



Review Article

Corona Virus Disease 2019 and its Impact on Indian Socio-Economic Structure and Education During Lockdown

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is an on-going pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The outbreak was identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January, and a pandemic on 11 March. As of 9 May 2020, more than 3.93 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported in over 187 countries and territories, resulting in more than 274,000 deaths. More than 1.31 million people have recovered.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, socioeconomic disruption, Lockdown.

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Introduction

The virus is primarily spread between people during close contact, often via small droplets produced by coughing, sneezing, and talking. The droplets usually fall to the ground or onto surfaces rather than remaining in the air over long distances. People may also become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then touching their face. On surfaces, the amount of virus declines over time until it is insufficient to remain infectious, but it may be detected for hours or days. It is most contagious during the first three days after the onset of symptoms, although spread may be possible before symptoms appear and in later stages of the disease.

Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath, and loss of smell. Complications may include pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome. The time from

exposure to onset of symptoms is typically around five days, but may range from two to fourteen days. There is no known vaccine or specific antiviral treatment. Primary treatment is symptomatic and supportive therapy.

Recommended preventive measures include hand washing, covering one's mouth when coughing, maintaining distance from other people, wearing a face mask in public settings, and monitoring and self-isolation for people who suspect they are infected. Authorities

worldwide have responded by implementing travel restrictions, lockdowns, workplace hazard controls, and facility closures. Many places have also worked to increase testing capacity and trace contacts of infected persons.

Socioeconomic Impact:

The pandemic has caused severe global socioeconomic disruption, including the largest global recession since the Great Depression. It has led to the postponement or cancellation of sporting, religious, political and cultural events, widespread supply shortages exacerbated by panic buying, and decreased emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases. Schools, universities, and colleges have closed either on a nationwide or local basis in 194 countries, affecting approximately 98.5 per cent of the world's student population. Misinformation about the virus has spread online, and there have been incidents of xenophobia and discrimination against Chinese people and against those perceived as being Chinese, or as being from areas with high infection rates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences beyond the spread of the disease itself and efforts to quarantine it. As the SARS-CoV-2 virus has spread around the globe, concerns have shifted from supply-side manufacturing issues to decreased business in the services sector. The pandemic caused the largest global recession in history, with more than a third of the global population at the time being placed on lockdown.

Supply shortages are expected to affect a number of sectors due to panic buying, increased usage of goods to fight the pandemic, and disruption to factories and logistics in mainland China, in addition, it also led to price gouging. There have been widespread reports of supply shortages of pharmaceuticals, with many areas seeing panic buying and consequent shortages of food and other essential grocery items. The technology industry, in particular, has been warning about delays to shipments of electronic goods.

Global stock markets fell on 24 February 2020 due to a significant rise in the number of COVID-19 cases outside

mainland China. By 28 February 2020, stock markets worldwide saw their largest single-week declines since the 2008 financial crisis. Global stock markets crashed in March 2020, with falls of several percent in the world's major indices. As the pandemic spreads, global conferences and events across technology, fashion, and sports are being cancelled or postponed. While the monetary impact on the travel and trade industry is yet to be estimated, it is likely to be in the billions and increasing. By 16 March, news reports emerged indicating that the effect on the United States economy would be worse than previously thought.

COVID-19 pandemic in India:

The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in India was reported on 30 January 2020, originating from China. As of 9 May 2020, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have confirmed a total of 59,662 cases, 17,847 recoveries (including 1 migration) and 1981 deaths in the country. The infection rate of COVID-19 in India is reported to be 1.7, significantly lower than in the worst affected countries.

The outbreak has been declared an epidemic in more than a dozen states and union territories, where provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 have been invoked, and educational institutions and many commercial establishments have been shut down. India has suspended all tourist visas, as a majority of the confirmed cases were linked to other countries.

On 22 March 2020, India observed a 14-hour voluntary public curfew at the instance of the prime minister Narendra Modi. The government followed it up with lockdowns in 75 districts where COVID-19 cases had occurred as well as all major cities. Further, on 24 March, the prime minister ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, affecting the entire billion population of India. On 14 April, the prime

minister extended the ongoing nationwide lockdown till 3 May.

Michael Ryan, chief executive director of the World Health Organisation's health emergencies programme, said that India had "tremendous capacity" to deal with the coronavirus outbreak and, as the second most populous country, will have enormous impact on the world's ability to deal with it. Other commentators worried about the economic devastation caused by the lockdown, which has huge effects on informal workers, micro and small enterprises, farmers and the self-employed, who are left with no livelihood in the absence of transportation and access to markets.

Observers state that the lockdown has slowed the growth rate of the pandemic by 6 April to a rate of doubling every 6 days, and, by 18 April, to a rate of doubling every 8 days.

The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT), in its report based on data from 73 countries, reports that the Indian Government has responded more stringently than other countries in tackling the pandemic. It noted the government's swift action, emergency policy making emergency investment in healthcare, fiscal measures, investment in vaccine research and active response to the situation, and scored India with a "100" for its strictness.

At this time, the government is facing these immediate challenges:

- Building up the medical care facilities, even in the remote areas in the country to meet the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the event of an uncontrolled outbreak;
- Ensuring that the lockdown is implemented successfully throughout the country;

- Keeping the supply chains of essential commodities robust and to keep the 1.2 billion citizens fed; and
- Ensuring that the 450 million migrant workers rendered jobless by the lockdown and trudging on the country's highways to return to their villages are stopped in their tracks, and are housed, clothed and fed at shelters put up on the state borders.

