

**IMPACT OF COVID19 PANDEMIC AND LOCKDOWN IMPOSED ON THE INDIAN
SOCIETY**

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“It will be important to be generous but also have some protections to make sure there isn’t too much leakage and diversion so that the benefits reach those who need them.”–Heather Schofield

BACKGROUND:

The Covid19 pandemic is much more than just a health crisis. It is now considered as a human, economic and social crisis. World Health Organization (WHO), as characterized the corona virus disease (COVID-19), as a pandemic and the same is attacking societies at their core level.

Every segment of the population had been affected by the covid19 outbreak and is particularly disadvantageous to members of those social groups who are susceptible to the disease and are in the most vulnerable situations. The course of the diseases and the after effects is unbiased that it affects diverse population such as people living under poverty, elderly persons, people with disabilities, indigenous people and has not spared the youth. Initial studies have shown that the virus disproportionately affected the poor in terms of health and also affected them economically. To be specific, the homeless people were more vulnerable to acquire the virus as they were in lack of proper shelter. People who did not have access to proper water and food, refugees, migrant labourers, or displaced people also suffered disproportionately both from the pandemic and its after-effects – be it the lockdown, lack of employment opportunities or a struggle for a daily living.

It is need of the hour to properly address the societal issues caused by covid19 pandemic and the after-effects of lockdown through programmes and policies so as to decrease inequality, social-exclusion, discrimination and unemployment. A comprehensive social protection system has to be implemented to combat the prevalence of poverty and unemployment as the system acts as an automatic stabilizer, meaning it would provide basic income security in a continuous manner furthermore, enhancing ones capacity to overcome the damage caused by unexpected chaos.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL HEALTH:

From the time Covid19 invaded this world, there prevails chaos, people across the world are in fear and India stands no exception. This global health pandemic has created an impact and has touched every person's life in some way or the other, whereby forcing isolation, uncertainty and ambiguity, anger, and despair and this coupled with the economic downfall has caused a huge psychological distress amongst the community. The COVID-19 pandemic has been perceived has a threat to human society, in terms of mortality, risk for human life, endangered economic stability and an enormous level of mental distress.

PANDEMIC AND THE IMPOSED LOCKDOWN

A pan-India lockdown was imposed from march 21,2020 and in the course of a gradual reopening of its economy, India prolonged its nationwide lockdown till June30,202 in containment zones i.e. areas where there were increased number of positive cases for COVID-19.

As the positive COVID19 cases and mortality related to corona continued to spike up, it was questionable to have even a phased reopen of shopping malls, restaurants and food stalls, market selling essential and non-essential goods, domestic trains and air travels. As of June 8, India was placed seventh on the list of countries with more active cases and deaths i.e. 258,090 and 7,263 respectively, reported by Johns Hopkins University.

India's GDP showed the slowest growth in last 11 years at 3.1%. therefore, it is undeniable that this lockdown has brought a misery to India's economy and this economic distress for India is dire. About 84% of the households in India have suffered low income ever since the lockdown started, as reported by experts from University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago and the Mumbai-based Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE).

Their study found that about one third of the household could not survive the lockdown for more than a week without additional assistance. Statistics shows that unemployment rate reached 27% in early May which was four fold more compared to January 2020.

DEGREES OF DISTRESS

In India Rural households suffered more distress compared to the urban households during the lockdown period. The downfall in income was 75% at urban households whereas; in rural households it was 88% showing a drastic difference. There were more number of higher-income household in urban India compared to rural India and this difference is because there were more "work from home" opportunities in urban area than in rural areas hence, urban households were "relatively protected.

There prevailed an unequal distribution in the fall in incomes geographically. Studies found that states such as Tripura, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Haryana were badly affected due to the economic downfall and states like Telangana, Puducherry, Karnataka, Punjab, and Delhi were least affected.

DEPLETING STAYING CAPACITY

The economic situation became uncertain. “Given the low baseline wealth of many households, a very large share of Indian households state that they will be unable to continue — even over relatively short periods — without additional assistance.”.

Household that were able to survive for one month or more without assistance was only 30%, on the other hand, about 14% of the households were already out of funds and were at risk of severe deprivation and were not capable of borrowing or receiving additional benefits. A quick distribution of in-kind or cash transfers is necessary to prevent a sharp increase in malnutrition and severe deprivation. Such transfers will also likely promote a more robust recovery as the country is able to reopen.

In most urgent need for funds are five states that are having deteriorating effect due to the pandemic and the lockdown. Namely, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Sustained and broad base of transfers is need of the hour since almost all households will be unable to survive without transfers in the medium-run.

CHALLENGES NOW AND BEYOND

The government has to focus on preventing malnutrition, and continuing to provide maternal and child health services, such as vaccinations. Domestic violence prevailed to be a huge concern during the lockdown period. Domestic violence is skyrocketing and there had been an alarming spike in mishaps during the lockdown. There is no evidence for these trends to decline however, it might exacerbate due to fewer resources and over-crowding.

The top most priority and challenge in the medium term would be to revive the economy and to boost the living standards. The lockdown has exacerbated the already declining economy of India. Experts envisage worsening impact of lockdown such as deteriorating mental health in long run. India being a low-income country already has high levels of under recorded and undiagnosed depression, a chaos like this would undoubtedly increase depression and anxiety rates.

