 cases per day early this week, India's current recovery rate is nearly 60%. The national capital, Delhi, has so far the highest number of cases.

COVID-19 CASES INDIA

RECOVERED	57,720
FRESH FATALITIES	154
TOTAL DEATHS	4,021

COUNT
1,38,345

WORLD

TOTAL	55,42,056
RECOVERED	23,21,556
DEATHS	3,47,381

THE WIRE
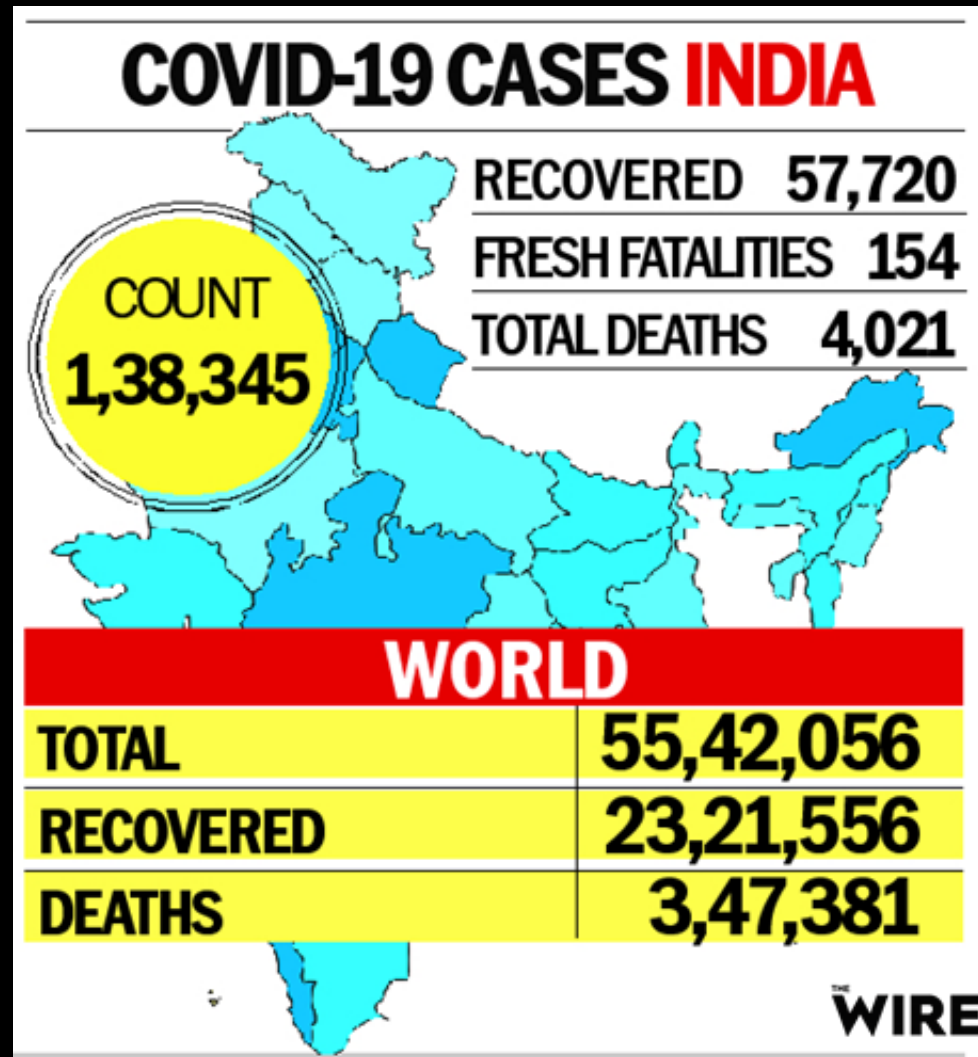
Major Steps Taken by the Government to Contain the Spread

First Week of March
Initially India's response was restricted to curbs on travel from countries reporting a large number of cases then -- China, Japan, Iran, South Korea and Italy.

22nd March onwards
All international commercial flights suspended. Last minute travellers till March 21 screened at airports for symptoms like high temperature, dry cough, etc. Travel details noted down too

19th March
PM Modi announces a one-day 'Janata Curfew' or a day-long lockdown across the country, also for March 22 (the day of suspension of the intl' flights).

