

Impact of Lockdown due to COVID-19 Pandemic on General Public in Pakistan

Dr. Iffat Rohail

Abstract

Background: The aim of this study was to explore the impact of lockdown due to COVID-19 from general public's perspective. People all around the world are facing this unusual challenge of staying home with government's orders and hence the effects of this lock down situation are still unknown from the point of view of a common man.

Methods: This study was a qualitative descriptive study conducted after two months of lockdown in April-May, 2020. A single question "how do lockdown due to COVID19 impact your life in last two months?" was asked on line from a sample of 114 people (73 males, 41 females) with an age ranged between 17 and 68.

Results: Their response transcripts verbatim were then analyzed by qualitative content analysis. Five themes emerged from the perspective and experiences of the participants comprising both, positive and negative aspects of the situation. These include stressors and uplifts in the domains of **Change in life** (world is on halt, no deadlines); **Social/emotional** (emotional setback, connected through network); **Personal/psychological** (sensitive, more reflective); **Professional/economical** (financial crises, doing online job); **Spiritual** (sad to see Haram(Holy Ka'aba) closed, closer to God) and **Familial** (confined at home, quality time with family increased).

Conclusions: To conclude, the unusual world situation has unexpected results. The uplifts expressed by people indicate that people have the ability to adapt even the worst situations. This ability model should be promoted and people should be taught to improve their skills.

Keywords: Lockdown, COVID-19, Impact, Qualitative analysis, General public

I. Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Iffat Rohail, Department of Psychology, and Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: iffat.rohail@fui.edu.pk.



Foundation University Islamabad

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Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has a major health, social and economic impact on societies around the globe. In Pakistan as much as in Europe or any other country, the virus is posing a threat to people's lives, straining communities, overwhelming health systems and endangering livelihoods.

The COVID-19 pandemic was confirmed to reach Pakistan on 26th February 2020 and by 18th March cases had been registered in all four provinces (Sindh, Punjab, KPK & Balochistan); the two autonomous territories (Gilgit & Baltistan) and the Federal territory of Islamabad. The country was put under a nation-wide lock down on April 1st 2020. Since then all the educational institutes closed; offices, commercial activities, industries, construction work, traveling was put on halt and health emergency was announced. People were asked to stay at home and socially isolate themselves to prevent being infected.

According to The World Economic Forum COVID Action Platform (Hoof, 2020), some 2.6 billion people around the globe are in some form of lockdown. This has impacted general public immensely. It is first ever pandemic in history which has strongly and directly affect people alike without taking into consideration any caste, creed, geographical boundary, rich or poor. The impact has its social, emotional, physiological, psychological, spiritual and mostly economical consequences.

Initially, public's emotional response to any pandemic is of extreme fear and uncertainty which usually drives towards negative societal behaviors and can involve public mental health concerns like anxiety, insomnia, depression aggression, frustration and hysteria (Shigemura et al. 2020).

Health emergencies such as epidemics can lead to detrimental and long lasting psychosocial consequences, due to disease related fear and anxiety, large-scale social isolation, and the overabundance of (mis)information on social media and elsewhere (Dong & Bouey, 2020). At the individual level, epidemics are associated with a wide range of psychiatric co morbidities including anxiety, panic, depression and trauma-related disorders (Tucci et al., 2017). The psychosocial impact of health emergencies seems to be even higher during isolation or lock down measures (Brooks et al., 2020). Lock down has always been associated with high stress levels (Di Giovanni et al., 2004), depression (Hawryluck et al., 2004), irritability and insomnia (Lee et al., 2005). Furthermore, it is also associated with acute stress (Bai et al., 2004) and trauma-related (Wu et al., 2009) disorders, particularly in specific at-risk populations such as health workers (Lai et al., 2020).

According to another recent review (Brooks et al 2020) it was reported that psychological effects of COVID 19 related quarantine on people is immense that include post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion, anger, infection fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma.

Staying home is not sustainable unless and until it will be imposed on public as formal lockdown. Since the

outbreak of COVID 19 people are directed by the govt. to suspend their activities outdoor, to the extent of closing down their businesses and offices till an indefinite period. All congregational meetings are disallowed even the mosques are closed, and people cannot offer their Friday prayers in mosques. This is being experienced in the month of Holy Ramadan when they are restraint from offering prayers (Jumma & Taraweih) in congregation they find it difficult to understand that it may be a health risk for them as well as for others.

