

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON IT PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract: The uncertainties and dismay of lockdown due to Covid -19 on people all around the world is immense, and all are going through a trying time, which will be fully resolved only when a vaccination or effective treatment strategy will be successfully implemented across the globe. By considering the effect of lockdown on employees especially on Information Technology (hear after IT) professionals, a descriptive study was conducted with an objective to find out the impact of lockdown due to Covid-19 among employees in IT and related fields. A questionnaire was developed for data collection and its reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha value of 0.815. The questionnaire was distributed through online platforms and the collected data were analysed by using Mann-Whitney Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test. The result indicated that more than 50 percent of the sample scored higher than the midpoint in the different variables. Thus, the study revealed remarkable psycho-social impact of lockdown among employees in IT and related areas.

Index Terms - Lockdown, IT Professionals, Covid-19, Psycho-social.

I. Introduction

World Health Organization (WHO) declared in January about the new corona virus disease (Covid-19) and expressed the international concerns regarding the high risk of its spreading all around the globe. WHO made the necessary assessment and came to the conclusion in March 2020 that it can be characterized as a pandemic. To Control and contain the Public Health Emergency and crisis WHO, Public health authorities all over the world and national leaders jointly and individually decided certain strategies. As part of the strategy social distancing and lockdown were implemented to avoid and control the transmission of the virus and thus we are in the fourth stage of the lockdown, in India. People are asked to stay in their residence and continue their daily work as far as possible. Employers put forward the option of 'work from home' to their staff in order to adjust, accommodate and cop up with the situation. Nations across the globe are going through high financial crisis, fall of economic growth rate and uncertainties towards the immediate future. Nobody knows how long and how much will be its impact on the economic arena. People working in the private sector are scared about the security of their job and the possible salary cut. Those who are in government sector are concerned about their perks, future hikes in allowances and other benefits. However, all are struggling to manage the crisis at all levels. Joseph Devasia, the India Managing Director of Antal International, pointed out that all organizations will have to face downsizing the staff at some point of time in the near future. A review in salary, perks, bonuses, allowances, increments and benefits would be there.

II. Methodology

Population and sample

The population of the study was people who are working in IT and related fields and 18 years of age and above. The sample of the study was 261 IT professionals. Majority of the participants were aged 18-40 years (87%), and about half of the participants were males, and were married (52%). Almost all the participants were residents of India (97%).

Data and Sources of Data

The present study adopted the descriptive approach by using a survey method. After a thorough review on related literature, a survey questionnaire was developed in order to understand the effect of lockdown among IT Professionals. The survey questionnaire consisted of a pool of 49 statements constructed in 5 point scale. After a critical analysis some modifications and deletions were made and the final version had 42 items. Free online survey facility was used for data collection. Survey questionnaires were distributed by using google forms. Links of the google forms were shared through social media to reach people who are working as IT professionals in a wide geographical region.

III. Theoretical Framework

For the present study eight variables which measured the impact of the lockdown on people who are working in IT and related fields were selected. The variables include loneliness, distress, apprehension, uncertainty, social seclusion, interpersonal relation, health concerns and concerns regarding lack of basic amenities. Each item of the questionnaire was with five options namely, strongly agree, agree, disagree, don't know, and strongly disagree. Each item was scored 0 to 4. Most of the variables had 5 items and their scores ranged from 0 to 20 except interpersonal relation and lack basic amenities which had 6 items and their scores ranged from 0-24. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach alpha value of 0.815 which shows that the tool is reliable in all sense.

Loneliness is a 'cut off feeling' keeping a person away from others. It is an emotional state and subjective in nature. A person can experience loneliness even in the midst of a crowd or among family members and colleagues.

Distress is a feeling of upset, disappointed and annoyed due to unfulfilled goals and desires. It can be personal or social.

Apprehension is a feeling of being anxious, tensed, troubled and distressed due to problems faced in life.

Uncertainty is a feeling of being unsure about the present or future. It includes the fears associated with it.

Interpersonal relation is the interaction in intimacy between two or more persons which bring them together to have association and affection among themselves.

Social seclusion is deliberately keeping oneself away from others to avoid physical closeness and contact. This can be either by force or by voluntary initiative.

Health concerns is the question, which bothers, whether or not the person keeps mentally, physically and socially fit.

Basic amenities are provisions that meet the basic needs and comforts in life.

Soheil S and Maurizio M (2020) conducted a research on Staying home saves lives, really, study the impact of Covid-19 quarantine and lockdown strategies on crime rates in two major cities in US. The result revealed a drop by about 42% across the communities and crime types in both the cities. The study pointed out that lockdown and quarantine measures in various cities across the globe brought a new trend in safety improvement and crime reduction in public.

Hien Lau (2020) conducted a research on the positive impact of lockdown in Wuhan on containing the Covid -19 outbreak in China. The study revealed a significantly decreased growth rate and increased doubling time of Covid+ cases which is most likely because of lockdown measures and a more stringent confinement of people in high risk areas. These measures seem to have a potential to slow down the transmission of virus.

