

## Examining the Community Services in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic, Testing the Role of Social Workers as a Moderating Variable: A Case Study of Pakistan

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### Abstract

*The COVID-19 outbreak was experienced first time in China, Wuhan city at the end of 2019, December. The virus was rapidly spread in China and then globally in 209 countries including Italy, America, Australia, Europe, and Asia that also includes Pakistan. The mortalities are more than 50,000 and above 1,000,000 individuals have been exposed to coronavirus across the world. Even with insufficient resources Pakistan has also taken various measures, i.e. Laboratories for testing, established special hospitals, quarantine services, lockdown, awareness campaigns, and helplines to control the transmission. In this paper, I have highlighted the community services and role of active social workers in response to this deadly infection. The results suggests that there is need of more community services, i.e. isolation wards, hospitals, quarantine in home setting environment, availability of prevention equipment's and so on. In addition, the social workers have showed a great support to vulnerable groups in their communities.*

**Keywords:** Government, COVID-19, community services, social work, current scenario, facilitations

### Introduction

The coronavirus (Aka COVID-19) pandemic refers to the health crisis of recent times and greatest challenge that countries are facing across the world. The outbreak of COVID-19 wasn't new to the world. It was presented in year 1960. The coronavirus caused lower and upper respiratory issues in human and was referred as SARS – severe acute respiratory syndrome. However, the first occurrence of coronavirus related infection was identified in 2002-2003, which affected 29 Asian countries, South and North America, and Europe. Approximately 8,000 cases were recognized with 9.5% mortalities (Kahn, J. S., & McIntosh, K, 2005). Researches were carried out in year 2010-15 that exposed that corona infection was found in humans as well as animals. Even though it was deadly, but until now no vaccine was discovered. Thus, preventive strategies were recommended against corona outbreak, for instance, changing eating habits, surveillances and monitoring (Graham, R. L., Donaldson, E. F., & Baric, R. S., 2013). In 2007, a comprehensive research was conducted about viral infectious diseases in Pakistan. Nonetheless, it was recommended that Pakistan is facing many crises, for instance, earth quake, and flood, epidemic of several viral infections (i.e. Dengue, Polio, and hepatitis). Therefore, the government of Pakistan is essential to go for inclusive health regulations of preventive in nature (Khalil, et al, 2017).

Quarantine is one of the historical preventative strategies and plays a central role in prevention of pandemic and epidemic. It simply refers to the isolation of vulnerable groups or suspected patients for specific period of time (Manuell, M. E., & Cukor, J., 2011). During this quarantine, if an individual present symptoms of a particular illness, s/he is shifted to hospital for medical treatment. If the person presented no related symptoms, s/he is set out of isolation (Benjamin, G. C., Stratton, K., & Sivitz, L. B., 2006). However, the time period of quarantine is different for diverse diseases. The incubation period of corona is fourteen days and was recommended as isolation period of corona infection (Fielding, et al. 2015, Backer, et al., 2019).

Recently, in 2019 at the end of December the corona outbreak has been observed and officials of public health from China notified the WHO – World health organization that they had an issue, a mysterious new virus was resulting in pneumonia-like sickness in the Wuhan city. They determined quickly that the infection was due to coronavirus and that it was transmitting rapidly throughout and outside of city.

However, scientists believe that this new infection primarily became capable to transmitting to human beings at the beginning of December. It first seemed like virus infected population at a seafood marketplace in Wuhan and transmitted from there. Although one investigation of early corona positive cases, published

in January, 24<sup>th</sup> discovered that the first patient to get affected didn't have any contact with seafood market. Still the experts are trying to trace the occurrence back to its root. However, the virus was originated in China, Wuhan, but now this pandemic has transmitted across the globe, causing severe losses and rate of mortality and morbidity is inclining with the rapid pace. The governments of susceptible countries are taking aggressive initiatives in order to slow down the spread of virus, i.e. slowing down the transport, shutting down SME's and large corporations, and even suspending the public get-togethers. Nations across the world are racing to lower down the transmission through testing and also treating the patients, conducting

contact tracing, quarantining the people, and banning large gathering places, for example, schools, sporting events, and concerts.

This disease is moving same as wave – one that may yet crash on those least capable to combat.

