



Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Socio-economically Vulnerable People of Pakistan

Muhammad Kaleem *

Bahadar Sher †

Dilkash Sapna ‡

Contents:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Statement of the Problem](#)
- [Research Question](#)
- [Objectives of the Study](#)
- [Universe of the Study](#)
- [Materials and Methods Used](#)
- [Findings](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [Recommendations](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract: Presently COVID-19 and its socio-economic impacts are burning and debatable issues around the world. This research aimed at investigating the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on people with vulnerable socio-economic conditions. The research was conducted in two union councils i.e. Koper and Hero Shah of Tehsil Dargai District Malakand, KP Pakistan. The data was collected through an in-depth interview method using an interview guide from 24 respondents, 12 respondents from each union council were purposively selected through a random sampling method. The collected data has been analyzed through the qualitative method and primary data has been combined with secondary information for further explanation and unfolding of the ground realities. The research findings indicate that 70 per cent of the workforce of Pakistan is dependent on subsistence earnings and an informal economy. The research shows that the socio-economic recession created by the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected the economy, health, education and livelihood of poor vulnerable people. Consequently, the miseries of the coronavirus enhanced the social and economic problems of poor vulnerable people. The research finding recommends that government should take concrete measures and should provide social and economic support to socio-economically vulnerable people in order to pull them out of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Words: COVID-19, pandemic, vulnerable, socio-economic, livelihood

Introduction

COVID-19 is a disease caused by Novel Corona Virus. Its breakup is CO stand for Corona, VI for virus and D for disease. Corona Virus attacks the lower and upper human respiratory system. Therefore, it was named severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The present outburst of the

coronavirus is not new to the world. In fact, it was discovered in the 1960s. (Mohammad Nafees, 2020). The current COVID-19 virus emerged in Wuhan city of Hubei Province of China. It was on 31 December 2019 that the first patient of coronavirus was reported. Soon the virus began to spread across the globe in less than three months.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda, KP, Pakistan.

Email: Kaleem@bkuc.edu.pk (Corresponding Author).

† PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda, KP, Pakistan.

‡ Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda, KP, Pakistan.

And, it was on 11th March 2020 that the World Health Organization (WHO) has to declare it a pandemic. The coronavirus easily transfers by contacting the infected patient, through spitting droplets, coughing, sneezing or touching the virus-contaminated surface. As the virus is incurable due to the non-availability of vaccines, its curbing measures are isolation, social and physical distancing, strengthening the immune system and hygienic practices (APP, 2020).

As far as socioeconomic conditions are concerned it refers to a composite status of a person that includes economic and sociological standings. It is assessed on the basis of social and economic status in relation to other community members, based on the quality of life, health, education, occupation and income. The social class ranking of people is usually based on these metrics from low, medium and high socio-economic status and least privileged to most privileged (A. Linda, 2015). Vulnerability is the condition of exposure to stress and contingencies. This is the situation of exposure to a hazard with insufficient capacity to mobilize the resources to combat the hazard and the possibility of severe consequences (Rayhan, 2002).

Human history is witnessed that the effects of pandemics are always worse on people having poor socio-economic conditions. For example, the influenza of 1918 killed 40 million people around the world in a year. Only in the United States did 675,000 people die through it. The ratios of mortality were high in the age group 18 to 40, and furthermore for males than females. This huge mortality rate of young people has severely affected the socioeconomic conditions of their families. Further, the influenza pandemic hit people with low socio-economic conditions. The report further reveals that the Black Death of 1348-1351, roughly killed 60 million people in Europe. This pandemic also left worse imprints on human social and economic aspects of life and hurt poor people disproportionately (Garett, 2007).

Another research study revealed that due to HIV/AIDS pandemic the life expectancy of 10 poor Sub-Saharan countries was reduced by about 20 years. About 13 million children lost their one parent to AIDS, which resulted in family economic

condition deterioration, malnutrition, and health issues and the bulk of children left school which was no less than the de-education of the future generation. This study further indicates that this pandemic severely hurt poor communities around the world due to lower socio-economic conditions. Therefore HIV/AIDS was regarded as a disease of Poverty (Cecilia Maria, 2007).

The above facts and this report show that infectious disease outbursts quickly become pandemics due to the frequent cross borders and intercontinental people travels. Historical pieces of evidence about infectious diseases and pandemics revealed that they mostly affect the social and economic activities of vulnerable communities by shrinking the small scale of businesses, vanishing temporary jobs, increasing the burden over the health care system, food insecurity, dysfunctioning of sanitation system, closing of industries and educational institutions which enhance poverty. The report extended that the above repercussions of the pandemics often contribute to morbidity and mortality (Sandra Crouse Quinn, 2014).

The prevailing coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented debacle in recent human history. The virus is killing people, upsetting and hurting their lives. Its severity indicates that this is more than a health crisis as the pandemic negatively affects the social and economic aspects of human life. The report further revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic may affect the livelihood of all the people but it may profoundly hurt the socio-economically vulnerable people. The initial facts show that the negative impact of the virus is more visible in the health and socio-economic conditions of poor people as compared to the rich segment of the population (United Nations, 2020).

Another report indicates that the current wave of the pandemic even affects the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable communities in the United States. The report further explains that poor people are more exposed to Corona Virus because of their poor socio-economic conditions i.e. low income and forced economic mobility, unawareness, weak immune system, and lack of hygienic and health facilities. Further, it was observed that the mortality

rate is also high in people living in poverty (Lennihan, 2020).

