

COVID -19 Pandemic Lockdown and its Impact on Socio-economic Life of Private Sector and Self-employed Job Holders in Kathmandu

Chet Narayan Acharya¹

Abstract

Coronavirus Disease (CoviD-19), which was first appeared in Huan province China in December 2019, has reached all over the world and become a pandemic. On 30th January 2020, World Health Organization has acknowledged this first outbreak of novel coronavirus as a public health emergency of global concern. To respond this pandemic, Government of Nepal has implemented mandatory preventive strategies such as two phase lockdowns, encouraging people to implement social distancing, self-isolation, travel restrictions and reduce physically close interactions between people. But then again, it has severely affected the socio-economic life. Schools/colleges have closed down, businesses have halted, employment and income have gone upset, the aggregate demand in the economy has decreased, people are getting afraid to be close, visits have stopped, and interactions are limited in virtual connection. This has creating socio-economic shocks at domestic and global level and exposing structural inequalities. It has also flashed fears of global economic crisis and recession. This paper aims examining and seeing the sights of lockdown and social isolation on the socioeconomic life of self-employed business and private sectors job holders in Kathmandu valley through online survey. The paper tries to identify the consequences of lockdown in terms of employment, income, health, education, and food security.

Keywords: COVID-19, Socioeconomic impact, Kathmandu Valley, Self-employed business and private sector jobs

1. Introduction

The year 2019 has passed and 2020 has begun with the corona virus world pandemic from the Wuhan city China during the Chinese festival Lunar New Year where millions of people were going home for the holidays. In the Chinese city Wuhan, thousands of people were dancing around on rubber floats and cheering along to a music festival. It was the scene of weekend in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where Covid-19 first appeared in December 2019. After that, within the first two months of New Year 2020, it has blowout all over the world and appeared as the big challenge to the human civilization and modern global societies. The United Nation has marked that the corona virus pandemic as the biggest human crisis after the world war II (Bajracharya et al., 2020).

The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission (WMHC) Wuhan City, Hubei province, China, has reported twenty seven pneumonia cases (including seven severe cases) of unknown aetiology in Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, a wholesale fish and live animal market on 31st December 2019 (WCHC, 2020). Among the cases, the symptoms of high fever, dry cough and dyspnea had been noticed. Immediately, the market has been set closed down on 1st January 2020 and few samples were tested in Radiological lab and the findings showed bilateral lung infiltrates (ECDC, 2020). On 9th January 2020, China Center for Diseases Prevention and Control reported that a novel coronavirus (later named SARS-

¹Research Director, Academy of Innovation for Economic Development, Nepal
Email: ozone55chetan@gmail.com

CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19) had been identified as the causative agent for 15 of the 59 cases of pneumonia (News Xinhua, 2020).

On 10th January 2020, the first novel coronavirus genome sequence was made publicly available (Holmes E, 2020). From the 20th January 2020, reports of confirmed cases of COVID -19 were started to disclose from the countries outside China: South Korea, Japan and Thailand (WHO, 2020). These cases had been passing on from China. On 23rd January 2020, Wuhan City was locked down – with all travel in and out of Wuhan prohibited –and movement inside the city was banned (Du et al., 2020). Since then, the cases were started to be spread in other parts of the world and conformed cases of COVID-19 were started to be appeared rapidly. The first European case was reported from France on 24th January 2020. This case had a travel history to China (SPF, 2020). In Germany, cases were reported on 28th January, related to a person visiting from China (BSfGuP, 2020).

On 30th January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared this first outbreak of novel coronavirus a “public health emergency of international concern” (WHO, 2020). During the following weeks, several countries implemented entry screening measures for arriving passengers from China Phelan A, Katz R, and Gostin L., 2020). Soon, several major airlines cancelled their flights from and to China (Chinazzi, M. and et. al, 2020). Within the very few following days, cases were reported from several other regions. Transmission appeared to have occurred locally, in contrast to first-generation transmission from people returning from affected areas. Transmission events were also reported from hospitals, with COVID-19 cases identified among healthcare workers and patients (ECDC, 2020).

