

# Distress and Depression Among Youth Under Covid-19 Pandemic: An Anthropological Analysis

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In the process of Bio-cultural evolution of human being, pandemics are nothing new. However, COIV-19 is different because it has taken place in the post globalization period when we are globally inter connected with economic and social dependency across the world. In Indian society, after a certain age, it is an automatic familial expectation that the youths will take up the prime responsibilities. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic, large section of youths have lost their jobs completely or partially both in the organized and unorganized sectors. Moreover, under the containment zones, there are a number of strict restrictions on their movements also. Ultimately under the restricted system and economic insecurity, the youths are getting distressed and depressed in a very alarming rate. The present paper is an attempt to discuss these issues from theoretical discourse and socio-economic aspects, with certain recommendations as well to redress this emerging problem.*

**Key words:** *Pandemic, Youth, Responsibility, Economy, Restriction, Distress, Depression*

## **Introduction**

In the process of biocultural evolution of man, pandemic is not a new phenomenon. Man became human being through the process of cultural evolution and gradual stages of development related to economic organization. In this process there developed are the man animal association and consequently different zoonotic diseases spreaded to the human ancestors. Obviously there were environmental response and allied supportive mechanism from the nature which ultimately made the human ancestors victorious over time to time pandemics and our livelihood continued. In this sequence at the present day the most talked about phenomenon is the COVID-19 pandemic. Its impact is markedly different from the earlier ones because it has taken place in the post globalization period where economy, culture, business, politics are internationally depended to one another both through the digital way and through the physical movement of human individual.

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In the contemporary world the Gross Domestic Product of a nation is directly related with the accessibility of resources and its marketization. At the large scale such products have social and cultural value along with their economic value. In a Nation GDP is directly associated with the working force or the human resource. It is worthy to mention that primarily this human resource is the young generation of any Nation, who are technologically and digitally skilled enough to represent the local resources on front of Global market. Obviously due to COVID-19 pandemic several restrictions have been imposed by the Government upon the citizen. One such restriction is the movement of people and limited transportation of essential goods only. In this consequence trade and business along with organized and unorganized occupational sectors have been seriously affected. Such issues have ultimately generated depression and unrest among the youth globally as well as in India.

### **Theoretical Background of the Study**

The present study has been conducted keeping in view of the theory of functionalism and need by Malinowski along with the concept of social orders, social fact and suicide as discussed by Durkheim. Further the study also co-relates the concept of social field by Bourdieu and the deconstruction of Derrida. Collectively how such Anthropological and Sociological theories have become relevant to the situation of youths under COVID-19 are analyzed sequentially.

### **Social Situation Among Youths Under Covid-19**

1. **Analyzing from the concept of functionalism and need:** According to Malinowski, Functionalism means the importance of a particular cultural trait in relation to its given environmental condition and social set up. On the other hand, need is the system of condition in relation to human livelihood, throughout the process of social evolution, human being have become attached with different existing social organizations or they have crested the organization as and when required. Every such organization has a specific rule which ultimately leads the human being towards his material goal. The mechanism (activity) through which human being achieve such goal is known as their function. It can be noted that such requirements are the human needs. Malinowski stated that there are three types of needs that is basic need, derived need and integrated need. In the derived need economy and political organization are very essential which leads to achieve the basic needs. Integrated needs mean assimilation and integration of people. It has been well noticed that due to COVID-19 economic sectors in India, both in the organized and unorganized and marginal sectors have

been seriously violated, joblessness, dismissal from work, refusal for continuation has emerged as a common phenomenon. This what India has noticed during the series of lockdown phases, when the hungry roofless, resourceless thousands and thousands migrant workers came on to the streets for a fold of rice many of them somehow got returned to their ancestral villages while many of them passed their lives due to their journey under hunger and thirst. Obviously majority of such workers are youth of their nation only. As the railways are mostly closed. Accordingly, a number of hawkers within the train and on the station had totally shifted their occupation to earn a fold of rice. Due to continuous lockdown both the automobile, industries and civil aviation became severely affected. The concerned sectors created a huge member of staff shrinkage and accordingly a large section of the youths became totally unemployed. Thus, as their economic need is violated so obviously their basic needs were equally violated. Series of lockdowns restricted the movement of the people across the world. Even within the state or districts, the concept of space and neighbourhood have become drastically changed and it came up with the term like red zone, orange zone, containment zone, hotspot zone etc. as a result of fact ultimately the youth and their thoughts confined and territorialized. The restrictions resisted their scopes of interaction and searching of alternatives occupational pursuits. As a result, their integrated need also became equally violated.