Pakistan is a developing country with low socio-economic indicators. About 37 per cent of its people are living below the poverty line. Furthermore, 73 per cent of its population consume less than 2 US dollar per day. According to UNDP, in human development indicators, Pakistan is ranked 136th among 177 developing countries. There is a scarcity of healthcare services, education facilities, employment opportunities, healthy food, clean drinking water and sanitation (Miankhail, 2012). It was observed by Shumaila (2016) that Pakistan spent only 3.1 per cent of its total GDP on its social sector services i.e. education, health, water and sanitation, food security and economic opportunities. Such a meagre investment in the all-important sector of social and economic development is much lesser than the average 4.5 per cent contribution of developing countries in the sector. On other hand, the average share of developed countries in the particular sector is 15 per cent. Moreover, the United Nations Human Development (2013) index indicates that the social and economic development mechanism in the country is not capable to provide basic livelihood facilities to a huge socially and economically vulnerable population. The report further revealed that in human development indicators Pakistan ranked 146th well behind India with 121 and Sri Lanka with 92 ranked respectively in the list of 187 countries (Ahmed S. , 2016). According to another study more than 60 million people in the country are living below the poverty line. They hardly earn for subsistence purposes. Buying or approaching healthcare services, providing a basic educational environment and nutritious food to their children and giving hygienic facilities to their families are beyond their economic potential. Any emergency situation may confront them with some more distressing socio-economic conditions (Khadim, 2017).

In addition, the WHO recommended average annual health expenditure for low and middle-income countries is 34 US dollars per head. Unfortunately in Pakistan, this ratio is only 17 dollars per head annually and the worse is that the

people spent 13 dollars from their pockets while the government share is only 4 dollars (BT. Shaikh, 2013).

Furthermore, a quality and effective education system is the key to improving the socioeconomic conditions of people. Once Nelson Mandela said that "education is the most powerful weapon through which one can change the world". But unfortunately, education is the most ignored sector in Pakistan and its share in total country's GDP is 2.4 per cent which is even lesser than other developing countries. Resultantly a major portion of the people is unskilled and unaware. Therefore they majorly rely on unskilled and physically hard-working low wages jobs. So 73 per cent of the people of the country consume less than 2 dollars on their selves per day (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2017).

In addition, water and sanitation are the guaranty to a healthy life but unfortunately huge population of Pakistan struggling to access clean drinking water and a proper sanitation system. The government spent about one per cent of its total GDP on water and sanitation system. That's why 63 per cent of the population has access to below-average sanitation; this ratio is 71 per cent in rural areas of the country. Further, 80 per cent of the drinking water in the country is contaminated. Statistics show that poor sanitation systems and contaminated drinking water spread infected diseases to around 3 million Pakistanis annually. This poor water and sanitation system maybe play the role of a catalyst darning epidemics and pandemics (Hakro, 2012).

The above information reveals that being a developing country the major portion of the population of Pakistan is living with poor social and economic conditions. In social and economic development indicators i.e. education, health, food security, water and sanitation and economic opportunities, Pakistan is behind even the contemporary developing countries. The huge population of the county is living with a variety of socio-economic problems. Through these socio-economic capabilities, they may not cope with any hazardous phenomenon like an epidemic or

pandemic. The pandemics and epidemics might further worsen their socioeconomic condition.

Presently the world is confronting an unprecedented and deadly COVID-19 pandemic which bamboozled the social and economic structure around the globe. The pandemic does even not spare the developed world. But its consequences on people with low socio-economic conditions in developing countries are significant. As Pakistan is a developing country with low socioeconomic indicators and the bulk of people live in poor socioeconomic conditions. On other hand, the coronavirus is imprinting its devastation across the country. It is therefore the present study has been carried out to evaluate the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socio-economically vulnerable people of Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

The aim of this research was to evaluate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with vulnerable socio-economic conditions in Pakistan. The facts indicate that the major portion of the people of the country is living with low socio-economic conditions. Further 37 per cent of the people are living below the poverty line. There is a scarcity of economic opportunities, and the bulk of the people have very rare access to health, education, nutritious food and water and sanitation facilities. The majority of the people are daily wagers and with no job security. They hardly earn for subsistence purposes. The government's share in social and economic sectors is nominal. All these factors lead a huge population of the country to socio-economic vulnerability. In the meanwhile, the deadly COVID-19 pandemic shattered the social and economic activities in Pakistan. Due to the lockdown, the industries, factories, markets, transport, construction sector, and educational institution are closed. The people are stuck in their homes. The social and economic sectors for people with poor socio-economic conditions are further squeezed. It shows that the COVID-19 pandemic may further enhance the socio-economic vulnerability of the already at-risk people of the country. It is therefore keeping in consideration the gravity of the situation and the vulnerability of a

huge population to the prevailing pandemic, the present study has been carried out.

Research Question

1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with poor economic conditions?
2. How are people with poor social conditions vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objectives of the Study

1. To know about the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with vulnerable economic conditions.
2. To evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with poor social conditions.

Universe of the Study

The present research was conducted in the district of Malakand. Malakand is high a risk district to COVID-19 with a high number of confirmed virus-infected patients and deaths. District Malakand consists of two Tehsils, Batkhela and Tehsil Dargai. In both Tehsil confirmed infected patients of COVID-19 have been reported. This research was carried out in two high-at-risk union councils i.e. Koper and Hero Shah of Tehsil Dargai.

