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# COVID 19 IN PAKISTAN: MEDICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

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## ABSTRACT

*The world is facing the challenge of COVID-19 Pandemic, and it has infiltrated every country in the world. The international community has stood still to fight against the COVID-19, which has an outbreak from the Wuhan City of China, in December 2019. Pakistan had also become the victim of COVID-19 back on February 26, 2020, when two patients tested positive, and the government started to panic to prevent its outburst in the entire country; therefore; preventive strategies are taken in place, and Standard Operating Procedures were provided by the government along with the Ministry of Health Advisory. Therefore; it is essential to undertake the effectiveness of preventive strategies taken by the Government of Pakistan to reduce the intensity of COVID-19. Hence; the researcher has taken interviews from 15 doctors, 21 paramedical staff (including nurses), 05 financial analyst or economist and 35 participants from social science in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. The results of the study*

*suggested that preventive strategies are sufficient for the benefit of citizens, but it is also essential to conduct businesses to maintain the standard of living rather than facing the financial crisis which will be a bigger issue than the COVID-19.*

**Key words:** COVID-19, SOPs, Preventive Strategies, Lockdown, Social Distancing, Smart Lockdown, Self Isolation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

The world has faced different challenges since its birth in the form of natural calamities or hazards, wars, diseases, financial crisis and others and state governments and other international authorities are keen to eradicate and overcome these challenges over time (Saqlain et al., 2020). The current problem is an infectious disease outbreak that started in December 2019; in the city of Wuhan, China (Wang et al., 2020). Gradually; people become the victim of this disease, and it becomes severe with time and indulged more and more people in the city which causes a high rate of mortality. Initially, it was considered that it is a China-based disease that can be dealt with by the authorities. It will be over very soon, but the predictions and the calculations were wrong, and on January 30, 2020, WHO (World Health Organization) announced it; as the Pandemic and named as COVID-19 because it was spread to the other neighboring countries in the region of Asia and the world as well (World Health Organization, 2020). Therefore; COVID-19 has become the most threat full feature for the international community.

COVID-19 spread in Iran very soon as it outreaches the borders of China and people affected with this disease without knowing it and government did not able to handle it in the initial phase (Hormati et al., 2020). On February 26, 2020; Government of Pakistan announced the first COVID-19 positive case in Karachi, Pakistan; similarly, on the same date, another patient tested positive in Islamabad (Capital of Pakistan) (NIH, 2020). After these two COVID-19 patients; Government of Pakistan step up and issues the alert throughout the country that it can be devastated for the people if they care is not being taken or the preventive measure are not being taken as per Pakistan's Ministry of Health Advisory (COVID. GOV, 2020). The proposed suggestions from the government were to reduce the social contact, use mask, wash hands or use sanitizer and increase immunity to fight against the Corona Virus. As it is a fact that Pakistan is the third world country; that are having different issues such as; poverty, lack of infrastructure, lack of education, lack of medical services for their citizens. Most people in Pakistan were not taken the advisory seriously and continued their life cycle as usual which causes the diseases to infiltrate into the societies, communities and across the provinces (Waris et al., 2020).

At the provincial level; Governments of their respective provinces closed the schools, colleges and universities to take the preventive measures for the spread of Corona Virus (Shereen et al., 2020). However; this step was a temporary setup to give a strong message to the families and parents to keep the future of Pakistan at home. Unfortunately; Pakistan's society and especially parents did not perceive this preventive measure as the safety and started to celebrate the closer as vacations and overjoyed through travelling from one city to other (Sajed and Amgain, 2020). In March 2020; as the cases reported with the high rate then the time comes when Government of Pakistan announced their one of the preventive strategies to

be enforced throughout the country in the form of lockdown after the consultation with the provincial governments (NIH, 2020). The first complete lockdown was announced on March 18, 2020; which require a complete shutdown of businesses, industries, shopping malls, markets, picnic spots, entertainment spots including the parks for the safety measures (Geo News, 2020). However; only grocery and dairy products shops or general stores could continue their operations to a specific time limit in a day.

The lockdown continuity was to prevent the spread of the virus and focused was on the prevention of local transmission of disease. The results of the lockdown comprise in the financial crisis, and poor were strangled to live below the poverty line (Hitav et al., 2020). The virus becomes vulnerable, and the process of local transmission becomes fertile, which caused an alarming situation for the government to handle the outburst of the disease and maintain the living standard of citizens. Therefore; other preventing strategies were introduced by government such as social distancing, smart lockdown and self-isolation (Gardner, 2020).

### **1.2. Smart Lockdown**

The smart lockdown was meant to seal the areas having a high rate of reported cases. In contrast, other areas that are such as marketplaces and commercial hubs were to be remained open with the social distancing and by abiding the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) set by the Government (Saqlain et al., 2020). It is a new and unknown term that can be helpful according to the highly populated corona areas but was not applied by the international community yet. Therefore; the results of this strategy are still ambiguous.