During the following week, several European countries reported cases of COVID-19 in travellers from the affected areas in Italy, China or other countries with ongoing transmission (ECDC, 2020). On 8th March 2020, the government of Italy has declared to implement strict public health measures including social distancing starting first in the most affected regions. On 11th March 2020, the government has extended these measures at national level. Following Italy, Spain, France and many other European countries started similar public health measures (Ministero Della Salute, 2020). On the same day, the Director General of the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (WHO Director-General's opening remarks, 2020).

As soon as the Covid-19 epidemic broke out in neighbouring China and other countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that Nepal is at high risk for possible infection. To reduce the risk of COVID-19 and possible infections, the Government of Nepal had set up a high-level Covid crisis management center. Nepal Government started its full lockdown on 24th March 2020, and currently it has extended its lockdown until 14 June (GoN; Ministry of Health and Population, 2020). Similarly, on August 18, the Government of Nepal announced a second phase of the lockdown implemented as a public health measure to slowdown the spread of COVID-19. The strict lockdown has been criticized by many and has been the cause for many deaths not related to COVID-19 (Nepali Times, 2020).

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health and Population, total 2, 33,452 people infected with Covid-19 in Nepal as of November 30, 2020 and 2,145,214 have recovered after treatment. They have returned home and death has record reached to 1508. According to the statistics, by that date 535 have been placed in quarantine in different districts and 17,423 people have been kept in isolation.

The current global outbreak of the corona virus has adversely affected and created the global economic downturn. Moreover, in least developed countries like Nepal COVID-19 pandemic and long lock-down period has added more complexities and deepened more the vicious cycle of poverty. This paper aims at exploring the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and continuous lockdown period on the self-employed businesses and private sector job holders in Kathmandu valley. This paper aims at accessing and highlighting the impact of lockdowns in Kathmandu valley from socio-economic point of view.

2. Literature Review

There are many academic literatures about the socio-economic disturbances and costs caused by COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The economic slump caused by COVID-19 increases the socio-economic disparities such as economic instability, health inequalities and social disparities in Nepal, which can have a huge impact on the poverty levels. Specially, the lockdown has affected small traders, self-employed small scale informal businesses and private sector job holders are more vulnerable. Some of the important and notable literatures about socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 pandemic are mentioned as follows:

People all around the globe were forced to adopt social distancing practices in order to minimize the risk to health and financial cost (Makris, 2020). Rigorous social distancing measures tend to be implemented in countries with a greater proportion of elderly residents, a higher population density, a greater proportion of employees working in vulnerable occupations, international travel, etc. (Jinjarak et al., 2020). According to the World Bank (2020a), the COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth in 161 countries to be out of school. Similarly, parents have experience increased pressure to work from home, to keep their work running and to take care of schooling children at home at the same time, while caregiver resources including grandparents and the wider family have been restricted (Fegert et al., 2020).

Lockdown is seriously affecting the education calendar. Examinations are either cancelled or postponed due to the lockdown. Choudhary et al. (2022) found that the educational institutions have been closed since March and they do not seem to resume soon. The online services are not found to be effective and less used and low access to internet services and poor technological know-how also matters in learning achievements The online education system for young kids has been reported adding extra burden upon the parents while many teachers in many private (Online Khabar, 2020). The socio-economic consequences of the pandemic on livelihoods across Nepal is expected to be the most serious for informal sector workers are more at risk of falling into extreme poverty (World Bank Report, 2021).

According to Kathmandu Post (2020), the pandemic lock down has resulted the problems of domestic violence in society. There were 176 cases of violence against women and girls in just 18 districts since the lockdown began on 24 March up to 1 May 2021, and this is expected to raise the nationwide annual average of cases of domestic violence this year (The Nepali Times, 2021). Violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified globally since the COVID-19 outbreak. A UN Report 2021, estimated that during the lockdown gender-based violence cases were found worldwide.

