

Societal Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic in India

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Abstract: Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created an unprecedented loss and disruptions over all across the world. From developed to developing, no country has been spared from its brunt. In this paper, we have analyzed the implications of COVID-19 on the society of India so far an impact assessment on the basis of available literature. The societal impacts are dire too with job losses, mental illness, increased domestic violence, and so forth. Some positive effects can be seen in terms of improved air quality, water quality, wildlife but the sustainability of such impact is conditional upon post-COVID and people's habits and future policies related to the environment.

Key Words: COVID, Society, Poverty, and Environment

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, caused by a new strain of coronavirus, raised out of Wuhan city of China in December 2019 has been called a pandemic by the World Health Organization. It has created an unstable environment for individuals, loss of business activities, and loss of employment. This has halted a large number of economic activities because of infectious nature and has no vaccine till date. As on June 24, 2020, there are around 9,129,146 cases globally out of which 4, 73,797 lost their lives. India is on the fourth place in the number of confirmed cases and first in Asia. Total confirmed cases in India are 4, 56,183 out of which 14,476 lost their lives mainly in the states Maharashtra and Delhi (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GOI). Most of the countries including even developed nations like United States, Italy, and United Kingdom are not prepared enough to deal with this pandemic. Presently, the worry is not for just human well-being besides for the worldwide economy which is most noticeably awful hit in each viewpoint. Economic disturbances are probably going to be more extreme and extended in developing and emerging countries with bigger domestic outbreaks and the more fragile and weak healthcare system; with larger exposure to international spillovers through various channels like trade, tourism, and commodity and financial markets; weaker macroeconomic frameworks; and more pervasive informality and poverty (Global Economic Prospects, World Bank, 2020). It is not just a health crisis; it is the economic and humanitarian crisis and called a black swan by many economists. As a result of its infectious nature, almost all nations favored lockdown to limit its spread. Following this, India initially proclaimed a one-day "Janata Curfew" on March 22, 2020. From there on, a total lockdown was reported in India at first for 21 days which was extended to an additional 19 days, and thereafter it got broadened further with minor relaxations. After June 1, many relaxations are given to proceed with the economic activities but borders of some states are sealed even now depending on the severity of the health crisis in a particular state. All the economic activities however now were provided

some relaxations after a complete halt on them but an unprecedented loss has already occurred and the economy is shaken badly.

In this article, an attempt is made to investigate the societal impact of coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) in India. The motivation behind this is to provide an overview of the loss that occurred to society to have a better understanding of the issues to the government. In this article, we have reviewed many latest articles, authentic newspaper articles, discussions, and interviews of experts from different fields, and so forth.

II. SOCIETAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Gender Gap and Inequality

It has been estimated that globally, women are more likely to be vulnerable to losing their jobs as compared to men due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The drop in employment is found to be biased and not gender-neutral in India which has one of the most unequal gender division of domestic work globally. The drop in absolute number is more for men compared with women because of the already existing large gender-gap in employment. By comparing the pre and post lockdown hours spent on domestic chores, a decline in gender gap is found in terms of hours devoted to domestic chores on an average during the first month of lockdown in most of the states. Also, there is an increase of 0.5 to 4 hours in men's proportion of housework post-lockdown. Still, the male proportion/distribution continues to be skewed to the right (Deshpande, 2020).

Considering the disproportionate burden of the crisis on low skilled workers, poor's, other vulnerable sections, many economists think that COVID-19 is most likely expected to raise inequality within and among countries (Initiative on Global Markets, 2020) and the results of study conducted by (Furceri, Loungani, Ostry, & Pizzuto, 2020) confirms that those having basic education (low skilled) are affected more than those with higher and advanced degrees, in terms of loss of income hence confirming increase in income inequality after during and after pandemics.

