

COVID-19 Second Phase Lockdown Option and Public Opinion: A case study in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT:

Novel corona virus (nCoV-19) is associated with lower respiratory tract infection, with mild to severe symptoms and fatalities, especially in patients with other comorbid conditions like metabolic, cardiovascular or respiratory disorders. Pakistan has been recording exponentially growing corona virus cases ever since it lifted the lockdown in early May. National and International health and research institutes have recommended a second phase lockdown to curb the country's current epidemic situation (Peshimam, 2020). However, government remains uncertain in perspective of poor, daily wagers and declining economic growth. As the general public is central to success of any health and preventive strategy, public outlook is considered as a key factor in feasibility studies for a national plan. The present study is designed to explore the general opinion of Pakistani population about lockdown interventions, associated problems and their disposition on the second phase lockdown. This questionnaire based survey study suggested that even though the first lockdown was not followed sufficiently, two-third respondents opted for a complete compliance with future lockdown. The belief in religious/home safety methods and denial of corona virus existence are the major causes for incompliance with lockdown instructions. However, the awareness among general public is rising which may help to halt the spread of infection in the future.

Keywords: COVID-19, situational awareness, precautionary measures

INTRODUCTION:

Novel corona virus (nCoV-19), also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome virus-2 (SARSCoV-2) is associated with lower respiratory tract infection, with an incubation period of 2 to 14 days. It causes a number of mild to moderate symptoms mostly described as flu like symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle pain, tiredness and shortness of breath., and in rare cases or in special population it may turn into more serious illnesses (acute respiratory distress syndrome, pneumonia, a cytokine storm, sepsis and septic shock) (Stephen A. Lauer et al., 2020)(acute respiratory distress syndrome, pneumonia, a cytokine storm, sepsis and septic shock) (Stephen A. Lauer et al., 2020) (C. Wu et al., 2020)(Y. Guo et al., 2020).The first case of COVID-19 reported in Wuhan city of China in December, 2019 and the outbreak was declared as pandemic on 11th March, 2020(J. Zheng., 2020). The confirmed cases of COVID-19 to-date are 7.88 Million with estimated mortalities of 433,259 in 213 countries as of report updated on 15th June 2020 (Coronavirus Death Toll, 2020).

According to World Health Organization (WHO), older adults and/or individuals with co-morbidities including diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, chronic respiratory disorders and cancers are at high risk to develop serious

illness and thus are more prone to fatalities (WHO Coronavirus., 2020) (Team, 2020)

Public health and social measures may play a key role in preventing the spread of COVID-19, reducing the number of active infections and protecting lives, as vaccine or specific therapeutic agent is not yet available for the treatment of COVID-19(Coronavirus disease (COVID-2019) situation reports, 2020). These measures include physical and social distancing of at least 1 meter, avoid public gatherings, detecting and isolating cases, reduce contact with contaminated surfaces, hand hygiene, wearing face masks, staying home if feeling unwell and avoid activities that may weaken lungs such as smoking (WHO Coronavirus., 2020). Flexible working schedule such as telegram and distant learning as well as closure of non-essential services should be adopted by general public (Shahul H Ebrahim et al., 2020). The individuals itself, institutions, local and national governments and international bodies should all play their role in ensuring the implementation of measures that can prevent the spread of infection and reduce the number of new cases (Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): situation report, 2020). Major negative consequences including physical and psychological stresses escalated because of business

closures, economic vulnerability and job losses, where children and mothers are more vulnerable to the risk of domestic violence (Caroline Bradbury-Jones, 2020). It is the sole responsibility of government and non-government organizations to balance the positive and negative consequences of each intervention, like to secure the food supply and protect the individual's incomes (Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): situation report, 2020).

Unfortunately, the first lockdown imposed in Pakistan by Government authorities in late March, 2020 did not meet with sufficient compliance from the general public, but nonetheless it helped the health care system to buy some time and develop sufficient facilities. However, authorities lifted the lockdown in early May and ever since the rise in corona virus cases has been following an exponential trend (Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19), 2020). World Health Organization (WHO) has suggested an intermittent lockdown in perspective of the current situation of epidemic in Pakistan (Sullivan, 2020). The modeling and prediction efforts of the country's COVID-19 situation also reinforce the option of a second phase lockdown (Hassan S. et al., 2020). However, the country's premier remains more concerned about poor, daily wages and economy that has already suffered with negative growth (Dawn News, 2020). Public opinion is

considered as one of the key elements in feasibility studies for any national strategy. But, the public's response in the emerging pandemic to the preventive strategies is uncertain and it is highly important to access the hurdles in the effective implementation of health friendly practices (Atika Qazi et al., 2020). The present study is designed to explore the awareness and general perception of Pakistani population about the lockdown imposition and degree of compliance in Pakistan. We also discuss the general factors behind non-compliance and current opinion about a second phase lockdown.

