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The Socio-Psychological Impact of COVID-19: A Case Study of District Khyber

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented educational, social, economic, psychological and political impacts with varying implications around the globe. The current study was conducted to gauge and assess the socio-psychological impacts of COVID-19 in District Khyber, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Primary data was collected for the current study from 200 participants through face-to-face interviews. The data was analyzed under the "Thematic Content Analysis". The findings of the study shows that the disease and the subsequent social distancing have put at stake the social cohesion and normaldom. In the wake of the disease, domestic abuse, aggression and violence increased making women prey to the predators' anger, abuse and battering; religious events suffered suspension or disruption; The schools' closure has had profound negative impacts on children's conduct; the deteriorating economic situation and the swelling poverty of the masses have led to a hike in the crimes' rate; the transgender community has suffered economic plight; women's regular health care services such as contraception's, safe abortions and other maternity ailments have suffered notably; schools closure has set off hazardous implications for girls such as harassment, abuse, rape, teen-age pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Resultantly, the people of the area have been suffering acute trauma, videlicet boredom, fear, anxiety, frustration, and insomnia enticing them towards unhealthy activities viz. use of sedatives, smoking, alcohol usage, and, above all, internet and online unethics. The recommendations should be implemented to help people avoid the downright negative impacts of the COVID-19 and, besides, to help the government to devise a mechanism to combat the pandemic.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19, acronym for Coronavirus Disease 2019, a lethal contagious pandemic, was erstwhile unknown to the laymen albeit a virulent deadliest disease. Coronaviruses – and the diseases they cause in animals and human beings – were discovered and recognized around fifty years ago. In 1931, Schalk and Hawn discovered them in the newly hatched chicks (Fabricant, 1998). In 1951, a hepatitis virus – today known as coronavirus – was deduced from mice by Gledhill and Andrewes. In 1968, Tyrell, Almeida, Berry, Cunningham, Hamre, Hofstad, Malluci and Mclontosh, in their study titled “Virology: Coronaviruses” – recording the first ever use of the word coronavirus – reported a group of host viruses causing avian bronchitis, murine hepatitis and other respiratory tract diseases.

According to Aronson and Ferner (2020), the term corona has many connotations. In 1968, “Nature” – a journal – reported that as the coronaviruses were belonging to a formerly unrecognized group, owing to which the virologist called them ‘coronaviruses’. According to the recent taxonomy, on account of its resemblance to the sun, the virologists have metaphored “the characteristics ‘fringe of projection’ on the outside of the virus with the solar corona”.

Coronavirus is an RNA virus having about 120-nanometer diameter and 40 different varieties. Mainly residing in wild birds and bats, coronavirus can infect birds, humans and other mammals. Among numerous speculations, it is reported that after originating in bats and thereon transferring to pangolins, coronavirus proliferated rapidly among human beings most probably through contaminated meat of these animals (Olsen et al. 2020).

According to WebMD (2020), corona’s operational mechanism is multistep. Entering into a body through the droplets of an infected person’s breath, sneeze or cough, or, besides, by touching eyes, nose or mouth with contaminated hands, the coronavirus attacks healthy cells in the lungs. Soon the body responses with symptoms like cough, fever, headache, soar-throat, diarrhea, nausea, etc. Causing lungs to flame, it turns difficult to breathe normally. After the lungs are affected, different organs do not receive enough oxygen to function properly and, hence, their survival turns at stake.

In their paper, Shafi, Liu, and Ren (2020) have highlighted the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The outbreak of coronavirus has brought world’s economy to a halt. Pakistan’s economy has suffered acute setbacks. The small-scaled enterprises are virtually on the verge of extirpation suffering – in the wake of coronavirus pandemic – financial issues, the disruption of supply chains, low demands, and downright fall in sales and profit. Besides, majority of these enterprises had no proposed plan for the ongoing situation. Majority of them reported about the impending collapse of their enterprises in case the outbreak of corona protracts.

According to Chriscaden (2020), besides inflicting an immensurable and unprecedented harm in terms of human loss, COVID-19 has jeopardized public health, food systems, and labor-work. The working population is losing jobs falling into the ditch of poverty. The number of the undernourished people is being increased. For the working people, losing job means losing food or access to food. Besides, the national and international trade-restrictions have downright disrupted food supply chains. As farmers are unable to access markets for selling their goods, access to healthy food has turned difficult.

