

# COVID-19 Lockdown: Current Situation and Challenges Facing in Pakistan During Lockdown

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## ABSTRACT

In inference, this hazardous Corona virus has a wide-spread terror over the world. This drastic pandemic originates from china and prevailed darkly all over the world. It has damaged all spheres of life in developing and developed countries as well. In Pakistan, It severely has harmed all areas of a country but specifically it demolished the state of economy, health care professionals, education and employment. However, around the globe, Governments have taken serious actions but remain unable to control the situation completely. There is a dire need of proactive management to fight effectively with such unexpected far-reaching pandemic. Along with Governments it is the duty of a common man to cooperate and participate actively in stimulus actions taken by Government.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, Lockdown, Unemployment, Religion, Sports, Economy, Education.

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Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) is a communicable disease caused by Coronaviridae a Coronavirus family. It is a group of viruses with single stranded RNA that can cause disease in humans as well as agricultural animals. It is supposed that Wuhan city of China was the originating place for this disease. On 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2019, the group of people were presenting with respiratory issues such as cold, pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome in Wuhan.<sup>1</sup>

In China, the patients with SARS-CoV-2 were tested by their healthcare providers and were then identified as infected with COVID-19. For the qualitative detection of Corona virus nucleic acid, a

test Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (rRT-PCR) was done. According to World Health Organization (WHO), around 205 countries and territories have confirmed cases of COVID-19 and globally, there have been 1,051,697 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 56,986 deaths.<sup>1,2</sup>

This worldwide Corona outbreak has resulted in various national responses and has included containment measures such as quarantines, lockdowns shutdowns and curfews etc. in many parts of the world.<sup>3,4,5</sup> In terms of confirmed cases the most affected countries are United States, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey and China.<sup>3-8</sup>

The pandemic of COVID-19 was confirmed to have reached Pakistan on 26 February 2020, when a student in Karachi tested positive upon returning from Iran. By 18 March, cases had been registered in all four provinces, the two autonomous territories, and the federal territory of Islamabad.<sup>9</sup>

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Date	COVID-19 cases in Pakistan	Deaths	Recoveries	Active cases May	Last 15 days
					No. of Cases
2020-05-02				19,103(+5.46%)	440 (+5.52%)
2020-05-03				20,186(+5.67%)	462 (+5%)
2020-05-04				21,501(+6.51%)	486 (+5.19%)
2020-05-05				22,049(+2.55%)	514 (+5.98%)
2020-05-06				23,214(+5.28%)	544 (+5.84%)
2020-05-07				24,644(+6.16%)	585 (+7.54%)
2020-05-08				26,435(+7.27%)	599 (+2.39%)
2020-05-09				28,736(+8.70%)	636 (+6.18%)
2020-05-10				30,334(+5.56%)	659 (+3.62%)
2020-05-11				30,941(+2.00%)	667 (+1.21%)
2020-05-12				32,674(+5.60%)	724 (+8.55%)
2020-05-13				34,336(+5.09%)	737 (+1.80%)
2020-05-14				35,788(+4.23%)	770 (+4.48%)
2020-05-15				37,218(+4.00%)	803 (+4.29%)
2020-05-16				38,799(+4.25%)	834 (+3.86%)

**Cases:** The number of cases reported by the Government **Sources:** Official reports from the National Institute of Health and Government tracker

### CURRENT SITUATION PROVINCE-WISE

The current situation of lockdown in all provinces of Pakistan is:

#### Punjab Province

In response to increasing number of COVID-19 cases, on 13 March, 2020 at the National Security Council meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan, it was decided that all schools and universities in Punjab would be closed until 5 April. However, the faculty and staff will go to work as usual. Online

lectures and classes will be held in some institutions.<sup>10</sup>

On 22 March, the government decided to close down shopping malls, markets, parks and public gathering places for two days till 24 March. Punjab Chief Minister, Sardar Usman Buzdar commended people to stay at home, practice social distancing and avoid unnecessary travel.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of various GOVT. serious actions, number of COVID-19 cases still was increasing rapidly. Consequently, the Prime Minister Imran

Khan announced complete lockdown and formation of youth force labelled 'Corona Relief Tigers' to help government in fight against the spread of Coronavirus nationwide on 27 March. The force was distributed across the country and would be used to supply food items to people in their houses in case COVID-19 cases sharply rose in a locality. The recruitment began on 31 March.<sup>12</sup>

On 23 March, The Chief Minister announced a 14 days lockdown from 24 March till 6 April. All markets, shopping malls and public places were closed and pillion riding was banned.<sup>13</sup>

### **Sindh Province**

Likewise Punjab, On 1 March, Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, announced the closure of all educational institutes in Sindh till 13 March, 2020 which was later extended until 30 May.<sup>14,15</sup>

On 12 March, the Government of Sindh also announced that the remaining Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches at National Stadium, Karachi would be held behind closed doors.<sup>16</sup> On 13 March the Sindh government announced that all educational institutions will remain closed until 30 May 2020.<sup>15</sup> The Government, also forced for temporary ban on marriage halls, shrines and festivals in the province on 14 March.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, on 25 March, the provincial health department officials began Coronavirus case mapping as per directions by the Chief Minister of Sindh province.<sup>18</sup>

Keeping in view the tragic situation of Corona spread, On 2 April, the Sindh government extended the lockdown until April 14 and also suspended inter and intra-city public transport.<sup>19</sup> Restriction on public movement was also imposed from 5:00pm to 08:00am except for armed forces, health professionals, persons requiring immediate medical care and persons on goods transport. Meanwhile, the local government purchased 50,000 testing kits for the province in early April.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly it is reported that other organizations like Edhi Foundation, JDC Welfare Organization and Jamaat-e-Islami to have stepped forward to provide relief to the minorities.<sup>21</sup>

