

REVIEW

Job Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemics and Its Psychological Consequences

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ABSTRACT

The Coronavirus pandemics, or the COVID-19, came as an unwelcomed guest that did not want to leave, where people until today do not know for sure all the ways it affects people's health and overall being. The year of 2020 will be remembered as the one in which life almost stopped. A year full of losses that continue, from losing people dear to us, to losing jobs, opportunities, and freedom in almost every sense. This paper covers the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak that it had on people, focusing on the job loss and unemployment, the healthcare opportunities and availabilities, the gender discrimination in the process of losing jobs, and the most importantly the psychological consequences people suffered from, due to isolation, inability to work and to provide.

1. Introduction

The year 2020 is the year that will be remembered in history as the year when many lives were stopped, forever on this world, or just for a period of time. The COVID-19 pandemic or the coronavirus pandemic, an outgoing coronavirus disease was first identified in the Wuhan, China at the end of 2019. The WHO (World Health Organization) declared it a pandemic in March of 2020, and as of the January of 2021, the number of reported cases raised up to 93 million with over 2 million deaths globally.^[1] After the first cases were identified and shared with the world, people were confused and scared as the virus is different from any other the medicine has faced, even though the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) comes from the

coronavirus family of viruses from which the most famous are MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

As the virus started to spread to almost every continent and every country in an unexpectedly short time, the countries had a different way of dealing with it. It is believed that the way the virus spreads is mainly through droplets that are released when a person coughs and sneezes, which then made it one of the main precautions to keep a safe distance, to regularly wash and sterilize hands, and to wear masks. The symptoms, according to WHO, are not too clear or universal as people with a positive test for COVID-19 reported a lot of different symptoms and side effects. The most common ones are fever, cough, tiredness, and loss of taste or smell; the less com-

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mon symptoms involve the sore throat, headache, aches, and pains, diarrhea, a rash on the skin, red or irritated eyes, and all those symptoms are seen as mild and mostly require patients to isolate themselves and take care of their bodies with healthy nutrients and medicine if needed. The serious symptoms require immediate medical care as they may lead to fatal endings, the symptoms involve shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chest pain and loss of speech or mobility and confusion. Easy transmission, sometimes even with precautions, ended with COVID-19 clusters and was one of the reasons why many countries started making decisions about lockdowns and curfews.

Shutting down the cities due to COVID-19 pandemics affected the economy in the majority of countries, which was followed by people getting dismissed, leading to recession.^[2] People were getting sacked and were stuck at home without many opportunities to find another employer who could afford new employees. People started losing their family members and friends to the virus about which no one can tell much information about, there was a lot of fear and anger people were feeling, and losing jobs and careers on the other hand made people feel like they are losing control of their lives. Every aspect of life seemed like it was crashing, people were getting isolated and only some were happy enough to have families with whom they could isolate and spend months with in a closed and restricted area, but many felt loneliness like never before and the mental health of many people was affected. The numbers of new cases keep going up even after more than a year from the first case recorded, but in some way, people are adapting to the new lifestyles, as working from home or starting their own business became an alternative. People are also getting used to avoiding social interaction with large groups of people at the same place, and at the same time they are trying to overcome feelings of loneliness. It is important to focus and provide sufficient psychological help, counseling, and support to people during these hard times, and the focus of this paper will be the job loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemics and psychological consequences, as well as impacts that it has on family relations, financial security, and wellbeing.

1.1 Job Loss and Gender Differences

In most countries economic activities are dependent on in-person interactions, different jobs come with different infection risks where some jobs have higher exposure and other jobs can afford employees to start working from home which was the case for a lot of firms.^[3] The low-wage jobs come with higher exposure as they involve more in-person interactions, so we have people with a high risk of being infected for a small amount of money,

and on the other hand, we have people who lost their jobs. According to OECD^[4], the crisis is having the greatest impact of joblessness and poverty on young people and women, as they are having not so secure and skilled jobs, and millions of people have been provided with reduced hours and work from home, but millions also have lost their jobs completely.

