Post-COVID19: Feeling with the Suffering of Migrants

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Abstract

The burden of COVID-19 has been huge and widespread. It is important to look at the nuances of formation in the post-COVID19, recovery, and rehabilitation stages. A qualitative study was done to examine the impact of COVID19 on Jesuits – priests and scholastics. This study examines the impact of the pandemic on all levels of formation and ongoing formation, in this changing world. The study suggests ways by which formation could be strengthened post COVID19, for Jesuits.

Keywords: Jesuits, Post-COVID19, Rehabilitation Stages

Introduction

COVID19 has spread across the country and the world. It is not abating. The impact on life has been all-encompassing. It has affected the functioning of most peoples. Jobs have been lost; job profiles have changed and ways of working within jobs too have changed. Conversely, in Catholics, it has been seen that there is an upsurge in faith, opposed to what would have been expected considering access to sacraments was not possible in the usual ritualistic form. All peoples were stuck in their homes, with uncertainty and impending doom, being some of the strong emotions, evoked by the pandemic. Suffering became more apparent, within homes, in communities, as well as in nation-states and countries. The worst affected were the migrants, displaced, and refugees.

The burden of COVID-19 was in terms of the fatality rates based on underlying health conditions; social mixing and hygiene infrastructure; the availability of intensive care and vulnerability to control measures that included social protection failures. These were related to and influenced each other. Media too added to panic and stress in masses which led to several mental health issues like media mistrust and conspiracy theories, threat perception, covid-phobia or corona phobia, anxiety, stigmatization, obsessive-compulsive disorder and aggression, frustration, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Corburn, Vlahov, Mberu, Riley, Teixeira, Hamza Shuja, Aqeel, Jaffar, &Ahmed, 2020).

The world has become more digitalized, more connected, and also more distant. It has become smaller and yet the human element is missing. There are anxieties and fears, yet, courage and confidence, struggles, and recovery are also evident. There are perseverance and failure, spiritual growth and frustrations, and the need to understand the term 'social' isolation. There has also been a tremendous effect on priestly life and ministry, primarily concerning the understanding of priesthood and the sacraments.

In the founding of major faiths, migration across borders is one of the key elements and is a reason that faith communities see their religious and ethical commitments as reaching across borders. The challenge is to develop more adequate ways of protecting the humanity of those threatened by displacement which is in part a moral one. The moral challenges are deeply embedded in the political, military, economic, environmental, and other conditions that drive people from home (Chakraborty& Maity, 2020). The easing of restrictions and advisories has begun. Recovery and rehabilitation are important after any disaster. These are often neglected.

It is important to look at the nuances of formation in the post-COVID19, recovery, and rehabilitation stages. A qualitative study was done to examine the impact of COVID19 on Jesuits – priests and scholastics. This study examines the impact of the pandemic on all levels of formation and ongoing formation, in this changing world. The study suggests ways by which formation could be strengthened post COVID19, for Jesuits.

Literature Review

The preamble of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights directly links recognition of the "inherent dignity" of all persons with

the protection of "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" (Hollenbach, 2016). The International Labor Organization (2020) has highlighted that, migrant workers are experiencing the worst of the economic crisis which includes access to basic hygiene products, including detergents/ soaps/sanitizers for personal safety; food because many workers are unable to afford them; loss of jobs and salaries as many employers terminated the employment of migrant workers without prior notice and increased panic and fear due to prejudice and abuse against migrant domestic workers (Mishra & Sayeed, 2020). Human rights are rooted in the universal and equal dignity of all human beings.

Migration often brings with it stress, strain, and risk factors such as poor medical care, separation of family and children as well as other relatives. It also includes homelessness, lack of food and water, xenophobic attacks, poor education, perceived and experienced discrimination, and a high risk of death and injury. Furthermore, social factors, like cultural bereavement, culture shock, social defeat, as well as a discrepancy between expectations and achievement, and acceptance by the new nation/place, can affect adjustment. Risk factors in communities include social exclusion, stigma, and discrimination. The migrants feel unwelcome by their host societies and perceive cultural differences such as language, traditions, food habits as the main reason hindering the development of social networks outside their communities (Mishra & Sayeed, 2020).

