

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: IMPACT ON MIGRANT WORKERS AND SUGGESTIVE MEASURES

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ABSTRACT:

COVID-19 has been declared pandemic by WHO, the impact of which is still getting assessed. The ways through which this situation has been handled world-wide is social distancing and lockdown. The decline in economic activity and constraints on people's movements is impacting both manufacturing and services. Underemployment is also expected to grow on a large scale. Labour supply is declining due to quarantine measures and a slowdown in economic activity. In particular, migrant workers are exposed to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, which will limit both their ability to enter their workplaces in destination countries and return to their families. Given that the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic continues to have widespread impacts on the global workforce, migrant workers are among those with the brunt of the crisis. Prices of basic hygiene products and food prices have increased leading difficulty for migrant workers to buy them. A focus on work, including self-employment, is important to support the recovery process. Past reactions to health emergencies and natural disasters have shown that labor-intensive investment in health and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and services (WASH) is an important means of creating immediate employment in crisis. This is a desk research where the focus is given to understand the problems faced by the migrant workers and the initiatives or policies taken or framed by the authorities to

promote professional growth and to retain the workers in their respective working cities. Besides, the restrictive and financial measures adopted during lockdown and containment COVID 19 Policy, still the migrant workers are facing the same discriminantal and psychological issues which is the major concern that need to be addressed and corrective measures have to be taken during reverse movement.

Keywords: COVID-19, Migrant workers, Pandemic, Lockdown

INTRODUCTION

Global lockdown has affected the economy which is calculative on the basis of trade and business. Remote working has become a new normal for many sectors, registered sectors as they planned and worked in shifts, but there is another group of people living in despair and anxiety that is informal workers and [migrants in India](#).^[1] The strict and sudden lockdown had made the manufacturing industry work to halt and migrants jobless. The anxiety, lack of food, public transport and loss of income worsen the mental health of the migrants around the world. According to ILO, 2.2 billion workers, or 68 per cent of the global labour force was affected, out of which 164 million are migrants working in different countries. The migrants in other countries were especially facing a huge turmoil as loss of employment and unplanned lockdown moved to psychological stress.^[2] As the expense for livelihood and supporting families in home country was a stuff journey for them. A telephone survey conducted by^[3], of more than 3000 migrants from north central India shows that the majority of the workers were the daily wage earners and at the time of the lockdown, 42 percent were left without ration, one third were stuck in city destinations without access to food, water and money, 94 percent had no worker's identity card^[3]. 80 per cent of small and marginal farmers said their income decreased after the Covid19 outbreak, says Caritas India 's rapid research in 18 separate Indian states. Caritas India shared its two rapid findings on migrants and small- and marginal farmers during COVID 19 at an online meeting on 06 June 2020.^[4]

PRESENT COVID -19 SCENARIO

The global scenario of pandemic has risen to 25 million cases. In which, according to^[5] report in Times, there are three countries which are currently having more of Covid cases. US has 5.9 million cases followed by Brazil has 3.8 million and then India has 3.5 million cases. The global scenario is showing a sad figure as the death rates have also increased to 8,42,000 globally. The highest death rate is in the US followed by Brazil and then Mexico. Many countries are preparing vaccines but till now the right medicines have not been prepared. In India the total cases are forty lakhs, as per the report by^[6]. The five states which are in bad condition are Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu,

Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. Due to which the fatality rate has gone lower to 1.73 percent. The total economic loss of 8.8 trillion dollar has affected globally which is equivalent to 9.7 percent of global GDP.^[7] The lockdown has given a boon to work from home patterns of work. The research revealed that 28.7 percent of migrants do not want to return to the cities, while 32.1 percent showed their willingness to return when the situation gets right, another 31.3 percent still find themselves in a dilemma. There is a huge educational loss recorded for the migrant children, with about 46.4 percent having to stop their studies^[4].

