

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdowns on Indian Society: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

Covid-19, a pandemic that evolved from Wuhan (China), has caused a devastating impact on every society in the world, including India. Because of the severe consequences of this crucial health crisis, World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global pandemic. The rapid spread forced the nations to cease international travelling, eventually leading to a worldwide lockdown. Multiple social, educational, economic, political, psychological, and agricultural issues emerged amidst the lockdown that further impacted Indian society.

The current study has critically analysed the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns on Indian society. It was found that the lockdown was inflicted without any planning or prior warning to the Indian society, resulting in loss of livelihoods, depression, stress, violation of human rights, poor education, unemployment, and numerous psychological issues. The central government blissfully ignored the plight of the Indian society as no action was taken to mitigate the sufferings.

Keywords: Covid-19, Corona, Pandemic, Education, Lockdown, Psychology, Unemployment, Indian Society

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which SARS-COV2 caused, severely impacted individuals' physical and mental health worldwide. To combat the pandemic, a nationwide lockdown was imposed that fiercely exploited people's mental health. Likewise, the Government of India imposed a lockdown in most districts of states and union territories. Interestingly, the Indian Government achieved success in the war against the Coronavirus pandemic and announced that the lockdown had controlled the situation.

As the young population was less susceptible to severe consequences of the pandemic compared to adults, they experienced a boom in stress, depression, anxiety, loneliness and other psychological issues (Bhattacharya, 2020). While emotional signs in younger generations can become linked with various severe mental health outcomes involving suicide, physical health issues, and noteworthy healthcare drift, the Covid-19 impact on adolescents' mental health could be pretty damaging in the long term the disease itself. Thus, it has become a priority for researchers to measure the early signs of mental health challenges like stress and depression in adolescents.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, India had the highest infection rates in the data on the worldwide level, with more than 2.5 million confirmed cases. An enhanced upsurge in disease dissemination was reported after March 2020 (Boxden, 2020). To combat the disease and its spread, the government imposed a nationwide lockdown in India. Every individual experienced closure during the lockdown, including the closure of educational organizations, hotels, cinemas, shopping malls, sports centres, and worship places. It has been reported that the closure of schools and colleges, notably, documented severe damage to young people and spotlighted immediate requirements to combat mental health problems in India.

Yet, no such systematic efforts were seen. Here, in this research, the experience of Indian people has been demonstrated through deep research on literature. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns on Indian societies has been analyzed while illustrating the most common issues and worries reported by young people. Moreover, the research has emphasized which age group, gender, and socioeconomic status are more susceptible to negative emotions in India during the lockdown.

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON EDUCATION OF INDIANS

Various researchers have reported an adverse impact on the education system due to the sudden imposition of lockdowns in India. An enhanced rate of the exodus of students from private schools has been observed during lockdown that not only ruined the education of young students but also disturbed their mental health. However, the rate of student migration is related to the parental job loss and financial crisis faced by most Indian families (Saini, 2020). Furthermore, many cases faced job loss in the education field. This involved private school and college teachers, ad hoc teachers, and non-teaching posts like clerical, drivers, conductors, and peons (Tiwari, 2020).

The educational authorities were forced to think about innovative measures to streamline the system. Thus, they forcefully terminated unwanted staff. Also, most educational institutes declared work from home or online classes from home after following the HRD Ministry's order, due to which people migrated to their hometowns (Sharma, 2020). Almost every state adopted work from a home strategy that drastically impacted the education of young students, as

lockdowns in the education field signified an immediate transition to online learning or online education.

However, the government fully supports online learning declaring it as easily accessible, convenient, pocket-friendly, 24x7 available, customizable as per the needs of an individual, flexible, comfortable, less burden, and attention provider (Chakraborty, 2020). In contrast to it, students faced some severe consequences, including a lack of social interaction, lack of self-discipline, lack of confidence, lack of interaction between students and teachers, poor personality development, poor learning skills, poor attention, poor management skills, poor learning, inability to ask questions in between online classes and many more (Kocchar, 2020).

Furthermore, e-Learning was declared an instructional challenge for the school systems (Dey, 2020). However, one of the most prominent limitations not pinpointed by most researchers was Digital Divide. Sudden lockdown or incorporation of digital learning subjected to various issues for many students and teachers. Most students lack digital devices or smartphones requisite for online learning or classes (Desai, 2020). Primarily, students residing in rural areas lack digital devices as well as access to the Internet. Poor connectivity to the Internet impacted their education to the next level.

Moreover, students engaged in digital learning using smartphones faced negative emotions and issues such as anxiety, stress, depression, an unfavourable home studies atmosphere, and poor Internet connectivity (Kapadia, 2020). Moreover, many cases of near and far-sightedness in young students were reported due to increased smartphone screen time during online classes.

Indian Government and University Grants Commission declared online examinations and promoted students to the next grades on behalf of their past performance and online exams. However, this created difficulty for both teachers and students as not all were familiar with digital learning (Chisti, 2020). Also, only a few universities, schools, and colleges had the requisite facilities to conduct online examinations.

