

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LIVELIHOOD OF MIGRANT WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus was first identified in China in December 2019. The disease instigated via the virus named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was declared as an epidemic by WHO in January 2020 but after seeing the severity and very quick spread of the disease it was declared as a pandemic by WHO in March 2020. Every section of the populace is more or less affected by this virus, whether it is youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, or indigenous persons (inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures). This paper focuses mainly on how migrant workers have been affected by this disease. The central government intends to create a database to confirm whether or not a relief package ought to be announced for the most affected segment of the population and this database also to assist the central government in making arrangements to transport workers to their native places from the relief camps.

Keywords: Covid-19, migrant workers, central government

1. Introduction

The disease instigated via the virus, which is currently recognized as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), is named

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as coronavirus disease 2019 or Covid-19 (Mayo Clinic, 2020). Wuhan, China, recognized this disease for the first time in December 2019 and due to its fast spread worldwide, it was declared as an ongoing pandemic (Hui DS et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Fever, fatigue, cough, shortness of breath, and loss of taste and odour are some common indicators of Covid-19 (WHO, 2020; Hopkins, 2020). Some of those infected may be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. Asymptomatic refers to those with no signs and symptoms and do not acquire any indicators within seven days subsequent to checking, whereas pre-symptomatic refers to those who show indicators within seven days subsequent to checking (Arons et al., 2020). Indicators' inception time from exposure is generally near about 5 days, however, it may fluctuate between 2 to 14 days (Velavan and Meyer, 2020; CDC, 2020). The virus is mainly unfolded among human beings in the course of close contact, often by way of coughing, sneezing, and talking by producing small droplets. The produced droplets cannot hold in the air over long distances. So, they generally fall on the ground or onto surfaces. Touching one's face after coming into contact with a contaminated surface may transmit the infection among people (WHO, 2020; CDC, 2020). Regular hand washing, maintaining physical distance from others (especially from those with indications), quarantine, covering coughs, and retaining unwashed hands away from the face are the recommended actions to thwart the infection (WHO, 2020). Moreover, those who are sceptical about the virus, the use of a face mask is encouraged for them and their caregivers (CDC, 2020; WHO, 2020). On 30th January 2020, Covid-19 was declared as an epidemic and on 11th March 2020, it was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020).

Every section of the populace all over the world is greatly affected by this disease. Whether it is youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons (inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures), or migrant workers. Migrant workers are those who move from place to place in search of work. Workers may migrate from their native places due to many reasons such as dearth of rain, floods, high population density, poverty, and lack of opportunities. The estimation of migration from rural areas to city labour markets, industries, and firms is about a hundred and twenty million people or more (Aajeevika Bureau, 2020). Usually, migrant workers work in hazardous areas and live-in inhuman dwelling conditions where fundamental facilities are not available. Their earnings vary in accordance with seasons and as per variations in demand (Bulgarelli, 2020). This paper focuses mainly on how migrant workers are affected by this disease.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To know about the impact of coronavirus on different sections of population
2. To gain familiarity with the concept of impact of Covid-19 on migrant workers.

1. *Impact of Coronavirus on different sections of Population*

As mentioned earlier, every section of the populace is affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. People living in poverty, older persons, persons with disabilities, youth, and indigenous people are especially affected by the disease. Poor people are facing the health and fiscal implications of the disease most as they are not able to secure themselves medically and financially due to lack of health insurance.

- **Effects on Older Persons**

Older persons, especially those with persistent health conditions, for example, high blood pressure, cardiac ailment, and diabetes are inclined to the peril of infection from coronavirus. Besides struggling with higher health menaces, they are also probably less proficient in assisting themselves in seclusion. To limit the unfold of the disease, social distancing is indispensable. If not executed properly, such actions can also lead to enlarged social seclusion of older persons at a time when they may be at the most need of support (DISD, 2020).

- **Effects on Persons with Disabilities**

Problems in enforcing measures to keep the virus at bay, together with recommended regular cleaning of surfaces and homes and personal hygiene may well be noticed in persons with disabilities. Due to bodily impairments, environmental barriers, or interrupted services, washing hands and cleaning homes can be more challenging for them, as they require regular assistance and aid from other people for self-care tasks each and every day. So, exercising social distancing and living in isolation as effectively as normal persons can do is unimaginable for them (DISD, 2020).

- **Effects on Youth**

Various authorities have called on the youth to travail to guard themselves and the whole populace from the deadly virus. They need to assist those who are most susceptible. They are mostly jobless, and those who are working work in the informal economy on perilous contracts or in the service areas of the economy that are expected to be brutally stirred through the havoc created by Covid-19. The medium and long-term consequences can be observed on the eminence of education due to commotion in education and learning system (DISD, 2020).

- **Impacts of Covid-19 on Indigenous People**

Indigenous people are especially susceptible at this period because of extremely sophisticated natures of contagious and non-contagious diseases, lack of entree to quintessential services, absence of traditionally suitable healthcare, and if anything, under-equipped and short-staffed nearby medicinal amenities (DISD, 2020).