Country like Pakistan has a large percentage of people below poverty line. They are daily wagers, they are simple, and they are mostly illiterate. They are highly innocent to the extent of being ignorant of the fact that social distancing means 'save your souls'. Yet they are oblivious, they are die hard Muslims, very emotional and less rational.

In a nation like Pakistan where uncertainty is not only that of COVID-19 but also for many about their next meal and disrupted work life due to lock down emotional disturbances such as aggression and frustration will be common. Comparably those health professionals working in quarantine COVID-19 units with lack of proper protective measures and death of fellow doctors can lead to significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Folkman & Greer 2000).

Although as of yet the effects of COVID-19 on mental health have not been studied qualitatively, it is expected to have significant effects based on recent public reaction (Li 2020, Xiang et al. 2020). The aim of present study is however to understand the impact of lock down qualitatively from the excerpts of people.

Method

Design

This was the qualitative study. Purposive sampling technique was used based on phenomenological approach. An exploratory study was conducted through an online survey to see how people are affected with the COVID 19 lockdown.

Participants and Procedure

A sample of 114 people (m= 73, f=41) of different ages (between 17 and 68 years) were asked a research question electronically, "how does COVID 19 lockdown impact your life in past two months?" to identify "real time" factors about their current circumstances, wellbeing, experiences with Covid-19 lockdown influencing their mental resilience or coping.

Results

Table 1

Stressors and Uplifts (in Yellow color) during lock down under different dimensions (Themes)

CHANGE IN LIFE	SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL	PERSONAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL	SPIRITUAL	FINANCIAL/ PROFESSION	FAMILIAL
world is on halt	emotional setback	become reflective	closer to God	professional relationships finished	more time with family
big spasm in routine	hiccups in emotions	Sensitive	faith is strengthened in Allah	financial crises of others disturbing financial crises of others disturbing	confined at home
more free time	social personal life finished	more me time	seek Allah's forgiveness	Lack of resources	closer to my family
no rush time	social distancing	becomes nature lover	Allah controlling everything	No job	time to clean house
no deadlines	social isolation	becomes environmentalist	Allah' s blessings	Work at halt	cannot take out son for parks or play
No servants	no social interaction	Frustration	sad to see Haram (Holy Ka'aba) closed	Lack of money	can see (working) mother daily at home
Unplanned future	Boredom without friends and hangouts	can sleep	forgive others more	How to earn money	cannot meet spouse(away and locked)
Being unoccupied	No Eid celebrations	contemplate on weaknesses	seek protection from diseases affliction and calamities from Allah	Doing online job/work	24/7 home chores
Lack of freedom	Can't call people for get to gathers	time to improve	Spiritual healing		Family dynamics changed
No outdoor play time	Interaction with people goes virtual	good break from hassles	Investing more time for religious rituals/pray		Daily wake sleep routine changed
No shopping	More connected through internet	Lethargy	Inner reflection/ connection to Allah increased		More domestic violence
Fearful groceries	More use of social networking services	Attend neglected issues			Family time increased
Online Classes with assignments burden		Anxiety			Quality time for family increased
Academic life turned to online		Depression			Indoor play with family members
Everything becomes virtual		Aggression			Time to cook different for family
Excessive screen time		Over burdened			
Media playing havoc		Fear of getting infected			
Work from home		Irritation			
Positive climatic changes		Impatience			
Less noise and commotion		Laziness			
Nature is healing		More time to contemplate			
Less smoke and gases in environment		Quality time for self increased			
Availability of online		Become more creative			
		Exercising/walk			
		Improving skills			

As Corona virus has imposed a deadly impact on people throughout the world so does it has influenced the people of Pakistan. To fight for the survival of people, governments of nearly every country around the globe has introduced lock down with the slogan “stay home stay safe”. This experience of staying home forcefully is novel for people and hence consequential too. Results of current study revealed that Lockdown has impacted general public economically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually as well as their family dynamics changed. A major shift is visible in their daily life circumstances. These results are in line with recent studies which are being conducted worldwide. According to a very recent article released by International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, June, 2020), global pandemic due to COVID-19 may increase stress exponentially. Those people who are already vulnerable may be the real target of the stress like people with already existing mental health conditions, old people who have difficulty managing themselves and already living alone, victims of sexual and gender based violence, children and health care workers. This pandemic has made people anxious, distressed and worried.

