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COVID-19 restrictions may have exacerbated India's TB problems: Study

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Findings show up to 7% TB patients stopped taking TB medicines during lockdown

A new study by the researchers at The George Institute for Global Health India examines the possible adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on India's Tuberculosis (TB) control programme.

This study is the first to show evidence of the negative impact of the nationwide lockdown on the income and health services utilisation of TB patients in India.

These findings were part of an ongoing cohort study aimed at examining the economic burden on TB patients in India by Dr Susmita Chatterjee, Senior Health Economist, The George Institute for Global Health, India; Palash Das, Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health, India; and Dr Anna Vassall, Professor of Health Economist, Department of Global Health and Development, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Researchers noticed that patients reported difficulties in collecting TB drugs from public health facilities, with 4-7% of patients compelled to discontinue their medicines during the nationwide lockdown.

“Many recruited patients belong to extremely low-income groups working as daily wage earners, contractual workers, etc. There is a clear need for their protection during such restrictions through measures such as paid sick leave, additional food support, etc.” said Dr Susmita Chatterjee, Senior Health Economist, The George Institute for Global Health, India.

The Indian National TB control programme aims to make the nation TB free by 2025, five years ahead of the Sustainable Development Goal target. These findings suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic may have an impact on the ongoing efforts to control TB in India.