24th March, 8PM
The PM announces a 21-day national lockdown stating that it was required to break the chain of infection. Till then, the ntional number of dead were 12. Cases reported were 564, and several states were free of Covid-19 cases. Most considered the step as time taken to ready the health infrastructure -- procurement of personal protection kits, testing laboratories, quarantine centres, etc.

Immediate Fallout of National Lockdown:h Travellers

- With the PM announcing the lockdown just 4 hours before it was to start, and with strict police action, many travelling to other parts of the country on work, for leisure, for medical reasons, to study, etc. found themselves stuck.

- With the subsequent extension till May 17, they continued to remain in those places, away from home.

- Some state governments had to electronically transfer money to some such people.

- The government ran 200 special trains for that category of people only from June 1.

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Immediate Fallout of National Lockdown: Migrants

- With all work coming to a standstill, India's huge migrant population found themselves in a massive disadvantage all of a sudden. The failure to earn meant the inability to pay rent, send money home, bring food to the table.
- With no other means of communication, thousands, dragging their little children and elderly family members, came to the streets/ railway tracks to begin walking hundreds of kilometres (in some cases over 3000 kms) to reach home. Several died on those journeys.
- With increased reporting of such travails, mainly in alternate media spaces and social media, the government had to act. It began running migrant labour special trains from May 1 onwards.
- While they were not adequate in response to the number of people wanted to board them, several of those who travelled in them died too due to lack of food supply on the long journeys

THE WIRE

Present Status

India is under several stages of unlocking the lockdown. Different states are following different rules, with some states also returning to implementing statewide complete lockdown once more due to the rise in the number of cases

Unlocking the curbs

Several restrictions will be eased in a phased manner in what the government termed as 'Unlock 1.0'

From June 1

- No more red, orange and green zones; lockdown only in containment zones
- No more permit system for inter-State movement of vehicles
- No restriction on movement within and outside a State

From June 8

- Malls, restaurants, religious places to open in all areas, except containment zones

In July

- A decision will be made whether to reopen schools and other educational institutions

Not allowed
- Bars, gymnasiums, entertainment parks, cinema halls, metro rail and international air travel

Advisory in place
- Night curfew for all non-essential activities to continue from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.
- Face masks and social distancing are mandatory
- Work from home preferable

WIRE

General State of Indian Big Media

The media sphere in India has grown to be of a considerable size today. In the last few years, big business houses have taken interest in it, leading to cross-owning of ventures and its increased corporatisation. The television news industry, particularly, has grown manifold, with huge salaries, fancy studios, international off-sites, and the works.

However, the entry of this new model has also made Indian media less freer than before.
- Instances of editors and reporters not liked by the government of the day **sacked or replaced,** news reports not favourable to state and central governments **withdrawn**, stories questioning the government's schemes, projects, or collaborative efforts of the government by business houses seen to be close to those in power or the party in power going **unreported**, etc. have become more commonplace.
- This is increasingly the case in the last six years of Modi rule.

Aside from the ability to control the narrative in the big media, the government has also succeeded in getting **support from some propaganda channels and online ventures** set up specially for the purpose.

The Indian Media's Response to the Lockdown's Fallout, and Rising Number of Cases

Big Media

Treading carefully, mostly functioning as an extension of the government's viewpoint, at times also questioning the opposition parties for posing questions to the government

Social Media and Alternative Online Media Platforms

Initially on social media platforms, both strains of supporting the government's actions and questioning them could be seen. It **dropped drastically** because punitive actions under the Information Technology Act and other sections of Indian Penal Code began to be taken against those questioning the government's actions in regard to Covid-19.

Aside from a few odd pieces in print media, the alternate online media space is where one sees in India mostly exhaustive reports and sharp opinion pieces **critiquing and analysing the government's response** to Covid-19.

Media's Role in the Stigma Surrounding COVID-19:

ISLAMOPHOBIA, MIGRANTS AND THE NORTHEAST

Tabligi Jamaat and Big Media's Role in Spreading Islamophobia

The initial spike in cases in India is said to have been traced to a religious congregation by the Muslim sect, Tabligi Jamaat, held at its headquarters in New Delhi in mid-March. The event was attended by hundreds of people from various parts of the country and also had representatives from other countries. The foreign delegates are believed to have brought the virus They also travelled to other states after attending the Delhi event.

