

Impacts of Covid-19 on Physical and Psychological Health & Well-Being of Rickshaw Pullers in India: A Case Study of Aligarh City

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent lockdown has caused immense crises to socio-economic structure along with profound physical and psychological distress among the people across the world. The implications of COVID 19 and its resultant shut down on psychological well-being has been progressively noticed among the people in terms of mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, loneliness, insecurity, fear, and uncertainty, etc. The adverse psychological effects of COVID 19 on account of socio-economic crises such as job insecurity, housing instability, discrimination and food insecurity have been more pronounced among the marginalized and deprived sections of population such as constructional workers, daily wage labourers, street vendors and rickshaw pullers. Nonetheless, they have been more prone to victimization of covid-19 yet not an adequate attention has been paid towards their physical and psychological health status. However, being the backbone of informal economy they require the urgent attention towards consideration of their physical and mental fitness. In this context, the present study aims to explore the physical and psychological effects caused by COVID 19 and quarantine focusing exclusively on rickshaw pullers so as to draw the attention of academician, researchers and policy makers towards their critical condition so that a enough space should be given while formulating the welfare schemes for the impoverished sections of society. The study has been based on primary sources of data generated through field survey consisting 135 rickshaw pullers in Aligarh city who were selected randomly. The survey has been carried out in month of October, 2020. The overall result indicates that the rickshaw pullers have suffered from the severe mental health status as well as adverse implication on their physical health condition.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Lockdown, Physical health, Mental health, Rickshaw pullers, Aligarh City

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of covid-19 and consequent lockdown imposed for a large period has immensely affected the people in innumerable ways. The most adverse implications of covid-19 apart of its physical effects have been noticed on psychological well-being of the people. There have been recently a number of cases highlighted in news about the increased stress, suicide, domestic violence, mental disorders, anxiety, depressive disorders arising from the combination of

factors such as the fear of uncertain future, feeling of loneliness, isolation, and the threatens of infection of corona virus since the government has imposed the Lock down considering to be an effective measure in slowing the spread of coronavirus around the globe (Barkur et al., 2020; Flaxman et al., 2020). Even the marginal section of the society more notable daily wage workers or the labourers could not escape from falling the victims of desperate mental health

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condition rather they were found to be more panic as they already suffer from considerable socio-economic vulnerabilities. The physical, psychological and socio-economic impacts of covid-19 have been more severely affected the poor and deprived groups of population especially the people with small shops and those with limited sources of income, the poor, and daily wagers who are already suffering from considerable socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Nonetheless, the psychological impact of quarantine of COVID 19 has been well documented generally faced by the population but with few exceptions the effects of COVID-19 outbreak and its resultant lockdown have been much ignorant and unnoticed in poor and deprived groups of the society such as on rickshaw pullers. Due to the stoppage of transportation, neither have they been able to meet their daily basic requirements nor they were able to access the help offered by governments and other NGOs due to unawareness and lack of their fixed abode during the lockdown.

Rickshaw-pullers are the most disadvantaged marginalized part of the people who participate in manual transportation to earn the means of livelihood, though rickshaw pulling is itself an arduous economic activity which takes a heavy toll physical health of rickshaw pullers but it also causes a great mental stress to them when they have to wait for passengers/commodities or in pulling the rickshaws to transport passengers and commodities from one location to another from early morning to late evening or whole night and even, sometimes, around the clock, they are not in a position to earn the adequate amount to fulfill their basic needs for life (Islam et al., 2016). The strictest lockdown has accentuated their physical and psychological well-being resulted from the insecurity of livelihoods amid extended lockdown. Fears of economics and food shortages had put extra stressors on rickshaw-pullers still anxious and sensitized (Kamal, 2020). All of these factors have severely led them to mental distress. In this context, the present study attempts to highlight the implications of COVID 19 pandemic on psychological well-being of rickshaw pullers, a segment of informal sectors in India who had certainly suffered greatly from both the direct infection of virus and from its indirect effects.

Nonetheless, the adverse situation of rickshaw pullers has been highly invisible. Not a single attention has been paid towards them how they were surviving amid pandemic? What have been the impacts on their physical as well as psychological health condition? Were they having some symptomatic problems

of COVID-19? C These were the questions which generally arise in mind while having an eyes on the vulnerable section's sustainability during the COVID 19 shutdown. This is a study which tries to seek answer of above queries by empirically their situation on the basis of their responses.