This paper aims to examine the community services in response to COVID-19 pandemic, considering the moderating role of social workers in Pakistan. The country that is highly at risk and rate of corona positive cases is increasing day by day. Thus, in this paper the factors will be determined that are causing quick transmission of coronavirus among people, followed by large groups and communities. The interventions used by social workers in response to this pandemic and to analyse the community services available to help poor and vulnerable populations.

### **Literature Review**

On 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Pakistan in port-city of Karachi. After that, many cases have increased to thousand digits. On 13<sup>th</sup> March, a nationwide response was announced by federal government, including the closing borders with Afghanistan and Iran, prohibiting the large social gatherings, and closing down schools across the nation. After ten day, the Sindh province went into strict lockdown for 15 day, whereas, Punjab was likely to do so partial lockdown starting from 24<sup>th</sup> of March.

The military was called to assist governments at provincial levels, if needed, in the execution of severe measures for dealing with the transmission of virus. Nonetheless, with developing situation, the main concern of Pakistan's government would be to balance the needs of public health with COVID-19 stress places already on its susceptible economy. The response of Pakistan to corona has emerged from late January, when decision for evacuation of 500 Pakistani students from China, Wuhan was taken, the epicentre of COVID-19 pandemic, owing to the concerns with respect to community spread and potentially the lack of its public-health system for dealing with such a deadly infection. Besides, in mid of February the situations changed, when its south-western neighbouring country Iran revealed a mass outbreak COVID-19. Thousands of Pakistani residents visit Iran every month for religious tourism or business. Also, Tehran is struggling to respond the transmission of this virus, the Pakistani tourists began coming back home through overland or air routes. Therefore, Islamabad city was pushed into action and suspended flights rapidly from Iran – following the closing down borders, while starting the screening of travellers at airports. Moreover, at the border city of Taftan (in Balochistan), an isolation center for temporary cure was set up with very basic necessities in order house thousands of people returning from Iran. The unavoidable case took place on 26<sup>th</sup> February, when 1<sup>st</sup> positive case of coronavirus was reported in Pakistan.

In addition to initial inertia, a number of structural tasks have determined Pakistan's response to corona nationwide. However, under the nation's decentralized legitimate system, the provision of health infrastructure and healthcare is the responsibility of provincial regimes, with federal regime only authorized to govern the health sector. In absence of federally-govern countrywide response, the provincial administrations were to set free to their own strategies. Moreover, the continuous economic downturn and austerity-focused fiscal policy have convoluted the capacity of federal government to respond against COVID-19.

Nevertheless, as corona swiftly spread around the country, the political force continued to build on federal administration for taking lead in response efforts. Later on, the first organized response evolved on 13<sup>th</sup> of March, when the government assembled an emergency session of National Security Committee, a leading

civil-military coordination body, and decisions were made to close the border with Iran, prohibiting public gatherings, i.e. marriage ceremonies, encourage social-distancing for limiting the rapid viral infection, and closing the educational institutes across Pakistan.

The provincial regimes establish quarantine places in existing community buildings and displaced the college dormitories in main cities. Also, Islamabad approached to Beijing for facility of essential test-kits as well as other medical equipment's to prepare hospitals and health-care providers.

Whilst provinces following the lockdowns and quarantine, there is an intense political discussion in nation on whether the Pakistani government should execute a countrywide lockdown of key industrial and urban centers like Italy and China have done and what will be the consequences of such a lockdown decision.

The decision makers face difficult choices; can Pakistan manage a de facto closure of economy, which is already in economic crisis? For example, a lockdown in Sindh province would have a direct impact on Pakistan's supply chain as Karachi; the capital city of Sindh is country's major port for outside trade. A shutdown at national level will hurt the vulnerable group in Pakistan, including those people working in nation's substantial casual economy, insecure food populations, and those residing in shantytowns outside the densely-populated urban centers. The PM Imran Khan has contended against a countrywide shutdown, and hence, Pakistan has comprehended various strategies for corona suppression changing across Pakistan's provinces.

According to a study, in coming days, the country's decisions would endure to be conducted by quickly evolving COVID-19 outbreak at both domestic as well as global level. As multi-lateral interventions and global financial institutes mobilize financial resources to aid the developing nations, potentially Pakistan reach out for some funding to boost its nationwide efforts in response to reduce the short-to medium COVID-19 impact on its stressed economy. Due to lack of resources and global support, county is unable to provide community services to large susceptible populations at the time of needs, people are dying due to hunger and stress. However, at individual level various agencies, NGO's, rich groups are trying to fulfil the basic needs of poor people, but everyone is not getting consistent help. The vulnerable populations are getting on and off support from community with respect and dignity. In this pandemic, the social workers are playing active role in determining and fulfilling the needs of deprived groups through delivery basis necessities at their doorsteps, while maintaining the social distance.