Universities in rural areas or where a sizeable portion of students come from middle-class or low-income families fail to afford online examinations (Bhattacharya, 2020). Moreover, webinars were organized to guide the students, which enhanced learning among them better. Webinars boast definite advantages over seminars as they are pretty easy to be organized (Marx, 2020). Participants can comfortably attend webinars from their place without worrying about food etc., and organizers are not required to worry about food, premises, accommodation et al., (Mahapatra, 2020). At the same time, webinars also boast some disadvantages.

In contrast to seminars, the speaker fails to view the entire audience due to the presence of a ghost audience from worldwide (Dattagupta, 2020). Also, seminars allow socialization and webinars obstruct such socialization. Seeking the drawbacks of lockdown, webinars were considered excellent alternatives to seminars.

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON EMPLOYMENT OF INDIANS

Lockdown resulted in the closure of many factories that, eventually, forced people to migrate to their hometowns or be unemployed. Also, thousands of migrants who protested in Delhi due to the lockdown were tear-gassed by the police authorities (Reuters, 2020). In India, migrant workers were worst exploited amidst the lockdown due to severe government mismanagement (Tiwari, 2020).

The 2011 census declared 139 million migrant workers from all across the country. The largest source of seasonal labour was from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, and west Bengal (Sharma, 2017). As per the data of Railways, the average annual flow of workers during 2011-2016 was around 9 million. Seasonal labour ruled the most hazardous sectors, including construction, hotel, chemical, transportation, domestic service, textile, etc. Due to poor occupational health, seasonal labourers faced massive illness and consequent loss in wages.

The impact of the lockdown was most critical on the migrant workers. It has been observed that about 2.2 crores of migrant workers were displaced during the lockdown. Migrant workers suffered severely during the lockdown as they were cheated out of their legitimate dues (Vij, 2020). Employers refused to give their wages while taking advantage of the lockdown (Dey, 2020). Consequently, migrant workers had to go back home; some even travelled by foot. If the government had given appropriate transport facilities, their problem could have been prevented easily. Unfortunately, the state did not provide any facilities. Even the agitated workers were arrested by the police, who treated them harshly (Forghash, 2020).

The lockdown in India resulted in widespread insecurity about jobs. It has been observed that southern India was far more concerned about losing their jobs. Compared with income, low-income groups felt too worried, followed by middle and high-income groups. Concerning gender, women were much more concerned as compared to men regarding job loss. When religion is concerned, Sikhs and Muslims perceive more fear of job loss (IANS, 2020).

People started taking low-paying jobs for the sake of their families and livelihood. Research has analyzed that the unemployment situation worsened in April and May. It was the reason that people were desperate to get jobs, whether low paying or high. Also, urban India's unemployment rate declined after the lockdown was an imposition. It, however, formulated economic hardship in the nation. Hence, it was the government's responsibility to combat the hardship created by their policies (Jha, 2020).

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON FAMILY LIFE

As the family is considered a fundamental element of the society of any nation, the significant impact of the lockdown was discerned on Indian families. However, the impact of the lockdown

was observed positively and negatively. The lockdown in India benefitted society in numerous ways. Firstly, the lockdown compelled the members of families to stay home for a longer time and spend ample time with each other (Rajkumar, 2020). It eventually increased in family time. Rather than being self-centred, Indian people became more family oriented. Lockdown, however, altered the work balance. Children became closer to their fathers, who, most of the time, stayed out of the home due to work. Couples give enormous amounts of time to each other. Husbands helped their wives with household tasks and supported their children in their studies. Furthermore, the lockdown gave them enough time to understand each other better and helped cement social relationships.

Interestingly, marriages were performed in a simple way without involving many people. As we know, Indian marriages are costly and crowded involving tremendous dowry along with pomp and show, and the lockdown broke all the stereotypes. Instead, people started getting married during the lockdown phase, saving money and wasting food and other materials (Ray, 2020). On the other side, many family differences, violence, stress, and depression were observed in Indian families.

Enhanced Violence in Families: Lockdown imposed a tremendous negative impact on the family lives of Indians. It was observed that domestic violence evolved as a drastic social issue during the lockdown in the pandemic. The rise in domestic issues and domestic violence cases was discerned right after the lockdown in India. The National Women's Commission of India received 58 complaints through email. The situation became so critical that National Legal Services Authority decided to open an online legal services cell with professional women lawyers who can help women during difficult situations (Mahapatra, 2020).