A study was done by Dang and Nguyen^[5] across six countries as China, South Korea, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, as well as the four states in the United States, where it was found that women are more likely than a man to lose their jobs permanently but there were no gender differences noted for the temporary job loss. The same study also shows how women are more scared than men about the future of their incomes due to the COVID-19 pandemics, but that is then one of the reasons why females tend to increase their savings and reduce more their consumptions.^[4] We see that females are more at risk of losing jobs as the economy is crashing and being unstable all around the world as around 58.6% of the workforce in the service sector are women. It is not strange to find gender differences, especially when the world is stopping, when shops, restaurants, and many services are closing, decreasing working hours or employers, but this is the problem that countries representatives and different organizations, I believe, need to take seriously. Many females are single mothers, many females do not have other supports, and governments need to provide policies that will support women, during and after pandemics.

Women are not the only ones who became the highest risks categories for the job loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemics. Some other categories involve the older employees who suffer from chronic diseases and are at risk because of poor health; younger workers seeking employment, as employers are having limited funds and would prefer more experienced employees. Self-employed workers as their employment is always flexible and they are unprotected in terms of health care and social protection; and lastly the economic migrants as the pandemic has prevented them to come to desired destinations and countries they were seeking employment in.^[6] Some firms in Bosnia have proposed an offer to families where both spouses are working with the same employer, to decide on their own who is going to leave the job, where another spouse is having a safe job for the time being. I believe this practice made it easier for a lot of families to keep a safe income, choosing on their own the best options and who will find another job in a shorter period of time. But even this model shows us the presence of gender discrimination and inequality, as most females would stay and males, as they are more preferred in business, would

find another job more easily.

1.2 Job loss and Health Care

In March of 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) ^[7] estimated that around 25 million jobs would be lost worldwide, due to the Coronavirus outbreak. Between February and April, around 22 million jobs were recorded and from April to June there was a rebound of 7.5 million jobs. One survey showed data of people who lost their jobs or work-related income during the pandemics, and the way it affected the health care of them and their families. Findings portray how nonelderly adults who lost their jobs, are more likely to have problems with the affordability of health care, than families who did not face such economic effect. More than half of them and the ones with family members who have chronic conditions, families who have children under 19, avoided the health care because of, firstly costs that can not be met, and also the fear and concerns about exposure to the coronavirus in health institutions. ^[7] Losing jobs directly affects the affordability of health care, especially in the pandemic season where there is a high risk of getting the virus and the possibility of needing proper medical care, but people can not afford it without proper income.

Health care is being avoided with the fear of getting infected, a lot of doctors in many countries advised people not to come to hospitals if there is no serious reason and need for it. But avoiding and delaying the proper health-care due to no income, is risky for the people who have ongoing medical problems, coming to the high possibility of having long-term consequences, but also, according to the study done ^[8], would contribute to the differences and already existing polarization in an ethnic and socio-economic sense. Another important factor is the families with kids, where parents would avoid or not be able to visit pediatricians regularly, where some developmental risks may be faced without the doctor's involvement, and again this has a long-term effect on child's overall health. The vaccinations are not being administered for a lot of children, where they're major risks for getting different preventable diseases ^[9], even though hospitals and doctors are preoccupied with the coronavirus outbreak and keeping people safe and well treated, we should not keep aside other important doctor visits, especially for children and elderly people.

1.3 Psychological Consequences

As mentioned at the beginning, many countries out ruled lockdowns, curfews, and isolation as important ways of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. From the men-

tal health perspective, the isolation process carries many risk factors and concerns if the isolation tactic would be a long-lasting solution. According to Safai ^[10], mental health professionals fear the consequences of self-isolation, such as increased incidence of depression, increased anxiety, and domestic violence many times related to alcohol or substance abuse. Fighting the virus just by isolating itself represents a trigger for many individuals, and those who lost their jobs on top of that have one more fight to fight, most of the time by themselves. Research suggests how people who struggle finding or maintaining employment and jobs, a lot of times suffer substantial psychological distress as a result of it. ^[11] According to Merriam-Webster ^[12], the work is "the labor, task, or duty that is one's accustomed means of livelihood". Work and job is the source of motivations, values, the way one chooses his or her career expresses their beliefs, and they take a significant meaning from the work they do. Being successful in work is what brings meaning to some people's lives, a big portion of one's life is spent working or building careers, and with such significance, we can easily conclude the importance it has to the psychological well-being of a person.

A job loss represents an immense stress source, ^[13] especially when it happens quickly and without much preparation for it, such as during the pandemics. Individuals who lose jobs and get separated from their work start questioning their abilities in life, and if the unemployment period lasts for a long period of time, some risk factors would easily follow, such as alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, family problems, and even suicide. Getting fired for some people may have a positive side, for example, an opportunity for a change, a new workplace, and colleagues, but even the process of search has its own effect on the psychological well-being of a person.

