

Editorial

COVID-19: A Psycho-Social Reflection

It cannot be put any more shortly- COVID-19 has had a huge impact on everyone around the world. Various researchers have found out that the COVID-19 has made a significant psychological and social impact on people around the world (Gopal, Sharma, & Subramanyam, 2020; Saladino, Algeri, & Auriemma, 2020). The measures that had to be adopted to curb the spread of the virus-like social distancing and restricted access to visiting or gathering outside have led to a lot of stress among the public. However, there are segments of the population that seem to be more susceptible to the risks of the pandemic- the socially and psychologically vulnerable. The Editorial focuses on the effects of the pandemic on the population and reflects on the messages of Pope Francis.

Impact of COVID-19

Some of the elements related to the pandemic that affected a lot of the communities were the separation from loved ones, the loss of freedom, the feeling of uncertainty about the disease and the future, and the feeling of helplessness (Li & Wang, 2020; Cao et al., 2020). The prolonged impact of such forms of stress involves anxiety, depression, and the inability to manage traumatic and negative emotions. Stressors included longer quarantine duration, fears of infection, helplessness, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma (Das, 2020). There are also increased chances of the rise of suicides (Kawohl&Nordt, 2020) which are associated with feelings of anger associated with stressful situations, especially among those who live in affected areas (Miles, 2014; Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, 2020). Women and the marginalized are among

the vulnerable population that deserves immediate attention (Gopal, Sharma, &Subramanyam, 2020).

The psychological toll that the repeated and extended lockdowns on the community is huge. A study in India (2020), revealed that the level of anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms have increased during the lockdown. In the study, individual resilience and social support had an inverse relationship with adverse psychological outcomes. This indicates that the individual and communal responsibility of working together to fight the effects of COVID is as important as ever.

Impact on Refugees and Migrants. A study was done on refugees and migrants (2020) found that they were the vulnerable population that seems to get the worst of the most unprecedented health and socio-economic crisis. The World Health Organisations advocates the right for everyone including refugees and migrants to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Some of the main problems that this group faces are: lack of access to healthcare services due to but not limited to inability to pay or lack of awareness about the services available or lack of facilities like transportation or facilities which provide such services; and fear of the stigma of revealing the immigration or migrant status. This is one of the groups who cannot take a day off from work since there is a huge risk of losing their job, even when they require a ‘sick leave.’ The kind of insecure jobs they have put them in a deeper vulnerable situation. Hence, financial resources are limited to the daily needs and there is a heavy dependence on the support made available by the government.

It is also hard for the health system to reach this group due to lack of access to such places, and most commonly the lack of sanitation facilities and access to clean water in these places make it a harder job for the healthcare providers. The uncertainty of their daily life was doubled with the lockdown restrictions and the inability to find jobs to support their families.

Messages of Hope from Pope Francis

Amid the times where there seem to be woes, Pope Francis offered a revelatory, uplifting, and everyday book on why and how we can make the world a safer, fairer, and healthier place for all. In “Let Us Dream,” he explores the crisis and what it teaches us about the fragility of the world and how to handle the commotion of any kind in the world. With the use of three personal crises in his life, Pope Francis touches upon

certain important aspects that changed him for the better. During the crisis, he explains how there is a choice for everyone to either return to a state of pre-crisis or to rise above the situation to a better future. The Pope reflected how painful it is to note that the growing legal systems in the world are moving away from their absolute duty to protect human life at every stage of life (Harson, 2021).

The Bible is scattered with analogous ‘personal Covids’ that reset the course of the characters’ lives. Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus and the story of King David as he flees Jerusalem are examples of how their lives changed in an instant but since courage and hope prevailed in their lives, they were able to transform the lives of many others after them. Both the characters were in a state of self-reflection where they had to wisely choose their next course in their lives. Pope Francis calls upon each of us individually to use the opportunity of self-isolation that we are in to make a ‘radical makeover’ in our lives.

In the *Review of Pope Francis, Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, Naulty (2021) reflect how Pope Francis re-couples “economics and morality by making the goal of economics the pursuit of the common good, which involves sharing the riches of the world among everyone, and regenerating nature, the source of the riches.” Along with a few pointers on reminding us of our Christian duty, Pope Francis conveyed courage so that we can emerge from the crisis better than before. A few of the points are reflected and ways in which this can be expanded to help the poor, marginalized, refugees, and migrants are discussed.

Compassion for the Other. Pope Francis called for the ‘mission of compassion spurred by the pandemic (Vatican, Jan 29, 2021). The theme for the year is “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). The pope described the theme as “a summons to each of us to ‘own and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts.’” He has said that it requires prayer, dialogue, listening, and a lot of patience to forge unity and make our efforts fruitful.

“The foreigners residing among you must be treated as native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:34). The church can support the refugees and migrants by practicing a few principles of compassion. Spreading the authentic messages from the governments about facilities and services

provided to help tackle the virus and verified information from the government on the vaccines can be made aware of those in these communities. Continually checking on them to ensure that they may get adequate help from the local governments can be ensured. “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners because you were foreigners in Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). It is time to start practicing compassion for those around us.

The attitude of Jesus. Pope Francis reminds us that our first duty as Christian is to serve others, especially the poor and the marginalized, just as Jesus did. Jesus had said, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The beautiful message inspires everyone and offers a chance to be like Him. Most Christians are aware of Jesus’ instruction to “love your neighbour as yourself,” however a lot of times, it has been found too difficult to follow through.

St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about how everyone was saved by faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2: 8- 10). “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (Ephesians 2:19). The attitude of Jesus is the perfect example of how one should lead their life during these COVID times.

Light at the End of the Tunnel. An attitude of all-inclusiveness helps one remember that everyone is in this COVID-19 situation together and that to reach the end of the tunnel, everyone needs to work together. Pope Francis had said: This moment in history is “a time to choose what matters in life and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.”

There is light at the end of this tunnel that seems to be going on and on for some time now. The pitch to the readers is to search within themselves the change that this is driving in them. The opportunity to choose between changing the ways of the past and striving for a better future is presented through the COVID. There is no one better than Pope Francis who could inculcate that idea into practical ways of living and still bear down upon us the Christian duty of the reader, no matter who they are.