

The Pandemic of COVID-19 and Loss of Employment: A Study of Un-skilled Workers in Kathua District of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract: *This paper provides an outline of the issues and the problems of the pandemic of COVID-19 which are responsible for the job loss of workers and which effect all over the world. Employment is a relationship between two parties which is generally based on a contract for work where one party is a profit, non-profit, cooperative, or other entity is the employee. Employment is an integral element in the life of a person; it describes and determines the socio-economic status of a person. During the time of pandemic COVID-19, most of the workers lost their jobs in their respective fields all over the world, and in India, workers could not be escaped from job loss. COVID-19 changed the livelihood of people and workers because workers did not get any financial support from their factory owners except a few. Employed people who lost their jobs were trapped in a very pity condition because they are unable to provide basic amenities to their families. This paper is an attempt to understand about the condition of un-skilled workers who lost their jobs due to this current pandemic of COVID-19.*

Keywords: Livelihood, Loss of Employment, Pandemic-COVID-19, Un-skilled Workers

Introduction

The pandemic of COVID-19 has exploded worldwide. It has brought millions of people into a complete halt, retrieved economies, and panic and strenuous everyday life. COVID-19, one of the zoonotic Corona viruses that cross over the infectious human being, is a serious acute respiratory disease. It was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, confirmed on 31st December 2019 to the World Health Organization in China, and announced a pandemic by the World Health Organization, on 11th March 2020 with over 118,000 corona virus cases worldwide. In people around the world, there has been fear of the pandemic nature of the corona virus. The essence of this fear as well as what the fear is all about is ambiguous, as information about COVID-19 was confusing (Egunjobi, April 2020). ‘Corona virus is indeed a major family virus that causes illness. It varies from the common cold to more diseases such as ‘Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS- COV)’ and ‘Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS- COV)’. Often the virus spreads by touching infected objects, infected persons or patients who have been positively screened (Jha & Gujral, August 2020).

‘There is one thing that's certain: COVID-19 is real. Whether the ongoing pandemic is triggered by a viral attack appears to have no uncertainty. In the reported cases of COVID-19, there has been much anxiety and apprehension among the people in every corner of the globe; regardless the race, culture, religion, place, social and economic status, social disturbance, and confusion concerning infectious COVID-19’ (Egunjobi, April 2020). The crisis of COVID-19 has reached without warning and has interrupted all of our financial plans as though nothing we have experienced before. The economic effects of the pandemic have led to substantial loss of jobs and cut salaries and benefits, and many of them may find it difficult to even get a new job with a decent or comparable benefit. In India, especially in April and May 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and consequential lock-down action caused an exponential rise in unemployment rates. The overall unemployment rate of the country rose as high as 27.11 per cent for the last week of May 2020, with businesses having to shut down triggering a major reverse migration surge (www.timesnownews.com, August 9, 2020). According to a joint study of the ‘International Labor Organization (ILO) and Asian Development Bank (ADB), 41 lakh youths in the country lost employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and most job losses are recorded by construction and farm workers. During the pandemic of COVID-19 in India, 2/3 of firm apprenticeships and three-quarters of internships in India were disrupted entirely (www.timesnownews.com, August 18, 2020).

More than 120 million India's employees, the largest of whom are small traders and daily wagers, lost their jobs in April, as the latest corona virus pandemic imposed a national lockdown, all but stopped functioning.

COVID-19 is considered to have been a highly infectious disease. But the lockdown, which is a result of the intensely infectious nature of the disease, is especially dangerous to young people. Although young people who are ready to begin work may survive the disease's extremely worsening consequences, their jobs and future are also devastating. Migrant workers are also suffering. As construction sites and other businesses shut down, many have eventually lost jobs. Without income, tens of thousands of devastated cities – hundreds of kilometers away – have been trodden away in the absence of public transport, indicating their level of distress (Sharma, May 2020). The pandemic of COVID-19 affected all parts of the population. Taken together, the mass unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 bears a huge human cost beyond its own (Crayne, June 2020).

The occupational environment and poverty of India are currently not well configured with the comfort of total self-isolation or social distancing or lockdown. This is not a matter of life and economic development, on the one hand, but a matter of lives versus lives. With the economy collapsing and employment in organized and unorganized industries going malfunctioning, with the International Labor Organization (ILO), the loss of more than 40 crores of jobs in India alone is estimated, and the loss global in more than 200 crores of jobs (Dutta et al., April 2020).

