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PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND COPING STRATEGIES OF THE COMMUNITY, JIMMA UNIVERSITY, SOUTHWEST ETHIOPIA

GEBRU, Alemayehu

ABSTRACT

Beside its infections and death rates, COVID-19's lockdown has instigated worldwide psychosocial impacts by causing mass stress, tension, isolation, loneliness, less social interaction, fear, and responded with social support system called ubuntu. Collective fear of coronavirus can be termed as "coronaphobia" has produced an excess psychosocial crisis across the different societal levels. Thus, to control its rapid spreading, countries introduced lockdowns and social-distancing. Therefore, the study aimed to explore the psychosocial impacts of lockdown and the coping strategies of participants. A cross-sectional qualitative phenomenological research design was used to explore the experiences of 10 Jimma University instructors. Ubuntu is used as a lens to inspect the support system in the community. The trustworthiness of the data is secured via member-checking and consent participation. Narrative data from in-depth interviews discovered eight major themes: the spiritual aspects, social and cultural aspects, emotional and behavioral stabilities, the social and physical environment, changing lifestyle, adherence to instructions, sharing and caring for others, future directions. Participants confirmed fears, stress, isolation, loneliness, poor social interaction are the psychosocial impacts and coped-up by support systems. Engaging in resource mobilization and spending their time with family and self-update. The finding implies the need for social workers' contribution in handling the psychosocial challenges of the community and intervention with culturally relevant theories like Ubuntu.

KEY TERMS: COVID-19, buntu, lockdown, psychosocial, Jimma, Ethiopia

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Author/s details: GEBRU, Alemayehu, Lecturer at Jimma University, School of Social Work, Email: gebrualemayehu@gmail.com

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

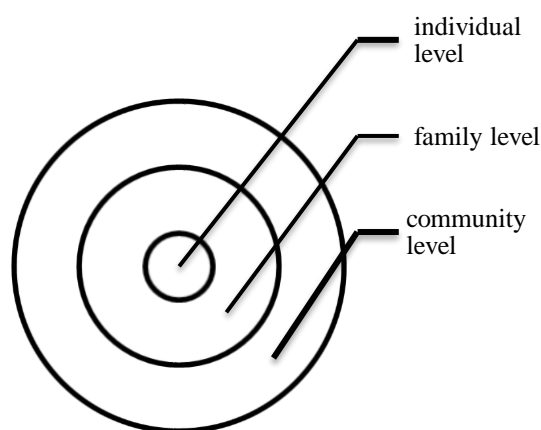
The purpose of this study includes understanding the psychosocial impacts of the lockdown and its coping strategies by Jimma University communities with *Ubuntu* as lens to see indigenous systems to solve such kind of problems. People have been gone through the waves of psychosocial problems since the pandemic outbreak. Their psychological stresses at the beginning included anxiety, anger, fear, worries, crying, and depression and so on. They fear to interact with their relatives, friends and colleagues. People are socially isolated and away from social activities. The researcher preferred to use *Ubuntu* as African based theory instead of western values, knowledge, approaches and models. Because the Africans problems are better comprehended and addressed via our own indigenous knowledge. And this is why the Ethiopian people said “የሀገሩን ስርዓት በሀገሩ በሬ” it represents cultivating the country’s land with the country’s ox.

Ubuntu as shared values and practices of black Africans has immense similarities with Ethiopian peoples’ cooperative values and practices in standing as one during difficulties as well as ceremonies. Hence, I observed the sharing and caring approaches of the Jimma University communities with particular reference to the instructors during the lockdown to overcome the psychosocial impacts in line with *Ubuntu*’s orientation. So, the definition given by Mugumbate & Chereni (2020) holds water to integrate with the approaches that Jimma University used against the COVID-19’s lockdown. They said:

Ubuntu refers to a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world (VI).

Moreover, the theoretical explanations by Samkange and Samkange (as cited in Mugumbate & Chereni 2020, p. vii) illustrated the human relations “*The attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour, an attitude to other people and to life, is embodied in hunhu or Ubuntu*”. This is directly related with social work core value called the importance of human relationship in dealing with clients need and the approaches used in overcoming the problems all through this pandemic lockdown. On top of this, these authors affirmed that sanctity of life is the sacred one by saying “*If and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life*” (Samkange and Samkange, cited in Mugumbate & Chereni 2020, p. vii). And it stands for the ethical principle of social work profession. *Ubuntu* social justice framework (Rankopo, Osei-Hwedie and Modie-Moroka as cited in Mugumbate & Chereni 2020) shows that *Ubuntu* is all about reciprocity and sharing within the community, respect and empowerment of individuals, equitable distribution of resources among the community, promotion of social justice in the society, inspiring economic progress at large. Therefore, this framework is one of the approaches to understand the impacts of the lockdown and coping strategies. An integrated framework of *Ubuntu* by Mugumbate and Chereni, (2019) indicated the interlocked, influence, and the overarching perspectives of *Ubuntu* at six levels: the individual, the family, the community, the society, the environment and the spiritual in facing and dealing with the challenges. Though an integrated framework of *Ubuntu* has six levels, the author preferred to present the three levels where Jimma University communities have been intervened in the following diagram.