It was found that the prevalence of poor mental well-being was higher among those who were single/ widowed/ separated/ divorced, unskilled, unemployed, daily wager, illiterate, and older in age. This in turn was associated with poor housing, educational and medical facilities. These factors lead to poor social support, feeling of insecurity, and adjustment issues. Migrant laborers due to their unique and disadvantageous position are particularly vulnerable to all these risk factors (Mishra&Sayeed, 2020).

Ethical Duties of Nations/States

Ethical duties reach beyond the borders that separate (nation-states) and there are implications of such duties for the treatment of refugees and other displaced persons. Borders whether national or state have moral weight, to prevent grave violations of the rights of displaced persons. This can create responsibilities and duties to not only citizens/

residents of one's own country/states but also towards others displaced (Hollenbach, 2016). These ethical duties can be negative or positive: Negative duties include the avoidance of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other violations of justice that often lead to mass displacement. These need a response. Positive duties are developed in light of several standards: (a) the needs of the displaced, the proximity and capability of the responder, (b) whether the response is the last resort, and (c) and if the response can be carried out without disproportionate burden on the responder (Hollenbach, 2016).

Regrettably, we have learned from history and from insight into a human moral weakness that threats to human rights will continue to occur. This raises the question of what positive obligations we have, to come to the assistance of the displaced when crises in fact occur. It is not enough to avoid causing harm. In some situations, omission can become as morally objectionable as a commission (Hollenbach, 2016).

Therefore, certain ethical values come into play when we address the needs of the migrants, displaced, or refugees. The Kew Gardens Principle argues that an agent (person/country) has a positive responsibility to help when four conditions are present: (1) there is a critical need; (2) the agent has proximity to the need; (3) the agent can assist; (4) the agent is likely the last resort from whom help can be expected, (5) the action can be taken without disproportionate harm to the one assisting. These criteria, of course, cannot be applied mechanically. But they can help us think about the scope of positive responsibilities in the face of the crisis-level suffering that is displacing so many people today (Hollenbach, 2016).In discussing migrants, the displaced, and refugees, certain terms are of importance. They include humanity, sovereignty, solidarity, subsidiarity, equity and dignity, confidentiality, and culture.

Humanity. The term "humanity" refers to the whole of humankind and all its members. Concern for humanity, therefore, is a concern for all members of the human race and the conditions that all are facing. To act in accord with humanity is to act with inclusive concern toward all men and women. The principle of humanity thus leads to another standard: impartiality. To act with humanity is to respond impartially to all members of the human family based on their need, not because of some characteristic that differentiates them from others, such as their citizenship, nationality, race, religion, class, or political opinion.

Capability. The criterion of capability also sheds light on positive duties to respond to crises that displace large numbers of people. In considering this issue it has become common to point out that someone who cannot swim does not have a duty to come to the aid of a child who is drowning if providing the aid requires swimming, while a good swimmer can have a duty to respond.

Sovereignty. The Sudanese scholar and diplomat Francis Mading Deng argued that sovereignty is such an important value because it secures each country's ability to protect its people by preventing external powers from taking harmful action within its national boundaries, (e.g. invasion, colonial exploitation, COVID19). Deng called this sovereignty-as-responsibility. Deng's thinking contributed in an important way to the development of the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Hollenbach, 2016).

Solidarity. This focus must be on assistance rather than on the emphasis on defensive action against external threats. It is based on the moral claim that there is a duty, founded on solidarity, for countries/ states, to offer assistance when required (Panchaud, Favre, Pomar, Leo, Vouga, Aebi-Popp, & Aud, 2020). The "ethical compass" is designed to guide both policymakers and those on the ground. It is based on three core values: respect for others as moral equals ("equal respect"); helping reduce suffering; and fairness.

Subsidiarity. "The principle of subsidiarity" helps to determine whether the more local or more global should take priority. This principle affirms that there are special duties within smaller and more proximate communities. In tandem with the principle of solidarity, subsidiarity also insists that when there is serious need at a greater distance or when local communities cannot or will not respond to this need, larger regional communities or the international community as a whole can have a duty to provide help to those in need (Wright&Sheather, 2020). Subsidiarity implies that the primary responsibility toward internally displaced persons falls on the country of which they are citizens. Their own country has the primary duty to protect them. But if their country of citizenship fails to protect them or acts in a way that compels them to flee, the duty of protection moves to neighboring countries and larger regional and international actors.

Equity and Dignity. There is a need to commit to key principles of equity and dignity to ensure the global resources are distributed fairly and marginalized communities are not left out.

