

## **Impact of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Aspects of Personal and Professional Life**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is officially a pandemic now. With around 30-40 % workforce working from home and around 30% unemployment expected, so far by analysts, it is becoming very important to understand the personal and professional impact that this pandemic is having on professionals. In the last weeks, alone many ICT companies have downsized, reduced pay, or stopped benefits in order to handle the economic strain caused by the pandemic while factories and manufacturing concerns have come to a halt. On a personal level, staying at home, isolation, unemployment, financial strain occurs that can cause numerous behavioral concerns. The aim of this paper is to do an exploratory study with a mix of auto ethnographic view and identify professional and personal effects both positive and negative due to the COVID-19 pandemic and repercussions for professionals. As COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic, thereby to the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted which explain the impact of COVID-19 on personal and professional lives with the qualitative context we adopted.

**Keywords:** auto ethnographic; novel coronavirus (COVID-19); unemployment; personal effects; professional effects

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## INTRODUCTION

March 11, 2020 was the day when the world health organization (WHO) officially declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as a pandemic. WHO last declared an outbreak a pandemic when the swine flu broke out in 2009. Pandemic is long rooted such as the earliest recorded case of a pandemic was in Ethiopia and Egypt in the year 430 which killed about two third of the population of Athens and is thought to be the cause of their loss in the war to the Spartans. Further the smallpox pandemic of 165AD spread from the Huns to the Germans and then the Roman soldiers who took it to Rome resulting the death of even the Roman Emperor. This was called the Antonine Plague and it lasted up to 180AD. The Bubonic plague of 1350 left only two third of the world population alive. Then there were seven cholera pandemics in the 1800 spread over almost 150 years and let's not forget the measles pandemic of 1875 which started in Fiji. About 50 million lives were lost in the world due to the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918. No vaccine or medicine was made for the Spanish Flu and it ended in 1919 when most of the infected people had either died or the ones who remained had developed immunity.

Similar to other pandemic COVID-19 currently infected millions of people (Athar et al., 2021; Contreras et al., 2020). Ground zero happens to be Wuhan city of China where on December 31, 2020 the WHO China office informed about a Pneumonia of unknown cause being detected. WHO tweeted on January 04, 2020 that a cluster of cases with this unknown strain of Pneumonia have been identified, however there had been no fatalities thus far. The situation developed, WHO issued guidelines that it had developed in the recent years considering the SARS (Severe Acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) helped with some level of control. WHO declared this epidemic a public health emergency on January 30, 2020 and officially announced that early detection, isolation, contact tracing and social distancing initiatives can help to control the spread of this virus. However, it was March 11, 2020 when the virus spread to more than 110 countries then WHO declared it a pandemic. The news show that the pandemic could further affect half a billion people under the poverty line and it is estimated that the financial crisis will be worse than the health crisis at the moment (BBC Business News, 2020).

It's not just the imminent threat of the disease that is causing stress, but also the relationship between governments and manufactures of safety items. One such major case is observed in USA (a super power) such that US officials (including President Trump) had a standoff with the multinational manufacturer '3M' where they used the Defense Production Act to force '3M' to prioritize local orders for the USA now managing to finalize 55.5 Million N95 masks. Earlier, Trump had asked '3M' to stop international supply and in response officials of '3M' CEO Mike Roman said had humanitarian implications, nevertheless 3M kept supplies moving slow, through its Mideastern concerns to the region (Sandler, 2020).

US officials had cut off funding to WHO and has put it under review. According to US officials, WHO played favorite and brushed aside the initial cover-up up by China on the spread and actual reality of the virus. Further, they verdict to suspend the funding for a 60 to 90 days period to evaluate and review considering that the USA is the largest funder of WHO with

around USD400 million per annum (The Washington Times, 2020; The Guardians, 2020). However, in 2021, when the new US President Joe Biden came to office, he has since reversed the stance of the previous administration and now decided to resume funding WHO (Keaten, Jamey, 2021). According to WHO the best way to handle and tackle the COVID-19 pandemic is by effective quarantine and contact tracing. Contact tracing is identifying everyone a patient has come in contact with during the period when they could be carrying the virus but not showing signs and then speaking to all those who are accessed to be a high risk of infection and so on. Given that, countries like South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and even Germany have significantly tackled the virus primarily focusing on contact tracing and quarantine (Boseley, Sarah, 2020). Since COVID-19 effects all over the globe in term of shelter-in-home, closure of business etc. thereby, to the best of our knowledge, there is a research gap exists to cope COVID-19 from social as well as behavioral perspective. From COVID-19 point of view, stats as on April 22, 2020 provided (Wikipedia, 2020), such as total countries infected are 225, total positive cases are 2580729, total deaths are 178371, and total recovered are 693093.