- 2. Analyzing from the concept of Durkheim:** Durkheim discussed about the concept of division of labour related to occupational specialization. Particularly after globalization, skilled based and digitally operated occupations in the form of business and e-commerce are on a rapid growth. Educated youths of India according to their acquired skills and technological competence are associated with different categorized of organized occupation in different sectors. If the quality education is the fundamental right then after education security of livelihood is another fundamental right to the educated youth. Obviously technological development, globalization has opened up many wider avenues for the educated youths to get associated with different occupational sectors from National to Global level. In the contemporary period COVID-19 has emerged as the social fact. Consequently rules and regulations framed by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India related to COVID-19 pandemic along with the SOP's from State Government from time to time have emerged as the Social orders. As a result of stringent rules and regulations, an alturism have been imposed upon the youths in a large scale. Meanwhile the phenomenon of series of

lockdown had ultimately resulted the restriction on the movement of people. As a result of fact different job sectors faced their opportunities limited and simultaneously there occurred the closure of huge number of medium and small scale industries. It is worthy to mention that such consequences ultimately told upon the job sectors of the youth in a very large scale. Reports has come up that the employees of many corporate sectors have lost their job and a few of them known to me are selling mask and sanitizers to earn a fold of rice. Since the first lockdown period regular railway movements are totally resisted. A person who was a hawkers in the railway platform has become a petty vegetable vendor, when I asked him about it, he (32 years) replied hunger don't understand lockdown and he has the responsibilities of aged parents, wife and children, he had no other options left, otherwise they have to commit suicide. It is to be mentioned here that many of the rural teenage and youths in the course of their high schooling or degree course studies cannot afford digital devices to attend the online classes. According to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) it can be noted that, out of around 133 crore of Indian population, internet accessibility is available with only 6 crore and 87 lakh people. In rural India, out of 100 people only 27.57 percent people can access internet. One of the main reason here is the economic disparity, because the 10 percent of Indians who are belonging to the highest income category are getting the direct access of the 77 percent of national resources (ABP, 21/08/2020). Although regulation have been imposed about the online education to redress the COVID-19 pandemic but these section of teenage and youths are far from getting any minimum support from the side of the authority who are directing for digital education. As a matter of fact, suicide rates among such frustrated teenage and youths are unfortunately on a rapid growth slowly and silently but gradually. On the other hand the employed youth, who became accustomed with a specific lifestyle, a section of them became suddenly unemployed. This emerging phenomenon had made it difficult for them to get adjusted with a number of cases are coming up related to their frustration, depression and ultimate suicide.

3. **Analyzing form the perspective of Social field by Bordieau and deconstruction of Derrida:** By social field, generally we mean the place of our habitat where we interact with the members of our concerned society. It is the place where we learned our cultural behavior, beliefs and practices as well as gradually our socialization takes place. COVID-19 had totally deconstructed the concept of social field. It had renamed the social habitations into containment zone, buffer zone, hotspot, coloured (red, green and orange) Zone from time to

time. Such rename of social fields had restricted the movement of the people within his own social and cultural field. The fear of Pandemic and co-related stigmatization had made distinction and isolation more and more wide between the so called normal and so called suspected. Obviously interpersonal trust between the neighbours had gone under doubtfulness. Even within a household also. Pandemic had resulted an individual isolation of the affected person. It is worthy to mention that familial relations had also undergone under doubt as the identity of a normal people had got deconstructed as asymptomatic carrier through COVID testing.

In the simple societies, the social fields are the integral part of their cultural field. As the social fields are restricted, obviously their cultural field got equally reduced. The youth are the worst sufferer of it. In one hand there is a joblessness or fear to lose the job, while on the other hand their emotional sharing within the peer groups got equally resisted. Although social networking sites and several digital platforms emerged as a popular media of social interaction but there are ample evidence of less affirmative support under the distress conditions from the friends and peer groups. Ultimately it had created more distress and depression among the youth. Meanwhile in the contemporary period, towards the post Covid world we are thinking about new normal. On the other hand, the continuous use of digital devices related to job and education, different health hazards are coming up, similarly with the use of mask and sanitizers. It can be noted that the social space and emotional space of "home" has been deconstructed into "work from home". Unfortunately, the youths are the worst victim of it because, they have compromised their place of self existence and space of emotional sharing for the sale of common minimum livelihood under the economic pressure of pandemic. They are reluctant to lose their job but unwillingly interested to compromise their emotions and mental psychological feelings. Such new normal is going to lead into new formal way of profession and less affectionate with socio-psychological issues. Benedict 1946, stated about the strict impositions of social norms on the teenage and youths ion the Japanese society. Definitely not similar, but in Indian middle class society. Across their ethnic identities and cultural practices, it is an automatic separation that the youths will be the pillar of sustenance for the entire family. Automatically such burden comes to their shoulder in the name of natural responsibility within the Socio-Cultural framework. Thus, when the COVID 19 pandemic affected seriously on the unorganized and organized occupational sectors particularly in the private corporate level, so obviously the binding of such familial responsibility generated large amount of depression and distress among the youth. Often such consequences resulted into the rapid growth of violence against women. Forceful physical relation resulting into unwanted pregnancy and so on as reported by National Women Rights Commission of

India. It can be noted that due to lockdown and job shrinkage in the automobile sectors of Gurgaon, Noida region the parents had brought back their children from the expensive private schools to be subsidized Government schools. It is the refraction of the depression of the parents to compromise with the emerging situation. Thus COVID-19 had deconstructed the meaning of Social life, place and apace particularly for the youths from a regular normal towards a new normal face. However, in spite of that the question of economic security and co-related social securities are yet to be ensured for the youths and their depended family members.

