AN UNINTENDED DISEQUILIBRIUM: IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AND LOCKDOWN ON MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND THE STRIVE OF MANKIND

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ABSTRACT

 The crisis caused by the unexpected yet unavoidable emergence of covid-19 pandemic has opened up new areas of discussion as well as of tension. Our very existence is put into question. This pandemic has created a drastic effect on both our physical and mental existence. This paper focuses on the psychological tension, caused by an immediate joblessness, homelessness and disconnectedness from society. All these crises have created an unavoidable stress that impacted our overall well-being. Lockdown, taken as a preventive measure against the pandemic, has confined people to their own lonely selves. Social isolation has caused a vacuum where the integrity of human society seems to collapse. The immediate stress and stigma due to this isolation and confinement have been the major issues of this paper. Loneliness has been the very imminent by-product of this lockdown. People's effort in being creative has been a major means to overcome loneliness. This paper also highlights the possible fruitful ways to get over loneliness. Several real life data and information have been collected to focus on the issue. Another focal point is the deterioration of economy, education, and production etc. due to the impact of covid-19. It has been found that covid-19 has damaged the living condition of all the classes, from rich to poor (mostly hampering the marginal community) to such an extent where they are forced to repent over the situation.

KEYWORDS- *Covid-19, Pandemic, Mental Health, Well-being, Stress, Stigma, Loneliness, Lockdown.*

PANDEMIC & MANKIND

The history of human civilization is abundant with epidemics. If we date back to the history starting from 430 B.C. to till date, mankind has been challenged by disastrous pandemics. When an epidemic crosses its country border and victimizes maximum people, it is called pandemic. 'Pan' suggests universal and 'demic' is derivative of Greek 'Demos', i.e. all people. In that sense the area of pandemic in stretched to the whole world. Covid-19 pandemic takes us into the history of pandemics that affected mankind to great extent. 1350 Black Death took a toll on one third of the world population. In 1665 Great Plague of London devastated the city as well as Europe. Cholera pandemic in 1817 and the third Plague pandemic 1855, 1889 Russian Flu, 1918 Spanish Flu, 1957 Asian Flu, 1918 HIV or AIDS, 2003 SARS and the latest covid-19 pandemic- these all are horrifying instances of the helplessness of humanity". (History, 2020) But different from other pandemics, the dimension of covid-19 is so large that almost no one is free from the unavoidable impacts of it. Besides taking a high toll on human lives, Covid-19 pandemic exempted almost nothing and no one. Human lives, economy, both physical and mental health, overall well-being and every sector of society that support humankind tended to collapse. An irreconcilable crisis caused imminently, has put humanity into many challenges. The immediate joblessness, homelessness, helplessness as well as disconnectedness from society are the major unintended consequences of the pandemic. This loss is beyond compensation. Lockdown adopted as a preventive measure to break the chain of transmission rolled out as having impacted the overall condition of human being. Human being has been initially locked into home which created an undesired distance from society. The increasing loneliness of the people started to affect the physical and mental existence of one.

Our overall well-being is an accumulation of both physical and mental calmness. Imbalance in any of the two unquestionably arises imbalance in the well-being. In our modern living, life is conditioned by many dominant factors. Our position in life, job, family & social network, prospects of future and daily life

hazards- all determine our overall physical and mental stability. Any unintended and undesired addition to life or subtraction from life instigates imbalance of which stress is the immediate outcome. Stressors that are inculcated into our daily actions worsen life and living. A prolonged stress may result in stigma.

The long-term lockdown, initially implemented, adversely gave birth to confinement, loneliness, joblessness for many & disconnectedness. The social chain of mankind was withheld in order to dismantle the transmission chain of covid-19. Lockdown and loneliness become synonymous. Man's social position has been continuously put into question.