### **1.3. Self Isolation**

Self-isolation is the extreme case when the individual becomes infected with the virus and must quarantine a minimum of fourteen days to recover from it (Zu et al., 2020). Self-isolation is not meant for only COVID-19 patient. Still, for those having influenza, cough and sour throat then they are suggested by the doctors to self isolate from other family members so that in case they are carrying COVID-19 infection it should not be transmitted to any other family member (Gardner, 2020).

### **1.4. Social Distancing**

Social distancing was consistently being suggested by the government through different medium of communication to deliver a message to every citizen of the country to follow the given guidelines and implement it into their daily routine life for the safety and security of their families (Rodriguez-Morales et al., 2020). This term is an invention of COVID-19, but the idea is ancient which is being derived from the Spanish Flue pandemic; they used the strategy of maintaining distance with the others which is not called as the social distancing (Patrick and Daniel, 2016). This strategy is appropriate and sufficient for the prevention of COVID-19.

## **2. AIM OF THE STUDY AND PAKISTAN'S POSITION ON COVID-19**

The study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the government's preventive strategies to reduce the intensity of COVID-19 in Pakistan. This research has focused upon the city of Karachi in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. Karachi is one of the biggest cities and economic hub of Pakistan, and currently, it is the center of COVID-19 Pandemic. In Pakistan total number of COVID-19 patients tally has mounted to 59,151 (Till Dated May 27, 2020) while Sindh has 23,507 cases which is the highest numbers of cases all over Pakistan (COVID. GOV, 2020). However; in comparison with the other countries, Pakistan has a low mortality rate which is about 2.1% and total death are 1,225 (COVID. Gov, 2020). Given these statistics, it is vital to undertake the perception of specialized and layperson of the society about the preventive

strategies of the government helps to reduce the spread of COVID-19. So; the research question of the study is “How effective are the Government of Pakistan’s Preventive Strategies to control the COVID-19 pandemic?”

### 3. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The lack of prior research and literature limited the sources of information to collect the data, and still lacks the in-depth insights of the phenomena as the cases are increasing day by day. There are no final words about the facts and figures. Therefore; it is limiting our research to the qualitative method and collecting data through the interviews from medical practitioners dealing with corona patients in public and private hospitals, economist and financial analysts and other well-educated citizens. The duration of the interview lasted between five to ten for the medical practitioners as they are the front-line soldiers to fight against the Pandemic and were quite busy in providing medical assistance to the COVID patients. However, the interviews with analysts and other participants lasted longer than 20 mins. The table below shows the number of participants categorically and average duration time for the interviews.

**Table 1**

<b>Participant Type</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Average Interview Duration in Minutes</b>
Doctors (Public Hospitals)	10	06
Doctors (Private Hospitals)	05	07
Nurses and other Paramedics (Public Hospitals)	15	07
Nurses and other Paramedics (Private Hospitals)	06	08
Economics and Financial Analysts	05	20
Other participants from social sciences	35	21
Total Participants	76	14.25 (overall average)

### 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Interviews were conducted in three different categories to take the perceptions about the effectiveness of preventive strategies of the government to reduce the intensity of COVID-19. The responses of doctors and paramedics were summarized as social distancing, staying at home, reducing the social contacts and following the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures). Doctors were fully convinced that complete lockdown should be implemented by the government because people are not taking it seriously, which has caused a high rate of Corona Patients in the last days of May 2020. The economic and financial analysts are of the concern that complete lockdown is not beneficial from the economic perspective due to its long-term effects on unemployment and economic uncertainty leading to worse social issues such as poverty, crime, mental illnesses etc. So; other strategies such as; smart lockdown, social distancing and self-isolation are better choices to prevent the COVID outburst and to keep the economic and financial activities operational in the country.

The responses of the other sociologists had mixed conclusion; most of them were against the Government preventive strategies because it has decreased the purchasing power of an individual and it has become difficult for them to earn bread and butter for their families. Majority of the population is not much financially stable and living under the poverty line that has caused a threat to their survival during the lockdown. They are more comfortable in living their life by abiding the SOPs and fight against the Pandemic. The few the participant think the Pandemic is more dangerous than the economic issues, and they are against the smart lockdown strategy. Therefore; Government and doctors are consistently appealing to stay at home and abide the provided SOPs while going out to the market or any other places. Random people are more concern for their financial position and want to earn money for survival. Financial experts

are a concern for the lack of financial stability that will adversely impact upon the lower class of the society. The overall analysis suggested that COVID-19 has infiltrated into communities. And the locally transmitted cases are increasing due to avoidance of SOPs by the citizens.

## 5. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has spread globally; however, the intensity varies depending on the approaches to fight against the Pandemic (Ioannidis, 2020). Currently; the scientist thinks that spread of COVID-19 is unstoppable; therefore; the people all over the world must maintain social distancing and abide the SOPs provided by the respective governments. The results of the interviews provide the difference of opinion among the medical professional, economists and sociologists. Medical professionals are of concern over the spread of COVID-19, and the safety of human life is at the top. However; financial analysts believe that the economic crisis which will lead to a mass disaster for human being which is again the threat to their survival. The conclusive remarks that come from the finding of the current study are; the Pandemic must be taken seriously by the common man, and it is necessary to take preventive measures and strictly follow the SOPs provided by the concern authorities.

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