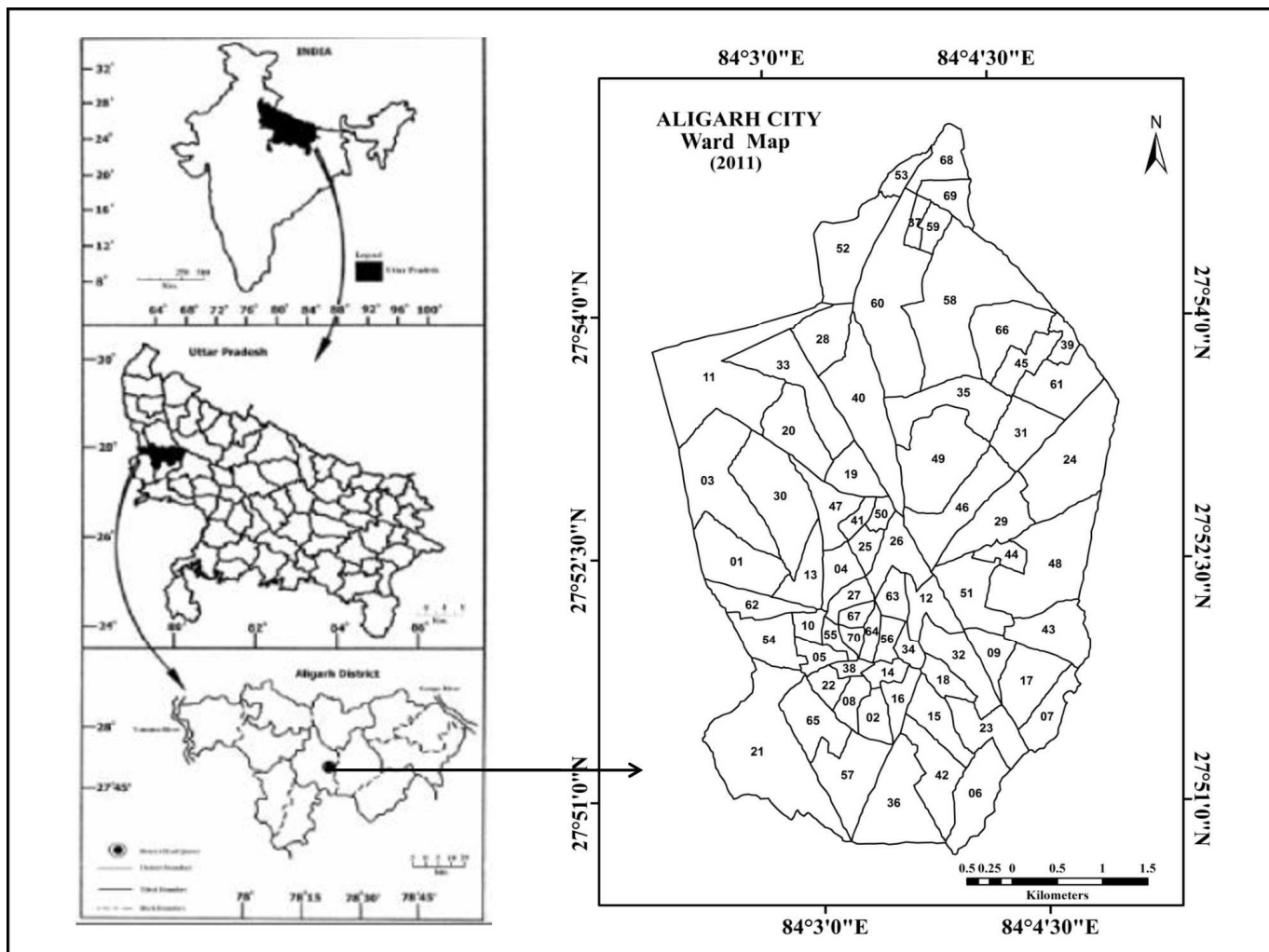
AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- To find out the socio-economic conditions of rickshaw pullers.
- To highlight the implications of COVID-19 on physical as well as mental health condition of Rickshaw pullers.
- To provide the appropriate suggestions to bring the essential and urgent improvement in their health condition.

THE STUDY AREA

The Aligarh city of Uttar Pradesh has been selected for present study. Aligarh city lies between 27°52'N to 27°56'N latitudes and 78°3'E to 78°6'E longitudes. It occupies an area of about 36.10 square km in the west of Uttar Pradesh. Total population of Aligarh city as per census 2011 is 8,74,408 out of which, 52.80 percent are males while 47.19 percent are females. The sex ratio of city is 894 females per 1000 males, whereas, the child sex ratio is 885. The literacy rate in the city is 68.52 percent. While literacy of male and female is 73.53 percent and 62.93 percent respectively. The area selected for the present study is well connected with its hinterland by both road and rail ways. The famous Grand Trunk passes through the city and many of Highways are well connected to Aligarh such as- NH91, NH93 and Yamuna Expressway. Besides, Aligarh is an important center of Uttar Pradesh and is mostly famous for its lock industry. The famous Aligarh Muslim University is also situated here. Thus, being an industrial educational and administrative city of Uttar Pradesh it provides the sources of employment for the people particularly belonging to its surroundings rural areas and the poor migrants.