METHODOLOGY:

Following upon (Muhammad Kashan Javed et al., 2020) a questionnaire based web-link survey was carried out to evaluate the general public's knowledge and awareness of Pakistani population about the preventive strategies of the current pandemic situation. The questionnaire consisted of four closed-ended questions (Table 1), which was sent to subjects across the Pakistan through web messengers (WhatsApp and Facebook). A special consideration was made to include diverse economic education and social circles. Both male and female in the age range of 24 to 60 were recruited in the study. A total of 204 responses were received and evaluated.

S. No.	Questions
Q.1	How important do you think the lockdown is in managing the corona virus?
Q.2	To what extent do you think the lockdown restrictions were followed in Pakistan?
Q.3	Which is the main reason behind people not following the lockdown instructions in Pakistan?
Q.4	If lockdown is extended in Pakistan, how much would you comply with it?

RESULTS:

Awareness about Importance of lockdown:

As illustrated in **Figure 3.1**, the population responded with quite a skew to the question "How Important do you think the lockdown is in managing the corona virus? Majority 43% of the total respondents consider lockdown a "very important" handle to manage the

pandemic. Overall, 90% of the sample population thinks lockdown is necessary. while only 10% sample population showed to consider lockdown "non-important" or "not-important at all". That depicts a high ratio of public recognizes the lockdown as an effective solution despite of the associated social/economical medical/psychological problems.

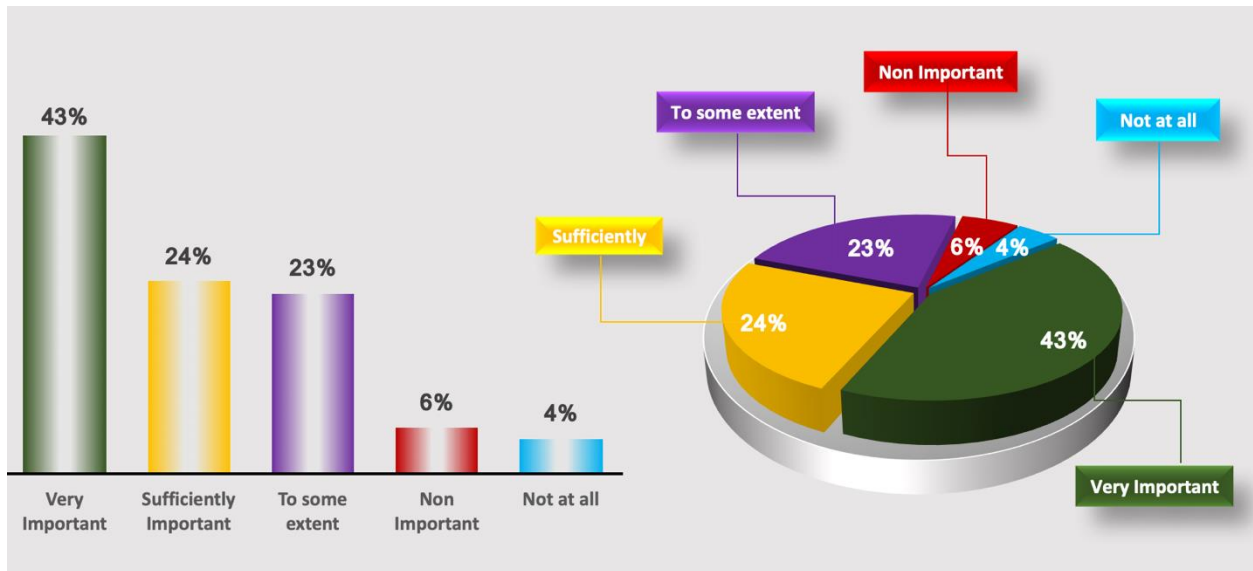


Figure 3.1: Importance of lockdown in managing COVID-19

Degree of compliance with lockdown instructions:

As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the population responded variably to the question “To which extent do you think the lockdown restrictions were followed in Pakistan? Only 6% of total respondents think that lockdown instructions were followed “completely” in Pakistan, 13% responded “sufficiently”, 34% “To some extent”,

31% “Rarely” and 15% of total respondents think that the restrictive instruction were not followed at all. Nonetheless, the general trend was tilted to non-compliance side and only 20% think that people acted sufficiently upon lockdown instructions and the majority 80% are of the view that lockdown did not prove effective in reducing the mobility of people to expected levels.

