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ANALYSING SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD AND THE IMPERATIVE OF CONSTRUCTING A STRONGER SOCIAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT
On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global crisis that has severely impacted humanity. The various outbreaks have led to countless fatalities and illnesses, costing billions of dollars. The consequences of COVID-19 have disrupted social life and significantly affected the global economy. This pandemic has altered people's daily lives and hindered economic activities worldwide. Additionally, it has instilled fear and anxiety in communities around the globe. Individuals have taken numerous precautions to combat this alarming infection in response to this threat. The crisis has caused significant social unrest and has led to unprecedented lifestyle, work, and social interaction changes. Measures such as social and physical distancing, along with lockdowns of businesses and schools, have become commonplace to mitigate the spread of the virus. However, these measures have also disrupted many regular aspects of life, including cultural and social activities among individuals and groups.
KEY WORDS: *Covid-19, Pandemic, Challenges, Social System, Survival, Crisis Management, Social Protection and Inclusion, Co-existence.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on people's lives worldwide. Everyone has faced the serious consequences of this disease, whether directly or indirectly. The economic and social crises stemming from the pandemic have created substantial global challenges that affect all aspects of human life (Panchal et al, 2023). Among the key issues highlighted by this crisis are the need for strengthened global health cooperation and security, improved crisis management, coordinated funding for public health emergencies, and enhanced access to prevention, treatment, and control measures (WHO, 2020).

The extended periods of isolation and the suspension of numerous social activities have led to problems such as social anxiety, panic arising from insecurity, economic downturns, and significant psychological stress. The increasing pressure of social distancing in daily life has also resulted in various adverse outcomes, including violence, irritability, conflict, theft, murder, suicide, sabotage, and a general disregard for the law (Hosseinzadeh, P et al. 2022:35). The sale and distribution of illicit drugs, the consumption of drugs and alcohol, cybercrime, and the purchase and sale of firearms have all seen an increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. The significant economic strain and rising unemployment caused by the pandemic have heightened feelings of anxiety, which have contributed to a rise in various crimes, including theft, domestic disputes, and fraud. Moreover, negative emotions and thoughts from the pandemic have increased virus transmission and created significant societal challenges (INCB, 2022). The widespread fear related to COVID-19 has brought about notable changes to social life for individuals across the globe.

The Major Social Challenges Faced by the World During the Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Era

The pandemic's impact was widespread, affecting individuals across all social groups and proving to be anything but gender-neutral; COVID-19 exemplified this reality. The closure of schools, coupled with the confinement of students at home and the shutdown of businesses due to social restrictions, contributed to an increase in psychological challenges within families, as well as a rise in abuse and violence among family members. Women, in particular, bore the brunt of the economic and social repercussions of COVID-19. Those who are poor and marginalized faced an even greater risk of COVID-19 transmission and fatalities, along with job losses and heightened violence (Hughes, 2022). Furthermore, a lack of education and economic instability intensified the risk of gender-based violence. When financial resources are insufficient, women struggle to leave abusive relationships and are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Older adults are a particularly vulnerable group, facing a higher risk of COVID-19 infection, especially those with chronic health conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes (Nelson, 2020). In addition to their increased health risks, they also have a reduced ability to support themselves during periods of isolation. Even in the best of times, individuals with disabilities encounter challenges throughout society. During the pandemic, they faced additional issues, including difficulties accessing healthcare services due to unavailability, lack of accessibility, and affordability. Stigma and discrimination further exacerbated these

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problems. Indigenous peoples were especially vulnerable, experiencing significantly higher rates of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. They often lacked access to essential services and culturally appropriate healthcare, and when available, local medical facilities were typically under-equipped and understaffed (Paneer et al., 2022).

Youth and children worldwide were also severely impacted by the pandemic. With schools closed, they missed opportunities for in-person learning and social interaction with peers. As a result, many became isolated in their rooms, leading to increased reliance on digital devices, which in turn contributed to rising rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues among young people during this period. The nationwide lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of many migrant populations. Due to a lack of job opportunities, millions of migrant workers were forced to return to their home countries or villages at a time when public transportation was either closed or heavily restricted. This created significant humanitarian and health security challenges and unprecedented logistical difficulties for migrants (Mishra, N.P. et al. 2020: 2670).

The common understanding of anxiety and threat during the pandemic has revealed significant insights regarding social conditions. This understanding affects how individuals perceive themselves and how they feel and respond to others in their environment. Increased fear and danger are associated with greater selfishness and punitive attitudes towards out-groups (Kabir et al., 2020, p. 2323). Social distancing measures have been shown to reduce compassion for those who are physically distant and may exhibit signs of infection. During the pandemic, people increasingly gravitated towards paranoid ideas when their significant mental needs went unmet. As COVID-19 spread and isolation increased, fear-driven notions gained traction.