With the rapid modernization of human life, stress has occupied a dominant place in the very bosom of our daily life. Any challenge that is beyond solution and beyond coping abilities arises stress. Psychology defines stress in diverse ways. Stress has a direct reflection on our personality, emotion and both on physical and mental wellness. The agent which produces stress is called stressor. Some stresses are naturally attached to a modern living while some other are forcefully added. The binary elements like job and joblessness, home and homelessness, association as well as dissociation produce stress. Covid-19 lockdown has introduced some unavoidable circumstances which have direct bearing on physical and mental health. The concept of mental health evokes two ideas- 'mental' & 'health'. "Mental health is the level of psychological well-being or an absence of mental illness. It is the state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral adjustment…mental health may include an individual's ability to enjoy life and create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience". (Mental Health)So, mental health is a way of living peacefully with the other members of the society. With the sudden and abrupt emergence of Covid-19 and lockdown, taken as an effective measure, this mental stability has collapsed. A restlessness and despair pervaded the mind. The overall well-being is shaken. Naturally, man's ability to cope with stress has decreased. The normal functioning to deal with the challenges as been restricted. With the breakdown of global economy, several grave problems came to forefront. Unemployment rose from 7% (March) to 27% (May). People who lost jobs had to adopt alternative income source. Major companies had to count loss. Stock markets incurred a huge loss. These all have impacted life at a direct-level. The condition of the marginalized worsened, death for them became an easier choice. The whole mankind had been stigmatized.

Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on the stress, stigma and the imbalance of mental health along with the possible measures, which may be taken to get rid of primary loneliness. The loneliness may be directed towards solitude which is creative and fruitful. Psychological remedies discussed in this paper may add meaning to human life and existence.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researches have been done on the issue of covid-19 pandemic and its immediate effect on physical and mental well being. Many researchers with real-life data have attempted writing on the issue of stress, stigma that has a direct connection with Covid-19. Leia Y Saltzman in "Loneliness, Isolation and Social Support Factors in Post-Covid19 Mental Health" discusses the potential impact of covid-19 on loneliness and well-being. Emphasis has been given on societal support, psychological skills that may help in psychological recovery.

Lambert Zixin Li, Senhu Wang in "Prevalence and Predictors of General Psychiatric Disorders and Loneliness during Covid-19 in the United Kingdom" investigate the prevalence and predictors of psychological disorders.

METHODOLOGY

The study with some real life incidents, happened during the period of covid-19 pandemic investigates into the primary cause of stress and imbalance in mental order. The overall impact of covid-19 on human life has been discussed here. This study focuses on the connection between loneliness and lockdown. The possible ways of reducing stress and channelizing loneliness towards solitude have been discussed in this study.

PANDEMIC AND STRESS

Whenever the natural flow of life is challenged, it produces stress. Stress is an outcome of the immense overload of work, man's inability to cope with difficulty. Everyone is tagged with stress but in his or her own way. People have diverse reactions to challenges in life. Covid-19has given birth to a collective stress. The stressors that are behind stress cause disequilibrium in body as well as in mind, which deters well being. One's well-being consists of both physical and mental stance.

Covid-19 pandemic has forcefully imbalanced the current of life by instilling stressors into life. With the continuous threat of getting affected by covid-19, men's mental stability is randomly oscillating. The global economy collapsed. For many, source of income was choked. Hardly finding any alternative way, people had to starve. The immediate joblessness and

homelessness for many created an extra burden on life. Production stopped. An acute deficiency of food was created. The daily laborers had to pay much to supply food to the family. Survival in this crisis became a challenge.

FACTORS CONDITIONING STRESS DURING PANDEMIC

The sudden and unprecedented inclusion of pandemic triggered stresses. Having no vaccine currently available, the uncertainty of a future regular life, the immense failures of resilience are directly linked to stress. This continued stress impinges us with stigma. Below are some of the primary concerns related to stress and stigma. Inclusion of stress emerging from various factors directly imbalances wellbeing. Strive of mankind is noticeable here too.

JOBLESSNESS

Owing to a huge loss incurred to many private sectors, most people became jobless. "According to the data from the centre for monitoring Indian Economy, India's overall unemployment rate for the month of July stood at 7.43%, down from nearly 24% during the month of April. (Nalapat, 9) Joblessness and the loss of job both are serious cause of stress. The loss of income source actually refers to getting deprived of healthy living. The balance of mental health is completely disrupted. Distress and anxiety become very normal and common to all. Attempt of suicides rose unexpectedly. "According to WHO, one suicide carries 20 suicide attempts behind it". (Health topic/ sucide prevention, 2020) The unexpected rise of unemployment naturally triggered Suicide cases. "The downsizing of the economy and the focus of the medical system on the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to unintended long-term problems for a vulnerable group on the fringes of society**.** (Kawohl&KarlosNordt, May, 2020)Covid-19 pandemic affected the society at a base level.