In the wake of COVID-19, the lives of millions of children and women are under threat due to the ailment, death or job-loss of their male peers and guardians. Besides, working in the precarious situation with SOPs ignored, the workforce is gravely vulnerable to contract and spread coronavirus (Fore, 2020).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has multifold psychological implications. According to Abbas et al. (2020), self-isolation, social distancing and quarantines – individual-cum-national – have set off earnest-cum-catholic psychological impacts. The disease has set off a pedestrian dysphoria among the laymen. Besides the direct threat corona poses to human life and health, the laymen fear the impending starvation and inflation. Medical staff and their relatives are suffering strained relations owing to the psychological pressure and dysphoria caused by the fear of corona's contraction. The study reveals the fact that many medical staff members in the wake of COVID-19 were advised to thicken their periodical visits to homes.

Brooks et al. (2020) have highlighted the multifold psychological disorders of anxiety, insomnia, frustration, stress and depression faced by masses. In the wake of corona, the threat corona posed to human life, health and economic well-being has downright shaken the psychological well-being of people. For Kang et al. (2020), the fear to combat the virus, the impending uncertainty of repercussions and the deteriorating economic situation are causing multifold psychological traumas in people.

Grein et al. (2020), in their paper “Psychological Impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 Among Italians during the First Week of Lockdown” interviewed 5683 Italians in order to gauge the psychological impact of COVID-19 on them. The study shows that youth and female were demonstrating acute psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, insomnia, and, above all, suicidal temptations. Besides, the study has also inferred the fact that those having majority of positive cases in their umbworld, extended lockdowns and the fear to relocate were tholing greater psychological traumas. According to Chen et al. (2020), the pandemic COVID-19 has caused humongous psychological traumas around the globe. As per the statistics of the author, there was 33% prevalence of depression and anxiety among the general masses, while 56% among the people showing symptoms of the disease.

In their survey, Wang et al. (2020) 1210 respondents from different cities were assessed on stress, anxiety and depression scales. The findings infer 53.8% of the respondents rated the psychological impact of COVID-19 as severe, 16.5% reported severe depression, 28.8% reported severe anxiety and 8.1% reported severe stress. 84.7% respondents reported fear for their family members. Female gender, students and people having self-rated poor healths were administering higher psychological issues. People aware of the preventive and precautionary measures and health information were least psychologically affected. For Serafini et al. (2020), in the wake of COVID-19, in an unprecedented move, quarantining masses previously unbound and free across the length and width of globe, coupled with the hysteria fomented by media, triggered multi psychological issues like uncertainty, stress, depression, anxiety and frustration. In the course of the outbreak of general diseases, fear, anxiety, panic-behavior and hysteria spread in every community.

According to Burki (2020), across the earth, some 740 million women work in the informal sector of economy. In developing countries, every 3rd woman is employed in the informal

sector of economy. Amidst the lockdowns all over the world, such jobs suddenly vanished followed by the subsequent nullification of their health insurances making it hard for women to survive. For the author, COVID-19 – if protracted – will undo the trivial improvement women have achieved in the course of the past few decades pushing them back below the poverty-line. According to Bradbury-Jones and Isham (2020), over the last twelve months, amidst the lockdowns, being trapped with their men, some 243 million women have suffered intimate partners' physical and sexual abuse. After the imposition of lockdowns, within one week, violence against women surged up by 30% in France. For Gabster et al. (2020), dropped out of schools in the wake of the coronavirus disease, some half billion girls are at a high risk of genital mutilation and early-age marriages. School protect girls from abuse, therefore, losing school protection poses hazardous implications for girls such as harassment, abuse, rape, teen- age pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Schools closure has increased women's unpaid labour to look after children besides many other domestic duties. Tang et al. (2020) aggravates the fact that as medical healthcare centres have put their front measures to control and treat COVID-19, some 9.5 million women have lost access to their regular health services such as contraceptions, safe abortions and other maternity complications.