Materials and Methods Used

The present research study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative data match survey findings and permit readers and researchers to search for insight and the behaviour of the proposed population (Muhammad Atif Habib, 2017). The research is based on primary and secondary data. Relevant literature was thoroughly reviewed for secondary data and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable people were highlighted in a thematic manner. The primary data was collected from various vulnerable people of two union councils i.e. Hero Shah and Koper through in-depth interviews. A total of 24 interviews were conducted in two union councils, 12 from each union council. The

respondents were selected purposively through random sampling from the selected universe. For the sake of balance representation, daily wagers, masons, drivers and factory workers (six each) were selected from the targeted area. Further, the collection for further explanation and attainment of stuck facts. Data has been analyzed qualitatively and primary data has been connected with secondary data

Areas of Analysis Based on Primary and Secondary Data

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on People with poor Economic Conditions

People with low economic conditions refer to deprivation of productive economic generation resources. The poor or low-income people struggle to satisfy their basic material and social needs. Furthermore, those who cannot afford to buy the goods and services basket used to describe a threshold for poverty are called poor or low-income people [\(Touray, 2016\)](#). The unprecedented nature of COVID-19 has caused pandemic significant human distress. Its economic contingency may not be lesser than medical insurgency, as the economic sector was disrupted by social isolations, factories; markets, construction sectors' closure and a sudden turn down in several service sectors. This disorder in the economic structure has considerably affected the economy around the world, especially in the developing world [\(Mauro, 2020\)](#). In addition, the lethal COVID-19 pandemic may broaden the global capital gap, leaving people jobless and unemployed. Further, they will have no paid sick leaves or health insurance. Therefore, they witness their income evaporate before their eyes [\(Rosenkrantz, 2020\)](#). The recent report of the International Food Policy Research Institute indicates that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of all production and economic activities, world economic growth has fallen by 1 per cent. This economic setback will cause pushing further 14 million people into extreme poverty and if the suspension of productivity and economic activities stretched further, this number will rise to more than 22 million. The report further revealed

that its economic consequences on poor people will be more distressing [\(WFP, 2020\)](#). Another research study observed that the prevailing virus adversely affected the world economy. Its finding shows that before the virus outbreak, 640 million people were in poor households which may rise to 690 million by the end of 2020. All this happened due to shutting down the economic activities around the world. Further due to the virus the graph of extremely poor people will increase from 40 million to 50 million. The facts show that due to the stretching of the labour market, losing of temporary jobs, the closing of small-scale businesses, and the blockage of transport and other economic activities really push the economically vulnerable people into a devastating situation, both socially and economically [\(Homi Kharas, 2020\)](#). According to [Lacina \(2020\)](#), the virus outburst also affects the US economy and a 4.8 per cent fall has been noticed in national GDP in the first quarter of the year. She extended her views that around the world, some 1.6 billion workers, almost half of the global workforce with temporary jobs and an informal economy are at an instant risk of losing their livelihood during the ongoing pandemic. Further, it is estimated that the wages of about 2 billion informal workforce plunge to around 60 per cent globally. It shows for dozens of millions of poor workers, with no income, no food, no social security and no future.

In Pakistan, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on 26th February 2020, when a student in Karachi tested positive upon testing due to a travel history from Iran. In less than a month, by 18th March in all federating units of the country the virus-infected cases have been registered [\(Wikipedia contributors. \(2020\)](#). Pakistan is a developing country with a fragile economic system. This vulnerable economic structure is always struggling to handle the pressure of more than 200 million people. The share of informal and low wages jobs is 70 per cent of the total country's jobs market. The research further revealed that so far more than 8 million people in the country have been affected by the lockdown during the pandemic [\(Diaa Hadid, 2020\)](#). Due to the complete lockdown in Pakistan, since late March, all the factories, markets and other economic production sectors are

closed. Resultantly the economy has shrunk and the income of low-wage workers has dried up. Therefore the immediate threat for a huge portion of the population is not becoming sick but hunger. Though the government of Pakistan is trying to help these vulnerable people by giving three thousand rupees per month the fear is that many people may still fall through the gap. Because there are concerns that how would this meagre financial support be good enough to meet the livelihood requirements of people with low socio-economic conditions.

The above statements indicate that due to the lockdown and suspension of economic activities during COVID-19, the workers engaged in the temporary and casual economy, which is almost half of the world's total workforce have lost their jobs. Therefore, the existing pandemic has negatively affected the income and economic resources of people with poor economic conditions. As the prevailing pandemic is in full swing in Pakistan and a huge population of the country is also dependent on a low-wage informal economy and temporary jobs. For curbing the ongoing pandemic, Pakistan has also taken measures of social distancing and lockdown. During the lockdown, all the factories, production units and other economic activities are being suspended. Resultantly a huge portion of temporary workers lost their jobs which create economic scarcity among these vulnerable people, who have confronted two fatal challenges i.e. exposure to a lethal virus and fear of lingering hunger. In this regard, extracts have been taken from field information as evidence material to the secondary data mentioned. The data collected from respondents reflect different views of the interviewees that support the secondary data. The question asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with poor economic conditions was as under, "what is the impact of the pandemic on your economic conditions and how has it affected your income"?