- Specific videos of police asking the Jamaat officials to send back the delegates were leaked on social media and elsewhere, from where the big media took the cue to help spread the notion that the community in general is anti-national, primitive, doesn't abide by laws, etc.
- It went to such an extent that fake videos were circulated on WA about the members of the community deliberately contaminating eatables to help spread the virus.
- In April, the government specifically gave out data in a Covid-19 related media briefing highlighting them as the 'single source' for the spread of the virus in 23 states and union territories.
- The big media's collaboration with government's action aided the right wing forces to launch attacks on members of Muslim community.
- Many within the Muslim community also ostracised those families whose family members attended the Delhi event.
- Media helped coin words like Corona Jihad. It gave space to ruling party members to air their communal statements in this regard.

Creating the Opinion Among the Middle Class that Migrants are Spreading the Virus

The pro-government TV news channels continuously questioned the migrants embarking on long walk home, accusing them of not maintaining social distancing and helping in spreading the virus.

This helped create a TV viewing middle class, particularly those in support of the government's lockdown move, to create an impression that this category of people are not cooperating with the government.

The support of the media helped police take massive action against such people.

In several instances, reporters from pro-government news channels like The Republic were seen acting as vigilante forces alongside the police in maintaining the lockdown, even suspecting medical workers while on their way to work.

THE WIRE
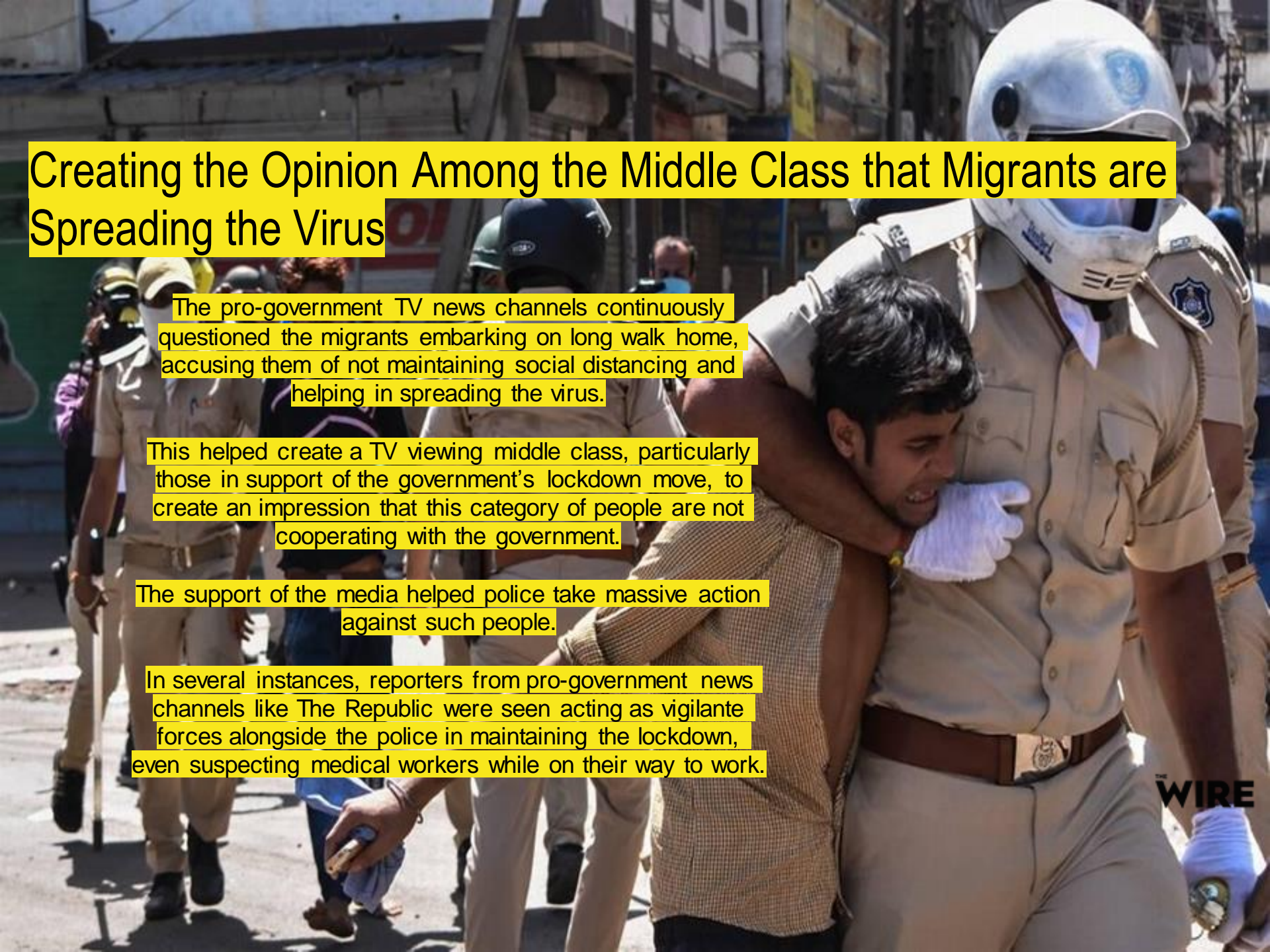
Inadequate Coverage of the Racist Attack on Northeasterners