HOMELESSNESS

Man, when rooted out of his comfort zone feels at sea. His alien existence is a threat for himself. He feels to be disconnected and isolated from society. With the emergence of covid-19, man's social position has been threatened. The migrant workers are the worst sufferers. With the shutdown of factories and workplaces for the implementation of lockdown, their lives were challenged with starvation, homelessness, denial of medical care, leading to suicide even. Life got stranded. "Due to lockdown, more than 300 deaths were reported till 5th May, with the reasons ranging

from starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care. On 8th may, 16 migrant workers lost their lives as they were crushed to pieces when they had stopped to rest after the long walk on railway tracks near Aurangabad in Maharashtra". (Indian_migrant_workers_during_the_COVID-19_pandemic) As of 2nd June, 198 migrant workers were feared killed in road accident, according to the data collected by SaveLIFE Foundation. (About two hundred workers lost lives in road accidents: savelife foundation)This unprecedented homelessness triggered the rate of unemployment. Again, the stressful situation arose when they were not accepted in the native places due to the fear of spreading infection. Either they were harassed or edged. The loss of job imposed on social isolation almost created a stigmatized existence. Another thing is that "When a family of more than 10 struggles to find accommodation in a limited area on the streets, it is but fanciful to mention social distancing." (Bhattacharya, 2020)

DISCONNECTEDNESS AND DISEQUILIBRIUM

Social isolation becomes social disconnection. One's initial existence becomes meaningful not in a solution but in connection with the other members of the society. The social distancing and isolation, followed to check the further transmission produced a new epidemic called "Loneliness epidemic". We entered a period of social pain. The people who have pre-existing mental illness suffered the most due to social isolation. Old people who are mostly dependent on other members lost their meaning of life. This abrupt disconnectedness created disequilibrium, a state of mental disorder inside. The stress produced due to this detachment is beyond recovery. Man has become alien in his own society. The fears of contagion automatically produce distance from others. Staying safe from infection rolled out with another contrary definition- infected with disconnection, with loneliness.

STRESS AMONG THE FRONTLINE WORKERS

The depression and anxiety related to the job of the front line workers are most noticeable. Their job is almost like belling the cat. Dealing with the Covid-19 patients under immense pressure and constant threat, the fear of contagion, overload of work, and the unnatural appearance of the virus the never faced before, all are enough to imbalance the mental stability. The risk of infection, separation from family, lack of social support, absence of proper medical facility- these

things disrupted the concept of mental well being, sometimes leaving a long term mental disorder. Unlike other front line workers, viz. Police, Food supply officials, the health workers are more likely to experience psychological imbalance, a mental disequilibrium, increased level of anxiety, insomnia, and depression and sometimes a prolonged mental disorder too. The sacrifice they are making for the larger human civilization sometimes layers stress, fear and terror inside. Many had to pay their life for greater cause. This triggers the vulnerability to mental stress. The lack of social support in some cases intensified the prolonged trauma. In some areas, doctors and nurses were not allowed for the fear of contagion. This societal separation detached them from the flow of mankind. It needs to be addressed positively.
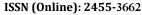
STIGMA AND COVID-19