4. **Social Policy Responses to COVID-19:** Whilst the public health response to COVID-19 is ongoing, a number of other social policy responses are also necessary as the crisis of COVID-19 expands to socioeconomic spheres of life. Social protection systems are one major way in which governments aim to mitigate some of the impacts that COVID-19 is having on people's wellbeing and livelihoods. However, access to social protection varies significantly depending on a person's background, including age, and this can further exacerbate vulnerabilities of young people. Too often, the specific needs of young people, stemming from this unique transition period between childhood and adulthood, are not properly considered in social protection systems. This includes young people who miss out on child- or family-based social protection systems but do not yet have access to employment-based social protection. These gaps in access can adversely impact young people's lives and generate negative consequences that can be felt in the long term and even spill over across generations. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, inclusive social protection is even more vital to protect young people who are already, in normal times, at a higher economic and social risk. Because young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely drastically increase unemployed youth, a population already overrepresented in the informal economy (around three quarters of young workers are in informal employment around the world). As many social insurance programmes are linked to formal employment, that leaves many young people, especially young women, underserved or unserved. The labour market disadvantages faced by young people also affect their access to other social protection schemes like health insurance. Many young people in countries where universal health coverage is not available are either unemployed, informally employed, or among the working poor. As such, they have neither health insurance nor the means to cover additional health-related expenses. Therefore, a large portion of young people will not have access to health care and services necessary to treat and prevent COVID-19. Moreover, homeless and unbanked

youth are at even greater risk and must be included in national social protection systems.

- 5. Youth Responses to COVID-19:** COVID-19 affects all segments of the population, with young people playing a key role in the management of this outbreak and the recovery following the outbreak. Though much is still unknown on how the disease affects young people, governments are mandated in the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) to ensure their services meet the needs of young people. In these circumstances, it is important to ensure that youth are heard alongside other community and patient voices in the rollout of health and non-health interventions in response to COVID-19. Building up the capacity of youth to be able to make their own decisions on health and to take responsibility for health is also a key element of WPAY. In this context, health education, public health promotion, and evidence-based information are critical in combating the spread and effects of COVID-19, especially to challenge the spread of disinformation online. The role of governments as well as youth organizations and community groups will be essential to ensure that trustworthy public health information is disseminated. Young people themselves are also utilizing online technologies to spread public health information in engaging ways such as videos to promote effective handwashing or explain how social distancing can save lives. Young innovators are already responding to the virus through social impact innovation. Around the world, a number of initiatives are being developed to leverage young people's efforts to generate and deliver support to at-risk populations or populations affected by the pandemic. Whilst most of these initiatives are on a voluntary basis (e.g. young people offering to shop for and deliver food to elders or at-risk people), they can also take the shape of social enterprises. Many youth-driven technology innovation hubs are supporting startups to develop effective solutions to address COVID-19. For example, CcHUB (an open living lab and pre-incubation space) in Nigeria is offering to provide financial, research and design support for projects related to COVID-19.

### **Economic Impact of Covid-19 On The Youths**

Half of the world's youth population are subject to anxiety or depression-causing circumstances and more than a third are uncertain of their future career prospects due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a survey by the International Labour Organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of our lives. Even before the onset of the crisis, the social and economic integration of young people was an ongoing challenge. Now, unless