A report published by UNICEF (2020b) shows that the lockdown has discouraged people and leads to some mental health issues such as fatigue, stress and other mental distress. The pandemic-related

restrictions such as spatial distancing, isolation and home quarantine, are impacting on economic sustainability and wellbeing, which may induce psychological mediators such as sadness, worry, fear, anger, annoyance, frustration, guilt, helplessness, loneliness and nervousness (Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2020). In the first month of the nationwide lockdown, a total of 487 people committed suicide, which is 20% more compared with mid-February to mid-March, when the number stood at 410 (My Republica, 2020b). The data compiled by Nepal Police shows that, from the onset of lockdown, 23 March till 6 June, a total of 1,227 suicide cases were reported, which is seriously high compared to the previous year (The Kathmandu Post, 2020).

3. Research Method

The study is conducted on Kathmandu valley including three districts Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur grounded on interpretative paradigm of research approach. A closed observation, case reviews, and micro level survey had been conducted to diagnose the impact of COVID -19 pandemic lockdown and its impact on socio-economic life of private sector and self-employed job holders in Kathmandu valley. The prospective respondents were divided into two groups: formal sector and informal sector. Formal sector includes the respondents representing private sector school/college, health care, banking and finance. Similarly, informal sector includes the respondents representing hotel and restaurant, transportation, construction, film line, beauty salon, hair cut saloon, street vendors, vegetable and fruits sellers, groceries, farm house owners and workers, brick factory labours, motor cycle repairs, and street food vendors. A structured questionnaire had been prepared and convenient and cluster samplings had been used with the intention of interviewing with personal interview with the 483 prospective samples respondents on cluster and convenient basis. For respondents belonging to formal sector were surveyed through online survey using Google docs. Respondents representing informal sector surveyed through both face to face interview and Google docs' surveys. Also, a focus group discussion was conducted among small scale self-employment business entrepreneurs and other prospective respondents. The respondents above 20 years are included in the survey. Social media net workings and phone calls were used to make the questionnaire available to more prospective respondents. Furthermore; various newspapers, online portals, WTO update reports, MoH update reports, and different organizational publications and reports have also been used as the secondary source of information for interpretative analysis. Factual enquiry and interpretative approach were used to analyze the data.

In order to maintain validity and reliability of this study, the truthfulness of finding was confirmed through pilot testing approach. For this strategy, again convenient sampling had been employed and 25 respondents representing formal and informal sectors were interviewed. The result of the study is based on the responses given by the participating respondents. The survey has been conducted during 26th September to 3rd November 2021.

4. Results and Analysis

A total of 483 people belonging to private sector jobs and self-employed businesses on Kathmandu valley including Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts were surveyed to assess the impact of Covid-19 lock-down and socioeconomic life. The study was conducted through online process and field survey. Targeting the self-employed and private sector jobholders in Kathmandu valley, the survey was

conducted during around two months. Survey results and analysis of the impact have been presented as follows:

4.1 Respondent's Profile

In this study the surveyed respondents are categorized into formal sector (i.e. School/College, banking and finance and health care) and informal sector (i.e. hotel and restaurant, transportation, construction, entertainment, beauty salon, hair cut salon, groceries, street food venders, vegetable and fruit sellers, farm house, motor cycle repairs, carpenters, metal tool workers, and brick factory workers) where, 39% belong to formal sector and rests to informal sector. 45% respondents were from Kathmandu, 28% from Bhaktapur and 27% were from Lalitpur districts. Out of 483 respondents, 59% respondents were males and rests were females.

Out of total respondents belonging to different age group (i.e. Age (in Years): Below 20, 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60 and 60 above); about two-thirds (74 percent) of respondents aged under 60 and rest above 60 years. Respondents were required to be at least 20 years of age for the participation in the survey. The survey was conducted among only the literate people having qualification below SEE/SLC to PhD and the majority was occupied by Master's degree.

Of the total respondents, 50 percent said they lived in rented house, 30% in their own homes and rests lived in hostel, and office quarter/shelter during the lock-down period. About one third of the respondents (about 33 percent) said that employment as the main source of income while 25 percent said that self-employed business as the main source of income. 21 percent respondents said house rent as their main source of income and rests said pension, remittance and daily wage as their main sources of income.