The respondents respond to the questions in their own contexts, and different responses and viewpoints were recorded. Agreements and disagreements have been observed on some points. The majority of the respondents revealed that the

COVID-19 pandemic has badly affected their incomes by losing their jobs or suspension of economic activities. They were subsistence earners and had no capital and material savings. Therefore they are confronting two major threats i.e. the one is the danger of the pandemic and the other is hunger. Here is the description of a mason when he was asked about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic "I am a mason by profession. I am the only earner in my 7 member family. Before the virus outbreak, the construction work was in full swing and I had been working for 24 to 26 days per month. My daily wage was 1200 hundred rupees and my total monthly average income was around 30000 rupees. Through this much amount, I was managing hand to mouth livelihood of my family. Since the coronavirus emergence, the construction sector has been closed or squeezed and my income becomes dried up, since then I cannot earn a single rupee. As I am a subsistence earner with no capital and material reserves, so it's too much hard to provide the basic goods basket to my family. He extended his views with a broken heart that if the situation prolonged further, he may compel on beggary".

A pandemic of this nature and magnitude severely affected the income capabilities of people who rely on the informal economy. Due to the lockdown and fear of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the small-scale and mega-construction projects are completely closed or squeezed to the extent that very few workers get the work occasionally. In such a situation the poor people who were largely dependent on daily earnings are now in vulnerable conditions both to viruses and economic opportunities. Furthermore in response to the next question i.e. why the poor people are economically so vulnerable to the prevailing pandemic? Answering this question major portion of the respondents replied that we are actually working class and their economy is mainly based on daily efforts and earning. The ongoing virus outbreak is an unprecedented disaster in their lives which suddenly suspended and disconnected the routine societal function. The People remain stuck in their homes. Factories, markets, transport, services and all other economic activities and earning

opportunities, especially for daily workers are no more available. Unanimously the respondents added that there is no permanent and comprehensive social and economic protection program for poor people in Pakistan. They admitted that the government made some arrangements to support the poor people by giving 3 thousand rupees per month through Ihsas Program but this meagre financial support couldn't meet our day-to-day basic subsistence demands even for one week in a month. Further respondent number 20 (Taxi driver) expressed his views

"I am a taxi driver and 8 family members are dependent on my earnings. Before the pandemic, I earned a reasonable amount daily. The owner of the car was happy with my performance and he often gave me some extra tips along with my daily wage. Through my earnings, we were somehow fulfilling our average kitchen requirements. As the government announced a lockdown for curbing the COVID-19 pandemic in late march, the majority of the people are quarantined. The markets, bazaars, businesses, tourism and other productive activities are closed. Resultantly the owner of the taxi car had to release me from my job. As I have no other means of earning so I often bower and sometimes beg to keep my family away from extreme hunger. In my opinion, the scarcity of economic opportunities and hunger is the big challenge for my family than the virus. The consequences of the pandemic may be worse if the government couldn't provide us with effective financial support, he adds". (Same observations have been noted from the replies of respondents 3, 8, 14, 21 and 22)

The so far debate on the basis of empirical and literary information revealed that due to measures taken to curb the COVID-19 pandemic almost all products and income generation channels in Pakistan are completely or partially closed. The people prefer isolation and discourage travelling. This situation created a drought in the labour market. The people who were relying on odd jobs or the informal economy become more vulnerable due to losing jobs and drying up their incomes.

On the basis of field information, a theory is hereby established that the COVID-19 pandemic is

a massive and unprecedented natural catastrophe which badly affects the already vulnerable economic market of Pakistan. The major portion of the country's population is dependent on odd jobs and a casual economy. Due to the prevailing pandemic majority of the income-producing sectors are closed. Resultantly a major portion of poor daily workers lost their jobs and become more vulnerable to the virus and economic recession.

How the People with poor Social Conditions are Vulnerable to COVID-19 Pandemic?

Poor social conditions have a sociological standing that refers to people's deprivation from food, health, education, water, sanitation and economic opportunities__ (Lotha, 2020). Vulnerability is people's condition of exposure and susceptibility to a natural or manmade hazard. In other words, vulnerability refers to physical, educational, economic, political or social weakness or inclination of a community to harm in the case of undermining the occurrence of natural or anthropogenic origin (Sapam Ranabir Singh, 2014). Many studies indicate that pandemics and epidemics initially target people with poor social conditions. As the first step of resistance against pandemics is surveillance, to check animal and human populations to mark the outbursts and restrain them as soon as possible. Despite the fact that poor people are unable to give attention to pandemic surveillance due to poor health systems, illiteracy and poor livelihood conditions. That's why regardless of the fact that where a pandemic embarks, once started, people with poor social conditions lean to take the brunt (Yamey, 2017). The United Nations (2020) report reveals that the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic is the unprecedented global health crisis in the 75 years of UN history that killed people, upsetting and suffering human lives. This is more than a health crisis. It is actually a humanitarian crisis as the virus suspended and vanish the social and economic aspects of vulnerable people around the world. The report further added that the prevailing pandemic exposes the health, education, livelihood, water and sanitation, infrastructure and political vulnerability in developing countries. An urgent response will be required to curb the diffusion of the virus and to