As the level of industrialization, urbanization and education and infrastructural facilities is improving, the mobility of the population is also increasing which has increased the demand of the different modes of transit. Hence, the Aligarh city is densely populated, the markets, schools and colleges are not sparsely located, therefore, rickshaw becomes the most convenient modes on short distance particularly for the students and women. Most of the rickshaw pullers in Aligarh city are migrants not only from other districts of Uttar Pradesh but from other states of India such as Bihar, West-Bengal, Rajasthan, and Assam, etc.



DATA BASE & METHODOLOGY

The present study is entirely based on primary sources of data that has been generated by conducting a comprehensive field survey. The data has been collected through the direct interview method to the respondents by visiting to various travel points and rickshaw stands by using a well-structured scheduled pertaining the socio-economic indicators and variables of physical and mental health status. The survey has consisted total 135 rickshaw pullers who were sampled randomly from various major locations of Aligarh City such as Sir Sayyad Nagar, Ahmad Nagar, Amir Nisha, Firdaus Nagar, Dodhpur, Jamalpur, Kela Nagar Chauraha, Medical road, Sasni Gate, Central point, etc. when the major concentration of rickshaw pullers was observed during the pilot survey which was held prior to field survey. The survey has been carried out in month of September, 2020 maintaining the all social distancing norms possibly and following all other infection control measures while interviewing the respondents. The obtained data has been calculated in simple percentage and average method and presented in tabular form. The data has been analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Profile

The data regarding the percentage distribution of rickshaw pullers has been provided in table-1. Hundred percent of the respondents were males. Out of total sampled respondents, the ratio of the rickshaw pullers falling in age-group of 46-60 was the highest in which they constituted 36.67 percent. The second largest proportion of rickshaw pullers was found belonging 36-46 age-group of followed by those falling in age-group of 21-35 in which they accounted for 35 percent and 16.67 percentage whereas the lowest percentage of rickshaw pullers was observed coming in age-group of 16-20 (1.67 percent) and above 60 (10 percent). With regard of marital status, more than fourth-fifth percent of respondents were married, nearly 12 percent were unmarried, about 4 percent were divorced/separated while the remaining comprised of widowed which was 1.67 percent. The further examinations of data exposes that 68 percent were non-migrant and nearly 32 percent of them were migrants in which the respondents migrated from Bihar were having the highest proportion. The ratio of rural migrants was much higher than that of the respondents migrate from urban areas. The overall literacy level of surveyed rickshaw pullers was very low. About 77 percent were illiterate while the rest (about 23 percent) comprised of illiterate.

The data contained in table-1 about caste-composition unfolds the fact that more than third-fifth of rickshaw pullers belonged to other backward caste category, little less than one-third of rickshaw belonged to general caste category whereas only very few i.e. 5 percent have been reported coming in category of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population. With respect of their religion analysis, the percentage ratio of Muslim respondents was exceedingly much higher than that of Hindu population and their corresponding figures were 70 percent and 30 percent respectively. Further examination of the data presented in table-1 illustrates that the majority of rickshaw pullers were observed living in the large size of household consisting 7-8 household members in which the percentage share of rickshaw pullers was 35 percent followed by those living in households of 5-6 members, and by those belonging to the household of 1-4 members whereas they respectively comprised of 26.67 percent and 20 percent. The minimum percentage of respondents has been examined belonging to households containing 1-4 members in which they accounted for 18.33 percent.

Table-1 Percentage Distribution of Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents in Aligarh City, 2020

SR. NO.	SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS	CATEGORIES	PERCENTAGE
1	Age-Groups	16-20	1.67
		21-35	16.67
		36-45	35.00
		46-60	36.67
		Above 60	10.00
		Total	100.00
2	Marital Status	Married	82.50
		Unmarried	11.67
		Divorced/Separated	4.17
		Widowed	1.67
		Total	100.00
3	Migration Status	Migrant	31.67
		Non-migrant	68.33
		Total	100.00
5	Literacy Status	Literate	23.33
		Illiterate	76.67
		Total	100.00
4	Caste-Composition	GN	31.67
		OBC	63.33
		SC/ST	5.00
		Total	100.00
6	Religious Composition	Muslim	70.00
		Hindu	30.00
		Total	100.00
7	Household Size	Upto 4	18.33
		5-6	26.67
		7-8	35.00
		More than 8	20.00
		Total	100.00
8	Ownership of the Houses	Own	40.00
		Rented	45.00
		Jhuggi/houseless	15.00
		Total	100.00

Source: Based on Sample Survey by Author.