4.2 Status and Source of Information about Covid-19

Of total respondents surveyed, around 71 percent seem to be aware, 26 percent said that they seem to be little aware and 3 percent of respondents do not seem to know about Covid-19 and its symptoms. Of the total 483 respondents, around 57 percent said the social media and online news portals were the main source of information about Covid-19. Facebook, Tweeter, Viber and online news seems to be used. Similarly, around 27 percent respondents have said Radio and television as the main source of information and rest said that newspapers, friends, relatives and neighbors as the main source of information.

4.3 Impact on Employment and Income

More than two third (i.e. around 73 percent) respondents said that employment was the main source of income while 16.8 percent said that it was their self-employed business. The daily wage earners around 5 percent and 4.5 percent said that their main source of income is pension.

The terrible fact behind the continuous lockdown is that that 25 respondents responded for lay off and around 37 percent responded for salary cut during the lockdown. Similarly 12 percent respondents responded for leave without pay and 12 % were forced from their employers to resign from their jobs. Around 19 percent respondents responded for loss of self-employed business and work. More than half (54.7 percent) of respondents responded to the ban imposed due to the Covid-19 epidemic. 90 percent participants have responded that they did not get any pandemic allowance from local government, central

government and other responsible bodies. Only 3 percent respondents have said that they did not get any pandemic allowance but got their salary in advance.

According to the report, the income has dropped significantly. Only 8 percent employees have got their regular salary. 52 percent employees have got partial salary and 40 percent are not getting their salary until the preparation of this report. Out of the 353 private jobholder respondents surveyed, only 9 percent employees have not received their salary since one month. Similarly, 13 percent since 2 months, 18 percent since three months, 12 percent since 4 months, 22 percent since 5 months and 26 percent are not getting their salary since six months.

Due to 19, the income of only around 16 percent of the respondents seems to have had a normal effect and rest of the respondents have reported that they have had adverse effects on their employment and income.

4.4 Expenditure Management During Lockdown

Out of a total of total 483 respondents, 58 percent belonging to informal sector job and business. Among them only 13 percent were managing their regular expenses from their regular income. But around 56 percent were managing from past saving and 24 percent were managing from borrowing loan. The daily wage earners were affected severely and they had to wait for relieve package for daily food. They said that no support from government and only dependent on free food distribution campaign by social activists and clubs.

4.5 Family Problems During Pandemic

According to survey, majority of the respondents, (around 62 percent) said that they were facing the problem in buying daily necessities, regular health checkup, caring elderly and sick family members and medication during the lockdown. Some of them reported that mental problems and suicide cases were seen in the families. Some of the Covid-19 patients have also committed suicide. Societal separation and deprivation, lack of intimacy and lovingness, fear, and mental terror have been reported in the survey as the cause of suicides. Of total respondents around 15 percent said that they were suffered from domestic conflict and violence in the family.

Due to the two phase's lockdown, majority of the rent payer respondents were found to be unable to pay rent which created turbulence with house owner. Similarly, economic transactions slowed down and stopped and businesses were closed completely. There also the issue of house rent clash with owners has found. Halt in business and income are easily assumed to be the causes of family problems, violence, and other tussles.

4.6 Problems in Teaching and Learning Activities

Out of 483 respondents, around 78 percent of the respondents have students in their family and around 46 percent had online study. It is seen that study of 38.0 percent of the students was totally halted. Around 31 percent were taking Television and Radio classes during lockdown. However, the online, television, and radio classes were not found to be effective.

Of 483 respondents, around 12 percent respondents were school/college teachers. Among them, almost were taking regular online classes to their students. According to teachers, number of participants was

only almost half than their physical classes. This also, shows that school/college students were significantly affected during lockdown period.

4.7 Effects on Children, Adolescents and Maternity Services

As the lockdown began, all the schools were halted, and children were bound to spend their time at home. Similarly college students (adolescents) have found themselves stressed because of the postponement of higher secondary level/ university level exams because of the uncertainty of the further study and career ahead.