tackle the consequences of the crisis on people with the vulnerable social condition. Furthermore, another report indicates that people living in vulnerable conditions see it as a vehicle for the lethal COVID-19 pandemic. The study further revealed that weak socioeconomic conditions increase health disparities, which peddled the spread of the virus in the population (Hibbert, 2020). Pakistan is also a developing country having a huge population with lesser and poor livelihood opportunities. More than 60 million people are living below the poverty line. A major portion of the population of Pakistan is struggling to access health care, education, clean drinking water and sanitation and economic opportunities. Therefore their lifestyle and livelihood conditions are poor. Resultantly they are exposed and vulnerable to infectious diseases like COVID-19, which may further grave poverty and affect the social conditions of many in the country (Khadim, 2017). Moreover, the ongoing pandemic is disproportionately affecting the people with poor socio-economic conditions in the country. Due to the subsistence nature of earning and dependency on the informal economy, the daily wagers and low-skill workers were already facing the challenges of hunger, health care, kid education, clean drinking water and hygienic practices. The virus outbreak and its curbing measures may further aggravate their livelihood challenges because of losing their jobs, closing of schools, overburdened health care system, scarcity of clean drinking water and hygienic practices, and price hiking of domestic goods (Ahmed S. S., 2020).

The above discussion indicates that pandemics disproportionately affect people with low socio-economic conditions. The people with vulnerable social conditions living in poor infrastructure, deprived of clean drinking water, lacking hygienic practices, malnutrition, cannot afford time and quality health care services, illiteracy and dependency on low wages and an informal economy are all the pre-requisites which provide a route to pandemics to pass among them and further pull them to poor livelihood. In the context of this research study supported by the literature, millions of people in Pakistan are living in poor livelihoods with dozen of social and economic problems. Due

to the ongoing pandemic, the daily wagers and those dependent on the informal economy lost their jobs and earning sources. Resultantly the virus outbreak pushes the majority of them to worse social conditions. As they were dependent on daily earnings and had no capital and other material reserved, their cumulative livelihood aspects i.e. food, health care services, kid education, water and sanitation and economic activities become stuck in the lockdown created by the COVID-19 pandemic (This notion is supported by the majority of the respondents). Similarly, the respondents were asked how the existing pandemic affects their social settings, and their replies indicate that due to already poor social conditions, they are living with numerous social problems. The present pandemic adversely disturbed their social and economic settings which will imprint a long-lasting impact on their lives. Such viewpoints and the findings of the study reflect the adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with vulnerable social conditions. Among the respondents, the viewpoints of Respondent No 18 (Factory worker) have an interesting explanation, which reflects,

I was working as a daily wage worker in a plastic pipe factory for 26 days each month for two years. My daily wage was 800 rupees, so each month I was earning about 21 thousand rupees. I am the only earner of 8 family members. My six children 2 sons and 4 daughters are admitted to the government school. While my wife is a housewife with chronic heart disease and we are living in a 2-room house with an open-air kitchen and no proper bathroom facility available in our house. We share a water hand pump with three other houses on the street for drinking and bathing purposes. There is no proper sanitation system in our house. We are living with different chronic social problems for a long because in my meagre earnings it is difficult to fulfil the basic social needs i.e. capital savings, proper education of children, health care, nutritious food, clean drinking water and to provide hygienic facilities for my family. After the coronavirus outbreak and shut downing of the factory, since then I lost the only mean of earning. I have no savings available to run my family's basic livelihood. My kids are quarantined at home as the schools are

closed. Due to no internet and a lack of creative facilities and resources my kids' education is adversely affected. I am unable even buy the medicines for my wife suffering from chronic cardiac disease. So the pandemic appeared more than a health crisis for us, as at the same time we are confronted with the risk of virus infection and on another side, we are facing the miseries of job loss, food insecurity, health issues, children's de-education and non-affordability of hygienic services to the family, especially to children. Thus as a whole, the COVID-19 pandemic brings social and economic disorder in our lives and it may leave long-lasting effects on our social structure. (Parallel observations also noted down from the extractions of respondents 2, 7, 11, 17, and 23 viewpoints)

While analyzing the mentioned facts about the above phenomenon, it is concluded that socially vulnerable people are easy prey to the COVID-19 pandemic. People with poor social conditions live with a variety of social problems i.e. food insecurity, health care issues, illiteracy, dropout of their children from school due to poverty, poor residential infrastructure, water and sanitation issues, poor livelihood and scarcity of economic resources and opportunities. Through these vulnerable social indicators, they do not have the potential to fight against lethal pandemics like the coronavirus. As the labour market is squeezed due to the pandemic and daily wages and unskilled workers are jobless, their income becomes dried up and they have no material and cash savings to pursue their basic livelihood. Therefore the situation becomes more critical for them and their families. Their overall social setup is at risk which may negatively affect their already vulnerable social conditions.

Facts indicate that for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, poor social living conditions play the role of a vehicle and unequally affect the livelihood of socially vulnerable people (Hibbert, 2020). A report revealed that in Pakistan misery and hopelessness spread quicker than the COVID-19 virus in poor people. The pandemic disproportionately hit the lower-income and low-social-status people of the country, which eventually affect the people related to them. In such

a distressing situation millions of people lost their jobs, the pandemic compel them to beggary, food insecurity and health care issues raised, domestic violence increased, and so is sexual and child abuse (Agha, 2020).