COVID-19 Pandemic in general is not only serious public health concern; rather it triggers disastrous socio-economic and political crises. According to the report of the World Health Organization (WHO as of April 18 2020), the current outbreak of COVID-19, has affected over 2164111 people and killed more than 146,198 people in more than 200 countries throughout the world, consequently creating the socio-economic and political crises. Besides that psychological morbidity is on increase as well.

Before conducting this study there was an assumption that people will talk more about having negative impact as compared to positive, but the results have shown that besides increase in domestic violence, anxiety, depression and emotional hiccups among people, the factors like improved family relationship, quality time with family members, positive environmental changes, faith healing and time for self contemplation emerged as mitigating elements in people to counter this unusual situation and decrease their risk of pandemic-locked down-related mental health issues.

Results also revealed that people are utilizing their time in lock down with improving skills, being more creative, doing exercise, investing time with self and family. Pakistani society is collectivistic in nature so people miss social gatherings; meeting or calling people home, socializing, hanging out with friends etc. The positive alternative however was that people turned towards technology became more virtual and interacted with their relations through internet. Like other nations of the world, work from home and online classes was carried out to compensate the time in lockdown. Reportedly, in other parts of the world doctors and researchers are noticing some curious and unexpectedly positive side effects of the abrupt shifts in human behaviour in response to the covid-19 pandemic. Skies are bluer, fewer cars are crashing, crime is falling, and some other infectious diseases are fading from hospital emergency departments (Nelson, 2020).

The main themes emerged in this study are as following:

- Change in Life
- Social/emotional,
- Personal/psychological,
- Financial/professional,
- Spiritual
- Familial.

‘Change in life’ is an interesting theme and is worth noticing, as discussed earlier, pandemic related change in life circumstances are new for everyone and so are the reactions of people dealing with it. If for some people world is on halt and there is a big spasm in routine, other people feel free to enjoy their free time, their ‘me time’ and they are not subject to deadlines, rush hours and so on. Some people are happy to see an environment taking a sigh of relief from smoke and pollution.

As expected, another main theme ‘personal/psychological’ reveal people’s anxieties, fear of infection, frustration, boredom, lethargy, depression, aggression, impatience and feelings of over burdened. However, on the contrary people are making use of time by learning skills, improving selves, contemplating, exercising, becoming creative, reflective, environmentalist etc.

Quality family life increased, parents playing and enjoying with children to make positive use of time, cooking, attending neglected issues of homes etc. On the other side violence also increased at certain homes. People cannot socialize with their other family members who are away.

At social level people find them stuck and their socialization stopped which is cumbersome for people. Although they try to remain connected with their friends and loved ones virtually but youngsters are bored and crazy staying home.

Spiritually people are more connected to Allah the Supreme and their faith increased. Economically people felt strained mostly.

So far, little research has been done in Pakistan into how the pandemic-locked down is specifically affecting people negatively or positively, so this study is just a drop in the ocean to inform mental health practitioners how to inculcate mitigating rudiments in people so that they perform their normal functions without drowning into uncertainties.

Conclusion

Though the pandemic of COVID-19 has spread fear not only on individual level but at societal level too and the need to implement proper mental health precautions along with physical health precautions is necessary. In countries like Pakistan where resources are limited, timely detection and eradication of mental health issues can help the patients from long term sufferings. Other strategies such

as online psychological help, getting counseling sessions

online from home can also give an easy access to people to reach psychologists for communication and assistance. It's a good omen that many non government organizations, and public or private sector universities are offering their services online to masses free of cost.

A framework is required which can provide an access to "real time" risk-assessment and inform self-management; a flexible approach considering the unique health needs for individuals and their own life circumstances with guidance for employers and education providers to adapt work/education to minimize risk whilst promoting inclusion; a psychologically informed approach to care provision which takes into account the unique psychosocial impact of covid-19 on people with serious underlying health conditions.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding authors on reasonable request.

Author's contributions

IR: study design, literature search, first draft, manuscript revisions, approval of the final version.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The integrate study was approved by the Foundation University Islamabad ethical Review Board. Written consent was obtained from all participants.

Competing interests

The authors declare to have no competing interests.

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