

Resilience and Responses: Exploring the Multifaceted Impact of COVID-19 on Economic, Mental Health, and Cultural Realms among Sri Lankans across Three Pandemic Waves

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The global aftermath of COVID-19 has significantly transformed socio-economic structures, especially in disadvantaged Sri Lankan communities. This study investigates how the pandemic's effects on economic conditions and cultural engagements can influence individuals' mental well-being. The research involved an extensive household survey across all nine provinces, using a semi-structured questionnaire. A total of 3020 households were sampled using a multi-stage clustering method, and data were collected during three pandemic waves. The collected data underwent descriptive statistical analysis, presenting results as proportions of the total population. Findings revealed that over all three waves, more than 60% of households fell into the low-income category. Employment routines changed for over 50% of participants during each wave, often involving reduced work hours or permanent layoffs. Additionally, more than 70% of respondents experienced decreased or halted monthly income throughout the pandemic, citing reasons like reduced salaries and fewer working hours. During all 3 waves, 70% experienced income reduction and, 53% among them reported increased loneliness, 59% felt greater emptiness, and 55% experienced decreased social connectedness. 61% of the population reduced social gatherings during all waves, resulting in elevated loneliness (51%), decreased social connectedness (52.7%), and increased emptiness (53.5%). Similarly, 77% reduced participation in cultural festivities and 50% among them rise in loneliness and a 56.3% increase in emptiness, coupled with reduced social connectedness by 52%. 80% of respondents reduced spiritual practices, leading to increased loneliness by 52.3%, heightened emptiness by 57.2%, and a decline in social connectedness by over 50%. The study highlights the interplay between economic stability, cultural involvement, and mental health. Reduced income and limited cultural interactions contributed to heightened loneliness, emptiness, and reduced social connectedness. This research holds broader relevance for similar contexts and crisis survey methodologies, emphasizing how the pandemic's impact permeated economic, cultural, and mental aspects. Recognizing these connections aids societies in navigating challenges and bolstering resilience in adversity.

Keywords: COVID-19. Cultural impact, Economic impact, Mental impact, Quantitative study, Sri Lanka

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