Many individuals began to view themselves differently from those in their social circles, contributing to social inequality. There is a prevailing belief in society that when faced with danger, people tend to act irrationally, especially in groups (UN, 2020). In their attempts at self-protection, individuals may engage in impulsive behaviors that could endanger everyone. This perspective has been used to explain responses to the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly the phenomenon of "panic buying." While some actions may seem reckless, they often stem from fear, and as a result, vulnerable individuals may experience increased distress. Additionally, misinformation and fake news, especially on social media, have had a severe impact on the post-pandemic world and resulted in various harmful consequences. Economic instability and social inequality are often linked to levels of trust in public institutions, including the healthcare system. Cultural and racial minority communities have both historical and contemporary experiences of discrimination, leading to a general mistrust (Mishra NP et al., 2020, p. 2677).

The Strategies for Retaliation and Reparation via Alterations to the Existing Social System

The social conditions highlighted and exacerbated by the novel coronavirus require us to fundamentally rethink our understanding of society and, consequently, reevaluate the prevailing social science assumptions, methods, and theories (Sorci, 2024). While governments and societies often prioritize social protection during crises, building these systems during better times is essential to ensure they are effective when adversity strikes, allowing for a rapid response.= Fighting COVID-19 necessitates action at multiple levels, and these strategies must evolve as new social and scientific evidence emerges. Social policies related to COVID-19 should focus on the most vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, who experience abuse, mistreatment, domestic violence, and decreased financial stability, often facing double discrimination during such times (Petersson & Hansson, 2022, p. 140).

The effectiveness of individuals' coping mechanisms throughout the pandemic has depended mainly on the quality and resilience of their social and psychological frameworks. Suppose these issues are not adequately addressed through policy measures. In that case, the social crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic may worsen inequality, exclusion, discrimination, and global unemployment in the medium to long term. Comprehensive and universal social protection systems safeguard workers and reduce poverty. These systems function as automatic stabilizers, providing basic income security at all times and enhancing individuals' capacity to manage and recover from shocks (UN, 2020).

Five years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has gained significant insights into resilience: understanding what enhances it, what makes it safer, what contributes to adaptability, and what does not. We must now focus on rebuilding our social, political, and economic systems in ways that empower and protect everyone. The choices made by policymakers and government leaders today regarding resource allocation and leadership will have long-term implications for women, girls, and other vulnerable populations and our overall health and survival as a species (Maisch & Dörr, 2023: 170). The pandemic has had social consequences for specific groups, potentially worsening their unfavorable situations. Therefore, during crises, special attention should be given to these groups, and clear, effective policies and programs should be developed to support them (Petrowski, 2021). Civil society and voluntary groups are rich in initiatives, innovations, and resources that can be mobilized during times of crisis. Modern communication tools and internet infrastructure have overcome physical limitations and enabled virtual social interactions, helping individuals maintain connections. People's behaviors are often influenced by their perceptions of what others think or do, leading them to follow suit. Correcting misunderstandings can change practices through open communication that reinforces positive moral

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values (Sahoo et al., 2022). Additionally, stocking up on supplies is a practical step in preparation for potential self-isolation. However, the concept of panic can be dangerously counterproductive. It can undermine the independence and seriousness needed during crises, turning reasonable planning into chaotic hoarding. This behavior disrupts the collective solidarity that encourages people to support one another in difficult times.

CONCLUSION

Even though the world has faced significant medical emergencies, such as the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, COVID-19 represents a pivotal moment in public health history. This pandemic is unique because it occurred during rapid technological advancements, including the internet and social media, revolutionizing communication. In addition, the speed of modern mass transportation has enabled diseases to cross international borders more swiftly than ever before.

The global economy, now more interconnected than ever, facilitates the quick movement of people, goods, capital, and ideas. This level of interconnectedness has amplified the societal impact of a contagious disease like COVID-19, allowing it to spread across continents and affect millions of lives in weeks. The pandemic has not only overwhelmed health care systems but also exposed critical weaknesses in our ability to manage health risks, injuries, chronic diseases, and mental health issues. The rising number of psychological problems and fatalities resulting from the pandemic has further highlighted these inadequacies.

As we began 2023, the climate felt somewhat more stable compared to the tumultuous previous years; however, we cannot disregard the enduring repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts anticipate that there will be further outbreaks in the coming months, some of which could lead to severe illness and potential fatalities. Such scenarios may necessitate renewed lockdowns, increased social isolation, and a resurgence of various social challenges. To navigate these ongoing threats, we must leverage the insights gained from our experiences during the pandemic. Our strategies must be informed by past lessons to address the challenges ahead effectively. It is essential to recognize that responding to the pandemic and other crises is not solely the responsibility of government entities; it is also a shared obligation that falls upon each of us. Instead of remaining passive and criticizing government measures from the comfort of our homes, we should actively participate in public health. This includes remaining vigilant, following health guidelines, and taking reasonable precautions to protect ourselves and our communities. Doing so can make a meaningful difference in safeguarding our world against current and future challenges.

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