MANAS @JajaborManas · Mar 23
Students of Nagaland are forced to leave their houses in Kolkata. They are being harrased and mocked as "Corona Virus". THIS is really Sick.
@HMOIndia
@AmitShah
@narendramodi

0:24 78.5K views

360   2.9K   2.5K

The otherwise proactive traditional media was not seen giving wide coverage to cases reported from various cities about people from the eight north-eastern states being attacked for looking like the 'Chinese' and hurled abuses like 'Corona'.

Some cases have been reported after videos have gone viral on twitter, pushing the central government too then to send orders to the state to act on such complaints.

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Media's Role In Fighting Stigma And Misinformation

In a typical response, some big media houses in India have begun collecting public donations to be deposited to the Government's corpus to fight the pandemic.

But various meaningful and more calibrated interventions are possible by joining hands with credible civil society organisations, both in fighting stigma, and misinformation or inadequate information.

THE WIRE'S SCIENCE SITE, among other online news sites, is regularly publishing articles related to misinformation by clearing those doubts with domain experts and publicising them through social media platforms.

So far, **CSOS IN INDIA** are engaged in conducting various ground reports and studies to address mainly the economic fallout due to the national lockdown and the sufferings of the migrant population. Apart from organising webinars and airing comments on social media, we have not seen much of formalised interventions by CSOs or media houses in addressing stigma.

Fact-check websites like **ALTNEWS** have however, continuously combed the WhatsApp groups and Twitter to fact-check misinformation and dispelling Islamophobia.

H2H COVID-19 Response
Irene Scott, Internews

Internewscovid19.org

@internewsCOVID

Covid-19-Internews

Covid-19@Internews.org

Why is understanding rumours so important in this crisis?

- Global Impact - not a localized crisis, rumours spread across borders

- Infodemic – Too much complex information for people to synthesize accurately

- The 'lab' of social media - Everyone is an expert and SM being used as a tool to amplify division

- Trust – or the lack of it, has serious consequences

Internews

Rumours are more powerful when:

- They are the only source of information

– They align with already held beliefs

– They have a kernel of truth

– When conditions are difficult or distressing

– When there is motivation to accept the rumour

– They cause a strong emotional reaction

– They are told to you by someone you trust

Internews

Who *else* believes also matters

- Group Polarization - when a group begins to uniformly have an opinion about a topic, therefore influencing other members in the group to believe the same thing

- Information cascades - where each person that accepts the rumour as fact adds validity to the information and increases its likelihood to be accepted at face value

Internews

On Rumours, Cass Sunstein, Princeton University Press, 2014

Why FACTS aren't enough

- Anchoring – once some believes something, it is very difficult to reverse that belief – even with facts

- Backfire effect– When your <u>deepest convictions</u> are challenged by contradictory evidence, your beliefs get stronger.

- Confirmation bias – where we search for 'facts' that back up the position we already hold. Post truth - 'beliefs' or 'gut-feelings' are more important that 'inconvenient' facts. The concept of 'alternative facts'

Internews

Denying to the Grave: Why We Ignore the Facts That Will Save Us" (Oxford), Jack Gorman

Humans are not perfect, rational creatures….

"People can foresee the future only when it coincides with their own wishes, and the most grossly obvious facts can be ignored when they are unwelcome."