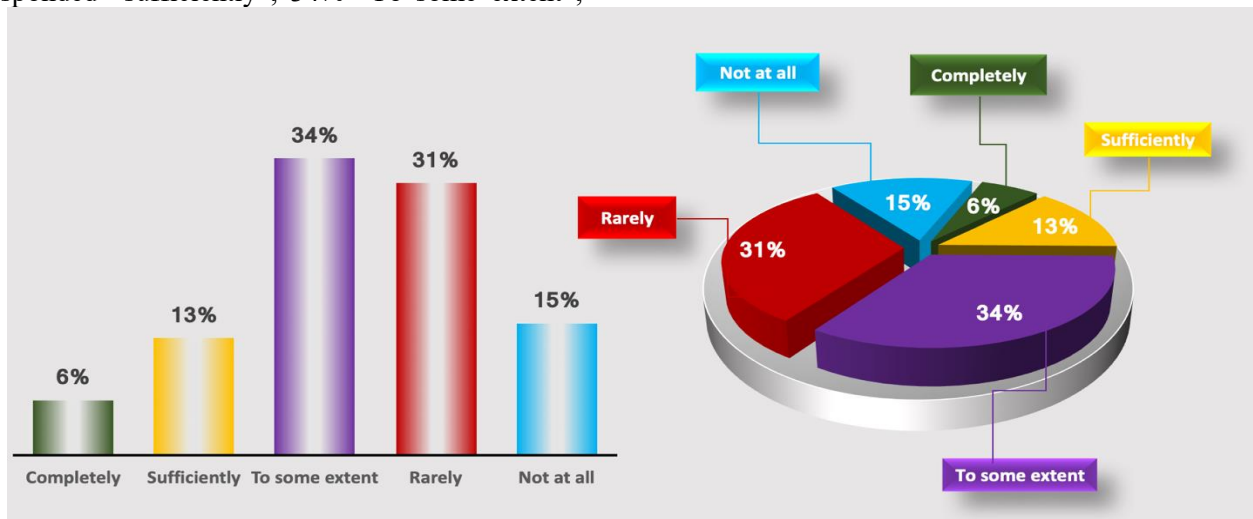


Figure 3.2: Degree of compliance with lockdown instructions

Causes of incompletion with lockdown instructions:

As illustrated in Figure 3.3, the population responds differently to the question “Which is the main reason behind people not following the lockdown instructions in Pakistan? The 48% of the total population are considering “COVID-19: a fake made-up story” slogan

as the main factor behind people ignoring the lockdowns restrictions. Unfortunately, a large majority in Pakistan is still ignorant of the existence of corona virus. The next two major causes are “corona virus is not lethal” and “religious or home-made safety precautions work against corona virus”.