The data considering the housing status of rickshaw pullers evidences that maximum amount of rickshaw pullers get the shelter in rented houses whereas little less than those accommodate in their own houses, and the corresponding figures of both categories are 45 percent and 40 percent respectively. A significant portion of them were found not having their own houses nor capable to afford the rented houses rather they were compelled to take the shelter by building a temporary jhuggi alongside of the railway line, pavements, under the bridges, or

in open fields. Some of them also reported spending their nights on the rickshaws. The respondents of such category constituted about 10 percent. Thus it exhibits the fact that social structure such literacy, caste, household responsibilities and housing status are major determinants pushing the workers in menial job of rickshaw pulling.

Few Case Studies Narrated by Rickshaw Pullers

1. *“I am a migrant from a village of Bihar. The lockdown declaration has given a complete break of our livelihoods. I could not go back to village due to stoppage of transportation. I starved many days along with my 5 children and wife. It has caused my extreme weakness apart from the uncertainty regarding our future”* (Ubaid, 46, Firdaus Nagar).
2. *“The fear of insecurity of livelihoods has more depressed me than the fear of covid-19 infection”* (Rajkumar, 42, Central point).
3. *“Although the phase of lockdown has come over, we are suffering from acute mental stress and frustration because the people still avoid to hire our rickshaw. They behave as if we are untouchable. Thus, we are least able to meet our daily basic necessities due to insufficient earning.”* (Munawaar Begum, 56, Jamalpur).
4. *“Not a single police personnel and government official have come to help us during the COVID-19. We survived just by the grace of Allah.”* (Kusum, 18, Ramghat Road)
5. *“I am still suffering from anxiety because due to closure of university, not a single student visit to campus who are the main source of our livelihood”* (Islam, 47, Chungi Road).
6. *“I am already a TB patient and a sole earner of my household. The lack of medical treatment during COVID-19 and anxiety of losing the livelihoods has worsened my health condition. only few breaths are left now. What will be the future of my family after my death”.* (Baeed, 53, Railway Station).

The data considering the percentage distribution of rickshaw pullers having the symptomatic health problems related to COVID-19 has been presented in table-2 which exhibits that more than third-fourth of rickshaw pullers (77 percent) were reluctant to give response about any health problems similar to symptoms of corona during the pandemic situation on account of fear of communal assault, police harassment, public's negative attitude and being afraid to be quarantined. Out of total sampled respondents the largest share have reported having the problem of cough in which they accounted for 18.33 percent whereas 15 percent rickshaw pullers have complained to have been suffered by fever in that situation. A significant part of rickshaw pullers have also responded about the cold and sneezing in which they constituted 11.67 percent and 9.17 percent respectively. The ratio of rickshaw pullers suffering from soar throat amid covid-19 pandemic situation has been the lowest which has been recorded 2.50 percent while the remaining 7.50 percent sampled respondents have been registered suffering from other forms of diseases such as difficulty in breathing, swelling in throat, etc.

Table-2 Percentage Distribution of Rickshaw pullers having the symptomatic health problems During the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown in Aligarh City, 2020

Variables	Percentage
Fever	15.00
Sneezing	09.17
Cough	18.33
Soar Throat	02.50
Cold	11.67
Others	01.50
No Response	77.00

Source: Based on primary survey by authors.

The data about the percentage distribution of rickshaw pullers having the implications on their mental health well-being has been contained in table-3. An examination of the data shows that the significant portion of rickshaw pullers was suffering from various mental diseases caused combinely by the fear of infection spread, loss of livelihoods, shortage of food and being afraid to be quarantined. Maximum percentage of rickshaw pullers have reported about the tensions (76.67 percent) followed by anxiety (70 percent), fear (56.67 percent), frustration (53.33 percent) and low mood (52.43 percent). A sufficient portion of rickshaw pullers has reported about the mental health problems such as stress (36.67 percent) which was caused to them by constant worrying about the uncertainty of future and fulfillment of basic requirements in remaining lockdown days.