– George Orwell

Internews

We're afraid, want to _blame_ someone

- **Rumours have inflamed existing prejudice**
  - **Anti-Chinese sentiment**
  - **Vulnerable groups (migrants, foreigners, minorities, LGBTQ+)**

- **Rumours have fueled new prejudice**
  - **Health workers**
  - **Patients and their families**
  - **Journalists**

- **Social media spreads this prejudice at an alarming rate**

Internews

How to respond to rumours:

## FIRST.. Do no harm

**Internews**

How to respond to rumours:

- **Build trust** – people accept information more readily from people they trust. Be transparent, correct fault, explain reasoning.

- **Language** – use plain language that is accessible to all. Explain complex terminology or concepts. Consider who language excludes

- **Listen** – Good communication starts with listening. Rumours tell you about community hopes, fears, anxieties, misunderstandings, information gaps. Via social media, community gatherings, bread and butter journalism.

- **Respond to ACTUAL not only PERCEIVED information gaps** – treat this as a conversation, not a direction. Consider that your audience may have a mix of unique information and communication needs.

Internews

…that's why we need more than this
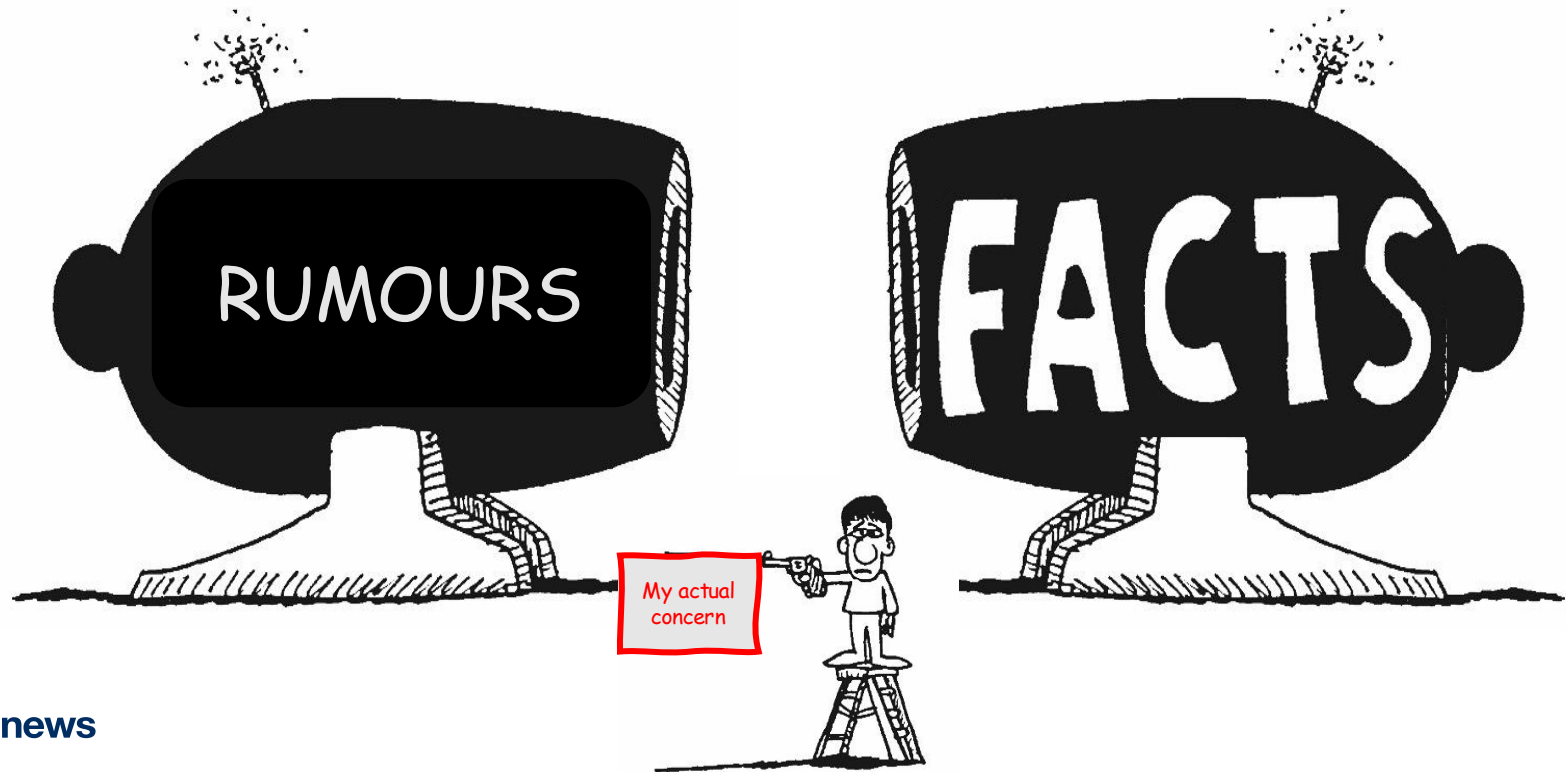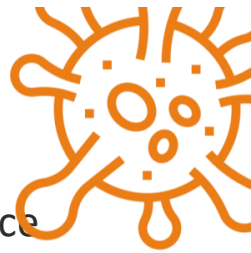
How to respond to rumours:

- **Localized advice** – not every solution works in every context. 'Reality check' any advice with people on the ground incorporate cultural needs. Avoid copy/paste from key sources without a reality check.

- **Actionable** – information should focus on what people can do, not only what they can't. People feel hopeless when they do not have practical actions

- **Keep listening** – there will always be more questions that follow, be ready to listen, engage and respond

- **Report on, and with marginalized groups** - The pandemic is exacerbating existing inequalities, yet many voices who are feeling the direct impacts most are still missing from the COVID-19 discussion. Spell out the cause of disadvantage, or audiences assume it must be due to the groups' own failings.

Internews

Example:

"The high rates of chronic illness and disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities only tell half the story. Some of the most influential determinants of health are access to adequate healthcare and housing, and these have been chronically underfunded.

Successive Australian governments have failed to meet national targets that would save lives, and have left Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus crisis."

How to respond to rumours:

- **Acknowledge fear –** acknowledging our audiences' fears can help establish trust. However it is not our role to increase levels fear. You can fight fear with anger or compassion...choose compassion

- **Encourage community-based solutions –** Avoid promoting individualism, or them V us. Provide space for the voiceless in the community to be heard (not feared). Prejudice is a tool used to divide and thus harm all of us. Promote what people can do individually AND for their community. Highlight it's the community effort, built of individual efforts

- **Reimagine the 'new normal'** – Do we want to snap back to what we had before? The 'old normal' had a lot of prejudice and inequality too. Can we use this pandemic as an opportunity to improve society?

Internews

We will not go back to normal.

Normal never was.

Our pre-corona existance was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, fonfusion, rage, hoarding hate and lack.

We should not long to return, my friends.

We are being given the opportunity to **stitch a new garment.** One that fits all of humanity and nature.

– Sonya Renee Taylor

How humanitarians can better work with media

- **Move beyond messaging:** help local media establish two-way communication channels that are well resourced with information that responds to actual concerns. Let the community shape content.

- **Build trust:** that goes both ways! Answer your phone, be available for backgrounding, build journalist knowledge over time and help them to understand the issues of the industry and the affected populations.

- **Broaden your focus:** don't only target big media outlets, look at all the information providers in a community including community led media that might better cater for unique information, language and communication needs.

- **Never be boring:** experts can be trustworthy and informative without being boring. Avoid technical jargon, be engaging, speak like a....human!

Guidance and resources to support journalists responding to rumours & misinformation about COVID-19.

Internewscovid19.org

@internewsCOVID

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Using community voices to mitigate and counter stigma
Richard Lace, BBC Media Action