As in many other situations, even the unemployment during COVID-19 pandemics is not the same for all, as some categories of people are having harder times than others. One study covered the COVID-19 outbreak and its effects on job security and emotional functioning of women with breast cancer, where the results showed how women who were unemployed due to COVID-19 had a greater level of job insecurity than those who continued their work. Another more important finding is that women diagnosed with breast cancer are at higher risk of anxiety and depression disorders, as well as poorer cognitive functions, and the emotional distress in those women is directly associated with poorer quality of life in general and the job insecurity only came as an additional increaser of symptoms and risks mentioned above. ^[14]

We are living in a time of extreme social changes for

which not many people are prepared for. The isolation and lockdowns for some people were too much, and the continuation of it in the case of not being able to take the virus under control only prolongs the pain and suffering of people who are afraid of the whole situation and what tomorrow carries with it. The economic crisis, which led to job losses and increased unemployment rates, as in the case of 2008, showed an increase in suicide rates. According to one study in Bosnia, where the cases of suicide were analyzed during the pandemics, concluded that those restrictive measures carried due to pandemics are representing the triggers for people fearing and facing job loss and having existential issues as well as the people with preexisting traumas and PTSD such as for war veterans.^[15]

Job loss and unemployment are also directly related to family functioning, where WHO and other sources, such as mental health organizations, are trying to draw attention to the problem and the risk of child maltreatment and abuse as a consequence of economic crash and losing job during COVID-19 pandemics in particular. The investigations done during the pandemics of 2020, showed that job loss of a parent was predictor for psychological maltreatment and physical abuse towards children, but the association between the two was highly dependent on the manner and how parents had a habit of coping with stressful situations and experiences in life in general^[13]. Observing the collected data and the study, researches have found that using positive cognitive framing, a technique in psychology used to challenge and change the particular view on the situations and thoughts, could help to decrease the negative effect of the parental job loss on the child abuse and maltreatment through stressful times, during and after the pandemics. According to Lawson and Simon,^[13] unemployment and losing a job is one of the biggest life stressors, especially for people who have families, and the literature mentioned the “family stress model” which states that the accumulated stress caused by economic adversity as unemployment, is increasing the risk of child maltreatment or abuse.

2. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemics brought us the feeling of powerlessness and dejectedness over some aspects of our lives. The stressful situations and experiences it brought to us will make new generations look at and live their lives differently. Restricting freedom, getting isolated, getting fired, and trying to survive during the hard times while being unemployed comes with particular psychological consequences. People who were suffering before with depression, anxiety, and many other psychological disorders,

mainly increased their symptoms during the isolation period, and the ones who thought that they had their life under control, started feeling like they are losing everything they value in life, like their jobs.

COVID-19 recession led to people getting fired or having a hard time finding an employer who can benefit from new employees and losing the secure source of income caused substantial psychological distress while making it difficult to get proper health care. Different categories of people who were getting dismissed were affected diversely. Ones who were already marginalized or had an already existing physical or mental health problem only got their symptoms to worsen.

Gender differences keep being persistent also during the hard times for the humankind, the weakest in our society became even weaker, at health risk people were slightly moved to the second or third plan as the focus of medical care is mainly on the COVID-19 patients and the treatment of symptoms this new virus carries. As the weakest in society will always be the easiest victims of the unfairness and hard times, the children in families as the weakest members also suffer and feel the consequences of the parents’ development or stagnation in their careers and socioeconomic statuses that may be changed due to getting dismissed.

3. Recommendations

It is only a matter of time when we all will feel the true psychological consequences of the isolation and everything that the pandemic of coronavirus brought to us. In this paper, we saw different ways the pandemics affected job loss and how every aspect of human life is being a part of that calculation. I believe how things could have a better ending and better future if we act on time and give importance to problems which could be the long-run ones. The psychological health of people needs to be a priority despite the physical health, especially during those hard times. I believe each country and city needs to have supportive policies for the ones in need, the people who are losing their jobs, chronically ill people who are losing jobs, families of people who became unemployed, and many others. Now that we have meeting restrictions, online counseling, both individual and group, the positive psychology, financial and social support are all the ways to deal with such obstacles. The mental health organizations are warning us from the beginning of the pandemics, it is a time when we can not do much to change things around us, but it is important to work on ourselves to have a healthy mentality and positivity which can help us to get over the obstacles we face in our lives.

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