Fundamentally, many of these key considerations relating to poverty and inequality, which have impacts on short- and long-term responses that require elaboration. Those affected settlements tend to be the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society, but within this, there is variation, including pockets of wealth and thus deeper pockets of marginalization. This means that there will be varied vulnerability profiles. When wealth and poverty are side-by-side (within affected settlements, and between the settlement and the rest of the city), perceptions of injustice can be palpable and could hinder collective action to fight a pandemic

Culture. The number of migrants and refugees will likely continue to increase over the years and health care services have to be prepared for them. Adequate resources need to be given to health care professionals and policymakers to meet the needs of the migrant population. Collecting more information about the impact of culture on key aspects of a migrant patient's clinical presentation may help provide better care.

Furthermore, the cultural competence of all professional staff and regular use of cultural mediators could be very useful to access health care services and reduce the key barriers to service access and use. Improving the institutional, cultural competence could increase the quality of care at a systemic, organizational, and institutional level. Therefore, cultural competence training for all professional staff and initiatives to facilitate institutional, cultural competence should be implemented to increase the utilization of mental health services.

Problem Statement of the Study

In the recovery and rehabilitation stage post-COVID19, what would be some of the essential steps we as Jesuits need to take to be more relevant in today's world?

Methodology

A qualitative study was done. It used interpretative phenomenological analysis (Shinebourne, 2011). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis studies the lived experience of persons (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010). The questionnaire was sent via google forms. There were three demographic variables – age, level of occupation, and present status of the person surveyed. The three groups were (1) Formators (Rectors, Faculty, Members of common houses, Assistancy formators and PCF's) (81.3%), (2) deacons (12.5%), and

(3) counselors/ psychologists (6.3%). Their ages ranged from 25-65. The level of education was undergraduate (6.3%), graduate (50%), and post-graduate (43.8%). The google forms contained twelve questions all of which had to be filled out.

Examples of three questions in the questionnaire include, "How has the present COVID19 pandemic affected your sense of identity as a Jesuit (priest / to-be-priest)?" "What are some of the struggles you have been going through?" and "What is needed for formation post COVID19?" There were 16 respondents.

Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The three categories that emerged are (1) Suffering, (2) Development, and (3) Responses. When considering the category of suffering, this was especially concerning the poor and migrants. The category of development included personal development in relation to Jesuit identity, against the backdrop of the challenges raised by the pandemic. The third category of responses addressed collaboration and facing realities.

The overarching theme was suffering. The respondents talked about suffering in these ways. With suffering as the overarching theme, there was an emphasis on "Being rather than doing; witnessing rather than performing" as was written by the respondent (4). It was emphasized by the respondent (5) that we need to have "fruitful insights, lessons and challenges blessing to others even in this time of pain and agony." There also was a plea by the respondent (4) that "God redefine my vocation… Service orientation is a necessity. nothing much! ... translate our Vision and Mission into concrete realities of life?" The idea seems to be that whatever be the situation, we need to adapt and modify our lives according to where we are most required. Let us now consider some of the major categories that emerged.

Suffering

Suffering was described by the respondent (1), as suffering from humanity, and a challenge was issued by the respondent (4) where he wrote that we should "beg on behalf of the poor and suffering." There also was a more specific focus on the suffering poor and migrants. Respondent (3) wrote about the necessity of "the works of charity, empathy, compassion, solidarity, and fraternity with the migrants." This was because he was affected by the plight of the poor and migrants & today's wounded world. This thought was reiterated by the respondent

(2) who wrote about trying to understand the "suffering of the poor and the downtrodden & concerns, agonies and hopes of the suffering."

Development

The category of development addressed personal development with regard to Jesuit Identity. The idea of development too was concerning ministries that dealt more with the needs of those oppressed. Respondent (5) wrote about development as the necessity to "collaborate with each other for everyone's benefit" and that the ministry needed to be more creative. It would involve us developing ourselves and our works by reorganizing and reframing them to suit the times for universal brotherhood and sisterhood.