Figure 1: An integrated framework of *Ubuntu*



Source: adapted from Mugumbate & Chereni (2019, p. 30).

The figure indicates that the university was playing tremendous roles from micro to macro level during the campaign against COVID-19 lockdown.

The number of information about the novel coronavirus is alertly increasing daily and more figures on transmission and its course, reservoirs, development period, indicators and clinical consequences, including survival rates, are collected around the world and escalated the psychosocial impacts it has on people throughout the world (Corman et al., 2020). Scholars confirmed that quarantine management is an essential measure ought to be taken once the human-human transmission is confirmed. Ideally, if considerable social distancing and/or epicenter lockdown were applied early enough, there would be no pervasiveness or no distribution. But convincingly, it takes time for initial investigation (Zhang et al, 2020). Because of that it enhances the psychosocial impacts before the society recognized it. Additionally, authors described:

Along with its high infectivity and fatality rates, the 2019 Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has caused universal psychosocial impact by causing mass hysteria, economic burden and financial losses. Mass fear of COVID-19, termed as “coronaphobia”, has generated a plethora of psychiatric manifestations across the different strata of the society. So, this review has been undertaken to define psychosocial impact of COVID-19. Disease itself multitude by forced quarantine to combat COVID-19 applied by nationwide lockdowns can produce acute panic, anxiety, obsessive behaviors, hoarding, paranoia, and depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the long run. These have been fueled by an “infodemic” spread via different platforms social media (Dubey et al, 2020, para. 1-4).

The aforementioned data indicated the need for further investigations to realize the situation of psychosocial impacts of the lockdown and pointed out the way out to the dependable level. To the knowledge of the author, there is no research which is conducted in the study area and this one is the first to investigate the psychosocial impacts of the lockdown and its coping strategies in Jimma university southwest Ethiopia. Therefore, to understand the psychosocial impacts of the lockdown and the coping strategies with *Ubuntu* as cooperative responses the upcoming objectives are achieved.

The general objective of the study was to explore the psychosocial impacts of the lockdown and its coping strategies at Jimma University, southwest of Ethiopia. Specific objectives were:

- To explore the psychosocial impacts of the lockdown of coronavirus pandemic
- To know the coping strategies of Jimma University communities during the pandemic
- To find out additional way out during this kind of pandemic using Africans way

RESEARCH METHODS

As Yin (2016) stated “*research designs are logical blueprints*” (p. 83). So, the researcher employed cross-sectional qualitative phenomenological research design in order to achieve the research objectives and address the research questions. The main goal of qualitative research is to depend on the participants’ views of the state being studied. And, it focuses on the participants’ life, experience, performing in their everyday roles including their context, institutional and social environment (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2016). Therefore, qualitative phenomenological research design with exploration purpose applied to undertake this particular study.

Study participant selection technique and size determination

In qualitative research, the participants are chosen deliberately and such participant selection technique is known as purposive sampling. And, this is one of the non-probability participant selection techniques which I employed to select my study participants. The main reason that I have chosen this purposive selecting technique is to have those yield the most relevant and plentiful data or rich information in line with my topic of study (Creswell, 2014). There is no formula for determining the size of participants in a qualitative study. Hence, I followed the principle that has been described as selection to the point of redundancy or data saturation point (Yin, 2016). And, in this way, I involved ten instructors from both genders.

Data collection techniques

In qualitative phenomenological interview and observation data collection techniques are advisable; thus, I employed online survey in-depth interview through email and critical observation to understand the lived experiences in the study setting. Because, qualitative information requires more open-ended questions as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings (Yin, 2016). Since the lockdown is not conducive to conduct face-to-face interview with the participants, this method is preferred. Well-organized interview guideline and observation checklist have been prepared ahead of time with local language *Amharic* and

Affaan Oromo and after the data collection, transcribed and organized the data into the research language, English. I have informed the participants before sending the email and with their consent and timely response, produced the document.