The objectives of the study are:

- To know the different socio-psychological impacts of COVID-19
- To recommend suggestions to help the government and masses to reduce the hazardous impacts of COVID-19

2. Research Methods and Data

After the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent suspension of trade, closure of international borders and restrictions on movement, economic crisis and psychological distress fomented worldwide. This study was conducted to gauge the socio-psychological impact of COVID-19 in District Khyber, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Under the qualitative research method – a method carried to measure factors on non-quantifiable elements (Jamshed, 2014) – primary data was collected for the current study. To tool of unstructured in-depth interview was used to collect varying information about the issue. In the course of the process of data collection, 200 participants – selected randomly – were interviewed face to face and their responses were recorded. In the next step, the collected data was analyzed under the “Inductive Approach” with the tool of Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) “Thematic Content Analysis” in six different steps: (a) familiarization of the data; (b) codification of the data; (c) searching different themes in the data; (d) reviewing the themes; (e) naming and elaborating the themes; and, (f) writing up the report and narration.

3. Discussion and Data Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent suspension of trade, closure of international borders, restrictions on movement and the mechanisms to combat and control it have caused unprecedented educational, social, economic, psychological and political impacts with varying implications around the globe. The current study was conducted to gauge and assess the socio- psychological impacts of COVID-19. The findings of the study shows that COVID-19 has had influential and grave impact on personal and community gatherings. As gatherings of mass sizes were prevented in order to depose the spread of the novel virus, the authorities mandated people for stay at home closing the recreation and entertainment venues. This suspension of the local community gatherings has gravely affected people's mental well-being. In the wake of the suspension

of these gatherings, people have suffered from loneliness, sense of isolation and boredom resultantly, tempted by unhealthy activities viz. smoking, alcohol usage, and, above all, internet and online unethics.

The findings infer COVID-19's another impact of mass influence viz. Surge in domestic violence. Majority of the respondents attributed domestic and intimate partner violence to lockdowns amidst COVID-19. Loss of employment, financial insecurity, inadequate supplies, the loss of health insurances, and, beyond all factors, the subsequent stress have caused domestic aggression at home ultimately leading to anger, abuse and battering. Amidst the closure of educational institutions, kids are staying back at home which in turn has further exacerbated the already simmering situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent struggles to curb it have impacted different religions, around the globe, in different ways. As gatherings of mass sizes were prevented, either many religious worshipping services and festivals were cancelled or their mechanism of performance was altered. Like other mainstream religions, it has gravely affected Islam and its followers viz. muslims. The respondents aggrieved that amidst the rising cases, muslims' pilgrimage to Makkah and Madina was temporarily cancelled. Besides, the culture of mass gatherings at masjids and the collective performance of prayers were disrupted.

The findings infer another crucial area namely children downright worse affected by the pandemic. The schools' closure – besides affecting the schooling of children and educational activities – has lead to the neglect of parental care and the impending debauchery of children. Many of the respondents resented schools' closure. As per their views, schools' closure has caused debauchery and licentiousness in their children's conduct. Primarily, the neglect of parental care and the subsequent vagabondage of the children have resulted in the spike of sexual abuse against schoolchildren.

The unforeseen upsurge in delinquency is another distressing fact revealed by the data. Some of the respondents aggrieved the rising crimes of robbery, burglary, extortion and kidnapping in the area. The closure of the borders and international flights, trade suspension and other restrictions amidst the pandemic have brought the people of the area to this halt. The deteriorating economic situation and the swelling poverty of the masses have lead to a hike in the crime' rate in the area, commented the respondents.

In Pakistan, the transgenders have been facing multifarious cultural and legal hardships and discrimination, but the ongoing pandemic has exacerbated their plight. The data infers that as marginalized by society, living in isolation and solely surviving upon their performance in different social events like weddings, engagements and other gay occasions, the transgender community has been profoundly affected by the lasting pandemic. Suffering economic and restrictive hardships, the members of the abhorred community are affected in several ways: exposure to the virus, non-availability of health services, social distancing and what not. Having no other source of income but to beg on streets, to perform sex-work or dance in events, amidst the pandemic, the subsequent lockdowns and the suspension of the social events have deteriorated the economic plight of the transgender community.