Enhanced Stress: Lockdown separated a considerable number of families due to a variety of reasons. It enhanced stress among the separated family members (Dattagupta, 2020). Most people were out of town and did not get a chance to return due to the sudden lockdown. Older people lost their children or vice-versa due to the pandemic and lockdown stress. Several people died due to stress, loneliness, and fear of disease, as their children were not with them. Had the government given some time to the Indian people, there would be fewer family tensions. With advanced announcements, families could make arrangements, and their lockdown would have been far less stressful.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON INDIAN SOCIETY

During the lockdown, medical and paramedical staff were severely attacked by people for various reasons. The then Indian president issued an ordinance named epidemic disease ordinance 2020, offering penalties for violent acts or disturbances against medical or paramedical staff. Also, people refused to help Covid-19 victims. A literature review of Covid-19 psychological aspects devised that higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and mental

disorder were reported in India (Rajkumar, 2020). The significant psychological impact, i.e. stress, anxiety, and depression, originated from spatial isolation and social and economic discord.

However, suicidal attempts, thoughts, and tendencies were hugely reported. A higher stress level was observed in Indian females compared to males. Psychiatric symptoms like stress, confusion, and depression were observed due to fear of Covid-19 transmission. Children reported symptoms of psychiatric issues because of domestic violence, child abuse, loneliness, online learning, and isolation, et al., elder or old age people, homeless people, and people living in care homes were more susceptible to psychological problems. They were psychologically hurt (Khan, 2020).

Dietary changes, alterations in travelling plans, transmission fear, and changes in sleeping patterns altered the lifestyle of Indian societies leading to negative emotions. Not all people were negatively influenced by the disease, as reports declared that 78.5% of respondents were sure that the virus could be treated. However, the findings were only related to the educated middle class (Kochar, 2020).

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DURING LOCKDOWN

While enforcing the lockdown, it was noticed that police and the government was violating human rights. Police forces started beating or punishing people they found on the roads. Even people were forced to perform humiliating exercises, and their videos were posted on social media. These degrading actions violate Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (United Nations, 1948). Degrading punishments include sit-ups, push-ups, etc.

Furthermore, personnel in charge of quarantine centres misbehaved with people while providing food and water. The killing of health personnel was considered the worst form of human rights abuse. In West Bengal, police authorities intentionally killed a young man who came out to buy milk for his kid. In Tamil Nadu, police authorities killed a man and his father as they violated lockdown rules (Gupta, 2020).

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON HEALTH AND PREVALENT DISEASES

Co-morbid conditions like non-communicable diseases such as Diabetes, Blood Pressure or Hypertension, Cardiovascular Diseases, et al., resulted in enhanced morbidity and mortality in India. Prevalent diseases and early non-communicable diseases put young and older generations at higher risk for Covid-19. Due to lack of physical activity, enhanced eating, altered sleeping patterns, consumption of calorie-dense food et al., gain in weight was observed drastically in Indians.

Research has further analyzed that the consumption of carbohydrates and snacking frequency enhanced by 21% and 23%, respectively, the duration of exercise was minimized, and gain of

weight occurred in 19% of patients having Type-2 Diabetes (Ghosh et al., 2020). Medical studies have declared that weight gain and obesity enhance the Covid-19 severity and susceptibility. It also increases the risk of Diabetes along with cardiovascular diseases.

Furthermore, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Tuberculosis, and Malaria-related morbidity and mortality are enhanced by up to 10%, 20%, and 36%, respectively, compared to the situation without Covid-19. The primary reason is obstruction of antiretroviral therapy (ART), minimization in timely diagnosis and treatment of life-threatening diseases, and minimal activities about prevention involving obstruction of campaigning.

Furthermore, economic slowdown enhances the chances of malnutrition. Loss of daily wages and unemployment is the primary reason behind malnutrition, making it challenging to purchase essential food items for low-income people in Indian society. Pregnant women faced much more stress, ignorance, lack of social activity, and loneliness that eventually impacted the health of young ones.

CONCLUSION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which SARS-COV2 caused, severely impacted individuals' physical and mental health worldwide. In order to combat the pandemic, a nationwide lockdown was imposed that fiercely exploited people's mental health. Likewise, the Government of India imposed a lockdown in most districts of states and union territories. During the Covid-19 pandemic, India had the highest infection rates worldwide, with more than 2.5 million confirmed cases. An enhanced upsurge in the dissemination of disease was reported after March 2020. To combat the disease and its spread, the government imposed a nationwide lockdown in India. The sudden lockdown in India severely impacted the Indian people and societies, primarily education, migrant workers, employment, health, family life, and many more.

Predominantly, the older and young generations were severely impacted due to Covid-19 and the lockdown. Depression, anxiety, stress, mental illness, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies were observed nationwide. Moreover, police authorities violated human rights and abused the general population. Thus, random lockdowns ruined Indian societies economically, socially, and psychologically. The government should have announced it earlier so that people could proactively join their families or plan. Also, the government would have provided transport, employment, food supply, Internet, and migration facilities to the societies of India, primarily rural areas.

Future researchers can research the political consequences of the lockdown as the study has observed coherent signs towards the trend of authoritarianism. For instance, various political parties (opposition) have alleged that their observations were intentionally removed from the final Corona report that was submitted to the Parliament Committee of the Indian Home Ministry.

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