

Impact of COVID19 on the Livelihood of the People of Lahaul & Spiti Valley

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Abstract: COVID19 has had a significant adverse impact on almost every economy of the world. Among all the developing nations, India has received a huge setback in terms of economic growth, loss of life, increasing unemployment rate, etc. The present study is based on the adverse impact COVID19 has had on the people of Lahaul and Spiti Valley, a cold desert situated in the lap of the Himalayas, inhabited mostly by tribal population. It is an exploratory research conducted on the basis of personal interview of about fifty people who belong to Lahaul and Spiti Valley. The interview was based on an interview schedule which had a set of questions pertaining to the probable explorations of this research.

Key Words: Fossils- preserved or traces of remains of ancient organisms, Pandemic- a disease that spreads over a whole country or the whole world, Pathetic- causing you to feel pity or sadness.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The study was conducted after the first wave of COVID19 in India, keeping in view that the inhabitants of the place are not indulged in too much work as less tourism was there and also following the proper measures of safety like wearing a mask, maintaining physical distancing and carrying a negative RTPCR test report to begin with. The objective of this study is to understand the impact of COVID19 on the livelihood of the people of Lahaul & Spiti Valley.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Kesang Thakur in his article has stated that in October 2020 the number of cases in Lahaul and Spiti Valley rose phenomenally and at one point of time became the most infected area of Himachal Pradesh with a positivity rate of 13.75% by December. After the inauguration of Atal Tunnel at Rohtang having social and religious gatherings, the virus outbreak was eminent in this region. Atal Tunnel has been built across Rohtang to facilitate trade and commutation between Lahaul and Spiti valley and the swift passage of military contingents through the region. This is a step to improve the economic activity in this region.

The Times of India stated that as Lahaul and Spiti became the worst affected area of Himachal Pradesh the villages were converted into containment zones and tourists were not allowed to enter the villages. Lahaul and Spiti was opened for tourism after two months and with the onset of the second wave it was again declared a restricted area for tourists due to the ongoing lockdown in the whole country.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The study was carried out in the form of field study during a period of about one week, by visiting different villages and interviewing the local people of each village. Since the population density of the target area is very low, only fifty people were interviewed with the help of an interview schedule. This study focused mostly on the occupation of the people and the economic impact of COVID19 on these people. The interview was more like a discussion so that the respondents were more comfortable in putting forward their problems and opinions and in developing a better understanding of their view point, their personal attributes and the way they perceive. The villages that were visited in the course of this study are Tabo, Shichling, Kaza, Rangrik, Kibber, Langza, Hikkim, Komic, Losur, etc. which constitute the habitats in the Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh. Some of the questions asked are as follows:-

1. The name and age of the respondent,
2. The village he/she belong to,
3. The educational qualifications and the occupation of the respondents,
4. Number of members in the family and the number of earning members,
5. The main source of family income and their economic condition,
6. The impact of COVID in their economic condition,

7. The economic condition now as compared to PRE-COVID times,
8. Whether the family income is dependent on tourism or not in any form,
9. Whether the respondent feels that his/her income sources are secure or not,
10. Whether the respondent feels that the steps taken by the government are enough to support them economically or not.

All the questions were discussed in detail so as to understand their perspective. These discussions helped in gaining information about the said explorations, the opinion of the people, the way these people think, their occupation, etc. Hence the data collected is in the form of primary data and has been analyzed accordingly. The table. 1 below shows the percentage of respondents belonging to each age group:-

Age Groups(years)	No. of respondents	Percentage%
0-15	2	4%
15-30	15	30%
30-45	16	32%
45-60	12	24%
60 & above	5	10%
Total:	50	100%

Table. 1

Majority of the respondents were in the age groups between 15 to 60 years and only two were in the age group of 0-15 years while 5 in the 60 & above group.

Educational Qualifications	No. of respondents	Percentage%
High School	7	14%
Intermediate	11	22%
Graduate	21	42%
Post-Graduate	9	18%
Others	2	4%
Total:	50	100%

Table. 2

The above table .2 shows the number and percentage of respondents educationally qualified and the level of education completed by them as of date. Here the others category includes two respondents who had still not reached high school.

Village	No. of respondents	Percentage%
Tabo	6	12%
Kaza	6	12%
Losur	6	12%
Shichling	5	10%
Dhankar	5	10%
Rangrik	4	8%
Langza	4	8%
Hikkim	4	8%
Komic	4	8%
Kibber	3	6%
Mud	3	6%
Total:	50	100%

Table. 3

The above table. 3 shows the number of respondents belonging to each of the villages mentioned in the table thus representing their habitat in the region.