The State of Migrants:

In addition to battling the pandemic and the worsening economy, India has in recent weeks struggled to manage migration of migrant workers from urban setup like Mumbai and Bangalore to their hometowns. Delayed transportation arrangements for migrant labourers trying to return to their natives

in other states have resulted in undesirable misery. Many of those migrants were daily wage workers working in construction projects, retail shops and restaurants. The lockdown has grabbed work from them, thereby leaving them unemployed, not able to afford housing, food, healthcare and education for their children. Eventually, making them more susceptible to get the diseases and have decreased quality of life.

Ever since the lockdown began millions of migrant labourers have travelled hundreds of kilometres on foot to their native villages in other states, with many dying on the way out of exhaustion, hunger or disease. The government was unaware of the whole scenario in the initial stage and their assistance in providing transportation was much delayed. However, the government took initiatives to arrange buses and trains—the special “Shramik” to take back the migrants. Social distancing went undoable since the migrant labourers and their families’ prioritised food and water over social distancing and hygiene.

Plight of the Homeless:

These are the most difficult days, nights and months of the year for the homeless Indian society. They share the same fears about COVID-19 as do those who are comfortably cloistered in their houses and apartments. They live with uncertainty and ambiguity about their health and future. Nevertheless, they also have fewer options as to where to bed for the night, as some shelters have closed and others have reduced their capacity to comply with state edicts intended to limit crowds and contact between people. The homeless in India also often lack ready access to other basics, such as proper food, clean water and medical care.

The elderly:

Covid19 has been perceived as old-people’s disease, it has exacerbated negative stereotypes about older persons who are viewed as weak, less important and a burden on the society. Health care is mainly given to the younger population rather than the elder ones as treatment to older people is considered as a waste of resources. During this covid19 pandemic and the lockdown, there prevails age bias and age-based discrimination in the society. International human rights law has recommended governments to take initiatives to provide medical care to those who need it, however, shortages of ventilators, for instance, demands the adoption of triage policies and protocols based on medical, evidence-based and ethical factors, rather than random decisions based on age.

Age-discrimination can have a direct and often disastrous impact on the ability of older persons to access services and goods. Among everyone in the society older persons face maximum isolation and food insecurity due to age-based discrimination. Already prevailing mortality due to covid19 affection

is further more increased due to age bias and discrimination. The government is urged to make programmes and policies taking the elderly groups into consideration and must initiate supportive measures as their lives are at stake and to protect each and every individual is an unquestionable responsibility.

Persons with Disabilities:

Even at the best of times, people with disabilities and differently able people face numerous challenges in accessing health-care services and this is due to lack of availability, accessibility, affordability, more importantly social stigma and discrimination. Persons with disability are highly vulnerable and more prone to covid19 and this issue requires specific action.

General person's self-care and other preventive measures against the COVID-19 outbreak can demand challenges for persons with disabilities. For example, some people with disabilities may have problems in implementing measures to keep the virus at bay, that includes personal hygiene and suggested regular cleaning of surfaces and homes. Precautionary measures such as washing hands regularly can be challenging, due to physical impairments, environmental barriers, or interrupted services. As physically challenged people require support and assistance for everyday self-care, practicing social distancing and isolation is practically impossible for this group.

TO COMBAT THE IMPACT OF COVID19: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The list is long and no sector has been spared by the COVID-19 pandemic, however every sector and industry is cautiously working towards recovery. Furthermore, we must focus on re-booting the Indian economy. The Indian economy is expected to get weaker by 1% to 2% next year. As already mentioned there has been a constant decline in India's GDP like never before and the problem has been further exacerbated due the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown.

A study conducted in Kashmir revealed that 76.5% respondents believed that lockdown is the temporary solution to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection it can result in many new problems such as psychological problems (67.5%), social problems (53.5%), economic problems (48.5%), academic problems if COVID-19 lockdown continues.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is causing widespread concern, depression and anxiety among the people all over the world. The mental problems caused by COVID-19 lockdown had an impact on the psychological wellbeing of individuals from the entire community including students, casual labours, healthcare professionals and the general population. The elders, females, students, people living in stress condition, healthcare professionals at front-line, and those who are with underlying chronic conditions are at a higher risk.

Government of India (Finance minister) announced certain relief measures on 24 March 2020 in view of COVID-19 outbreak.

The Government should be urged to focus on the tax measure, be it indirect or direct, in terms of payment deferrals, rate reductions and so on. Employment related compensation must be taken into consideration, also state compensation schemes ought to be given special attention. There must be keen follow-up for food related compensation covered under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Direct benefits play an important role in upholding individual, families and society. Wages must be increased under MNREGA project.

A crucial part of covid19 pandemic, healthcare related issues must be given importance. The finance minister had already announced insurance cover that serves as an incentive to many. This might highly benefit health services and ancillary workers would also be benefitted from such insurances. Economic stimulus measures are need of the hour as the country as never seen such downfall in the economy in several years, this can be achieved by moratorium on debt repayments, liquidity relief measures by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Other measures such as imports and exports of medical equipment plays a vital role in stabilising the downfall. Most of all it is necessary to come up with strategies to improve quality of life of migrant workers, elders, youths, economically downtrodden as they have suffered the most during the covid19 pandemic and the Pan-India lockdown.

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