

Socio-Economic Challenges of Covid-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka

-Special reference to human wellbeing-

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Abstract

Sri Lanka's first confirmed COVID-19 patient was identified on the 11th of March 2020; after the Wuhan outbreak in December 2019. Sri Lankan health authority had a great challenge since it doesn't have an effective medicine and 21.4 million people of the country should be protected; minimizing health impacts and socio-economic losses. Sri Lankan Government has taken every step to manage these contradictory situations at a middle point with the support of security forces and health sector professionals, extending various preventive and management strategies, under the provision of quarantine and prevention of diseases law no. 12 of 1952. However, a total of 31,375 people were infected with coronavirus and 23,304 patients have been recovered, and 147 were dead as of 19.11.2020 (Epidemiology Unit, 2020). The objective of this study is to identify the socio-economic challenges, providing more weightage on human wellbeing during this Covid-19 outbreak. The quantitative and qualitative secondary data were predominantly used, extracting from scholarly research articles and published and unpublished data sources of health authority as of 31.10.2020. The collected data have been sorted according to the objective, correlating with human wellbeing related occurrences. The analysis was carried out, following both quantitative and qualitative approaches; while applying the author's viewpoints by interpreting such data into information. The result revealed that socio-economically most affected people are low-income earners, daily wages laborers, and business community due to the curfew and locked down situation and import trade restrictions imposed by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. Similarly, the security forces, front-line health care workers, quarantined people, and patients associated with long medical history are at higher risk. Their mental health and human wellbeing are beyond normal conditions, due to sleep-deprived workload, stress, frustration, depression, isolation, and genuine psychological fear of being infected by this novel-virus. Apart from this, the cost of living has been increased, while the rising of Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI, 2013=100) from 5.7% in January 2020 to 6.4% in September 2020, align with increasing trend prices for essential goods. According to International Credit Rating Agency (2020); the economic loss is 4% of GDP, amounting to LKR 735 billion. Tourist arrival had dropped by 65-75% from January to October 2020. The income source of 65-70% of families had been affected, representing all districts of the Island, while 7-10% lost their entire income. 30-35% of families reduced their food consumption pattern/frequency. 75-80% of families experienced verbal abuse and 7-10% were physically abused and 5-7% had sexual violence. More than 95% of higher education institutions conducted their education over the Internet (University of Ruhuna, 2020). The least cost and more effective tool to mitigate and manage the human health impacts and subsequent drawbacks on human wellbeing is to extend productive education and awareness, among the general public. Further, this study recommends to implement a sustainable recovery plan on human wellbeing by improving personal living standards, maintaining physical and mental health, creating self-employment opportunities, expanding e-business, and promoting self-sufficiency cultivation. The outcome of the study is much more helpful in a long-term decision making purpose and prepare a national contingency plan to face similar situations in the future.

Key Words: Covid-19, socio-economic challenges, human wellbeing, sustainable recovery, mental health.