Lockdown in India:

On 24 March 2020, the Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. It was ordered after a 14-hour voluntary public curfew on 22 March, followed by enforcement of a series of regulations in the country's COVID-19 affected regions. The lockdown was placed when the number of confirmed positive coronavirus cases in India was approximately 500.

The government has taken the following steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 across the country:

- On March 25, the government invoked the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and imposed a 21-day nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 until April 14. On April 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended the nationwide lockdown until May 3. All districts, localities, and states will be closely monitored till April 20 to see how strictly lockdown guidelines have been implemented. States who
- do not let hotspots increase could be allowed to let some important activities resume and certain restrictions may be eased.
- All international flights are suspended, except for the ones that have been granted permission to evacuate foreign

nationals. All existing visas, barring a few categories have been suspended till April 15.

- All domestic flights are suspended, except those carrying essential goods across the country.
- All bus, train, and metro services are suspended.
- State borders are sealed, inter-state movement within the country stopped.
- Camps have been set up at state borders to stop migrant workers walking back to their villages. According to the government, these camps are also providing workers with basic amenities such as shelter and food.
- Several states have identified COVID-19 hotspots, and have taken measures to seal and sanitize such high-risk zones.
- Dedicated COVID-19 quarantine sites have been set-up including hotels and railway wagons.
- 586 hospitals and 100,000 isolation beds designated exclusively for treatment and care of COVID-19 patients across the country. This number is continuously increasing with the measures being taken by the state governments and the health ministry.
- INR 1700 billion (US\$24.3 billion) relief package in the form of food grains, cash transfers for the poor and vulnerable sections of the population announced to deal with the hardships caused due to the lockdown.
- INR 150 billion (US\$2.14 billion) will be spent to set up isolation wards and intensive care units (ICUs), procure ventilators and personal protection equipment for medical professionals,

and to train health workers to fight COVID-19.

- The finance ministry has extended several compliance deadlines under the various corporate, mercantile and taxation laws, and allowed individuals to make partial withdrawals from their provident fund accounts.
- PM-CARES fund launched to provide food and care to the poor. Donations being sought to augment resources for this fund.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken a number of steps to ease the stress caused by COVID-19. This includes ease in interest rates, relaxation of cash reserve ratio,
- and other liquidity improvement measures such as moratorium on repayment of loans by businesses and EMIs by individual borrowers.
- Aarogya Setu App has been launched by the government to disseminate information related to COVID-19 and to provide a platform for the population to reach out to the government.

Impact of COVID-19 on education sector in India

Covid-19 has forced universities across India, and the world indeed, to suspend physical classrooms and shift to online classes. In India, while this transition has been smooth for most private universities, the public ones are still adapting. There have also been debates on the nature of classes and the future of examination and evaluation— whether they could be conducted online or not.

While faculty grapples with new ways of managing this sudden transition to online education, students are left clinging on to their mobile phones and computer screens. If the lockdowns were to continue for some time, how would higher education be

affected? What are some of the deeper issues that require introspection? And what does this mean for the students going forward?

The structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies, was the first to be affected by these closures. Only a handful of private schools could adopt online teaching methods. Their low-income private and government school counterparts, on the other hand, have completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions. The students, in addition to the missed opportunities for learning, no longer have access to healthy meals during this time and are subject to economic and social stress.

The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. A large number of Indian students—second only to China—enroll in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK, Australia and China. Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected.

Online education is conducted in two ways. The first is through the use of recorded classes, which, when opened out to public, are referred to as Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs). The second one is via live online classes conducted as webinars, or zoom sessions. Universities require high-speed internet and education delivery platforms or learning management systems, besides stable IT infrastructure and faculty members who are comfortable teaching online. Students also need high-speed internet and computers/mobiles to attend these sessions or watch pre-recorded classes.

Students have complained about lack of clarity going forward and what the plan of action would entail, especially with respect to examinations, results, internships, and placements. While most institutions of higher education are trying their best in this situation, nobody knows what will happen next.

Most educators across institutions agree that there is a need to invest in creating standardised online education platforms, and not using apps and Google hangouts only; and to train both students and teachers. Others highlight the necessity to introspect on the nature of these platforms and how students are taught using different online tools and methods, while keeping accessibility and equity challenges in mind. There is also the need to understand all this across academic disciplines and institutions.

The way ahead can be charted only if we take into account the diverse views of experts, and incorporate all the lessons learnt from the summer of 2020.

Online education for teachers

Advantages:

1. Allows innovative methods of teaching with the help of technology and online tools
2. Allows reaching out to a large number of students across geographies
3. Especially useful for distance learning

Disadvantages:

4. Online teaching takes time and practice
5. There is little consensus on how students can be evaluated in a fair manner
6. Inability to have a face-to-face connect with students and facilitate free conversations, discussions, and mentoring
7. Inability to reach all students because of technological limitations
8. Online education for students

10. Advantages:

11. The ability to learn using different online tools and methods
12. No disruption in learning because of the pandemic
13. Listening to recorded and live conversations and working at their own speed

Disadvantages:

1. Lack of free flowing conversations, debates, and discussions
2. Technological difficulties related to weak devices or access to the internet
3. Getting used to learning and being evaluated online
4. Studying while living at home, with family and other distractions

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