Considering that the current world population is estimated at 7,779,492,448 (worldometer, 2020). Further as on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020 a total of 4,942,687 corona cases have been reported worldwide with a total of 321,987 deaths so far indicating a 6.51% mortality rate (Worldometers, 2020). This means that while overall this appears a small percentage when we dig deeper into the country level, we note varying level of reporting and percentages. We note such country wise differences as in the case of USA and China for instance in Table 1(a) we note that while China has the largest population in the world as of 2019 data comprising 18.99% of the world's inhabitants and only about 0.01% of corona patients compared to let's say USA which has 4.27% of the world population but about 47% which is significantly larger. Further, we note that the mortality due to the Corona Virus alone is significantly higher compared to the national mortality rate for the countries mentioned. As of the latest updates in this article on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020 there are over 13 million cases reported worldwide with the USA being at number one for highest number of cases followed by Brazil and India. Pakistan is currently at the 12<sup>th</sup> number with over 253,000 cases (Wikipedia, 2020).

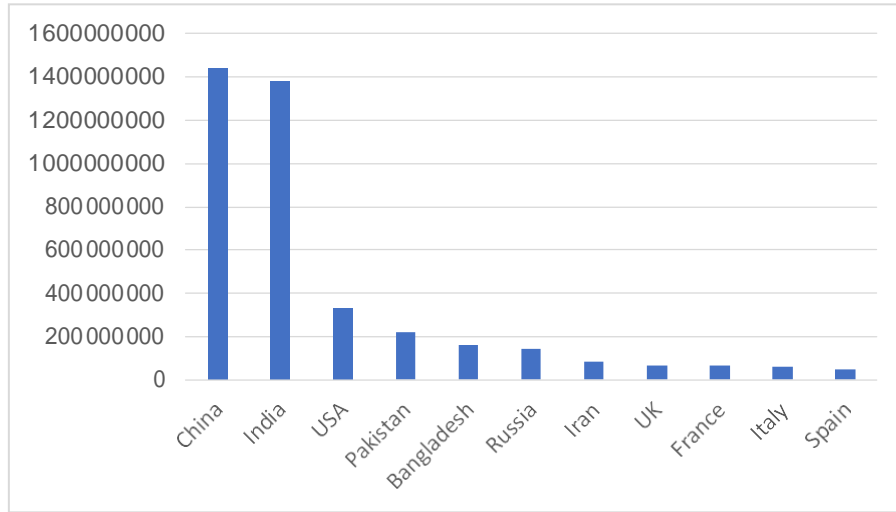


Figure 1: Population

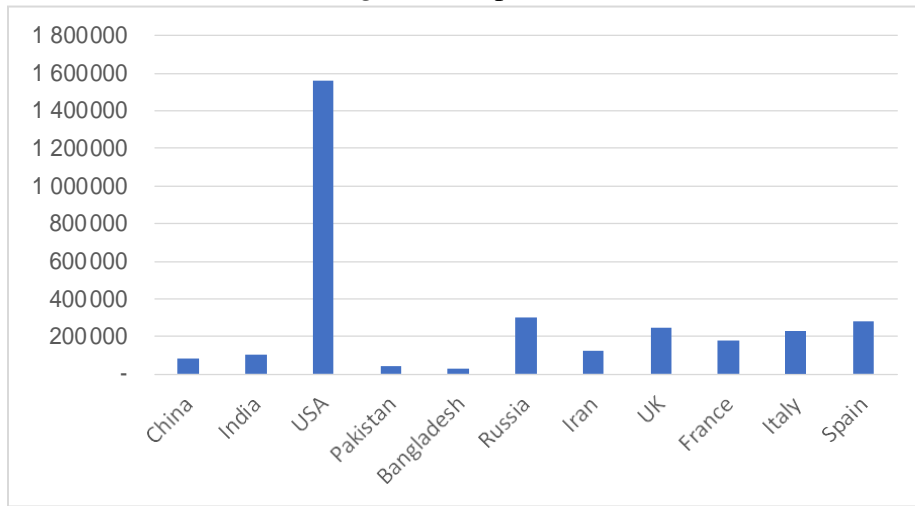


Figure 2: Total number of Corona virus positive cases (sorted country population wise)