- Reduce perceived difference

- Surface the impact

- Build empathy

BBC
MEDIA ACTION
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD
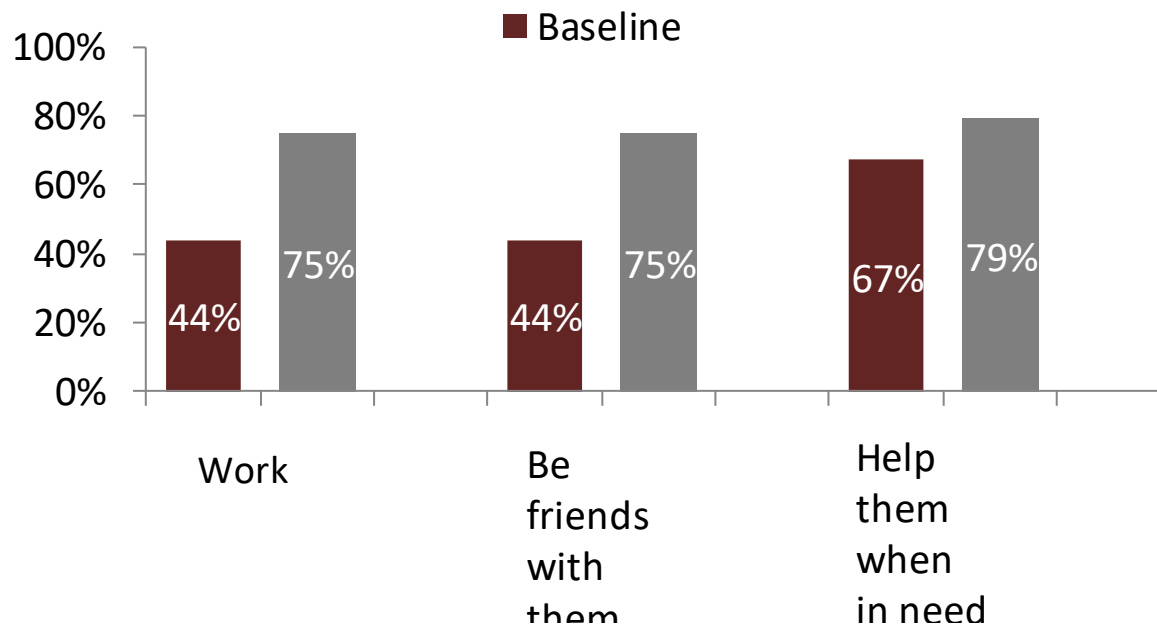
- People have common concerns: their future, their finances and their families.
- People often live 'side by side but not together'
- Quite deeply entrenched negative attitudes
- Weekly radio drama to reach and engage audiences
- Based in a tea shop where a range of diverse characters come to mingle, interact and chat
- Storylines and characters rooted in everyday issues

BBC MEDIA ACTION
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD

If you met someone who is Muslim would you be willing to...

■ Baseline

	Work	Be friends with them	Help them when in need
Baseline	44%	44%	67%
	75%	75%	79%

MEASURING EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

- I felt sorry for some of the characters in Tea Cup Diaries
- I could imagine myself or people in my community facing similar situations
- The story affected me emotionally
- The events in the story were relevant to my everyday life
- During the program, when a main character succeeded I felt happy, and when they suffered in some way I felt sad.

- **Prepare:** Who is being stigmatised, how and why? How is your content going to help?
- **Style, tone and format:** Role model respect, compassion and kindness. Help your audience see the person as a person.
- **Engagement and empathy:** Emotional engagement is critical to driving changes in attitudes. Empathy helps to humanise and reduce the sense of "other".
- **Safety:** Remember that we have a duty to protect any real-life community voices that we feature.
- **Time and collaboration:** A one-off, quick hit is unlikely to show much impact.

Discussion

- How do we as media practitioners speak to Youth about COVID-19?

- How to include marginalised voices into reporting (without stigmatising them further and while keeping them safe)?

- What can the media do to make sure that people residing in remote areas are well informed about stigma (and COVID-19)?

Resources & Tools

- Internews: [Stigma and migrant communities](#)

- Internews: [Guidance Note: Reporting on and with vulnerable people: LGBTQ+ people](#)

- Internews: [Engaging local media as partners during COVID-19](#)

- BBC MA [Covid-19 handbook for media](#)

- BBC MA [Guide to communicating in public health emergencies](#) (many languages)

- BBC MA [Guide for humanitarians on working with media](#)

- IFRC: [Guidance on how to address stigma](#) (several languages)

- WHO [COVID-19 dashboard](#)

- WHO [EPI-WIN updates on COVID-19](#)

- Asia Pacific [RCCE resources](#)

- Community Engagement Hub: [COVID-19 resources](#)

- CDAC Network [Resources page for Covid-19](#)

Thank You

Speakers in order of appearance:

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Thank You

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