To clarify the theme of the present study in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on people with vulnerable social conditions, some more views of respondents are demonstrated as under

As we are low-skill workers with poor social conditions, dependent on daily wages and an informal economy with no capital and material reserves, are facing a very hard time in our lives during the ongoing pandemic. The scenario created by COVID-19 deprived us of jobs; we are unable to feed our family twice a day, to provide their health care services, especially at this stage is beyond our buying capacity, and our children are adversely affected due to the closure of schools and we have no alternative for them, due to poor physical residential infrastructure and poor hygienic facilities our family members especially children and aged members are more vulnerable to coronavirus. They unanimously replied that due to poor socio-economic conditions, they cannot afford to keep social distancing and stay at home and thus get infected from the virus. Presently they are confronting both the virus and their social vulnerability. Therefore it may leave long-lasting severe social, economic and psychological disorders in their lives. (Interviewees 6, 13, 15, 19 and 24 respectively)

Similarly, different research studies have also supported the statement that vulnerable social condition is a curse, especially at the time of infectious disease like COVID-19. It has been observed that poverty is the main cause of all social problems. Poverty is a vulnerable social condition that includes deprivation from education, health care facilities, balanced diet, material goods, proper hygienic infrastructure and economic opportunities. The research further explains that infectious diseases easily entrap people with poor social conditions (Chambers, 2006). Another research study indicates that more than one-third of the population of Pakistan is living below the

poverty line. The daily consumption of about 73 per cent of its population is less than 2 dollars per day. Facts revealed that a major portion of people in the country is unable to attain basic social services i.e. education, health care, a balanced diet, clean drinking water, sanitation and economic opportunities. Therefore this huge population of the country is vulnerable to a variety of infectious diseases and other physical disabilities (Miankhail, 2012). In a populated country like Pakistan people are living in crowded cities and slums. The majority of them have small and confined residential infrastructures and surroundings with dense population, in that situation, the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for curbing the COVID-19 pandemic is not easy to follow. Further due to poor family social conditions people don't have running water and soap for washing their hands, there is no concept of sanitisers and having no proper bathroom system to follow the basic hygienic protocols which is the basic curbing methodology for the prevailing pandemic. Furthermore, socially vulnerable people often hold temporary jobs with little security, in insecure situations, a lesser amount of livelihood opportunities and less access to education and health care services available to them. For them, both COVID-19 and poverty are a malicious cycle. The prevalent declining economic opportunities increase the chances of more diseases, which further strengthens poverty. Pandemics make worse inequality and increase the cost of livelihood, making it further complicated to get by (Rodriguez, 2020).

It is therefore concluded from the above discussion and viewpoints of the respondents that people with vulnerable social conditions have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As they have no permanent source of income and their social settings are not meeting the basic living standards. Due to the suspension and squeezing of economic activities, the basic needs of human survival i.e. food, health care services, education of their children, clean drinking water, hygienic practices and other livelihood requirement are further dried up to them. Furthermore, because of the vulnerable social conditions, the virus outbreak is more than a health crisis for them, if the

prevailing pandemic lingered, it may further aggravate their social and living conditions and they will confront devastating social, physical and psychological complications.

Finally, in light of the concluding remarks, the proposed assumption that the "COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately hit the people with vulnerable socio-economic conditions" is approved and validated.

Findings

The findings of the research study indicate that more than 70 per cent of the workforce of Pakistan is dependent on low-wage, unskilled and informal economy. One-third of their population is living below the poverty line. People with poor economic status hardly satisfy their basic livelihood needs. They have temporary sources of income with no job security. The COVID-19 pandemic unequally affects people with poor economic conditions. The coronavirus pandemic has an unprecedented nature, creating major human pain. Its economic dent may not be less than medical rebellion, as the virus outbreak severely affects the income generation channels by closing and declining economic activities, especially for low-wage poor people who majorly rely on the informal economy, their earning capacity become dried up. Furthermore, due to the subsistence nature of earning, poor people often haven't any saving capacity. That's why the ongoing virus outbreak is no less than a misery for low-income people in the country. The research findings observed that if the prevailing situation is not curbed soon, in Pakistan millions of poor people will compel to beggary.

The facts extracted from the research further revealed that people with vulnerable social conditions are the most exposed section of the population to infectious diseases like COVID-19. Statistics show that more than 60 million people in Pakistan are living in poverty and poor social conditions. The findings of the research indicate that the lifestyle, diet, awareness level, health care, hygienic facilities and residential infrastructure of these millions of poor people play the role of catalyst for virus spread which may make the situation

worse for them. The socially vulnerable people of the country are passing through a very distressing situation. Their basic livelihood is in danger; they are fighting for themselves and their family's survival against COVID-19. As the pandemic negatively affects their social structure i.e. majority of them lost their jobs, basic health care services went beyond their capacity, and they are struggling to provide nutritious food and hygienic facilities to their families. Further, the most devastating effect of a pandemic is the

Closure of schools. As the majority of the children of poor people are out of school and due to poor socio-economic conditions, they cannot provide educational opportunities to their children at home. They are spoiling in meaningless activities and in rough and tough environments. Therefore there is a threat of de-education of millions of children created by the coronavirus. So the COVID-19 pandemic is not only affecting the social and economic aspects of vulnerable people in the country but also the future of the children of a huge vulnerable population is also at risk.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the present research study, it is concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented painful occurrence in recent human history. In a span of fewer than three months, the virus spread around the world and adversely affected the social and economic sectors across the globe. The research findings revealed that COVID-19 disproportionately affect people with poor socio-economic conditions. In Pakistan, the first case of the coronavirus was reported on 26th February 2020 in Karachi. Since then the virus spread rapidly across the country and has negatively affected the social and economic sectors. The findings of the study observed that the impact of the pandemic is unequal and people with poor socio-economic conditions are suffering adversely. As the majority of them are dependent on the informal economy with insecure temporary jobs. For curbing the virus outbreak, the factories, construction sector, markets and other economic activities were completely or partially closed and the labour market is considerably contracted.