Responses

The responses section focuses on what could be done about how formation can be enhanced, post COVID19. Respondent (1) expected that we should be "Reaching out to give more" and in more specific ways as was described by the respondent (3) in ways such as "Works of charity, compassion, solidarity, and fraternity with migrants." This would only happen if we are "Constantly remind (ed) … of the situation outside and its implications, as was stipulated by respondent (8). Respondent (12) therefore emphasized that "programs need to be geared to greater rootedness in God as well as collaboration and "sharing the struggles of the people to recover their lives and that of their families, personal accompaniment of the formees and formators." and that we should "invest more resources in economic planning and developmental works that reach out to the periphery' as was again emphasized by the respondent (5).

The three categories of suffering, development, and responses, are interrelated and give focus to what could be developed vis-à-vis formation, and some of the changes that could be implemented concerning our various ministries.

Discussion

It is important to assess risk and have proper interventions. This would indicate readiness if there is another surge in the pandemic. Readiness would imply that this is done at all levels, at the center, the states, and the community levels. For individuals, it would imply that they too are ready at the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual levels.

General

There has to be readiness concerning isolation, quarantine, sanitization, and physical distancing. As affected countries implement control measures that restrict social and economic life, the questions are whether their governments have begun to provide economic support packages to mitigate effects on livelihoods? (Grover, Mehra, Sahoo, Avasthi, Tripathi, D'Souza, et al., 2020).

Therefore, what is needed is to (1) dampen the spread of COVID-19 based on the latest available science, (2) improve the likelihood of medical care for the poor (urban and rural) whether or not they get infected, and (3) provide economic, social, and physical improvements and protections to the urban poor, including migrants, slum communities, and their residents, that can improve their long-term well-being. Also, dealing with issues of confidentiality, stigma-discrimination complex, and psychological immunity.

For Jesuits

The interrelationship between the three categories that emerged, gives focus to what could be changed, adapted, or modified in the various ministries Jesuits do. There is a clear indication that more should be done for the poor and migrants. It appears that in this study, the poor and migrants were considered the same i.e. poor migrants. This could be because it was done at the time the migrants from various parts of the country were returning to their hometowns and there were disturbing images in the media.

Self-development too was a strong feature, not just social or institutional development. The lockdown forced the participants to look at themselves, and see their strengths and growing edges. It forced them to think about how they could be more creative in their ministries. The focus was not just on intellectual development but skill development. It also called for emotional and spiritual development.

Clear responses were indicated, stemming from the Jesuit charism, where the language used was in classic Jesuit form, "finding God in all things." The suggestions were very practical in their implementation, not forgetting the rootedness in God and the 'why' of their mission and vision of 'going to the periphery.'

Limitations

Although the study was done on Jesuits, it could be generalized to the general population of clergy and religious. This is because clergy and religious are involved in the same type of work. They are also trained and formed to feel with the people and so clergy and religious other than Jesuits would possibly feel the same way as the Jesuits in this study.

Conclusion

Evidence-based guidelines alone in complex humanitarian crises may not suffice in a pandemic like the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Without the adaptation of existing standards, mitigation plans will fall short of health and human rights obligations in outbreak response.

Crisis-affected community engagement is integral in pandemic planning, to maximize the real-world effectiveness of efficacious interventions (Poole, Escudero, Gostin, Leblang, Ta, 2020). While the virus has shaken the very foundation of life, it has also made all aware and appreciative of what we have and be grateful for that.

It has kept people afloat with family time, bonding, sharing, trying out different things, housework, honing professional skills, learning new hobbies, developing new interests. Life certainly has changed and realigned itself. Staying safe and healthy as individuals, family, and as a productive member of society is essential for survival and wellbeing.

For Jesuits, considering the three categories that emerged, there are three implications. More elaborate discussions could be had around these perspectives. It would help in concretizing some of their ministries.

1. There should be a clear focus on migrants, the poor, and the poor migrants in our ministries.
2. As Jesuits we have neglected personal and institutional growth, therefore it is necessary to also focus on these areas of growth issues. This could necessitate pedagogical and personal changes.
3. The third point on responses gives indicators for changes or adaptations in formation. An emphasis on the pastoral and practical dimensions, of the documents *Pastores Dabo Vobis*(Pope John Paul II, 1992), *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutions Sacerdotalis*, (Pope Francis, 2016)] and the Universal Apostolic Preferences could help in developing the responses.

Questions for Self-reflection

1. Do we hold on to our time and tried ministries or develop new ones?
2. How do we make space for the 'other' in our lives even by maintaining physical distancing?
3. How do we become more mindful of how we live our lives?
4. How do we reframe our choices?

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