Social workers play important role during public health crisis, the one that is mainly overlooked. The work starts from giving psychological and emotional support to educating and creating awareness among larger community, their contribution entails navigating what is often a highly complex and emerging situation.

In such natural or manmade disaster like COVID-19 Pandemic, for instance, social workers are essential to connect their clients / patients with FEMA – 'Federal Emergency Management Agency' or local agencies resources, besides offering them psychological health resources, following such traumatic incidents.

Currently, in many nations social workers are providing their services to communities that have been affected by Coronavirus. Social work has a significant frontline role in combating against transmission of virus by supporting populations to protect themselves as well as other through adopting physical or social distancing and social unity. Here are some key contributions of social workers at this time:

They are working in communities for ensuring essentials, for example, food and pure water are accessible. Social workers are educating people about following quarantine, social solidarity and physical distancing.

They are helping poor people through getting support from rich community members in order to fulfill basic necessities of poor communities.

This pandemic has caused a great damage to the world's economy. People have lost their work, routine work has been disturbed and along with dramatic destruction in many sectors of the different countries. This has raised the different needs of the people at individual and community levels. Government of every country has been putting efforts and struggling to mitigate the losses incurred due to this pandemic. But government

cannot resolve all the issues all alone. So, for this it has called for the need of the social workers and social caretakers who contribute greatly to the society and also other communities as well. There are different barriers faced by them. These can be the safety issues for themselves, as during the social work they come in contact with the other people physically, so to be at safe side they need to in full kit. They are also facing the financial problems so they have been collecting the donations from the well-off people.

There are many mutual projects which have been started for helping the individuals and communities. This way, those people who were the daily wage earners have got help from that. It is because, due to this pandemic, their work has been disturbed and they cannot go out to work. There are different projects started for collecting the aids and taking different initiatives to bring the food, cloth and other necessary things for fulfilling the needs of the people. Some of the projects are related to bring the food for the people so that people do not go out of their homes and stay there. This helps in the preventing the disease because this spreads by the contact with the other person as well. People are provided with the door to door food and other accessories for their basic needs. Apart from this, there many other projects started for bringing the awareness among people. The groups of the volunteers are made who work together to let the people know about the safety cautions, being safe and how to save oneself from this virus. So, they greatly work to spread the awareness of this virus among the people.

The Board of Executive Directors of World Bank have approved the emergency related set-ups operating in the countries that are developing in almost all those countries with a rapid pace. They have been getting the fast track facility and the dedicated response of the COVID-19. The first project is worth \$1.9 billion and this will be assisted in twenty five countries and other projects will be operational in other forty countries by the use of fast track processes.

Apart from this, World Bank is also busy in working on the deployment of the resources at the world level, in the other financed projects which are of the worth \$1.7 billion. This includes the restructuring, using the components of the emergency of the projects which are existing etc.

Along with this, Facebook is also working with the Harvard university researchers and university of National Tsing Hua, which works to share the information of the movements of the people and sharing the maps of the high resolution population. This widely contributes in predicting and forecasting the virus spread.

Social workers contribute greatly by taking their lives at risk. They have been continuously working to fulfil the needs of the people and spreading the awareness among them. They come in contact with many other people; so, they have been getting the information at much greater rate about the people. These social workers must report to the government about the current scenario in the local areas. Government cannot go door to door but rather emphasis on the national level. So, these workers can tell the government about the level of precautions taken by the people.

There are people who can come out to work, so as a result they are unable to earn and get the necessary things. These social workers will help them reaching the government. So, as a result they are trained to provide the counselling to the people in the local areas, like those people who are less educated and do not have much understanding about the viruses and such pandemic. They have been in the contact with the many other people globally and they have been contributing in such a difficult time of crisis than no any part of the world can escape form this.

## **Research Method**

This is a desktop based study and data is gathered through secondary sources, the official webs dedicated to update studies on COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the results are also analyzed using same research papers that particularly specify the community services and role of social workers in Pakistan's context.