A review of the Lockdown 2.0 in the Newsletter of the Techno Park SRA, Stellenbosch, South Africa (April 28, 2020) states that 'stress, anxiety and feeling of loneliness' are the possible impacts of lockdown on the psyche of the people. As there is no specific end in the immediate sight it is inevitable to analyse the psychological burden of lockdown to consider what the employers can possibly do to mitigate its negative impact and to prepare support system to go forward.

Multinational companies and firms offered 'work from home' options to their staff and shut down their offices after the announcement of lockdown in almost all nations across the globe. Several Information Technology (hear after IT) companies allowed 90-95% of their staff to work from home. In the beginning many of them enjoyed the provisions but later they are facing the side effects. Most of the companies hiked the work-load and target. Also there is no time cap as they are not traveling and available at home. People are advised to do exercises and relaxation techniques to keep themselves safe and sound in body and mind. Along with the pressure from the office responsibilities due to high workload they have to look after the domestic works without the help of their regular helpers, which make many of them tired and exhausted. Due to the lockdown restrictions many people curtailed their regular outdoor physical exercises which in turn resulted in putting on body weight. Many people sit in front of the computer all throughout the day and the prolonged hours of work causes various health hazards and side effects on mental and physical wellbeing such as headaches, back pain, stress, insomnia and so on. Frequent and distressing updates on the pandemic in the media make many people worried and fearful about the spreading of the virus on them and their loved ones. WHO and health experts warn people against the over exposure to social media.

Many of Tech professionals who are working from home experience 'a feeling of burnout' because they end up working longer hours while some others say that they were expected to contribute more. Another cause of the burnout is social seclusion. Even though there are chat apps like slack, MS teams etc for internal and team communications within every organisations, people feel excluded. There are certain conveniences in working from home such as enjoying the personal freedom at home and avoiding the hazards of commuting to office etc. but many people enjoy office culture and fellowships. Human beings enjoy interactions and now as they don't have its provisions they feel a vacuum in life.

The present study intended to investigate the impact of lockdown among IT Professionals. Working throughout the day by sitting in front of their laptop and being separated from colleagues bring forth a 'feeling of boring' for many of them. Due to work load, restricted mobility and curtailed outdoor activities majority of the tech people feel exhausted and are in distress and tension. Many people, especially those who are above forty years of age, have concerns regarding job security and future prospects.

Statistical tools

Descriptive statistics such as Mean, Standard Deviation and Median, Range are calculated .Data were analysed by using Mann-Whitney Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test. Shapiro Wilk's and Kolmogorov Smirnov tests indicated non-Normal distribution of study variables, hence median is a better measure to describe them.

IV. Results and Discussion

It can be seen from Table. 1 that Median scores above the midpoint of score range, this indicates that half the participants had scores higher, than them, which is indicative of higher psycho social issues among the IT professionals.

Table1: Description of study variables

Variables	Mean \pm SD	Median (Range)	Score range (midpoint)
Loneliness	10.97 \pm 2.24	11 (2-19)	0-20 (10)
Distress	9.73 \pm 2.77	10 (3-20)	0-20 (10)
Apprehension	13.00 \pm 2.65	13 (5-18)	0-20 (10)
Uncertainty	11.13 \pm 3.70	11 (0-20)	0-20 (10)
Concerns Regarding Social seclusion	9.90 \pm 2.88	10 (3-20)	0-20 (10)
Interpersonal relations	14.30 \pm 3.27	15 (4-21)	0-24 (12)

Health concerns	14.30 ± 3.24	15 (0-20)	0-20 (10)
Concerns Regarding Lack of basic amenities	15.54 ± 3.46	16 (2-24)	0-24 (12)

Further an attempt was made to see if the study variables differed with respect to their socio demographic characteristics like age, gender and marital status. Because of the non-normal distribution of study variables Mann Whitney Test was used for the comparisons. Data are represented using Mean, Standard Deviation and Median, Range in the table. It can be seen that gender do not have any influence on these variables, as none of the study variables differed significantly between males and females. Mann Whitney test indicated that age and marital status scores on apprehension. IT professionals who are older than 40 years seem to have significantly more worries than younger IT professionals (14 vs. 13, $p=0.001$). Also, married IT professionals have significantly more worries than IT professionals who are not married (14 vs. 12, $p=0.001$).