Data analysis

Analysis in qualitative research proceeds hand-in-hand with the data collection, transcription, coding, categorizing, searching for patterns of data and developing themes, write-up of the findings as well (Creswell, 2014). Hence, thematic analysis is the main approach used to analyze the data with clear procedures as stated by Braun & Clarke (2006). For instance, while observation the researcher analyzed, wrote memos that ultimately included as a narrative in the final report, and organized the structure of the final report.

Assuring trustworthiness of the data

To secure the trustworthiness of the data, I used member checking since the interview has been undertaken online survey with exhaustively listed questions. And peer debriefing employed by accessing four colleagues from Jimma University to review and comment on the contents of the paper.

Ethical consideration

The identity of the participants is anonymous by using codes and pseudonym as well as reporting the findings in aggregate fashion. The information they provided is confidential because without the assent I don't share it with third party. And, their privacy and willingness to take part in the study are secured by signing the informed consent form (NASW, 2017).

STUDY FINDINGS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Six male and five female instructors have taken part in this study and produced these dependable findings in relation to the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19's lockdown and the coping strategies. The participants have their MSW and teaching and research experiences in Jimma University. Thus, after rigorous and systematic analysis of the data through transcribing, reading, coding, categorizing, searching for patterns and themes, the following eight major themes are generated. After thoroughly followed and conducted thematic analysis from data collection to interpretation via the processes of transcribing, reading over and over again, coding, categorizing, searching for patterns, eight major themes are emerged. The themes include spiritual aspects, social and cultural aspects, emotional and behavioral stabilities, social and physical environments, changing lifestyle, adherence to instructions, sharing and caring for others and future direction. Thus, themes are presented sequentially.

The spiritual aspects

Regarding the spiritual aspects of the participants, the pandemic lockdown highly affected their get together for worship purposes as they stated. For instance, one of the participants (P1) said, "*The COVID-19 pandemic highly affects my religion in many ways. For instance, the cancellation of worship services is one of them. So, I'm worshipping at home*". The other participant (P2) affirmed that "*Other than difficulties of getting together for worship and prayer, the vertical relationship with my spiritual core is as is*". Most of the participants tried to take responsibilities for their less involvement to solve the pandemics lockdown impacts at different system level. Thus, one of them (P7) stated:

It is related with the way we live and (give) all the good and positive practices and thoughts. Most importantly, is about how much you do good things and share all these good things with the community. Therefore, in terms of contributing for the community, when I evaluate myself, I think I am not contributing that much and I can say I am not contributing little. When we come to religious involvement in my institution, most of the usual activities in the church are not available because of the pandemic (regarding holy mass, social interactions with the church community). However, the catholic secretariat throughout the world including my country is active and I am trying to participate in different social service activities as much as I can. No matter how these involvements have their contribution in teaching how to practice spirituality, I am not contributing as expected.

Hence, social work professionals (instructors) can play huge role in reducing the impacts of COVID-19 lockdown by engaging with the community at different system levels from individual, family, neighbor, community, society at large.

Social and cultural aspects

The social and cultural bonds of the country are tested negatively because of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown since the country has very tight social weave. For example, P8 confirmed:

As Ethiopians we have culture of social gathering (eating and playing together, handing and sharing resources together), but the coming of COVID 19 totally cancelled this culture and social values. So, it creates social isolation. Also, it affects social gathering like attending marriage, birthday parade mourning and visiting an ill one.

The finding shows how the lockdown affects the indigenous peoples' social and cultural values and practices. Participant-6 stated that visiting friends and relatives has been affected. Due to it, avoiding funerary and wedding ceremony was a must during the lockdown. The author also observed that many cultural and social activities are restricted and the communities are forced to be introduced with new lifestyles.

Emotional and behavioral stabilities

Participants experienced emotional instability. Participant-5 described that feeling of stress and fear due to the uncertainty period of the COVID 19 and social isolation, sleeping disorder, continuous fear to be infected by the virus. Similarly, P4 elaborated:

I am not feeling emotionally stable because most of my family members and friends are still working; I'm not sure about my plans; I am worried of individuals in my community who need to go out to survive (since our community is at this status); most individuals are negligent about the necessary care for COVID-19 even if they can do it; majority of the individuals in my community are not taking care because they can't afford for the necessary materials like sanitizers and the proper face masks. All of the issues I mentioned above are attached with my life and that makes me to feel emotionally unstable.

Participants also believed that they observed many behavioral changes since the lockdown. E.g. P9 stated; *"I learned and developed: the habit of personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, physical exercise, depending on balanced diet, the culture of reading, kindness or being generous"*. And P3 added that *"Enhanced caution, thrift and limited interest for engagement in extra activities"*.