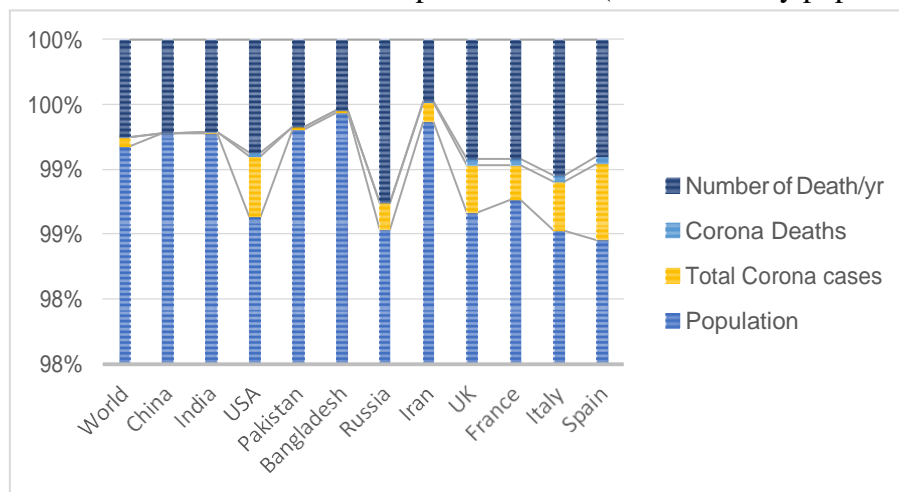


Figure 3: A visual comparison of national mortality rate in comparison to the deaths by corona virus so far

As of 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2020 there were 41 vaccines in early development phase with following breakdown:

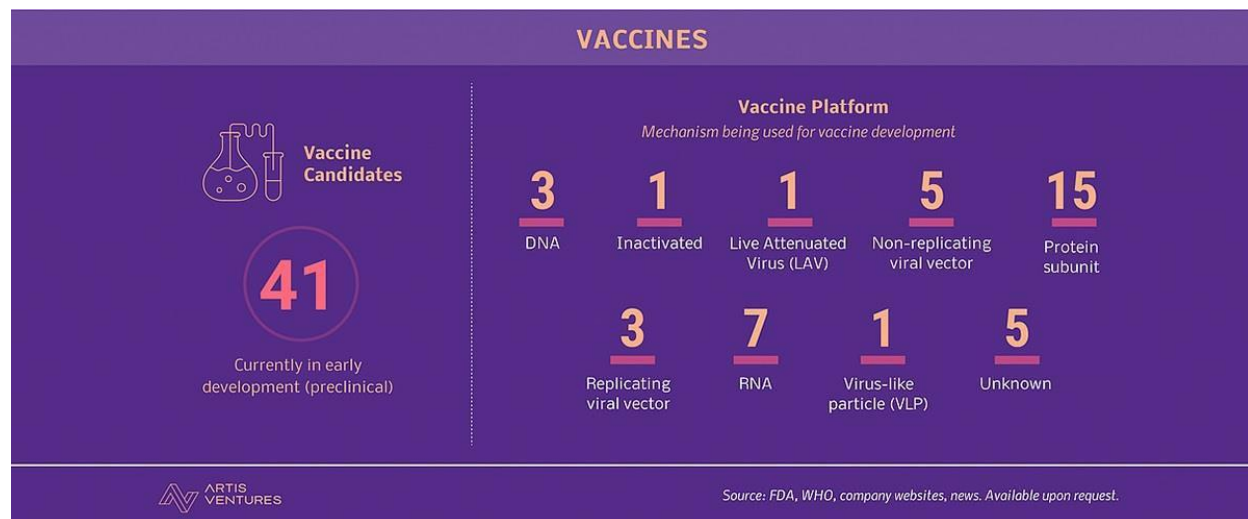


Figure 4: Vaccine in early development phase, Credit: (Routley, 2020)