Table 2: Comparison of study variables w.r.t socio-demographic characteristics

Study variables	Gender			Age (in years)			Marital Status		
	Mean \pm SD Median (Range)								
	Males (n=135)	Females (n=126)	p-value	< 40 years (n=228)	> 40 years (n=33)	p-value	Single (n=124)	Married (n=137)	p-value
Loneliness	11.06 \pm 2.36 11 (3 - 19)	10.87 \pm 2.12 11 (2 - 15)	0.300	11.01 \pm 2.22 11 (2 - 19)	10.67 \pm 2.44 11 (3 - 14)	0.664	11 \pm 2.22 11 (5 - 17)	10.94 \pm 2.27 11 (2 - 19)	0.787
Distress	9.68 \pm 2.99 10 (5 - 20)	9.78 \pm 2.51 10 (5 - 18)	0.452	9.75 \pm 2.84 10 (3 - 20)	9.55 \pm 2.27 10 (6 - 15)	0.896	9.6 \pm 2.91 9 (5 - 20)	9.85 \pm 2.64 10 (3 - 18)	0.225
Apprehension	13.04 \pm 2.92 13 (5 - 18)	12.96 \pm 2.33 13 (7 - 18)	0.755	12.79 \pm 2.59 13 (5 - 18)	14.42 \pm 2.59 14 (8 - 18) *	0.001	12.82 \pm 2.39 12 (5 - 17)	13.65 \pm 2.71 14 (5 - 18) *	0.001
Uncertainty	11.26 \pm 3.83 11 (0 - 20)	11.00 \pm 3.57 11 (2 - 19)	0.702	11.16 \pm 3.69 11 (0 - 20)	10.94 \pm 3.81 11 (3 - 19)	0.657	10.75 \pm 3.77 11 (0 - 20)	11.48 \pm 3.61 11 (3 - 20)	0.177
Concerns Regarding Social seclusion	9.58 \pm 2.79 10 (3 - 15)	10.24 \pm 2.94 10 (4 - 20)	0.126	9.91 \pm 2.92 10 (3 - 20)	9.79 \pm 2.66 10 (4 - 15)	0.849	9.83 \pm 2.89 10 (3 - 20)	9.96 \pm 2.88 10 (4 - 19)	0.625
Interpersonal relations	14.44 \pm 3.17 15 (4 - 21)	14.14 \pm 3.38 15 (5 - 21)	0.410	14.32 \pm 3.20 15 (5 - 21)	14.09 \pm 3.76 15 (4 - 19)	0.940	14.22 \pm 3.26 15 (5 - 21)	14.36 \pm 3.29 15 (4 - 20)	0.414
Health concerns	14.29 \pm 3.20 15 (0 - 20)	14.30 \pm 3.28 14 (0 - 20)	0.895	14.24 \pm 3.16 14 (0 - 20)	14.7 \pm 3.74 15 (0 - 20)	0.199	14.07 \pm 3.20 14 (0 - 20)	14.50 \pm 3.26 15 (0 - 20)	0.185
Concerns Regarding Lack of basic amenities	15.46 \pm 3.46 16 (0 - 23)	15.63 \pm 3.48 16 (6 - 24)	0.505	15.51 \pm 3.38 16 (6 - 24)	15.79 \pm 4.07 17 (0 - 23)	0.236	15.54 \pm 3.20 16 (6 - 23)	15.55 \pm 3.69 16 (0 - 24)	0.971

V. Recommendations

Employers should provide and assure a healthy working environment in order to ensure the well-being of their employees. The organisation will benefit and enjoy its employees' loyalty, productivity and commitment in return.

- Employers should provide interventions like life skills training, which promote and sustain social, financial and psychological wellbeing of their staff.
- Problems in the workplace should be identified and addressed with due seriousness.
- Employers should provide counselling and other support services to help their staff to manage their stress and strain.
- Yoga, Mindfulness meditation, physical exercises etc. are helpful to de-stress and relax during this pandemic crisis.
- Required to reschedule and restructure the work from home responsibilities in a balanced and integrated way so that employees can maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- It is necessary to keep an equilibrium between the freedom in personal life and professional responsibilities. When people work from home, there is no clear line to demarcate one from the other.
- Try to identify one's strength and weakness and strive to improve oneself.
- Encourage all family members to get involved in domestic chores so that time can be well managed and they also will learn certain values and life skills.

VI. Limitation

- The content of the self-developed questionnaire, used for data collection, could not be validated.
- The distribution of socio demographic variables was not evenly distributed as the data were collected through online.
- Persons who have no inter connection were not able to be accessed.

VII. Conclusion

All over the world, people experience and encounter a crisis situation during this lockdown. Crisis is not just because of corona virus and its outbreak but also myriad of apprehensions allied to it. Due to an array of measures and strategies taken by management for their organisational benefits and survival strategies such as downsizing the strength, over expectation regarding worker's contribution, workload, longer working hours, lack of job satisfaction, security and so on the employees experience and encounter stress and strain as never before. Many are at the risk of lay-off. Impact of lockdown disturbed the daily routine of the IT professionals and curbed their freedom for looking after the responsibilities in personal, family and social life. This destroyed the rhythm and harmony which they enjoyed during pre-lockdown in their respective organisations. Now they face absence fixed time for daily work, seclusion from colleagues and hence they feel lack of team spirit and fellowship, disorganised in daily routine, pressure due to workload, fear of laying –off and so on. **Hien Lau** (2020) pointed out that lockdown measures have a potential to slow down the transmission of virus and significantly decreased growth rate of the pandemic and other positive impacts. This study also emphasises positive impact of lockdown in various fields, especially in strengthening family relationship. Along with the study in the newsletter from Techno Park SRA, Stellenbosch, the present study also emphasise that while upholding the discipline of the lockdown to control the pandemic and to alleviate the ill effects of the crisis it is significant to ensure intervention of the employers to ensure the safety, security and an integral personality of the employees.

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