## **Results Analysis**



According to the statistics given by Ministry of Health, the government of Pakistan – there is 3277 total positive confirmed cases in Pakistan with 18 acute and 50 mortalities reported on Monday, 6 April, 2020. The highest number of cases reported in Punjab province (approx. 1493), Sindh Province comes on second number (approx. 881), KPT (approx. 405), Gilgit Baltistan (approx. 210), Baluchistan (approx. 191), Federal (approx. 82) and Azad Kashmir have reported around 15 cases. The results have been also exhibited in figure below. So far, the highest figure of mortalities arisen in KPK with 16, after that in Punjab and Sindh with 15, Baluchistan 1 and Gilgit Baltistan 3 respectively. A total number of 85 infected individuals have recovered their health in Sindh, followed by 30 in KPK, 17 in Baluchistan, and 25 in Punjab, 9 in Gilgit Baltistan, and Azad Kashmir have 1 recovery so far as summarized in table 1. The rate of mortality in Pakistan is 1.3% and rate of recovery is 4.8% considerably.

### Facilitation by government of Pakistan against COVID-19 (Community Services)

Table 1. The current figures of COVID-19 outbreak in Pakistan

S. No	Province	Confirmed cases	Mortalities	Recovered
1	Punjab	1493	15	25
2	Sindh	881	15	123
3	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	405	16	62
4	Balochistan	191	01	30
5	Gilgit Baltistan	210	03	13
6	Azad Jammu & Kashmir	15	00	01
7	Federal (ICT)	82	00	03

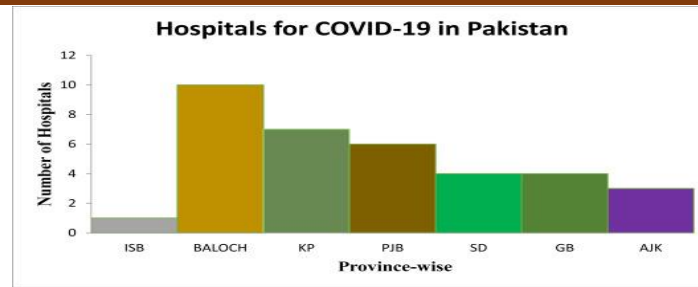
The Government of Pakistan is taking different measures against COVID-19 for providing and insuring the responsibilities of state for their citizens. Since the day first, the 1<sup>st</sup> case was confirmed in Sindh Province, Karachi city and all the facilities and measures were used with great capabilities for ensuring the safety of people within respective region. In the meantime, all the corona cases have a history of traveling or connection with those with a travel history, suggesting the transmission somewhere else being imported in Pakistan. The government provides the mitigation tactics with their measures against COVID-19, for instance, early detection and tracing of cases, tracking contacts, social distancing, risk communication, isolation and quarantine to avoid the transmission of virus.

Moreover, the Government has set up a Relief Fund against COVID-19 to receive the donation for public welfare. The Social network 'Helplines' were launched by Government in 7 local languages to help the communities. Communication Task Force Baluchistan with the help of UNHCR has established IEC material in Pashto and Dari Languages. The materials would be delivered with refugees in Baluchistan to all the villages. The KPK Government has issued orders for closure of elective surgical services and OPDs from 1-13 April, 2020 in every District Headquarters Hospitals, Tertiary Care Hospitals, and Private Clinics across the province. Besides, Central Emergency Relief Fund – CERF has allocated the 60 million Dollars to Global Response plan to combat COVID-19 and Government of Sindh has set up its first drive in Karachi by COVID-19 Testing service.

### Hospitals in Pakistan for COVID-19

There are a lot of measures being taken to fight against COVID by Government of Pakistan in order to control the spread of virus and facilitate their communities. Many hospitals are dedicating their services in this outbreak to bring life back and combat against this dangerous COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan.

In Islamabad, there was just one functioning hospital. While in KPK there were seven hospitals for COVID-19, in Baluchistan ten hospitals are working against this outbreak, Punjab six, Gilgit Baltistan four, and in Azad Kashmir 3 hospitals are functional as exhibited in Figure below.



### Designated hospitals

Specific health-care facilities have been designed to admit and manage the confirmed and suspected cases based upon convenience of quality quarantine wards at ‘Federal, Provincial and Regional level’. Each hospital and institute is anticipated to conduct availability and need assessment of materials i.e. personal protective equipment’s, lab diagnostics, and together with this the identification of means for ensuring the availability and provision of PPE’s and other necessity materials. Inform and train the IPC – Infection prevention and control teams at the chosen hospitals.

