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**PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND COMPLICATIONS DUE TO COVID-19: INDIAN CONTEXT**

Nidhan Singh\* and Ajay Kumar Garg\*\*

\*Associate Professor of Botany, I.B. (PG) College, Panipat, Haryana, India

\*\*Principal, I.B. (PG) College, Panipat, Haryana, India

**INTRODUCTION**

COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, quickly spread to other parts of the country and have rapidly spread across the international boundaries to affect almost every country now. It has ended enormous lives and the panic associated with it is inviting a variety of psychological disorders like anxiety, depression, insomnia and so many other problems. The lock down, social distancing and isolation lead to almost complete shutdown of many vital industries, rendering millions of people jobless across the globe. COVID-19 was declared by WHO to be a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” in January 2020, and a pandemic in March 2020, predicting high risk of its spread to many countries around the world. The novel coronavirus threatened the health and lives of millions of people, within a few weeks after its emergence. It is a respiratory system virus, and highly contagious, it has almost paralysed the present health systems of developing countries. According to United Nations, we are facing a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations, it is much more than a health crisis, rather it is a human, economic and social crisis. Though it is a global issue, we will discuss about various implications arose due to this pandemic in Indian context.

**SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19**

COVID-19 has affected people from many countries, in many geographical locations, irrespective of ethnicity, race, tribe or rationality. It is all inclusive and not selective in its spread. The stress generated by its spread is common to entire human population. When all entire segments of population are affected, the social implications are bound to be very high. During the initial stages of COVID-19 in India, almost one-third respondents (out of 1106 used for feedback of the survey) had a significant psychological impact (Varshney et al., 2020). The impacts are particularly very detrimental to vulnerable age groups as well as the poor people. The very young, as well older people are at higher risks due to weak immune system, whereas the living conditions of poor people exposes them to higher risks. Recently, due to closure of work places, thousands of migrant labourers have started leaving their work places for their native places, despite hardest situations faced midway. The impacts of this migration will be far reaching and will surely disturb the social threads across the population. The health as well as economic status of the poorer will be disproportionately disturbed by this pandemic. We have a huge number of homeless people who use other shelters, they are highly exposed to the infection. They do not have cloths, food and even access to potable water, what to say of sanitation facilities. As the chain of virus is to be entirely terminated, this situation poses a very serious trouble. The problem is further complicated by restricted movements, lost employment and surmounting fear, and this may continue for considerable periods. The social inequality

may further enhance, leading to exclusion of masses, and consequently, unethical actions by the excluded segments cannot be ruled out. Lack of bread, butter and other basic amenities to a considerable segment of population is the biggest challenge to cope with. We could not fully implement comprehensive and uniform social protection systems, which can provide basic income security at all times, thereby enabling people to manage and overcome shocks.

Coming to psychological impacts, the pandemic having hit the poor and rich equally, the societal inequalities will make the poor more amenable to stress and traumatic conditions. Although social distancing is very significant to reduce the spread of the disease, it can also lead to increased social isolation of older persons at a time when they may be at most need of support. The infected and under treatment patients are obviously under stress, due to the fear psychosis associated with this infection, but the related people are also always in a state of shock and fear. Person with disabilities are further at much higher risks, due to the logistics involved in the treatment of this disease. We are passing through a never before paranoia, which may persist for times to come, and it is feared that the behaviour and interpersonal communications will be severely affected in times to come. It is also suspected that on long terms the case of domestic violence and other offences may surge, and many countries have seen an increase in cases of domestic violence during the lockdown period.

## **ECONOMIC COMPLICATIONS**

With around half the population of world under lockdown in April, the economy is bound to suffer, and the sufferings are really severe. The problem has spread to entire region, and the impacts are global. Millions of jobs are lost, small scale industries, tourism, hospitality, aviation and entertainment sectors are heavily hit. The demand and supply of goods have receded to lowest levels, leading to almost negligible economic transactions across the countries. Although, at present the primary concern is to save human lives than anything else, still the consequences will be far reaching in times to come. The people under poverty line are at higher losses here again, and the number of people under poverty line may further increase. In the present scenario, it is predicted that economy of our country would go into recession, severely affecting the unorganized sector and semi-skilled jobholders (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2020). Developing countries like India have fragile economic and social fabric and the present situation will create more suffering for the unorganized sectors and migrant labour (Khurana, 2020).

In India, millions of migrant workers are moving back to their hometowns, leaving the workplaces, for saving their lives. These workers of the unorganized sector are real work force of our country and their migration for longer periods of time may further hit the small scale industry and agriculture sector. The workers, daily wagers are migrating despite the fact that they not have an option to sustain their daily needs in lockdown, and their work cannot be done online to earn revenue. The poor connectivity and lack of internet access further parts them from essential public health information, to put them under more risk. This will further widen the income gap, pushing more number of people to poverty. However, their contribution is so vital that it can ultimately affect the flow of resources and revenue across the population. While developed countries can somehow generate required economic impulse to bridge the gap, most of the developing countries cannot. With other aspects, the gender inequality may also soar into worst scenario, as majority of women from economically weaker segments work

in unorganised sectors or small scale industries. Agriculture segment will also be highly affected by lack of labour and normal mobility or resources and implements associated with cultivation. Undocumented migrants also present a health risk in their host countries, since they might fear deportation if they turn up for testing or treatment. Vulnerability depends not only on people's exposure to shocks, but also on their individual and collective resilience. This pandemic may have really wrecking impacts on the economy of our country. Looking at the global recession and also at the already slow growth rates prior to COVID-19, our GDP may fall down to unexpected levels, as the recession of many quarters have made India more vulnerable.

### **MINIMIZING THE FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

Some recommendations from the work of Qiu *et al.* (2020) are worth note in Indian context too. Briefly saying, the recommendations stress on giving more attention to vulnerable groups like young, the elderly, women and migrant workers, providing a better access to medical resources and the public health system for masses and a nationwide strategic planning and coordination for providing psychological first aid or counselling. While preventive and medical action is crucial at this stage, emergency psychological crisis interventions for affected people are also critical, involving relatives, caregivers, and health care professionals, if need be (modified from frontiersin.org, 2020). Setting up specific multi-national mental health organizations for future and arranging awareness program at both personal and community levels is desperately needed (Dubey *et al.*, 2020).

Only authentic and scientific recommendations should be communicated to support mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak. WHO has prepared a list of recommendations, which are summarised as below:

Affected people deserve our support, compassion and kindness, and they should better be referred as "people who are recovering from COVID-19". Avoid excess news related to this disease to reduce feelings of anxiety and distress, seek information only from trusted sources, that too at specific times of the day, get the facts; not rumours and misinformation. Facts can help to minimize fears. Protect yourself and be supportive to others.

We must show an unparalleled solidarity, courage and decisiveness to combat this pandemic, the economic framework must be expanded to include all and not few. It is a time of global unity and all countries must co-operate to alleviate the COVID-19 and associated problems. We must focus on not wasting the resources and revenues on unnecessary things, but instead the people who are prosperous must support the weaker segments, because this is ultimately in their own wider interests. In these times, when social distancing is a must we must not forget that mutual support and social bonding has been our culture and heritage. India has highest proportion of young population, this demography has its advantages, the youth can protect and help the most vulnerable, and can aid in increasing public awareness campaigns. These efforts by youth can contain the virus's spread and also reduce its impact on public health, society, and the economy at large.

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