The social and physical environment

Participants explained the challenges they faced in the social and physical environment after the COVID-19 lockdown is enforced. For instance, P7 said, *"Everything is not as usual and that makes things difficult for me. Remember! I am Ethiopian and imagine what kind of social life we had. And now all the normal activities and our ways of life have become the ways of transmission of the virus"*. In addition, P2 stated, *"The work place appeared to be a bit abandoned because of absence of students and teachers, which stagnates academic engagements and public dialogues yet administrative tasks eased the scenario not to be boldly felt"*. Furthermore, P1 elaborated,

"Of course, it has been challenged. Not possible to visit and take time with others in person. Yet, with those who have the access, capability and interest to take advantage of technological apparatuses, I have maintained communication via social media outlets".

Results from observation shows that public spaces for social and physical interactions are abandoned and staying at home became the only choice.

Changing lifestyle

Changing the lifestyle is one of the strategies to cope-up with the COVID-19 lockdown impacts as the participants affirmed. Participant-4 added that still working online and also do has a program for readings (academics, and other books) and has schedule for prayers. Participant-5 also asserted that buying more foodstuffs at ones to avoid social interaction, praying at home, staying at home unless it is must to go out, wasting more time on reading and

watching film to recreation purpose are the lifestyles employed currently to cope-up the lockdown impacts. Listening to credible sources and taking cautions to maximum extent the current behavior that participant-3 has developed. Through observation, I have learned that people changed their lifestyle; for instance, the ways of greetings, personal spaces, gatherings, personal hygiene, family and societal interactions.

Adherence to instructions

Adhering to credible sources of information and respecting as well as changing in to practice is one of the strategies to cope-up with the impacts of the lockdown. E.g. P2 said:

I carefully adhere to all of the necessary instructions from WHO, health minister of my country and practice all of the prayers scheduled and adjusted and announced via all of the eparchies throughout the world including my eparchy (online via different social media platforms, TV and hard copies).

Participant-10 also asserted that being selective while following information about the virus and following WHO techniques to avoid the virus infection are the necessary measures. I also observed that people share the information they heard via social media, and mass media and tried to operate accordingly.

Sharing and caring for others

The participants asserted that sharing and caring for oneself and others ease the situations of COVID-19 lockdown impacts. P6 supported this idea by saying “*Caring for self and others with possible means like: Exerting efforts to get necessary equipment and sharing with needy others, extending financial and in-kind assistances to the vulnerable using institutional and personal links and modalities*”. And P3 confirmed that,

Our instructors at Jimma University have mobilized the 30% of salary for the needy community members and delivered at their neighborhood (local administrations). In addition, sharing the resources within the community especially at religious centers, community support systems like Idir and Mahber for the vulnerable segment of the community are the major strategies. Moreover, our instructors engaged in different research projects to find out the virus's nature and productive solutions beside their contributions to their communities.

Through my observation, I understood that our informal community associations have great contribution during drastic and mild problems. Jimma university's communities mobilized resources at hand using government and private links and overcome economic and the psychosocial needs of the members.

Future directions

The participants suggested the way outs for future cases may occurred. Pandemics may happen in the future too. So, anticipatory investigations, accumulated capitals, and responsible-and-changed behavior will be among helpful way outs. National self-sufficiency, than dependency on other nations [as themselves are victims] will also be priceless. On the other hand, everyone have to adhere for all of the instructions from WHO and respective health ministers; we have to feel calm and focus on prevention and care; we have to have updated information; we have to learn how to share what we have with our brothers and sisters/the community and most importantly practice spirituality. On top of this, having strong safeguarding health policy which supported by advanced technology, doing the role of prevention (creating awareness on personal hygiene and community health) at the grassroots level and praying (doing and thinking only what God's love or being upright person) are the points raised to handle future conditions.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 lockdown have tremendous influences of the communities of Jimma University staffs particularly on their psychological and social interaction. And they used the social values and practices of the indigenous knowledge, values and collective responses as the African theory *Ubuntu*. Moreover, the different system layers such as individual, family, community, societies, environment and the spiritual dimensions are influenced each other and have great contribution in reducing the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown in the study setting. Scholars also confirmed that these intervention levels have their own values and benefits in dealing with such kinds of catastrophes because Africans have indigenous solutions for the cases happened in the contexts where they lived (Mugumbate & Chereni 2020). The Jimma university

