

IMPACT OF COVID-19 INDUCED LOCKDOWN ON RESEARCH ACTIVITY: A FIELD STUDY

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Abstract

It is almost a truism to state that COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost all the affairs of humankind all over the world. To be specific, these phenomena have also adversely affected the domain of research activity. Across the disciplines irrespective caste creed and gender some effects are general. And there are some specific issues per se and cannot be dismissed as a common view. This paper proposes to include if there is any particular outcome resulting from the pandemic and lockdown. The paper attempts a qualitative discussion on the basis of the interviews conducted for a few researchers across the world. Finding incorporates a variety of responses received from the researchers. The discussions in the paper present both the unanimous and incoherent views of the respondents. This paper is a miniature portrayal and a stepping stone to further the research in the same context.

Key words: *COVID-19, lockdown, research activity, field work.*

Impact of COVID-19 induced Lockdown on Research Activity: A Field Study

On the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, mankind has come across a severely difficult time. Day today activity has come to a halt. Worldwide phases of lockdown have been imposed. There is nothing to reiterate that specific socio-cultural and political issues break out as a consequence of the pandemic. When lockdown started, like any other field it also impacted thoroughly the teaching- learning situations. Traditional ways of teaching and learning in the classrooms have been interrupted in order to secure survival safety of the mankind. To some extent, many alternatives of digital platforms have sufficed yet foregrounding pros and cons. Creative and scientific mind of people have necessarily sought for alternatives to replicate the traditional classroom and school environment. Such a scenario extends to the domain of research activity also. Like the traditional classes, lockdown has intervened the activity of the researchers also. Basic everyday research plans and reading activities of the researchers have faced interruption inevitably. Lockdown has on the surface scene deprived the researchers of the library space in the respective institutions. Regular brainstorming conversations

with peers and guides in the institutions have been scoped with a reorientation during this lockdown period as can be observed. The official research works like submission of a thesis or dissertation; Viva, pre-submission etc. are also temporarily discarded when the matter is about the survival and safety of the people. It is understood that during complete lockdown process, the mindset of all the people are occupied with the primary tension of fighting back tactfully the pandemic. But with the reopening or unlocking process, it is now time look back to find out what have been the impacts of the entire phenomena of pandemic and lockdown on the different activities of the people. It is in this context, this paper attempts to record and analyze the impact of lockdown on research activities. The paper queries about the mental health of the researchers, accessibility of materials during lockdown, productivity of enough free time in lockdown, immediate reaction to lockdown on its onset and the expectation from unlocking process regarding research activities. This paper intends to get hold of all these concerns. Since the field work is conducted for the intended study, the analysis is based on the responses of the participants. Primary objective of the study is to explore new knowledge on the correlation of pandemic, lockdown and research activity. One can not refuse the impacts of lockdown on the activity of the researchers. This paper highlights both the pejorative and optimistic study on the chosen topic. With an objective outlook, the paper brings forward the challenges and substitutions faced by the researchers during the lockdown process.

Methodology:

This study employs a field study with a few researchers from different universities of India. To conduct the field study, a questionnaire has been prepared. The questionnaire contains 6 questions on the concerns of the paper. Questionnaire is formed through google forms. Keeping in mind the safety measures of pandemic, questionnaire has been mailed to the participants with full consent. Questionnaire is sent to ten researchers. Within the given time, six researchers have replied back. This paper contains the analysis on the basis of the responses received. The participants chosen for the research is based on the random sampling method. The writers' purposeful selection of the participants has been the sole determination of sending the questionnaire. After receiving the replies from the participants, a qualitative discussion is presented in the paper.

Literature review:

Adom and all (2020) writes that researchers have to seek for alternatives, when traditional means of data collection is not feasible. Alternatives include e-surveys, video conferencing, telephonic conversation etc. even the secondary data available from the published sources can be the initiation to proceed with research. Due to lockdown, researchers cannot sit back sighing down the situation. They have to look for solutions to the problems faced by the global communities. Byrom (2020) writes about the challenges the early career researchers come across during the lockdown. This study extends to confirm that more than three quarters of the respondents talk about the impaired research. The loss of employment possibility for the early career researchers have also been pointed out in this study. According to this study, problems have arisen to publicize the research findings. Situation worsens for them whose research funding has been stopped or discontinued as a result of economic crisis aftermath the pandemic. Sundarasan and all (2020) studies the state of mental health of university goers in Malaysia. This study reports that students suffer from higher level of anxiety during this critical time. Various stressors have been classified including financial constraints, digital learning, uncertainty larking in career options etc. Cui and all (2020) studies the issues particularly experienced by the female researchers. This study purports that there is a disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the researchers. Use of productive time differs from female to male researchers. This study is significant to inform readers about the gender perspectives of the impact of pandemic on research activity.

Thus, the reporting on the existing literatures has shown that scholars from the different parts of the world have responded to the issues surfaced after the pandemic outbreak. Researchers have surveyed and collected data to explore to what extent pandemic has tensed the researchers. Previous study has also attempted to figure out the cause and effect of pandemic on research. But it is almost truism to state that the more is less in case of exploring the impact of pandemic and lockdown upon the

research activity. Some researchers have started their study from the middle of the pandemic outbreak and some started at the end of the first wave of pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic has trajectoryally broken out. From its initial emergence to the aftermath of the pandemic, researchers have to continue study to find out the impact of pandemic and lockdown on the research activity. A perpetual study by the different researchers at different levels through various methodologies only can report the actual and complete scenario of the lockdown in the matter of research activity. It is on this ground, this paper attempts to explore on the same topic.