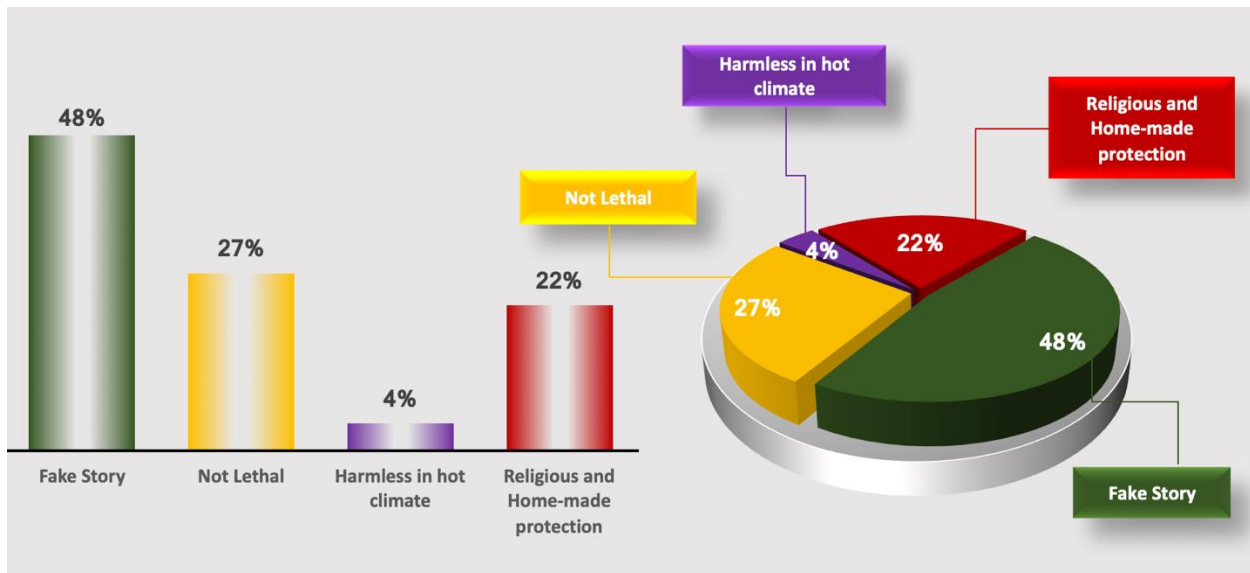


Figure 3.3: Causes of incompletion with lockdown instructions

Compliance with lockdown, if extended:

This question was devised in view of a phase2 lockdown suggested by WHO and COVID-19 prediction studies in Pakistan. To the question “If lockdown is extended in Pakistan, how much would you comply with it?”, about

81% of the sample population responded that they will comply sufficiently or completely with the restrictive instructions of lockdown (Figure 3.4). While only 5% of the subjects responded that they would not comply with the lockdown.

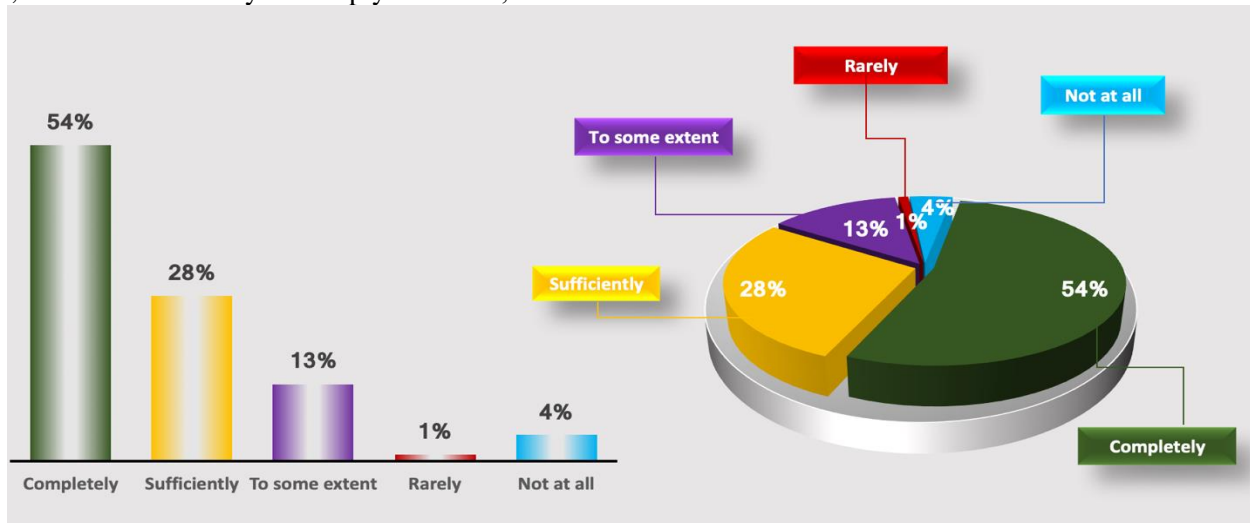


Figure 3.4: Compliance with lockdown, if extended

CONCLUSION:

The World is currently fighting with COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitates the situational awareness among the general public to adopt the precautionary measures like compliance with lockdown, social distancing and personal hygiene. The parameters studied are reflecting the awareness of Pakistani population about the COVID-19 spread, related protective measures as well as general consequences of lockdown. Our findings suggest that precautionary measures were not followed previously and that ignorance resulted in a high rate of infections and fatalities. The found causes for “non-compliance” are alarming as still some people are

of the opinion that it is just a “made-up” story and corona virus can be prevented with either religious or home protection techniques. However, the awareness among general public is improving and a large majority (81% of sample population) is willing to comply with the decision of a second phase lockdown imposed by the authorities to curb the pandemic. Even though, Prime Minister has decided not to implement a second phase lockdown keeping in view the poor daily wagers and economic conditions, based on our findings of public opinion we strongly recommend the implementation of necessary restrictive strategy as it would save many lives and families across Pakistan.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to the present work.

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