urgent action is taken, young people are likely to suffer severe and long-lasting impacts from the pandemic. The ILO survey aimed to capture the immediate effects of the pandemic on the lives of youths (aged 18 to 29 years) with regard to employment, education, mental health, rights and social activism. Over 12,000 responses were received from 112 countries, with a large proportion coming from educated youths with access to the Internet. The survey found that one in two (i.e., 50 per cent) young people across the world are possibly subject to anxiety or depression, while 17 per cent are probably affected by it. Severe disruption to learning and working, compounded by the health crisis, has seen a deterioration in young people's mental well-being," the survey said. Mental well-being is lowest for young women and younger youths between the ages of 18 and 24 years. Among those who thought that their education would be delayed or might fail, 22 per cent were likely to be affected by anxiety or depression, compared to 12 per cent of students whose education remained on track. According to the report, 38 per cent of young people are uncertain of their future career prospects, with the COVID-19 crisis expected to create more obstacles in the labour market and to lengthen the transition from school to work. The coronavirus, which first emerged in China's Wuhan city, has claimed over 7.4 lakh lives with more than 20 million confirmed cases across the world so far. The ILO survey said some youths have already felt the direct impact of the pandemic, with one in six youths having to stop work since the virus outbreak. Many young workers are employed in highly-affected sectors, such as support, services or sales-related work, making them more vulnerable to the economic consequences of the pandemic. The coronavirus has left one in eight young people (13 per cent) without any access to courses, teaching or training -- a situation particularly acute among the youth in low-income countries and one that serves to underline the sharp digital divide that exists between regions. It added that despite the best efforts of schools and training institutions to provide continuity through online delivery, 65 per cent of the young people reported having learnt less since the pandemic began. Fifty-one per cent believe their education will be delayed, and nine per cent fear their education would suffer and might even fail. One in six young people (17 per cent) who were employed before the outbreak, stopped working altogether, most notably younger workers aged 18 to 24 years, and those in clerical support, services, sales, crafts and related trades. Working hours among the employed youths fell by nearly a quarter (i.e. by an average of two hours a day) and two out of five young people (42 per cent) reported a reduction in their income. Young people in low-income countries are the most exposed to reductions in working hours and the resultant contraction in income, the survey said. Despite the setbacks, the youth have continued to mobilize and speak out about the crisis. According to the survey, a quarter of the young people have done some kind of volunteer work during the pandemic. Despite the setbacks, the youth



have continued to mobilize and speak out about the crisis. According to the survey, a quarter of the young people have done some kind of volunteer work during the pandemic. Ensuring that their voices are heard is critical for a more inclusive COVID-19 response, the ILO said, adding that giving youth a chance to articulate their needs and ideas during the decision-making procedures improves effectiveness of policies and programmes (Economic Times, 12/08/2020).

According to the recent report of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, from April to July 2020, near about 1 crore and 80 lakh, salaried employee, mainly the youths have lost their jobs totally. Only in the month of July 2020 near about 50 lakh employees have lost their job. Out of the total job sectors of India, 21 percent belongs to the organized sectors. It can be noted that, during the lock down period, the rapid increase of unemployment has not been compensated enough, through the scope of re-employment in the unlock period (ABP, 19/08/2020).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In a period of around 5 months, COVID-19 has morphed from a small outbreak to a pandemic, which the WHO deems a public health emergency of international concern and a socioeconomic crisis affecting everyone. Whilst epidemiologists are still analyzing the devastating health impacts on young people and their families, indicators suggest there will be widespread economic and social impacts on their communities and economies. Governments and the UN System must understand and anticipate these impacts so the worst effects of this crisis can be avoided. The priority remains a vigorous and global public health response that interrupts transmissions and provides effective care and treatment for those who are positive. In this effort, youth can play a key role in supporting the public health response by taking responsibility for their health based on the best available evidence and information. However, the economic and social impacts also present challenges for Member States. Young people are already disproportionately unemployed. And for those who are employed, many work in the informal economy, gig economy, on precarious contracts or in service sectors of the economy that are likely to be severely affected. More than one billion youth are now no longer physically in school. Vulnerable youth such as migrants and refugees or homeless may fare even worse. This could lead to unprecedented levels of unemployed youth and education or training requiring robust social protection expansions. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic calls for global solutions and intergenerational solidarity, and for innovative, inclusive policy solutions. The Sustainable Development Goals will be more important than ever in accelerating the response and recovery of this epidemic as well as build the resilience and social immunity that the world

needs to combat the next pandemic. The following recommendations are put forward for the consideration of Member States and UN entities:

- Provide universal health coverage, including all young persons, and ensure that the health system effectively meets the needs of youth in COVID-19, including public health promotion, testing and treatment.
- Promote public health approaches and accurate information so that young people can be empowered to make evidence-based decisions on their health.
- Monitor youth unemployment and underemployment, take targeted measures during the recovery to promote youth employment and decent work.
- Adapt the delivery of education, through digital and non-digital methods, from early childhood education to tertiary education to ensure the continuation of skills acquisition and learning.
- Protect the rights of migrants, refugees and other minority youth during this epidemic, including right to health care, and combat the rise of xenophobia and racism resulting from the spread of COVID-19.
- Ensure that social protection systems include all young people, with special attention paid to those who are most vulnerable and marginalized, such as homeless youth, youth with disabilities, unbanked youth, etc.
- Consult and meaningfully engage youth in the development of health, economic, and social interventions in response to COVID-19 and in its recovery.
- Incentivize youth innovation for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and the management of its corollary socioeconomic impacts.

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