"Social stigma, in the context of health, is the negative association related to people or a group who have a specific disease in common. In an epidemic, this may mean that people are labeled, stereotyped, and discriminated against because of a perceived link to the epidemic. This is even more true when dealing with a highly contagious disease. This can have a negative effect on those affected by the virus and on the work of HCWs". (Phelan, 2001)The discrimination and stigmatization of people on the basis of caste, creed, and religion is not new. The outbreak of covid-19 initiated fear anxiety and depression among people which ultimately led them to labeling people. The front line workers who are in the direct management of covid-19 are mostly labeled. The fear of contagion, the lack of adequate information, fake information circulated through social media created an immediate stigma. Besides the frontline workers who are discriminated and stereotyped for their direct exposure to the disease, the patient and the quarantined people, even their families are facing stigma and discrimination. Covid-19 has pervaded a stigmatize existence and it needs to be addressed. The effect of the stigma and discrimination mostly led people concealing symptoms, avoiding medical care. People fear to home quarantined. The stigma attached with this pandemic threatens self-esteem and confidence. With the increasing number of unreported cases as a result of emotional isolation, feeling of guilt, anxiety, Covid-19 management becomes harder. According to the statement made by Puja Hati, a nurse at Khatra Hospital, Bankura that unlike other diseases, the presence of terror is very much among the people when it is the matter of Covid-19. Doctors and nurses were refused rent due to the fear of contagion. They faced lots of hardships. They were

denied shelter. These all happened because of the primary labeling and stereotyping. Even they were stigmatized nonetheless they worked as warriors. She felt isolated too for her distance from family, relatives. This had a direct impact on the mental happiness. Peace and relaxation of mind became almost an imagination.

The community collapsed. The prejudice against people and certain groups of people culminated into increased hostility and unnecessary social disruptions. People made the choice to remain safe by cutting away from larger society. On the other hand, stigma triggered the feeling of isolation, leading to the imbalance in mental stability. Patients with health workers and other front line workers got loaded with unnecessary stress, as their existence seemed alien to the other members of the society. The concept of wellbeing disrupted, sometimes leading the stigmatized people to end the lives.

LONELINESS AND LOCKDOWN

Loneliness which is a subjective experience triggers imbalance in mental health. A prolonged state of isolation and disconnectedness may instill loneliness. Remaining safe from infection had a detrimental effect on the overall well-being as it made people lonely. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly halted the modern society disrupting the social interaction. Loneliness for people gave birth to boredom, sometimes triggering inter-personal violence and irritation of mind. Forcing the mind into stagnant situation, it has increased vulnerability to depression, anxiety and other mental disorders. Man's productivity has been forcefully put into challenge. Experience of people regarding loneliness happens at different level. Covid-19 situation has altered the definition of loneliness. Loneliness is basically a void filled with terror, depression. When man fails to fix his own identity in the great human civilization, it brings out loneliness. The wholesomeness of living is torn into pieces. The effect is rather deeper on the aged persons. Their dependence on other members is challenged when the natural amalgamation of people got choked due to lockdown. Man's strive to get rid of this loneliness is also noticeable. Weather the loneliness or lockdown- both are imposed- two external factors conditioning life, men strived hard to get over loneliness, by following creative methods. For most of the poor, old people, this was a life-choking experience as there was less exposure to communication and social interaction.

LONELINESS TO SOLITUDE

Loneliness which is a personal void, filled with anxiety, fear, and the sense of disconnection can be channelized into solitude which is a creative faculty. The great works of art in literature are the products of experience of solitude. Solitude increases the sense of integrity. While the greater numbers of people inhabit loneliness, solitude may fill them with an increased sense of social connection. One's ability to be at peace with oneself is the ultimate solution to the feeling of loneliness. The long-forgotten hobbies, creative works, neglected passions may be practiced again to channelize loneliness into solitude. Though the intensity of covid-19 is vast enough, disaster in the history of humanity is not a new one. The immediate loneliness has a solution in the domain of solitude where men will find the meaning of life and enjoy the aloofness.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

The impact of Covid-19 is so large that it has spared almost no one, deteriorating his or her overall well being. The older persons are mostly victimized. With the heavy toll of lives, Covid-19 pandemic has dismantled the order of the society, physical and mental well being. Spending more time with family, staying away from the maze of misinformation circulated through social media, taking care of infected and old persons may add to the good of the human community. It is the joint and collective strive of mankind that will help cure the detrimental effect. Maintaining the Government orders and instructions, people may remain connected through audio, video calls and other possible ways. Emotional support is very crucial in this time. Giving proper respect to the sacrifices of the frontline workers and reconsideration of human being as a part of greater community by staying away from any kind of stigmatization, labeling and stereotyping will definitely help overcome the harsh experience of Covid-19 pandemic.

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