Albeit the pandemic poses a threat to the whole population beyond discrimination, however,

the data shows that women – especially the working and poor women – have been affected disproportionately because of the unequal power and gender relations determining access to and control over resources. They are suffering extra burden of care owing to the schools' closure, domestic and intimate partner abuse and violence, and economic hardships. All this plight has ended up in their ultimate psychophysical woes. In the wake of the pandemic, it gradually turned visible that men are more infected, while women more affected resulting in men's higher mortality rate than that of women's leaving them with no choice but to face and endure its social, economic and psychological maledictions. The findings show that the pandemic is further widening the pre-existing inequalities in our socio-political structures. Solely determined to fight the virus, the health care units have neglected women's regular health care services such as contraception's, safe abortions and other maternity ailments. The suspension of educational activities and the closure of schools have caused far-reaching consequences for girls. School protect girls from abuse, therefore, losing school protection poses hazardous implications for girls such as harassment, abuse, rape, teen age pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The coronavirus pandemic, the subsequent suspension of trade, closure of international borders, restrictions on movement, the unprecedented hikes in prices, low supply chains, the loss of jobs and employment and school closures, besides the fears associated with the spread of the disease itself, have downright worse affected the mental health of masses causing multifarious psychological issues and traumas in them. The findings of the study show that, in the area, among the commonest psychological impacts were boredom, fear, anxiety, frustration, and insomnia. Above all, the pandemic has caused an unprecedented spike in suicidal temptation, if not suicides, further exacerbated by loneliness, social isolation and social distancing. These psychological disorders and pressures have lead to the use of sedatives, smoking, alcohol, etc. among the frontline fighters of society.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

After the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent suspension of trade, closure of international borders, restrictions on movement and quarantines, economic and social crisis and psychological distress fomented worldwide. The pandemic has caused unprecedented educational, social, economic, psychological and political impacts with varying implications around the globe. The current study was conducted to gauge and asses the socio-psychological impacts of COVID-19 in District Khyber, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The findings of the study show that profound fears are associated with the pandemic COVID-19 looming imminent threats to human life and society. The disease and the subsequent social distancing put at stake the social cohesion and normaldom. In the wake of the disease, domestic abuse, aggression and violence increased making women prey to the predators' anger, abuse and battering; religious events suffered suspension as pilgrimage to Makkah and Madina was temporarily cancelled, and the culture of mass gatherings at masjids and the collective performance of prayers were disrupted; The schools' closure has lead to the neglect of parental care and the impending debauchery of children causing licentiousness in the children's conduct; the neglect of the parental care and the subsequent vagabondage of the children have resulted in the spike of sexual abuse against school children; the deteriorating economic situation and the swelling poverty of the masses have lead to a hike in the crime-rate in the area with increased crimes of robbery, burglary, extortion and kidnapping; having no other source of income but to beg on streets, to perform sex-work or dance in events, the transgender community, during the COVID-19, has profoundly suffered economic plight besides other social and restrictive hardships; and, in the course of the virus, women have

suffered profound health issues as the health care units were solely determined to fight the virus, women's regular health care services such as contraception's, safe abortions and other maternity ailments suffered notably. As schools protect girls from abuse, in the wake of the pandemic, losing school protection has set off hazardous implications for girls such as harassment, abuse, rape, teen age pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The findings of the study show that, partly caused by the pandemic and partly by the social impacts discussed so far, the people of the area have been suffering acute trauma, videlicet boredom, fear, anxiety, frustration, and insomnia. Above all, the pandemic has caused an unprecedented spike in suicides or suicidal attempts, further exacerbated by loneliness, social isolation and social distancing. People have been suffering from loneliness, sense of isolation and boredom enticing them towards unhealthy activities viz. use of sedatives, smoking, alcohol usage, and, above all, internet and online unethics.

In the light of the findings, the author recommends: in order to reduce the impacts of the pandemic, firstly, the government should not ban and recess sport, education, business and industry, rather these institutions should be kept functionalized with strict observance of SoPs, creating opportunities of employment and recreation which are vital for healthy survival; secondly, the government should encourage domestic business helping people to work and earn at home which will help – besides producing revenue – in the elimination of the spread of the virus; thirdly, opportunities of online entertainment should be produced in order to avoid masses' distress; fourthly, the government should take tangible preventive and precautionary measures to reduce and eliminate the spread of the virus; fifthly, the government and NGOs should help people financially in order to help them combat the disease; sixthly, people should be given guidance and counselling in order to reduce their psychological distress, and, lastly, above all, the government should create media hypes claiming great achievements against the spread of the pandemic resultantly producing euphoria among the masses. It is further suggested that in the post-covid scenario, in order to produce revenue and jobs ultimately paving the way for economic prosperity, the government should devise policy for interest-free loans. In order to boost up the economy and produce mass opportunities of employment, high resources should be invested in the construction, tourism and agriculture sectors.

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