communities reacted to the COVID-19 lockdown based on the indigenous strategies instead of depending on the western theories via mobilizing the resources from the area and responding accordingly. Because the African *Ubuntu* theories of practices and values have home based solutions for context centered drawbacks as the current issues designated. Since it needs context-based lifestyles change and the cooperative responses for the challenges through sharing and caring to the communities; the finding shows to handle the psychosocial impacts of the lockdown the coping strategies ought to be integrating various system level. And different frameworks from Africa specified that *Ubuntu* social justice framework (Rankopo, Osei-Hwedie and Modie-Moroka as cited in Mugumbate & Chereni 2020) shows that *Ubuntu* is all about reciprocity and sharing within the community, respect and empowerment of individuals, equitable distribution of resources among the community, promotion of social justice in the society, inspiring economic progress at large. Therefore, this framework is one of the approaches to understand the impacts of the lockdown and coping strategies. An integrated framework of *Ubuntu* by Mugumbate and Chereni, (2019) indicated the interlocked, influence, and the overarching perspectives of *Ubuntu* at six levels: the individual, the family, the community, the society, the environment and the spiritual in facing and dealing with the challenges. Moreover, the finding elaborated the emotional, behavioral, environmental, social and spiritual disturbances of the COVID-19 lockdown on the communities of Jimma University as the literatures supported. For instance, authors like Corman et al. and Zhang et al. affirmed that people during the pandemics spreading experienced emotional, behavioral, social, environmental and spiritual disturbances and if they accessed early awareness about the cases and understood the protection strategies beforehand, they can cope-up with the situations properly (2020). Therefore, context-based responses to the problems and depending on the indigenous knowledge, values and practices are the major approaches as the African *Ubuntu* pointed out.

Limitations of the study

As we all know, qualitative research needs firsthand information via face-to-face interview to grasp the participants' real-life experiences in scrutinizing the non-verbal reactions to amass the whole situations. But, this study has been conducted with online survey of well-organized and exhaustively listed interview questions through email in which to some extent lacks follow-up and probing questions for clarifications. The situations of COVID-19 lockdown restricted the author from getting and interviewing the participants on personal base since it is one of the virus's transmissions methods. On the other hand, to have rich data both qualitative and quantitative approaches ought to be implemented though for the sake of time constraints this study has been undertaken with qualitative research approach, only.

Implications to social work profession

The finding implies the need for social workers' contribution handling the psychosocial challenges of the community and intervention with culturally relevant theories like *Ubuntu* of Africans'. Social workers have a room to intervene with context-oriented knowledge, values, skills and perspectives during national and international pandemics like COVID-19 at different system level from micro to macro level. Since social workers are spiced at different work settings and client systems via influencing the policies, programs, and projects. Social workers work with clients not on clients with trustful working relationships, ethical principles, competencies, integrity, social justice and services as well as enhancing the dignity and worth of the person by comply with their core values. Thus, this study implies the requirements of social workers intervention since the definition of social work itself indicating the need for collective responses, indigenous knowledge and cultural context to solve the problems of vulnerable individuals. So, they are in the front line to upgrade Africans philosophies, practices, values, theories, and social capital as the finding implied.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above finding to advance the coping strategies of the people during pandemic outbreak, author puts recommendations as follows:

- Scientific communities in higher education institutions should play as first line actors in raising the awareness of the community and should have to conduct problem solving investigations.
- Professionals in higher education should reconsider a problem-solving indigenous knowledge like *Ubuntu* to amass the resources within the community.
- The social bond in Africa is strong than the western societies as I observed and this social bond and the sympathy we have to each other is helpful during the problems raised; so, we need to keep those useful social capitals by including in our educational curriculum.

- I have learned a lot in resources redistribution during needy time like the current one by sharing the resources we have at hand. In my university instructors as well as the community have contributed for needy individuals and solved huge problems; thus, this culture should be there every time.
- Scholars ought to uphold the context-based knowledge, values, practices and philosophies since they are effective and efficient with the familiar communities of the country. And concerned bodies such as academicians should have to work rigorously to bring these social capitals to higher education via conducting continuous investigations in the areas.

CONCLUSION

Although the world appears to be one village, Africans still have countless opportunities to overcome their problems and uphold the indigenous knowledge, values and practices such as *Ubuntu* theory. Similarly, Ethiopians have indigenous approaches to challenges they faced like *Idir* (organized neighbor associations to handle the funeral needs of individuals), *Iqub* (financial association of peers for traditional saving), *Mhaber* (formed for spiritual needs of Orthodox Church followers) and have innumerable societal values and practices for being in cooperative life in their respective villages. And social work professionals in the universities have huge contribution through their economic, social, psychological, spiritual and academic milieus as Jimma University communities study findings showed. Accordingly, scholars in Africa should have to be on the front line to dig out our ancestors' knowledge, values, practices, theories and philosophies as responsible bodies to our case.

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