COMPARISON OF SPANISH FLU AND COVID 19

The current pandemic is not the first time which brought death and brought the economy loss. In our history, during 1918-1920 there was a deadliest period which brought 500 million deaths globally through H1N1 influenza. The similarity of both the deadly diseases were affected through respiratory droplets. Those times also during world war I many were migrated through sea or rail routes to unexplored places. The medical facilities were not appropriate and vaccinations were not introduced. After a lot of deaths and sorrows the curve was flattened by 1/3 of the world being washed away due to H1N1 influenza. Similar situation has occurred in 2020, COVID -19 which has reached death tolls to again a high peak. The only way to reduce and flatten the curve is through social distancing and wearing masks and keep sanitizing. Still many countries are working on preparing vaccination to fight against the deadly disease to save humans.^[8] While major Indian cities such as Kolkata (Calcutta), Mumbai (Bombay), Chennai (Madras), and many other urban sites suffered greatly from influenza, smallpox, plague, malaria and cholera ^{[9]. [10]} past epidemics were hardly concerned with migration and livelihood during colonial India.^[10] In 1896 Mumbai witnessed a devastating plague, and in 1918 also an influenza. In September 1918, Hill reported that the influenza epidemic arrived in Mumbai, which spread across north and east India. He found that influenza induced excess mortality was negatively linked to district level out migration research but gave no reason^[11]. Compared with epidemics, famine has been seen in the past causing not only death but also migration.^[12] A big plague outbreak broke out in western India with the Surat epicenter in 1994. There has been a massive exodus of migrants from Surat industrial area^[12]

EFFECT OF INDIAN MEDICINE ON COVID -19

India is a place known for ayurvedic and other herbal treatments. For any sickness and diseases home remedies are tried and tested. The moment the coronavirus got diagnosed in India, many doctors, pharmaceuticals and people were behind proving medicines to cure these deadly diseases. As per^[13] study during these six months, many medicines were suggested like Hydroxychloroquine which was suggested but had side

effects like severe heart arrhythmia. There were medicines being prepared by homeopathic and ayurvedic doctors, various local or home remedies like drinking hot water continuously, consuming turmeric and having homely foods. The various other medicines were Itolizumab & Tocilizumab, Methylprednisolone, Low molecular weight Heparin, Antibiotics - Azithromycin, Ivermectin and Convalescent Plasma Therapy. But till now there is proper medicine being approved. Many countries are striving to bring out medicines to save the human race and bring the normal life among people.

MIGRANT WORKERS

The cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore which have huge [numbers of migrants](#)^[14] from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgar, Bihar, Manipur and Mizoram. Migrants include the hawkers, street vendors, daily wagers, mechanics, agriculture workers, domestic maids, industry and construction unit workers, contract labourers. In the disastrous situation when migrants are not able to earn, they wanted to go back home which was again restricted as all the borders were shut, which made the mental condition of workers worse. As it was in news that many migrants were walking towards their hometown, on the way many had died. The social distancing made the eateries closed and transportation into halt, which brought more hunger for the migrant workers. As per the report by Ranjit Devraj in SciDev.Net, about 200 million undocumented internal migrant workers.^[15] Central government has started comprehensive exercise to find the migrants across nation to provide them relief as per reported by Business Standard News. The chief labour commissioner had started collecting a database of the migrants, as they are the ones in huge numbers and impacted more. In every city, the daily-wage workers are usually migrants. As per India Ratings Manufacturing industry is the main segment in an Indian economy where we have 60 lakh migrant workers from other states—more than any other sector where MSME's contribute 8% to the country's GDP.^[16] At this point of time, Bihar government as initiated with relief camps where approximately 14.56 Lakh migrants have been supported with meals and dry ration.^[17] As per TOI, there are 3.5 lakh migrants in Telangana State, from various states are being taken care by the State.^[18] Moreover, at this point of social distancing, these people are not allowed to work, which in turn made them go back to their hometowns. As per state of Karnataka, the migrants in Bengaluru are less compared to Delhi and Mumbai, the proactive actions by providing relief camps for 1.5 lakh migrants by 1,779 camps and converting 166 government schools into camps.^[19] As per Outlook India, the 'guest workers' in Kerala are 3.5 lakhs, the state government has set up 19,764 camps. The camps are not just providing stay and food but indoor games like chess and carom.^[20] Lockdowns were announced to reduce the spread but proactive actions, not taken for inter-state migrants. The migrant's occupation include agriculture, domestic maid, rickshaw pulling, brick kilns, automobile workers, food processing workers,

construction workers. Government is trying to contact the employers and collect the data's to reach to these migrants and provide them the financial help and providing ration kits.^[21] According to International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) a global human rights organization report on current situation that, 90% of the population lives in rural areas, where if not taken corrective steps, it might be threatening for some endangered tribes of Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onge, Shompen of Andaman and Nicobar and many other tribes. Also the North East India where racism is at high level, will increase starvation and their livelihood.^[22] As the information is way- too far to these places, ignorance of symptoms and no feasible place to test, which might increase the mortality rate. The sudden closure of services has made the migrants not able to reach their homes, because without money, it's not easy for them to survive paying rent and other expenses. This has led to majority of migrants returning by walking as no transport is on roads. Due to which, there are many getting sick, suffering from hunger and dying. State governments are doing their job of testing the migrants entering the state with medical test and sending to isolation wards. According to Economic Survey 2019-20 by Centre for Financial Accountability 86.8% of the workforce presents the unorganized or informal sector. Out of which 92.4% of the workforce are migrants, work without any contract, no paid leaves and perks. This sector contributes to 52.4% of gross value.^[23]

The migrants going back to their hometown has created a worry in the metros and cities as the **3D jobs** like dirty, dangerous, demeaning jobs in the cities were majorly done by the migrants.^[24] Now as majority of migrants have gone, the industries and other sector will have shortage supply of workers, which will hinder the businesses cost.