Resultantly major portion of people with poor socio-economic conditions lost their jobs; resultantly their incomes become dried up. Due to the subsistence nature of livelihood, there were no capital and material reserves available to them. So buying basic goods basket for their families become beyond their capacity. Consequently, their families reached the edge of starvation. Furthermore due to the poor physical residential infrastructure, it was hard to follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for curbing

the virus in their homes, as less space and no proper hygienic facilities available to their families. This further made them vulnerable to COVID-19. The pandemic brings them to a stage where access to basic health services is hard to reach. Moreover, due to the closure of schools, their children are at the edge of learning poverty, as the majority of them are enrolled in government schools and there is no effective arrangement of online and virtual education opportunities available to them at home. Their economic conditions are not allowing them to arrange an alternative system of education for their children, to avoid the risk of their kids' de-education. Moreover, the research findings observed that people with vulnerable socio-economic conditions are trapped in the vicious circle of COVID-19 and a variety of socio-economic vulnerabilities. This may further affect their social and economic conditions and also a serious threat of infection by the virus is hanging around them.

It is therefore extracted from the research findings that the COVID-19 pandemic is at the same time health and livelihood crisis for socio-economically vulnerable people. They are fighting against the virus and hunger. This is the fight for the survival of their families and themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic pulls poor people into a situation, which may imprint adverse and long-lasting negative effects on them and their families.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings, it is therefore recommended that the government of Pakistan should make a practical and research-based plan to curb the COVID-19 pandemic and provide capital

and social development assistance to socio-economically vulnerable people of the country on emergency bases. A delay in this regard will not only mark an adverse impact on a huge socio-

economically vulnerable population but may also leave long-lasting negative effects on the social and economic development indicators of Pakistan.

References

- Agha, N. (2020, May 1). *The pandemic and social support*. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2211752/pandemic-social-support>.
- Ahmad, I., Ur Rehman, K., Ali, A., Khan, I., & Khan, F. A. (2014). Critical Analysis of the Problems of Education in Pakistan: Possible Solutions. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 3(2), 79–84. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v3i2.1805>.
- Ahmed, S. (2016). The Social Sectors in Pakistan: A Story of Neglect. *Rentier Capitalism*, 65–83. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137554475_4.
- Ahmed, S. S. (2020). *Covidonomics and Pakistan: Economy in and after Covid-19*. Dailytimes.com.pk. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/586001/covidonomics-and-pakistan-economy-in-and-after-covid-19/>.
- Ashraf, M. A., & Ismat, H. I. (2016). Education and Development of Pakistan: A Study of Current Situation of Education and Literacy in Pakistan. *US-China Education Review*, 4(11), 647–654. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2161-6248/2016.11.003>.
- Baldwin, R., & Mauro, B. W. di. (2020). *Economics in the Time of COVID-19*. CEPR. <https://cepr.org/publications/books-and-reports/economics-time-covid-19>.
- Chambers, R. (2006). What is poverty? Who asks? Who answers? *Opendocs.ids.ac.uk*. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/120>.
- Garrett, T. A. (2007). *Economic Effects of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic Implications for a Modern-day Pandemic*. https://www.stlouisfed.org/-/media/project/frb/stlouisfed/files/pdfs/community-development/research-reports/pandemic_flu_report.pdf.
- Habib, M. A., Soofi, S. B., Ali, N., Hussain, I., Tabassum, F., Suhag, Z., Anwar, S., Ahmed, I., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2017). Knowledge and perceptions of polio and polio immunization in polio high-risk areas of Pakistan. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 38(1), 16–36. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-016-0056-6>.
- Hadid, D., & Sattar, A. (2020). *Pakistan Has A Plan To Keep Millions From Going Hungry During Shutdown. Will It Work?* NPR.org. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/14/831753354/pakistan-has-a-plan-to-keep-millions-from-going-hungry-during-shutdown-will-it-w>.
- Hakro, A. N. (2012). Water, Sanitation and Poverty Linkages in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Water, Environment and Pollution*, 9(3), 25–36. <https://content.iospress.com/articles/asian-journal-of-water-environment-and-pollution/ajw9-3-05>.
- Ibbert, K. (2020, April 19). *Poor living conditions seen as vehicle for COVID-19*. Jamaica Observer. <https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/poor-living-conditions-seen-as-vehicle-for-covid-19/>.
- IRC. (2020). *Public Awareness and Public Education for Disaster Risk Reduction | IFRC*. Wwww.ifrc.org. <https://www.ifrc.org/our-work/disasters-climate-and-crises/climate-smart-disaster-risk-reduction/pape#:~:text=Our%20work->
- Khadim, M. (2017, November 2). *15 Top Health Issues In Pakistan*. Transparent Hands. <https://www.transparenthands.org/top-health-issues-in-pakistan/>.
- Kharas, H., & Hamel, K. (2020, May 6). *Turning back the Poverty Clock: How will COVID-19 impact the world's poorest people?* Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/05/06/turning-back-the-poverty-clock-how-will-covid-19-impact-the-worlds-poorest-people/#:~:text=Our%20post%2DCOVID%2D19%20estimate>.
- Khayyam, U., Inamullah, E., & Shah, S. (2018). Socio-Cultural Dynamics and their Relation with the Participatory Development in the