## OTHER CONSEQUENCES

There is also a surge in fake medicines due to the panic created by the pandemic which is a serious consequence of the pandemic. Developing countries are the worst hit due to the sudden introduction and sale of so called Corona medicines and vaccines where experts claim that the health hazards from these could be lethal in themselves (Piranty, 2020). Fake news has had no reduction during this trying time. Fake news has spread more panic than any comfort. We note such news which fact check and refute fake news circulating on social media applications like Facebook and WhatsApp. One news item that spread like wildfire was that the 5G technology harms the immune system and hastens the infection of COVID-19. This has been strongly refuted by the scientific community (Schraer & Lawrie, 2020). While fake news has the obvious consequences, we are also quick to draw inferences or as the saying goes about the straw for a drowning man. There have been some articles about the BCG vaccine and lower mortality rate, and this caused an interest and hue in the general population regarding the possibility of this being a wonder drug. This because so popular in such a short time that on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April in its daily Situation report 84 WHO published that there is no evidence that BCG vaccination protects people from covid-19 infection and they are conducting two clinical trials in regards to this as well to comment once evidence is received (World Health Organization, 2020).

WhatsApp has imposed a limit of forward ability of messages to try and restrict the avid spread of fake covid-19 related news on WhatsApp (Hern, 2020). Multiple online social media platforms have been approached by officials to seek assistance in combatting fake news (Molloy & Kelion, 2020). Being at home also means that people are at a greater risk of cyberbullying, cyber harassment and even human trafficking according to the news. With kids not going to school and being home bound they are spending more time online. It is noted that especially kids with low self-esteem are targeted online. Similarly, due to the panic and uncertainty in the

situation human trafficking and similar illicit activities are on the rise. Furthermore the whole solution of social distancing has created a need for companionship which many people are relieving online and not every relation online especially with a stranger has positive consequences(Amar, 2020).

Invasion of privacy is another problem. With the ongoing use of information technology, apple IOS and android being the largest operating systems in use are being bombarded by various governments to provide real time data on the users. This accordingly to privacy law analysts and the company representatives is in itself a huge blow to the already very fragile balance between online information sharing and privacy of the individual users (Greenberg, 2020). Reports of hazardous working conditions of health care workers seem to be coming in not just from the 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries. The UK, USA, along with such nations like India, Pakistan, etc. have various reports of shortages of PPE's (Personal Protective Equipment) which has been the cause of infection and even death for many front-line workers such as doctors, emergency responders etc. (Observer editorial, 2020).

Unemployment has been a direct consequence of the pandemic. According to China Global Television Network (CGTN) one in six youngsters have lost their jobs while those who are employed have had their working hours reduced by as much as 23% in China alone while in the USA one in three youngsters are unemployed which is the highest unemployment rate since 1948 (Zhang, 2020). According to MM News around 17.3 million people may lose their jobs in Pakistan while in Punjab and Sindh alone around 24% and 37% people will likely lose their jobs respectively (MM News, 2020). Further, according to International Labor Organization (ILO) about 10.7% working hours have been lost due to unemployment and economic disruption due to the pandemic around the world between Q1 and Q2 of 2020 (ILO Monitor, 2020)

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants***

A questionnaire with open ended questions was posed to professionals. 135 respondents shared complete surveys with 41 sharing email addresses for further communication as well. The respondents were asked two main open-ended questions "How is the Covid-19 pandemic effecting your personal life?" and "How is the Covid-19 pandemic effecting your professional life?" besides this they were asked to add anything else in this regard. We noted that about 95% were professionals from various industries while 3.7% were specifically from the medical profession. 64% of the respondents were from the 31 to 45 years' age group followed by the 18 to 30 years' age group with 21%. 46 years and older comprised about 15%.

Also note that at the time the survey was conducted, the results showed that 75% of the respondents were working from home while 15% were working from the office with about 9% who had recently become unemployed specifically as a result of company layoffs due to Covid-19.