STRATEGIES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

1. According to ILO, Healthcare coverage is one of the main challenges faced by migrant domestic workers, whether those in a normal or irregular situation. While the government has committed to providing free COVID-19 testing to all, it is unclear if this still extends to undocumented workers, and who will pay medical expenses when a migrant worker is infected with the virus. In detention centers and shelters, where there is a high concentration of migrant domestic workers and where few preventive measures seem to have been enforced, there is a substantial risk of infection.^[25] Government, they have to plan how the migrants can reach their homes to provide support. Timely check has to be done for rural areas, health and other essentials. Awareness should be brought about the government initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Kalyan Package, which provides insurance of 50 lacs if loss of life happens within 90 days. The grants, financial aid, Mid - day means should reach the required segment.^[26]

2. The lock down is generating hunger and starvation specially for the migrants and emergency workers like medicine suppliers. There are many NGOs and volunteers who are working in cities, to control and support in fight with corona. If the same zeal and more teams can reach out to villages and towns will be great initiatives. Our Indian economy depends on agricultural products at this moment, when the harvesting month is starting the government must focus on the farmers and their harvesting, how to sell it and provide income. Many states like Karnataka have directly reached people and asked them to order online for fruits and vegetables, which they are selling for farmers.
3. Due to the lockdown migrant domestic workers in shelters which benefited from the amnesty cannot return home. This leads to mental health issues among staff and, given their limited ability relative to demand, increases the burden on existing shelters. For such migrant workers the government should take initiative that with the regular temperature check of the people they should be returned back to their home. They should be provided rural households with labor wages form Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) budget. Extending village officers (VOs) to provide soft loans to families who lost jobs or COVID-19 related health expenses. Rescheduling bank loans for SHGs and agriculture debtors.
4. Social distancing must be continued for a longer period and the government must create employment opportunities in rural India. The infrastructure to be improved with the increase in number of doctors and availability of medicines. Currently rural India is safe, but if more migrations happen from urban to rural, the case number can increase and as cited above the infrastructure details in rural areas is insufficient, spread of disease will be higher than urban. Government has to keep an eye on the migrants entering any village, so that medical check and quarantine is there. Village panchayats must be vigilant and must abide to the social distancing, also ensure that villagers are having food. As per government's new rule in the lockdown period, that agriculture and related sectors will restart from 20th April,2020 also logistic, repair shops and construction workers, provided they are keeping distance and wearing face masks. Employers need to provide a stay or transport facility to the employees.^[27] COVID-19 after effect can be challenging for urban India, as migrants who have gone back to their homes might try locally something rather than migrating again. The employers will have to pay higher perks to call them back. Overall economy will face labour shortage.^[28]
5. Amidst this situation, it is proposed that the government should allow employers who cannot work remotely to return to work with proper working conditions, regular temperature check, and providing transport or accommodation, which can help to some extent the migrants to live.

CONCLUSION

COVID cases increased though Unlock 4.0 was announced followed by Unlock 5.0, however the restrictions and all were relaxed from unlock 1.0 onwards. During the lockdown all the migrant workers have started going back to their hometowns with the fear of losing jobs and survival. However, as the unlocking has started migrant workers have been asked to come and start working with little rise in the payment leads to reverse movement. MSME's are the major contributors for engaging the migrant workers, which leads to increase in employment and further leads to growth in GDP. In all this concern the health and safety measures are being ignored resulting in rise in cases. The unlocking seems to be challenging for the economy, as to bring back the migrants the un-registered sector is required by the manufacturing and production industries to make the work happen. Government is coming up with relief schemes with job opportunities and financial aid and focusing on Aatma Nirbhar, due to which the return of migrants might be doubtful. Now the industries in metro's have to plan accordingly and have to strategize the ways to bring the migrants back. This unlock will reshape the definition of factory setup and plant, as sanitization is not the only way to fight with COVID-19. Government and Industry experts need to think in new lines for their manufacturing workplace as the whole set up has to be changed keeping the current pandemic situation and getting prepared for future epidemics.

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