According to Ministry of Health, government of Nepal, the percentage of births attended by skilled birth attendants in Nepal before the pandemic was only 58 percent. As lockdown began, the proportion has fallen significantly during this lockdown as pregnant women were facing more barriers to accessing maternal health care facilities. Also, due to fallen in income and transportation, they were deprived from the consumption of nutritious food and fruits. The maternity services have been obstructed during this lockdown and there has been a lack of transportation services.

4.8 Impacts on Supply Management

As the lockdown started, obstacles on supply management including shortage of medicine and food supply begun in Kathmandu and major cities. Similarly, impacts on farming including both production and sale also begun. The big issue for farmers is not production but means of selling their goods. In Kathmandu people quarantined in their houses were encountered with shortage and on the other fruits and vegetables begun to rotten in the field of farmers and storages.

4.9 Estimated Time to Return to Normal Life and Priority after Lockdown

According to the answers given by 483 respondents, 32 percent of the respondents opined that it takes around six months, 47 percent said one year and rest have expressed ignorance in this regard to return to normal daily life after the lockdown. According to the expert's opinion pull session, experts are expressing the opinion that it may take at least two years for the daily life to return to normal situation and some of them said it may recover within six months.

When asked about lockdown post-closure priorities, around 25 percent respondents said to return and continue the existing job/business. Similarly, around 19 percent said that they will change the current job/business and will go village to start commercial agriculture. Some of them around 19 percent said they will go abroad. Likewise, around 14 percent have said their existing job/business has gone and will search similar kind of job/business.

4.10 Positive Aspects of Lockdown

During the survey, questions were also asked about the positive aspects of the lockdown. The respondents were allowed to choose more than one options in this category. 48 percent response was given that the family intimacy and closure has improved during the lockdown. Similarly, 17 percent response was given in health awareness has increased, 12 percent response for the environmental improvement, 13 percent response for learning in performing household works, 7 percent response for increasing book reading habit.

5. Finding and Conclusion

Continuous countrywide lockdown adversely affected socioeconomic life of self-employed and private sector jobholders in Kathmandu. Multidimensional impacts of lockdown have been found in the city such as loss of jobs and businesses along with other some health issues. It disrupted all the economics activities shut down many informal sector and small self-employed enterprises and contributed to further poverty situation in the city. It disrupted the supply chain system and shut many informal and small businesses specially vegetables, fruits, milk, meat, and other essential goods.

The lockdown has disrupted healthcare services, particularly emergency treatments and regular health checkup services. Mental health issues have found at the individual level during the lockdown period. Lack of proper awareness; quarantine, social isolation, travel restrictions and restrictions on physical interactions had negatively affected the mental health of people. Some of the mental health issues are noticed as stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia among the people. Due to continuous lockdown, some of the suicide cases have also been found. The uncertainty about the pandemic, social distancing, travel pauses, self-isolation and loss of jobs, business stresses, financial burden, loss of family members etc. are found to be the reasons for suicide and suicidal thoughts. In addition to suicide, some of the domestic and social violence, sexual harassments, abuse, etc. are also found during the lockdown.

COVID-19 pandemic has caused many students to be out of school/college from primary level to university level. Due to long and unprecedented lockdown, most parents have worries about child's education and their future due to restrictions on physical mode of education and halt of schools and colleges for uncertain time. Virtual way of education became only the way for the teaching learning process, which has additionally burdened parents with internet fees. Therefore, for many parents with low daily wages were compelled to compromise with the new mode of education of their children.

The global threat of Covid-19 pandemic has affected several aspects of socio-economic life of the global people. It has troubled the workforces, transportation systems, supply chains, food security, education system, socio-economic systems and health priorities around the globe. This is a threat for all economies around the globe to be alert form new economic recession and demanding a strong and visionary leadership in healthcare, business, government sectors. Immediate relief packages need to be borrowed and implemented for all victims. Medium term and longer term economic planning including sector by sector plans with strong commitment is needed to re-balance and re-energize the economy from this global crisis. People belonging to private sector jobs and self-employed business should be encouraged for entrepreneurship development. Despite the continuous efforts and resulting progress toward preparing for and alleviating the impact of COVID-19, the efforts have becoming more challenging in the health system and millions of lives around the world.

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Annex: Survey Data