4. ANALYSIS:

The method of analysis used in this research is exploratory research analysis through which the data was examined in terms of patterns, trends, outliers and unexpected results in the study. After recording the responses of all the respondents and examining them carefully, it reflects that most of the respondents were financially more stable in 2019 as of now which is a matter of great concern. The fact that the people of this area are overdependent on tourism for their source of livelihood has been the main cause of their financial instability after the outbreak of COVID19. Since COVID related lockdowns and restrictions affected tourism industry the most therefore in their peak season when they were awaiting tourists sudden lockdown had pushed them on the backfoot. A lot of respondents were owners of homestays, some others were tourist guides of those regions, while some others were cab drivers, few of them were chefs, few more owned shops of handicrafts, etc. This lead to negligible earnings in the peak of their season and had put them under tremendous financial pressure. The period of lockdown was the most difficult one for these people as some of them had to borrow for their livelihood, in some cases the bread earners of the family lost their battle against the deadly virus leaving behind the dependent members of the family who have no idea how to earn their living now. Those who had savings left from the business from previous seasons had exhausted most of them while battling the pandemic and in medications. People who had fields indulged in cultivation and helped by sharing the produce with the villagers. They were taking care of each other since the population of these villages is very small, people have a bond with each other. With the inauguration of the Atal Tunnel there was hope among the people that their businesses would flourish even more, whereas COVID had some other plans for them. Tenzing, a little boy from Langza who used to sell fossils was hopeful that once the situation gets normalized he can get back to work. These people already have a lot to deal with and on top of that the loss from COVID has made it even more challenging for them to get the basic necessities of life.

Age group(years)	Total no. of respondents	Those who feel they are financially stable	Percentage in terms of total	Those who feel they are financially unstable	Percentage in terms of total
0-15	2	0	0%	2	100%
15-30	15	6	40%	9	60%
30-45	16	8	50%	8	50%
45-60	12	10	83.33%	2	16.66%
60 & above	5	3	60%	2	40%
Total	50	27	54%	23	46%

Table. 4

The Independent variables in this study are age, educational qualification and the dependent variables on them are financial stability and occupation respectively. Another independent variable used is COVID19 and the feeling of financial instability is a dependent variable on this as well. In the above table it is seen that the financial stability is directly proportional to age which means that with age the respondents are feeling more stable financially. The concern here is that around 46% of the respondents don't feel financially stable and COVID has hampered these numbers all the more.

Educational Qualifications	Total no. of respondents	Business	Farming	Daily Wage	Employed
High School	7	4	2	1	0
Intermediate	11	6	3	2	0
Graduate	21	11	2	4	4
Post Graduate	9	5	0	0	4
Others	2	0	0	2	0
Total	50	26	7	9	8
Percentage		52%	14%	18%	16%

Table. 5

From the above table. 5 it is clear that 52% of the respondents are dependent on business which is directly or indirectly related to tourism and this is a huge number. It proves the overdependence of the people on one industry. The second point which is getting highlighted is that the percentage of daily wage workers is more than the percentage of people who are employed and this explains the non-uniform pattern of earnings as the employed people are the only ones in the above categories who have a fixed income throughout the year. All the rest of the categories are uncertain

about the inflow of cash and it is irregular. COVID has affected these sectors the most who do not have a fixed source of income and they are the ones who have really struggled for their livelihood after the outbreak of the virus.

The table 6. below shows the number of respondents who have started feeling financial unstable after the outbreak of COVID19 is around 21.73%. This means that before the virus had stepped in these many people felt that they are financially sound but now they don't think so. COVID19 is the independent variable here and the feeling of financial stability is dependent on it.

Age group(years)	Total no. of respondents	Those who feel they are financially unstable	Percentage in terms of total	Those who feel the financial instability after COVID	Percentage%
0-15	2	2	100%	1	50%
15-30	15	9	60%	2	22.22%
30-45	16	8	50%	1	12.5%
45-60	12	2	16.66%	0	0%
60 & above	5	2	40%	1	50%
Total	50	23	46%	5	21.73%

Table. 6

5. KEY FINDINGS:

As on 23rd May 2021 all the people above 45 years of age residing in Lahaul and Spiti Valley have been vaccinated against corona virus which is a great achievement for the people and the administration and also the Government.

6. CONCLUSION:

The analysis reveals that 52% of the people are dependent on business which is directly or indirectly based on tourism both National and International and this number is pretty much unbalanced in the sense that it should be well diversified. The number of people who are unemployed is huge and if this number goes up it will be the best way to diversify the economic dependence of the people. The analysis also reveals that 46% of the people don't feel very secure about their financial condition in the future and also their livelihood and this has been a major cause or impact of COVID19 on the livelihood of the people as out of these 46% around 21.73% feel so after the COVID scenario stepped in. Although the population is very less yet people are very compliant and disciplined and they followed all the necessary precautionary measures related to COVID19. The people of Lahaul and Spiti Valley have set an example in the fight against corona and their efforts of locking themselves in their houses even before the lockdown was announced in the second wave, were appreciated even by the government. The impact of COVID19 has been very severe and painful for the people in these areas in terms of economic condition. Most of the people are desperately looking for employment so that they can feed themselves and their family after the adverse effects of the virus are over. Some people are migrating in search of employment just to earn a living. The economic condition of the daily wage workers has been pathetic due to the outbreak of the virus. The government should provide some employment opportunities to these people and if needed some financial aid looking at the economic condition of the people post COVID.

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