Numerous garment/textile factories in China have stopped the export of fabrics, yarns, and other raw materials from India because of the pandemic of corona virus. The uncertainty triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a shutdown to demand textile products overseas and domestic sales. It is hard to say whether all kinds of textile factories are closed that they will resume due to the lockdown. The corporate sector is afraid of instability in the supply chain, cash falls, and labor problems. Because of a lockdown, most workers in the major corporation-controlled units live in labor colonies surrounding the factories that could return to their hometowns or villages. The daily wage workers in textile industries that operate on and back in Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, and other states, account for 80 per cent of the workforce is on the streets or in his home village. Some workers have been bound to stay in the lack of transport means after the lockdown and in India, there are more than 2000 spinning mills with various spindle capacities are operating. Every shipment is on pause, and a letter of credit expires can lead to significant renegotiation, raw energy, and raw material expenditures are not being incurred, but all the other complications can be a direct loss to mill owners. It would not have been simple and quick to restart (Jha & Gujral, August 2020).

Objectives

- ❖ To understand about the condition of un-skilled workers who lost their jobs during the Pandemic of COVID-19 and lockdown.
- ❖ To identify the difficulties faced by workers.

Methodology

The unit of analysis has been un-skilled workers (“People who are [unskilled](#) do not have any special training for a [job](#)” www.collinsdictionary.com, “Work not demanding formal qualifications or much experience” Hashimzade et al. 2017) who lost their jobs and tackling with livelihood difficulties during the current pandemic of COVID-19 and lockdown. The locale for the present study was the ‘Chenab Textile Mills’ (CTM) also called ‘Birla Factory’ in Kathua District of Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir recently become Union Territory. Kathua is a industrial district where number of factories established like Textile Factory, Generator Factory, Tyre Factory, Pesticides and Chemical Factory, Soap and washing powder Factory etc.. These factories provide employment to people not only who are permanent resident of J&K but all over the India and especially people of Pathankot district of Punjab (which shared its boundary with kathua) mainly work in these factories. But during the lockdown workers lost their jobs and face numerous hardships for livelihood.

Techniques of Data Collection

Both primary as well as secondary sources have been incorporated for this study. The secondary sources include reports of World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO) and government, books and research articles. Primary sources for data collection included pilot study, and

telephonic interview survey. Total 30 respondents were interviewed through telephone with snowball sampling technique.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Conflict Model: It is based on the premise that society is a complex system defined by inequality and disputes that bring about social change. Marxist perspective argued that unemployment is a natural fall from the capitalist system. It supports the capitalist system because the unemployed are competing with the working people for employment that lower labor costs to favor the business owners. Marx (1959) thought that market competition compels the capitalist sector to decrease manufacturing costs through the use of labor displacement equipment, that's creating unemployment. Although in present study job loss of workers and we can say unemployment is mainly happened due to the current pandemic of COVID-19 but alienation among unskilled workers reflected in the 'Theory of Alienation' of Marx which also dealing with the phenomenon of unemployment as he given four components of alienation such as a) Workers are alienated from their productive activity in capitalist society, b) the worker is alienated from the object of product, c) the workers are alienated from their fellow workers, and d) the workers are alienated from their own human potential. In the present study researcher found third and fourth components of alienation is linked with the pathetic condition of unskilled workers after job loss.

Seeman (1959) identified five dimensions of alienation such as powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Last three dimensions are used by researcher for relating with the current study. The third dimension of alienation is 'meaninglessness' which applies to the sense of individual knowing the events he is involved in. We may talk of a high degree of alienation in the use of meaninglessness when the person is unsure about what he should believe when the person's minimum standards of clarification in decision-making are also not satisfied. The fourth dimension is a sense of 'isolation' and isolated are those who allocate low reward value to goals and beliefs that have been usually highly valued in a particular society and the last dimension of alienation is 'self-estrangement' which is commonly defined as the destruction of essential meaning or dignity in work, a deprivation which Marx and others have considered to become an essential characteristic of contemporary alienation.

Results, Discussion and Findings

- It ascertained from this paper that the Corona Virus significantly affected both Indian employment opportunities and the Indian economy. How there had been a huge loss of jobs when the business was stopped due to pandemic. Loss of Employment and unemployment occur throughout every sector such as hospitality, entertainment industry, tourism, retail, construction, and textiles, etc, which affected the GDP and economy by a higher proportion. In general, they have led to a decline in jobs and a rise in unemployment rates.
- Workers faced numerous difficulties throughout the process of lockdown due to COVID-19, as they lost their employment and due to loss of employment their overall livelihood scenario burst effected.
- Un-skilled workers as their category shows do not have necessary skills for operating other monetary works but workers who have particular specialized skills in their respected profession and field operate their work from home and earn even during the lockdown, therefore unskilled worker feel alienation.
- Most of the workers took loan from moneylenders on interest and some received help from their relatives during the process of lockdown.
- As government enforced some schemes (Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana PMJDY, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana PMGKAY etc.) and under these schemes government provide/distribute some basic daily necessities (wheat, pulse, rice etc.) to the people but government officials and our ministers did not implement these schemes positively. Therefore poor people and workers could not get benefits of these government sponsored schemes.
- Some workers did not get any help from government and village panchayat.