Health Crisis—Rural/Urban

Due to the paucity of testing services, shortage of doctors, health equipment, beds even in the developed area of India, COVID-19 is a major threat for India. With a subsequent rise in the no. of confirmed cases India's capacity to contain the further spread and to handle the current cases is questioned by many experts. As per the National Health Profile of India, 2019, India's expenditure on healthcare as % of GDP was merely 1.28% which is lower than poorer countries of the world (Rakshit & Basishtha, 2020). Coronavirus Pandemic has disproportionately affected the rural and urban areas. Presently, the brunt is faced more in urban areas because of the high density of people. But the risk is much more to the rural areas where around 70% of India's population resides. India's healthcare sector is still developing and there are large differences in the healthcare systems of rural and urban areas. The rural health care system which is a three-tier system is comprised of-

- Sub-centres with 23% shortfall in healthcare facilities,
- Primary Health Centres with 27% and
- Community Health Centres with 28% shortfall, as of July 1, 2019.¹⁴

The healthcare system in the rural area is not adequate to handle this pandemic and the transmission especially in the northern states where population density is high because of doctors' shortage, healthcare facilities like very less availability of no. of beds per thousand people, equipment, and so forth. (Kumar, Nayar, & Koya, 2020)

Domestic Violence and Crime

According to the latest report by National Commission for Women (NCW), within 25 days following lockdown, there was a 45% increase in the number of cases of domestic violence against women. Domestic violence cases have seen an upsurge mainly in states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Punjab with a near doubling of the cases as compared to pre-lockdown cases said NCW chief Rekha Sharma. The real situation, however, may be more dangerous because many women from rural areas especially do not file a case and raise their voice and are scared of their husbands and family (Kundu & Bhowmik, 2020).

For the overall crime rate, there has been good news since lockdown that the crime rate has decreased significantly in India and globally too but studies shows that the hunger, poverty and inequality which are the after results of any crisis and pandemic lead to increase in the crime rate (Uppal, 2020).

Reverse Migration

After the partition in 1947, it is the second biggest mass relocation that India is experiencing. More specifically, it is the "reverse migration." As indicated by IMO (International Migration Organization, 2011) return or reverse migration is the act/process or movement of individuals back to their local spots who prior moved to urban communities or urban regions looking for employment and to gain bread-butter for their families.

As indicated by the Census of India, 2011 Delhi and Maharashtra had the most extreme number of the flow of migrants for the most part from the states of UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, Assam, Punjab, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh. And at present Maharashtra is followed by Delhi in

the highest number of COVID-19 cases. (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India). Now, due to COVID-19 there is mass reverse migration due to limited employment opportunities, fear of more destruction due to the uncertainty of future crisis, financial crisis, health crisis, and so forth. The extent of this reverse migration was such that the efforts of government through policies could not match this crisis. (Mukhra, Krishan, & Kanchan, 2020)

Singh (2020) studied the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the rural economy of India mainly about the plight of migrant workers and the short run-long run implications of COVID-19 on the rural economy. He stated that COVID-19 is going to affect the rural economy in both the short run and long run with reverse migration exerting excess pressure on the agriculture and rural economy that will significantly affect the poverty and will put a greater number of people into abject poverty. He also discusses that although the government is announcing schemes and helping in many ways. But mass corruption in the system is the biggest challenge in the effective implementation of plans.

Poverty, Job Losses and Informal Sector

According to the World Bank (2016) report, every fifth Indian is poor with around 80% population residing in rural areas. At least 49 million individuals all over the world are expected to dive into "extreme poverty" as a direct result of the destruction caused by the pandemic and according to World Bank, India is estimated to have its 12 million citizens pushed in extreme poverty (Bloomberg, 2020).

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), in India more than 122 million people lost their jobs in April 2020, out of them largely were the small traders and wage-laborers. According to a phone survey of 4,000 workers conducted by Centre for Sustainable Employment, around 80% of urban workers in the sample lost jobs with a sharp decline in the earnings of farmers and those who were self-employed in sectors other than agriculture.