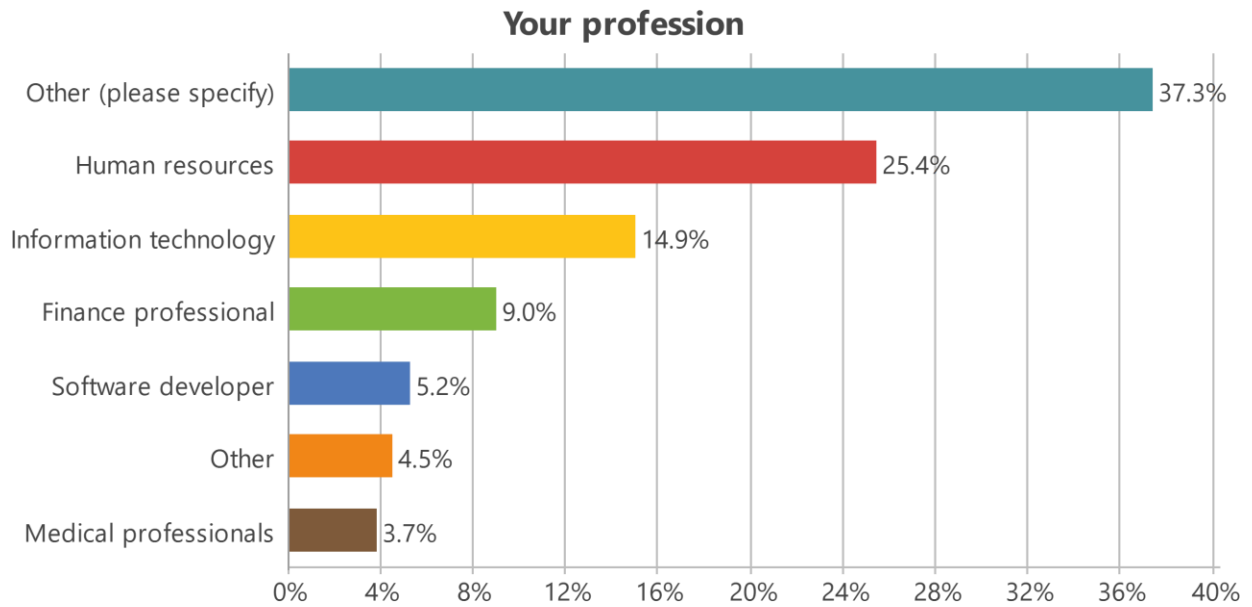


Figure 5: Profession

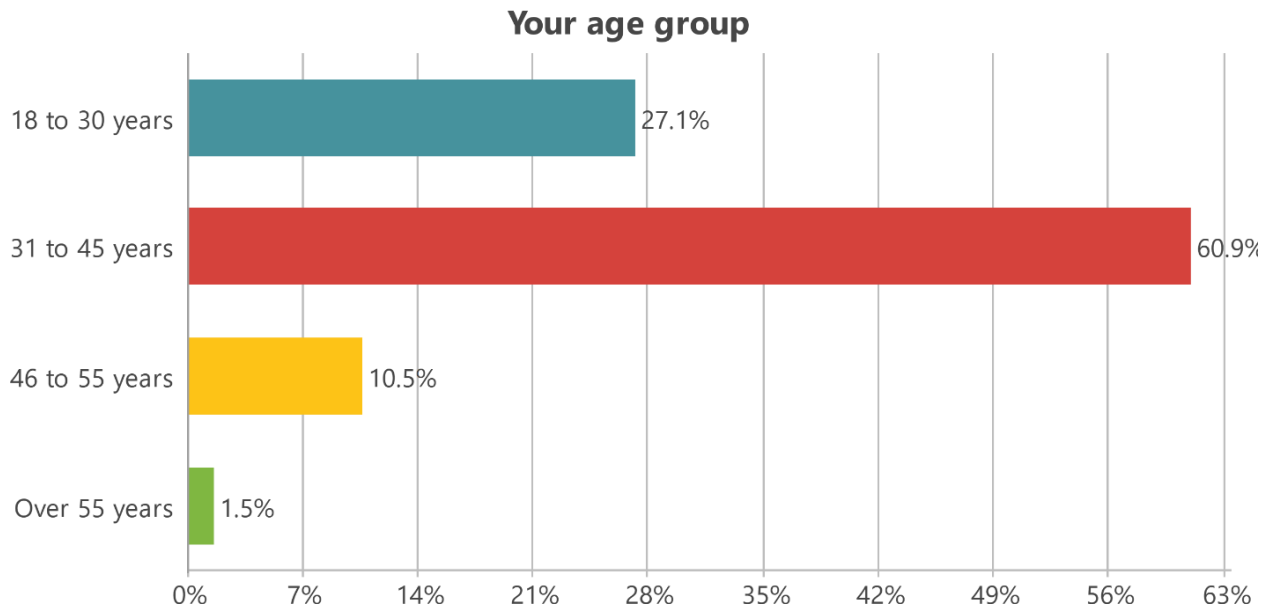
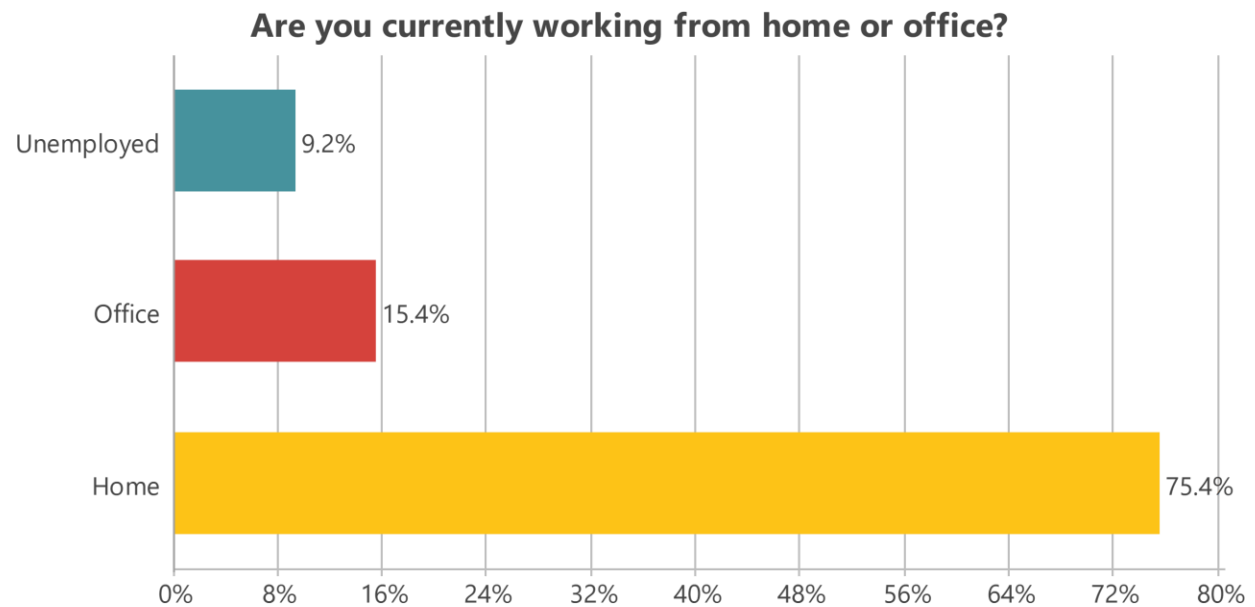


Figure 6: Age



*Figure 7: Working type*

## ANALYSES

The underlying philosophical orientation of the author is always of interest when analyzing qualitative data. The author in this case uses exploratory research analysis and auto ethnography. The author is a human resource professional with over 18 years of field experience dealing with employee engagement, employee relations, policy development and organizational development. Content analysis of the survey data was done using MAXQDA software (VERBI Software, 2019).

The scale of this pandemic is like no other incident in the recent history of our generation. Things are changing at a very rapid pace and it is not easy for everyone to keep abreast of these changes especially since this was neither wanted nor expected. It is noted in the analysis that people who are happy spending more time with family are the mostly the ones who are working from home as opposed to those who have lost their jobs. The burden of affording even the basic necessities let alone the colossal expense of treatment or health care associated with the covid-19 disease is terrifying. The stress due to the uncertainty of the future along with economic loss has added to the anxiety inducing fear in people. Also noted that people who are working from home actually have the luxury of complaining about loss of social life while this is not the compliant from the ones who have lost their jobs. It would derive from this that the complaints are relative to the person and circumstances surrounding the same people.