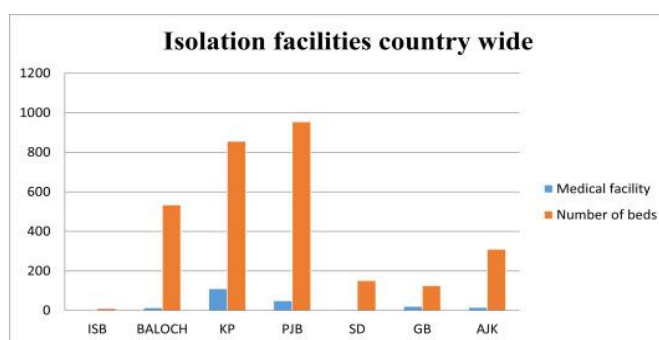
A proficient focal person from IPC team is selected in order to ensure the IPC practices implanted as well as embedded. Recently, a National IPC draft was made on SOP’s/guidelines (standard operational process) would be distributed and executed that are as follows: The SOP’s have been formulated and distributed for waste management at airports and hospitals. The local SOP’s have to be established and accessible in all HCF’s with proper staff training assigned to manage the waste.

The environmental decontamination and disinfection were formulated.

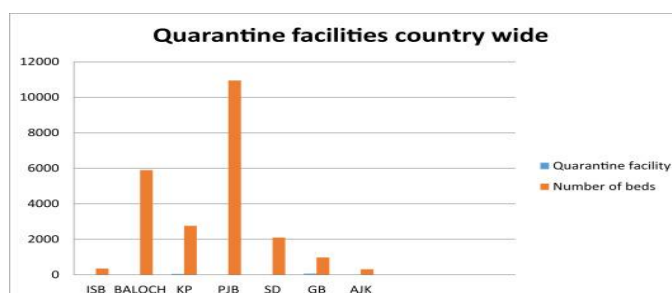
The isolation wards have been established across country to prepare for corona outbreak. Region/Province wise figure of chosen hospitals are ICT (Isb)-1, Sindh-4, Punjab-6, KPK-7, AK-3, GB-4, and Baluchistan-10. The number of total beds in ‘Isolation Wards’ in Pakistan are 23,557 were set up. In ICT Isb- 350, Punjab 10,948, KP 2,760, AK 530, Sindh 2,100, and Baluchistan 5,897 bed facilities were provided in the isolation wards.

### Graphical Representation

#### Province-wise Hospitals with the isolation wards for in response to COVID-19 across Pakistan



#### Province-wise Quarantine facilities in response to COVID-19 across the country



## Social workers and volunteering activities

In Pakistan, the social workers and volunteer individuals are playing active role in their communities to help the poor and vulnerable groups. They have started their own charity foundations with the help of rich community members so they can at least fulfill the basic necessities of people. The teams are regularly delivering the ‘Rashan’ and ‘Preventive equipment’s i.e. gloves, face masks, sanitizers to families while maintaining social distancing.

## Conclusion and future prospects

The COVID-19 pandemic flowed by SARS-CoV-2 in China, Wuhan city, which spread rapidly in 208 regions/countries including Italy, USA, Pakistan, India, UK, Iran, Iraq, Spain and many others. The current situation of Pakistan is not under control as the country is highly much populated that requires more facilitation. Also, Pakistan is a developing nation where the economy is not strong as compared to USA, China, UK, and Russia to fight with COVID-19 pandemic. The number of quarantine services, hospitals, social work facilities is not adequate to fulfil the basic needs of poor and vulnerable populations as required. If these services will be enhanced, then it wouldn't be hard to control the spread of corona and treatment of infected patients. Currently, the testing services are much less than the desired target. The testing services can be raised by 5-10 folds. The proper steps are needed to be taken to combat the COVID-19, for example, creating awareness among public for volunteer isolation, lockdown, avoiding social contact, using quality face mask, gloves, using sanitizers and take other necessary precautions. Pakistan need mores more facilities, i.e. for screening of arrivals and departures. Even though, being deficient in resources the Government of Pakistan is taking several steps to help the communities in order to ensure their safety and well-being, and together with the social workers and other private as well as not-for-profit organizations are utilizing great efforts and resources to help the poor and vulnerable populations to fight against this outbreak.

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