- Workers did not get financial assistance and other necessary required help from their factory owners as they got only their wage salary as per their working days.
- One of the most difficult condition observed during this study is that, one side workers lost their jobs, they faced hardships for livelihood and on the another side government and private educational institutions took online teaching mode, therefore children needed and demanded for smart phones from their parents, then parents took money on interest from local people as a result of that workers trapped in the new condition of debt.
- As for India's development, the Prime Minister has already taken policy steps to deal with the economic difficulties of COVID-19. India's GDP decline is believed to be more fragile, considering that India's economy has already been ailing and in deep-seated recession over several quarters, even before the pandemic of COVID-19 became known. The health, social, and economic system of the whole world was broken down by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic of COVID-19 is one of the severe occurrences in human history. The government in each country attempted to control the current pandemic by many steps such as lockdown and social distancing discipline. In India, the prolonged lockdown has had a significant effect on the lifestyle of the population. Migrant and daily wage workers are serious victims. Prolonged lockdown led to the exhaustion of their limited number of savings, pressuring to people to start their journey to hometown. The lack of availability of transportation services deteriorates the journey by searching for daily bread and butter.
- In the last few years, the economy, and thus the job market has been quite challenging. The detrimental effect of the recession appears to have been exceptionally effective for young people. The world will be threatened by recession or economic catastrophe and recovery from these will take a long time. The disparity between rich and poor would be massive. Poverty and unemployment would be severe. We have the task of standing up to the burden of returning to business and incorporating the value of collaboration, contact, trust, and kindness into economic thinking and social shaping-in a word, love (Egunjobi, April 2020).

Case Studies

1. Harvinder Singh is a 58 year old worker who before lockdown was working in Chenab Textile Mills Kathua. He is from Pathankot district of Punjab. He has six children, four girls and two boys. His three elder daughters got married and his sons and one daughter studying. For more than 25 years he was working in above mentioned factory under the contractor, but when lockdown imposed due the pandemic of COVID-19 he lost his job. After losing his job his family's livelihood pattern disturbed because he does not have any other means of earning. He faced problems about the arrangements of meals. But he received food grain (wheat) by the government but how he could survive with only wheat, so then his elder daughter gave ration to her parents. He did not get any benefit from the factory where he spent his life's more than 25 years. Even now when work is started in factory, he approached to his senior official but still he did not get reemployment there, because he is from Punjab and officials said they have low work in factory therefore they have enough local labour of J&K for operating the work. Through this whole process he felt alienation from their co workers, and he trapped in state of depression, because he thought he is a person/worker who served more than 25 years of his life in one factory but when he need the work and support, he discarded and neglected by the factory. During interviewing for a while he cried, he shared that his elder son pursuing a Post Graduation, but during lockdown he could not provide financial support to him for buying books, so his son also trapped in the state of depression. He also shared one depressed condition about the thought of suicide, as he decided to do suicide but when he thought after him how his family would survive then he dropped the idea of suicide.
2. Gurinder Singh is a 33 year old worker in the same factory. He is from Pathankot district of Punjab. He got married three years ago and now he has two year old son. He worked there for more than 10 years, but due to lockdown he also lost his job and come into the state of hardships. While interviewing he said due to job loss his earning source blocked and he has experienced domestic conflict with his wife regarding the arrangement of household necessary things. Then he received help from their relatives. He shared one experience he said on the occasion of 'Raksha Bandhan or

Rakhi' (It is a common, historically Hindu, annually ceremony that is crucial to a festival of the same name, celebrated in India, Nepal as well as other places of the Indian subcontinent, as well as among people across the globe influenced by Hindu tradition. On this day a amulet called Rakhi is tied by sisters of all age groups around the wrist of their brothers who symbolically safeguard them, received a present in compensation, and usually invested the brothers with a share in their possible care) which was on 3rd August 2020, his wife demanded for going to her maternal parents home for tying a Rakhi to her brother but they did not have money at that time and firstly he refused to his wife then his wife started crying then after tough situation he arranged some money and went there. He said there is no purpose to work in factory where he spent more than 10 years, as he did not get any financial and other assistance from the factory.

Conclusion

COVID-19 affected every part of the globe and nobody could escape from this pandemic. But workers and especially un-skilled workers are most affected category among the workers. They lost their jobs and job loss burst their livelihood. They suffered with very hard difficulties even in few days during lockdown they did not take meals in a single time in a day. They trapped in indebtedness. Government took some measure to help poor people but government official and ministers did not perform their duty as per their position and did scam in food distribution and other facilities by the government. Up to September 2020, there is no corona virus vaccines have been developed, but several patients healed with certain precautions/ safeguards, such as keeping physical distance, using a mask, frequent washing of hands, using a sanitizer after 30 minutes, avoiding contact with face and eyes, maintaining good hygiene and so on, etc.

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