## RESULTS



*Figure 8:* Word cloud showing various items mentioned by the respondents

We had 135 respondents that were analyzed. For the question regarding the impact of COVID-19 on professional life and personal life we show a word cloud. Most comments revolve around family. There are varying comments while emphasis is on spending more time with family while working from home there are many concerns from people who have lost their jobs and are worried about how they will support their families financially. Work like balance has also been disrupted since many people working from home also comment on increased work compared to when they were working from the office while some also think it may mean a reduction in productivity due to distractions.



Figure 9: Word cloud showing personal and professional life

Variables were coded using the terms that kept repeating and formed trends and similar sentiments by grouping and shown as a word cloud (Figure 8) while the trends from the overall survey eliminating conjunctions only (Figure 9). Since the qualitative data was coded and grouped in terms of relevance and similarity, we moved further by getting in touch with the people who had shared contact emails. One on one discussion over the phone was done where possible and, in some instances, where available over video tools such as Zoom and WhatsApp since meeting in person was difficult due to the lockdown.

It is important to note that family, personal, work, life appears to take more weightage with the people followed by professional, business and home etc. We note that there is an air of uncertainty not only in terms of the news and social media but also in terms of personal and professional interactions. As the time progresses people are losing jobs, spending more time at home with family while this is not something that many are used to now in today's culture. The comments in the interviews appear to corroborate the findings in the recent study (Kramer & Kramer, 2020) it is anticipated that the impact from the covid-19 pandemic will likely increase the inequality found in income, gender ethnicity and race.

We noted that one of the first actions by most companies and organizations at the onset of the virus was making all nonessential staff work from home (Villas-Boas, 2020). This also brought forward struggles because of this change in routine. Also, considering that schools, colleges and universities were shut down (Latif & Sajid, 2020). There has already been a growing anxiety in people due to the unknown factors associated with Covid-19. There is no treatment as yet and the impact on the economy are still unraveling. So much that even now the perception in many is that the government is either hiding the facts or simply unable to fight the

virus. Especially when such updates in reputed newspapers make headlines such as one saying that in Lahore, Pakistan alone there are suspected more than 670,000 cases according to the summary sent to the Chief Minister (Gabol, 2020) while the official reported number as of the same date as per the government of Pakistan for the province of Punjab is 26,240 (Covid-19-Punjab, 2020).

We can note that this needs to be asked again in order to review any difference that there may be in the question asked earlier and now considering if people support or don't support work from home. This is entirely a different way of life and work altogether. Being put into a situation that is not familiar causes distress or anxiety in people and it shows in the conversation of the people. ILO survey reported that nearly half of students surveyed who are completing studies have delayed them while about 10% have stopped altogether primarily due to onset of anxiety or depression (ILO Monitor, 2020). Though very few people said they were afraid in the initial survey many turned out to speak about new fears and about recent anxiety or panic attacks due to the uncertain conditions or unemployment.

Out of all the respondents the ones that provided their email address were further contacted and spoken to in detail to elaborate their comments. Also, there may be some difference as to the timing of the initial survey and also the telephonic conversations recently which means that the respondents had now been in a work from home scenario or facing some other repercussion of the corona virus pandemic thus altering the depth, understanding and gravity of the situation also allowed the participants to actually observe the ramifications if any in person. This is further corroborated by the local survey where since the first wave in March 2020 to the sixth wave in June 2020 there is only an 8% decline in the number of people who think that threat from COVID-19 is exaggerated from an overwhelming 62% to 55% now. Further, it can also be ascertained to some level that countries where the population accepted the threat level of covid-19 the infection control has been much better compared to countries where the threat was perceived to be exaggerated. 57% of Pakistanis do not believe the government is reporting the right statistics on covid-19 pandemic (Gallup Pakistan, 2020).