### **Balochistan Province:**

In Baluchistan, COVID-19 situation is not different than other provinces. For the sake of cautionary measures a technical committee is constituted by Baluchistan Government in the late January to handle COVID-19 Pandemic.<sup>22</sup> It is decided that all schools in the province will remain close till 31 March.<sup>23</sup>

Minister of Baluchistan, Sardar Yar Mohammad Rind looked for best compliance for schools closing. The exams of secondary school has also been postponed.<sup>24</sup> The province like others also asked for the army to be positioned for pandemic grip.<sup>25</sup>

On 24 March, a complete lockdown was imposed by the Baluchistan government until 7 April. Moreover, all social and religious congregations were banned.<sup>26</sup> The federal government directed for further extension in lockdown until 14 April.<sup>27</sup>

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province**

Like other provinces, as a measure of avoidance the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) government also endorsed that all educational institutions remain closed until 5 April and all civic crowds postponed until further announcement.<sup>28,29</sup> For seven days, all inter-district public transport was also deferred.<sup>30</sup> The provincial Chief Minister, Mahmood Khan declared on 26 March that the government had employed about 1,300 new doctors on contract basis.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the government approved on 29 March, a stimulus economic package amount Rs32 billion to provide relief to the masses and the business community.<sup>32</sup>

### **Challenges During Lockdown**

It is evident that lockdowns are found helpful in breaking the chain and effectively slowing down the virus transmission. National & international health care team experts also agree upon shutting down large territories for an extended period.<sup>33</sup>

Though, the government's move is necessary, but in this travel, Pakistan is facing serious challenges, particularly the ability to continue this extended blackout. While, the government

appealed for the implementation of disaster management laws but lower-level bureaucrats are seemingly confused about the establishment of needed services. Grocery chains are scrambling to maintain delivery lines undamaged as traders are opposing with logistical matters.<sup>34,35</sup>

Furthermore, laborers and manual workers on daily wages have a great difficulty to earn their money and to bring food to their families. This pathetic situation of food scarcity leads to increasing ratio of beggars.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, the financial impression of this lengthy lockdown is likely to be enormous and tremendously unbearable.<sup>37</sup> There would be widespread job losses and instabilities at a large scale that might require government attention and intervention, parallel to what is being done/was done in other countries that have set incentive packages to support the country monetary system.<sup>38</sup>

## IMPACTS OF LOCKDOWN

### Economy

On 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, Government of Pakistan announced that the Pakistani economy had lost Rs2.5 trillion due to the Coronavirus pandemic.<sup>39</sup>

Some government programs were issued through the calamity for the purpose of keeping people employed. For example, the Plant for Pakistan reforestation program was continued through the pandemic employing 60,000 people. This has also a great burden on economy.<sup>40</sup>

### Healthcare Professionals

Likewise, economy, health care professionals are also affected drastically. By May 7, 2020, more than 500 Pakistani healthcare workers are infected with COVID-19.<sup>41</sup>

On 29 April 2020, it is reported that at least 05 health care workers have died and 132 are hospitalized, 152 are isolated at home and 87 have recovered. In this report those are affected with COVID-19 included 181 doctors, 55 nurse and rest of them are other health related staff members.<sup>42</sup>

The federal government's economic relief package also benefitted the healthcare

professionals in the country. It was decided that if a doctor, nurse or a paramedic died while treating Coronavirus patients, they would be considered martyrs and their families would receive the package that is given to martyrs.<sup>43</sup> It has also a great economic effect on country's budget.

### Education

Education is the most affected area due to this COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Like other many countries Pakistan has decided to close schools, colleges and universities. The disaster manifests that policy makers are facing dilemma between closing of schools and keeping them open. Teaching is shifted to online classes, on an experimental and extraordinary scale. Student evaluations are also moving online, with a lot of trial and error and ambiguity for everyone. All scheduled exams of students have been cancelled. Prominently, these disruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase dissimilarity.<sup>44</sup>

### Sports

As other areas of life are greatly affected due to Corona virus pandemic, the sports schedules were also got interrupt such as matches of the 2020, PSL, scheduled in Karachi, were impacted by the pandemic and played behind padlocked entries.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) requested to international players participating in PSL to leave for their countryside.<sup>45</sup>

On 17 March 2020, the PSL knockout matches (both Semi Finals and Final) were suspended until further notification due to the unexpected spike in Coronavirus cases in Pakistan.<sup>46</sup>

### Religion

Religious and spiritual activities came also under a dire discussion. In regards to maintain social distancing, it avital step of defensive measures is asked to follow by all to fight COVID-19 pandemic, all religious ceremonies has banned in Pakistan. It is considered that religious crowds and prayer gatherings became a reason of anxiety due to their

possibility to exacerbate the explosion of disease in the country.<sup>47</sup>

### Unemployment

Similarly, other impacts of lockdown, the challenge of unemployment cannot be ignored. As unemployment leads to insufficiency of resources that leads to dearth and poverty. The Ministry of Planning has assessed that 12.3 million to 18.5 million people will become jobless due to pandemic.<sup>48-50</sup>

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None to disclose.

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### *Author's Contribution*

**SK:** Acquisition of the published data, drafting of manuscript.

**SK:** Conception and design of study and final approval of the manuscript.

**MG:** Critical revision of manuscript for important intellectual content.