2. *Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Workers*

- **90% Workers lost Livelihood, 94% Ineligible for Govt. Relief: Study**

The lockdown levied due to coronavirus spread may prove to be disastrous for India's poor, especially labourers (Menon, 2020). Due to lockdown, almost 40 million internal migrants' livelihoods have been impacted which is a giant part of the country's labour force (Economic Times, 2020). What's worse is that in spite of the authorities of India proclaiming a reimbursement for construction workers whose livelihood has agonized due to lockdown, it may not be convenient for the considerable majority of workers to benefit from the reimbursement. The survey conducted by an NGO, Jan Sahas, which was carried out among 3,196 construction workers across India, reveals that as many as 94 percent of the workers do not have the Building and Construction Workers' identity card which is essential for availing the central government's reimbursement. According to the study, 17 percent of the labourers surveyed do not have bank accounts which may make it challenging for them to access the government's monetary benefits (Menon, 2020). Being poor and migrants, they have to suffer more since lack of identity cards and residential proofs makes them incapable of taking advantage of the government programmes designed for the poor. (Bhagat et al., 2020) Another impediment for the labourers to get access to the remedy measures is lack of information. According to the survey, 62 percent of the workers stated that they did not know how to access the government's emergency remedy measures, whilst 37 percent stated that they were unaware of how to avail of the government's current schemes (Menon, 2020). Lack of awareness about the scheme named 'One Nation, One Ration Card' executed in 12 states posed difficulty for migrants to take benefit of the government's schemes (Kumar, 2020).

- **Struggle for Survival**

When additional rations were announced for the poor during lockdown by the government, due to area-peculiar ration cards the distribution scheme turned out to be ineffective. Another major hurdle is inaccessibility of fair price shops (Kumar, 2020). Research carried out by IIPS (International Institute of Population Sciences), Mumbai shows that lockdown had brought about 42 percent of workers with no ration and about 33 percent had been caught in areas without the access of food, water, and money (Bhagat et al., 2020). About 33 percent of workers stated that they did not have the money to purchase ration, 14 percent stated that they did not have ration cards and about 12 percent referred that they could not access it in their current area as they were migrants. Another significant impediment is advances (loans) 31 percent of workers highlighted that without employment, repayment of loans will be challenging for them (Menon, 2020). Another study done by an NGO, Stranded Workers' Action Network (SWAN), reported that after

21 days of lockdown, among 9,403 workers, 96 percent of workers had not received rations from the government and 70 percent had not received any cooked food. Although the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order requiring all firms to pay their workers full wages during the pandemic, the SWAN investigation indicated that 89 percent of 2,198 workers were not paid by their employers, and 9 percent were paid partially (People's Archive of Rural India, 2020). Even when they arrived in their villages, they were confined in isolated areas for 14 days and were forced to live with limited amenities. Their situation deteriorated further as they were unable to find jobs in their rural villages (Shahare, 2021).

- **Migrants' health and livings are at stake due to coronavirus outbreak**

Migrants are compelled to stay and function in congested areas and unhealthy conditions that don't allow them to maintain social distancing, thus putting them at increased threat of contacting the virus. They are as well at extreme danger of earning loss. Henceforth, residing at home for the duration of the outbreak is a luxury that several migrant workers cannot manage to pay for (Testaverde, 2020). They are not merely losing their livelihoods while absconding from the metropolises but also become prospective carriers of the virus thereby transmitting the disease to their local areas. They had been substantially denounced for being providers of the virus and blamed to have put a section of populace at danger (Bhagat et al., 2020). For example, locals denied access to 13 migrant workers who arrived at their native village in West Bengal's Bankura district at the quarantine centre (Indiatvnews, 2020).

- **Migrant women workers too are not spared from the menace of Covid-19 pandemic**

The loss of livelihood and recurring debt are two primary difficulties faced by women migrant workers. Many vital requirements in daily life had to be sacrificed by them. Women's lives became stressful due to increased responsibility and confinement. As a result of the lockdown restrictions, women's access to services was severely disrupted (Azeez et al., 2020).

3. Welfare measures taken by States

Due to space constraints, the study outlined herewith the welfare measures undertaken by a few selected states for the welfare of migrants.

Kerala

The government decided to term the 3.5 million migrant workforce marooned in the state as 'guest workers', to avert any undesirable situation and to preserve their prestige. It also applied its 'Ernakulam model' to reach out to workforce through migrant community kitchens accomplished (managed) by them (Kerala Government), an effort designed to deliver rations for them (Daniel, 2020).

Telangana

The state government would provide them rations, shelter, medication, and economic aid until the lockdown was ended. This was ensured to the migrant workers by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao (Daniel, 2020).

Jharkhand

‘Chief Minister’s Special Assistance Scheme’, a cellular app was initiated by the Jharkhand government, to assist with the recording of the marooned workers. The app is projected to assist in handover of Rs. 1,000 as emergency monetary help to the workers. Inter-state harmony in exchanging information on marooned migrant workers and their secure transportation is vital (Daniel, 2020).

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The central government has begun one of the most wide-ranging exercises to map the volume of migrant workers dispersed across the country—in alleviation camps, on their employers’ premises, or in clusters (the place where they reside). The government desires to create a database of millions of workers from unorganised sector to confirm whether or not a relief package ought to be announced for the most affected segment of the workforce due to a country-wide emergency like the one happened during the countrywide lockdown owing to coronavirus (Covid-19). The database will also assist the central government to make preparations to transport workers to their homes from relief camps. As workers are unable to take advantage of the government schemes which is meant for them because of their unawareness, government should take steps to sensitize the workers about the scheme and ensure the needy to avail the benefits of the scheme.

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