There were also cases where the respondents had tested positive for the virus in the interim since the survey and while they were in quarantine and getting better, they did get panic attacks due to breathing issues even when oxygen saturation levels were at acceptable levels. These cases had been advised various anti-anxiety drugs.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the negative consequences include people losing their jobs or working in changed circumstances such as from home, or with a reduced compensation package, or for students who are now studying online while others are taking an unwanted break, etc. there are also positive outcomes such as more family time and eating at home for instance which has in cases proven to be healthier for those who have wanted to do this even taking on online learning opportunities such as technical and professional certifications due to the time at hand. Some contacted participants after 2 quarters show that they were desperate to get back to the brick-and-mortar

office routine and were no longer of the same opinion as earlier stated about being happy in regards to more family time. While one can debate about the right use of the available time, the facts are clear as day. This is a major change and it brings much uncertainty with it. While some people are actively trying to adjust to the new environment, there are also people who are showing increasing signs of anxiety, stress and fear. Stress also comes in other forms such as from staying for longer hours at home with family. It may appear an off thing however this is not routine. While the working member(s) of the home were away at work and children at school the members at home had a while routine of their own with no interference from anyone. The lockdown has suddenly caused everyone working or studying to be at home this causes undue interference for the usually at home members while in other cases the informality at home compared to the discipline and formalities at work are also something which has caused increased stress for both parties.

It is also noted that due to the increased unemployment, there are consequences for professionals who specially have a single source of income. We noted that a recent survey shows that 2.1 million households in Pakistan reflecting around 8.4 million adults have had to see some kind of asset in order to cover basic household needs while 4.8 million households reflecting 19 million adults have reported to be looking for additional ways to earn income to cover basic household expenses (Gallup Pakistan, 2020). The results further indicate that people want this lockdown and situation to end soon. Even the new normal is taking a hit where people have yet to adjust to now wearing masks and maintaining social distancing while they leave their homes or very soon when they return to work. Many professionals are stressed since these are unprecedented times and there are not enough sources to work out that stress. Being stuck indoors in itself is something that many people have a tough time coming to terms with.

Some professionals are coming up with novel entrepreneurial ventures that will help them survive and thrive in this environment which could be a way for the unemployed or underemployed professionals at this time to focus on and for the governments to provide opportunities and facilitation for the same. The article and analysis show that people have concerns about their jobs, income, family and future outlook and definitely government communication would play a vital role in assuring people along with actual on ground efforts. Companies can focus in providing online counselling free or charge to its employees, especially such employees who have been released due to the impact of the pandemic. Change management by institutions and organizations alike should be provided as a matter of social corporate responsibility to all who are willing to attend online so as to ease and facilitate this transition.

We note that the covid-19 pandemic is going to have a lasting footprint in our lives and not just for the professionals. Future researchers can further look into details of the work from home related concerns and challenges, the personal life outlook of the virus, etc. the study has limitations in terms of the respondents which can be expanded to include other industries such as educational institutes or government employees.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1(a)

	<b>World</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>
<b>Population</b>	7,713,468,100	1,439,323,776	1,378,381,772	330,774,664	220,356,788
<b>Percent of world population</b>	100.00%	18.66%	17.87%	4.29%	2.86%
<b>Percent of Corona cases</b>	0.06%	0.01%	0.01%	0.47%	0.02%
<b>Total Corona cases</b>	4,942,687	82,960	103,886	1,557,707	43,966
<b>Corona Deaths</b>	321,987	4,634	3,212	92,477	939
<b>Percent Mortality</b>	6.51%	5.59%	3.09%	5.94%	2.14%
<b>Number of Death/yr</b>	58,394,000	10,441,000	9,926,000	2,909,000	1,493,000
<b>National Mortality rate</b>	0.76%	0.73%	0.72%	0.88%	0.68%

Table 1(b)

	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Iran</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Spain</b>
<b>Population</b>	164,493,041	145,927,292	83,862,642	67,844,241	65,256,826	60,471,924	46,752,703
<b>Percent of world population</b>	2.13%	1.89%	1.09%	0.88%	0.85%	0.78%	0.61%

<b>Percent of Corona cases</b>	0.02%	0.21%	0.15%	0.36%	0.28%	0.37%	0.60%
<b>Total Corona cases</b>	25,121	299,941	124,603	246,406	179,927	226,699	278,188
<b>Corona Deaths</b>	370	2,837	7,119	34,796	28,239	32,169	27,709
<b>Percent Mortality</b>	1.47%	0.95%	5.71%	14.12%	15.69%	14.19%	9.96%
<b>Number of Death/yr</b>	901,000	1,858,000	401,000	634,000	609,000	642,000	428,000
<b>National Mortality rate</b>	0.55%	1.27%	0.48%	0.93%	0.93%	1.06%	0.92%