Table-3 Percentage Distribution of Rickshaw suffering from various Psychological Health problems caused by COVID-19 and Lockdown in Aligarh City, 2020

Variables	Percentage
Stress	36.67
Anxiety	70.00
Tension	76.67
Depression	19.17
Fear	56.67
Nervousness	30.00
Irritation	28.33
Frustration	53.33
Sleeplessness	25.19
Loneliness	32.21
Social isolation	34.34
Low mood	52.43

Source: Based on primary survey by author

The adverse implications caused by covid-19 and its lockdown has ultimately affected the physical health of rickshaw pullers. In this regard the table find out that constant anxiety, tension, sleeplessness have made them the victims of permanent headache, increased the level of diabetes and blood pressure. The rickshaw pullers are the habitual of hard work, the long term idleness have caused the muscle pain and gastroenteritis while insufficient and non-nutritious diet have enhanced the weakness to them. The in-depth analysis of the data exposes that majority of rickshaw-pullers have been recorded suffering from the migraine or permanent headache, followed by lack of appetite, chest-pain and gastroenteritis in which they constituted 18.33 percent, 16.51 percent, 15 percent and 14.23 percent respectively. The ratio of respondents suffering from the disease such as high blood pressure, diabetes, muscle pain and respiratory have been registered to 11.67 percent, 9.17 percent, 6.24 percent and 5.40 percent respectively. The rickshaw pullers who have complained about the weakness and tiredness shared 2.50 percent and 0.56 percent respectively. The remaining part of them consisting 7.50 have been reported having the problems of other diseases such as

Table-4 Percentage Distribution of Rickshaw suffering from various Health problems faced during COVID-19 Pandemic during Lockdown in Aligarh City, 2020

Variables	Percentage
High blood pressure	11.67
Diabetes	09.17
Migraine	18.33
Weakness	02.50
Tiredness	00.56
Lack of appetite	16.51
Gastroenteritis	14.23
Chest pain	15.00
Respiratory	5.40
Muscle pain	6.24
Others	07.50
No Response	65.00

Source: Based on primary survey by author

CONCLUSIONS

The present study suggests that the current COVID-19 pandemic has caused the severe implications on the physical as well psychological health-status of rickshaw pullers. It has caused severe anxiety and depressive symptoms in rickshaw-pullers. The long-term mental hazards have led them to adverse implications on their physical health too as significant portion of them have been recorded suffering from

the permanent headache or migraine, increased level of blood pressure and diabetes. Moreover, the constant taking of under nutritious and inadequate diets have caused them acute weakness and tiredness. The long-term uncertainty, tension and anxiety regarding their livelihood security have made them more vulnerable. However, majority of them were reluctant to respond about the health diseases as similar to covid-19 symptoms, but a sufficient portion

were recorded having these symptoms in some forms but they were most probably due to seasonal impacts and unhygienic conditions rather than actual infection of covid-19. The major concern before them was their economic survival rather than the fear of spread of covid-19 infection which has kept them more vulnerable in terms of their physical and psychological health well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The rickshaw pullers is one of the most deprived and disadvantaged group of society. Their economic insecurity and lack of social dignity make them more vulnerable. The arduous nature of their job and low wages have devastated their condition. Above of all these, the covid-19 its resultant impacts have accentuated their socio-economic, physical, mental and spiritual condition more severely. This is the group which urgently require the adequate attention of government, volunteer organizations non-governmental organizations. The government should create emergency funds specific for rickshaw pullers, formal and informal, to assist them with temporary wage support and relief packages. The people should be educated to fight COVID-19 and discrimination at once. The pandemic is not an excuse for discrimination. The government should ensure the unconditional provision of health services free of religion, caste and class discrimination, institutionally and individually, to rickshaw pullers. The timely, transparent and rightful access to information should be ensured that accurately reflects the figures and cases related to COVID-19. There should be awareness raising campaigns aimed at employers, rickshaw pullers', and the society at large about rickshaw pullers' rights under COVID-19.

There should be regular monitoring of employers through the reinforcement of inspection to check whether the employers provide food, water, protective gear and necessary hygienic products to the workers. Whether they expose the workers to dangerous environments, by not following quarantine measures or forcing workers to perform excessive and unsafe tasks. Whether they force workers to quarantine in the workplace and deny their rights to enjoy days-off fully through limiting their freedom of movement. The safety equipment such as mask, sanitizers, surgical caps, face shield, washing dispensaries, and wet tissues, etc. should be distributed at first to rickshaw pullers free of cost as they are more vulnerable to the infection of while maintain the household environment clean and being in interaction with the employers and their families.

The most distress aspect of rickshaw pullers' is that they are not part of formal sector, thereby, are not

included in planning and policies. The problems what they face at place of work often go unheard in absence of the institutes where they can register their problems. In the city, there is need for institutionalizing some mechanism for consultation between municipal authorities and representatives of rickshaw pullers so that their voices can be heard.

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