- Pashtun Tribal Society of Pakistan. *Trames. Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22(2), 173. <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2018.2.05>.
- Lacina, L. (2020). *COVID-19: What you need to know about the coronavirus pandemic on 29 April*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-on-29-april/>.
- Lennihan, M. (2020, March 19). *US: Address Impact of Covid-19 on Poor*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/19/us-address-impact-covid-19-poor?gclid=Cj0KCCQIA37KbBhDgARIsAlzce17NY8j87lO8Bidu_bURZDRyNTKPV2IGETmYgKwfbTH-ALLglRU3LAoaAjl5EALw_wcB.
- Lotha, G. (2020). *Social Status*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-status>
- Miankhalil, S. B. (2012). Causes and Consequences of Poverty in Pakistan. *Journal of Managerial Sciences*, 2(1), 44-48.
- Mohyuddin, A., & Khan, N. (2015). Socioeconomic causes of devaluation of Pashtun values (a case study of village Chakdara, Lower Dir, KP, Pakistan}. *The Explorer Islamabad: Journal of social sciences*, 1(12), 442-448.
- Nafees, M., & Khan, F. (2020). Pakistan,s Response to COVID-19 Pandemic and efficacy of Quarantine and Partial Lockdown: Facts, Hopes and Expectations. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nafees-Mohammad/publication/340349542_Pakistan's_Response_to_COVID-19_Pandemic_and_Efficacy_of_Quarantine_and_Partial_Lockdown_A_Review/links/5e848afe92851c2f52713fa0/Pakistans-Response-to-COVID-19-Pandemic-and-Efficacy-of-Quarantine-and-Partial-Lockdown-A-Review.pdf.
- Oppenheim, B., & Yamey, G. (2017, June 19). *Pandemics and the poor*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2017/06/19/pandemics-and-the-poor/>.
- Quinn, S. C., & Kumar, S. (2014). Health Inequalities and Infectious Disease Epidemics: A Challenge for Global Health Security. *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science*, 12(5), 263-273. <https://doi.org/10.1089/bsp.2014.0032>.
- Rayhan, D. P. (2002). *Vulnerability and Poverty: What are the Cause and How are They Related?* Bonn: Zentrum FUR Entwicklungsforschung Center for Development Research (ZEF) Universitate Bonn. https://www.zef.de/fileadmin/downloads/forum/docprog/Termpapers/2004_3a_Philip_Rayan.pdf
- Rodriguez, L. (2020). *5 Reasons COVID-19 Will Impact the Fight to End Extreme Poverty*. Global Citizen. https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/how-covid-19-impacts-fight-to-end-extreme-poverty/?gclid=Cj0KCCQIA37KbBhDgARIsAlzce15GeTnprgYv_KV6T0uN1_q8zKF0RQ90kMu3E0UtmMVsI2j2s-dfaAvvTEALw_wcB.
- Rosenkrantz, H. (2020). *Coronavirus May Leave Poor More Vulnerable to Illness as Pandemic Puts Wealth Gap on Display*. New York: Karma Network Corp. hello@karmainimpact.com.
- Saqib, M. (2020, March 29). *Coronavirus vs. Social Distancing: A changing paradigm of social interaction*. The Daily News. <https://en.baaghitv.com/coronavirus-vs-social-distancing-a-changing-paradigm-of-social-interaction/>.
- Shaikh, B. T., Ejaz, I., Achakzai, D. K., & Shafiq, Y. (2013). Political and economic unfairness in health system of Pakistan: a hope with the recent reforms. *Journal of Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad : JAMC*, 25(1-2), 198-203.
- Singh, S. R., Eghdami, M. R., & Singh, S., 2014. *The Concept of Social Vulnerability : A*

- Review from Disasters Perspectives. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(6), 71–82. <http://www.ijims.com>.
- Touray, M. (2016). *Definitions and Measures of Poverty*. Nairobi: www.devinit.org.
- United Nations. (2020). *Everyone included: Social impact of COVID-19*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included-covid-19.html>.
- United Nations. (2020). *UNSDG / Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*. [Unsdg.un.org. https://unsdg.un.org/resources/shared-responsibility-global-solidarity-responding-socio-economic-impacts-covid-19](https://unsdg.un.org/resources/shared-responsibility-global-solidarity-responding-socio-economic-impacts-covid-19).
- Venkatraja, B., & Indira, M. (2011). Role of education in social development: an empirical analysis. *Madhya Pradesh Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(1), 29–33. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A319228689/AONE?u=anon~5a488b5c&sid=googleScholar&xid=e57bfb51>.
- Wasay, A. (2001). *Public expenditure on social sectors in Pakistan - trends and issues*. World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/542051468758747910/Public-expenditure-on-social-sectors-in-Pakistan-trends-and-issues>.
- WFP. (2020). *COVID-19 - Potential Impact on the World's Poorest People / World Food Programme*. www.wfp.org. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/covid-19-potential-impact-worlds-poorest-people>.
- Wikipedia contributors. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 08:55, May 18, 2020, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=COVID-19_pandemic_in_Pakistan&oldid=957231307
- Wikipedia. (2020). *COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan*. (2020, October 2). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Pakistan
- Zanakis, S. H., Alvarez, C., & Li, V. (2007). Socio-economic determinants of HIV/AIDS pandemic and nations efficiencies. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 176(3), 1811–1838. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2005.10.033>.