Pre-existing similarities in the formal and informal sectors in India are more likely to be increased because the informal or unorganized sector or workers do not have access to social security benefits and there is a lot of uncertainty in their work. The informal sector workers were already facing issues like low wages and income and in this pandemic; they are among the most affected people. Around 40 to 50 million workers are seasonal migrant which are directly and harshly affected and moved back to their native places (reverse migration) due to lack of employment, income, shelter, and so forth (Dev & Sengupta, 2020).

Psychological Impact—Mental Illness

Apart from the health and economic crisis, this is the major challenge to every country hit by the pandemic. Due to lockdown, mass unemployment, the collapse of various businesses, loss of income, increasing inequalities and poverty, deaths, less mobility, and so forth. there is a huge impact on the mental status of people. From older to younger, rich to poor, everyone is affected. This outbreak is resulting in additional health issues like anxiety, stress, depression, anger, fear, and so forth, globally. (Torales, O'Higgins, Castaldelli-Maia, & Ventriglio, 2020)

The psychological challenges can be severe to marginalized people like farmers who already have psychological burdens

due to pre-existing problems in the agriculture sector. Nearly 16,500 cases of farmers' suicide are reported every year due to their poor socio-economic conditions and due to COVID-19 such cases can be aggravated. (Hossain et al., 2020)

Recent studies in psychological science and evidence show that similar pandemics like the current one increased mental health problems like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), confusion, loneliness feeling, boredom during and after the quarantine too. (Brooks et al., 2020)

Older people are battling with larger health risks as well as are likewise prone to be less fit for supporting themselves in isolation. Although social distancing is important to contain the spread of the virus, if not executed effectively, such measures can likewise prompt expand social confinement of older people when they might require the most support. (UNDP, 2020) So, there is more stress and tension for older people and the youth there are several challenges too. Schools and Colleges are yet closed and there is disruptions in studies, those who are weaker at studies and do not have internet access to study online (like in some rural areas, especially girls are not allowed to have a phone and internet connection) are likely to face the brunt more. And those who are about to enter the workforce are likely to face problems due to changing needs of the employers and less vacancies These all factors lead to mental stress and in extreme cases where people are already suffering from some mental illness, the consequences of this pandemic may be harsh.

Positive Impact on Environment

With serious negative implications and destruction to the economy and people, COVID-19 has got some positive implications too. One such is a gift to the river Ganga. In just 34–35 days of lockdown due to COVID-19 in India, the pollution in the river has decreased significantly which the two major plans, Ganga Action Plan, 1986, and Namami Gange, 2014, with hundreds of crores investment could not do, said Prof. B. D. Tripathi, Chairman, Mahamana Malaviya Research Centre for Ganga. There is a positive impact on air quality, water quality, wildlife and vegetation due to less traffic, less pollution due to lockdown and less business activities etc.

III. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic has incurred unprecedented loss globally but India being an emerging economy is likely to get more affected in every sector and that too disproportionately. The overall loss to the economy and to different sectors depends on the severity and longevity of crisis. Amid this coronavirus pandemic and an unprecedented crisis, apart from the monetary losses, the societal impact is harsh with major sociological and psychological challenges. Already existing poverty and inequality is likely to increase with major negative impact on migrants, casual and informal worker with domestic violence and mental illness being another major challenge. Although there are some positive impacts also but the sustainability of these impacts on air quality, water quality, wildlife is conditional to post-lockdown scenario and people's behavior and habits. Various fiscal and monetary policy measures are undertaken and announced by the government and Reserve Bank of India but prominent economists are of the view that more spending is needed by the government

regardless of the GDP numbers and fiscal deficit. In fact, more attention is needed toward the vulnerable sections of the society and sectors especially poor people, MSMEs and the non-essential commodities sector who is worst hit in this demand contraction due to pandemic. Unique, inclusive and innovative measures are the need of the hour.

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