Discussion:

First question in the questionnaire is about the first impression of the researchers regarding their researches during lockdown. Amid a variety of responses, what becomes prevalent is the adverse effect assumed on research. Researcher staying in countryside has become more tensed on the onset of lockdown. Reportedly, lockdown is the deprivation from the general academic environment of research. For this researcher, onset of lockdown is a gap presumed in case of the meeting with supervisory team, in presenting seminar papers and in having talks with peer group. For a researcher who has just begun field work in February, first impression upon lockdown in March comes out as havoc. Field work got postponed and it remained as an unpleasant set back in research. One researcher opines that announcement of lockdown came as a matter of shock. First impression was not about research but about the acceptance of the sudden news of pandemic and lockdown itself. News of lockdown brought in tension. Lastly one researcher commenting in an optimistic way confirms that free time during lockdown was promising for writing research papers. However, it did not become so fruitful as stated by the researcher.

Second question in the questionnaire is about the experiences of the researchers during the lockdown. Replies to this question begin from the almost no research activity to the uncertainty and anxiety experienced by the researchers. One researcher posits an optimistic answer and asserts that lockdown has taught to search for alternatives to go on in the critical times. One researcher has become hopeful during the lockdown to work on research papers. But this researcher has also experienced an overall slow down in the academic activity. Inconvenience is faced by one of the researchers for not being able to meet the supervisor physically. One researcher extends the comment to assert that lockdown has been the waste of time. No considerable progress is counted on during lockdown.

Next question in the questionnaire is about the management of field work during lockdown. Except one participant, others have field work. One participant has completed the fieldwork luckily before the pandemic outbreak. Two others have kept on postponing the field work for six months. And the rest have sought for alternative means of conducting field work.

Fourth question is about the accessibility of materials during lockdown. Our first respondent has said that due to bad network connectivity from his countryside home it becomes impossible to get access to materials online. One researcher from Jamia Milia University has reported that he has faced no problem for accessing materials since the university has provided them all with a wide variety of open access to journals and websites. Another two researcher's consent that materials are available online and it is not a great difficult to access the materials. Two researchers have declined the availability of enough materials during lockdown. They have not become able to access materials as per requirement.

Fifth question comprises the query to know if the period of lockdown has been enough of time to continue with research. Answers to this question become similar in the sense that all have reported about the unfruitful times of the lockdown. Although the period of lockdown is apparently much free time, there is less productivity in this period.

Next question in the questionnaire is about the tackling with the issue of mental health. Except one respondent, all others have consented to the adverse effect of pandemic on mental health of the researchers. Two researchers have admitted that the situation around due to pandemic has distracted from focusing on. The news of pandemic has turned out to be a mental trauma. However, one researcher informs that initially it has been a problem but gradually work from home becomes usual.

Last question in the questionnaire is about the expectation from the unlocking process. Respondents wait for the re-opening of university and resuming data collection. One respondent wants to be back on track faster than before. One significant answer contains how significant it will be to continue with research in a post-COVID situation. This answer reaffirms the sense of meaninglessness.

Thus, the responses to the questionnaire comprise the variety of answers as mentioned above. Some responses are unanimous. For example, majority has confirmed the decline of productivity of work during the whole period of lockdown. Researchers have stated that news of pandemic has created havoc to mental health. But for other questions we have received mixed responses. For many it has not been a problem to avail materials online. As noticed, in remote areas it has become difficult to avail resources online. Another answer that draws our attention is about the field work. It has been a great loss to the researchers whose research only fits in the practical field work. Telephonic conversation and mailing of questionnaire do not suit all kind of research. Again, one can state that in many a case personal interview may suit the research better. In that case, the difficult times of pandemic have laid back the research activity. Although researchers have said about the lack of an academic environment during lockdown, observation contends to take up the opportunity of digital environment to create group chats among the peers through what's app, google meet or zoom video calls. One is wiser if one fights back the critical times. So, it is better to step up according to the situation around. We must create a global digital community of researchers to share our knowledge among the peers. Even with our supervisors we can build up communication through mail and other social media opportunity. One can never do away with mental health while discussing anything about lockdown period. This paper extends to suggest that researchers must consider academic counselling in a post-COVID situation. From the end of the university also counselling must be offered freely to benefit the researchers. Governmental and non-governmental organization must pay concern for the same. Since it is observed that researchers have spent less productive time during lockdown, it is now time to fasten up the research activity. It is up to the researchers and to the supervisors to work for the best maintenance of time after the re-opening. There should be more and more brainstorming stations, seminars, workshop etc. to adjust the laid-back research works. From the time of lockdown, researchers have become more dependent on the online resources; the university must ascertain the free excellent resources to the researchers. Moreover, library services must be resumed with 24x7 services so that the earlier gap in library work can be adjusted with.

Conclusion:

This paper pertains to the research questions raised in the introduction. The paper within the purview of methodology analyses the responses of the questionnaire. The study extends the analysis to generalize that researchers worldwide have come across tough times in the matters of research. In terms of continuing research during lockdown, in the management of time and the accessibility of materials- all come into halt or at least get designed by alternatives. All these matters necessitate inquiry. In a post-COVID situation, together with socio-economic and political amelioration, the arena of research activities also demands investigation. This paper has endeavored to present the analysis as a stepping stone to this broad research area. Certain limitations are there in this project. Within a short span of time, only a few responses have been considered for discussion. With the invest of much time and resources, one can broaden the study to include more researchers from the world. The questionnaire can also be lengthened to include questions about other relevant aspects. The questions analyzed in this paper are basic and hints at the primary concerns. Future researchers can carry on the study in a large scale. Researchers can send the questionnaire to more researchers from all over the world to receive more responses. Further the theoretical frameworks of psychoanalysis during pandemic can also be made a part of the study by the future researchers.

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