

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

COVID-19 and Internal Migrant Workers in Karachi

Working Group Description:

There are over 195,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and approximately 4,000 confirmed related deaths in Pakistan. Karachi is Pakistan's commercial hub and hosts over one million internal migrant workers (MW). The low-skilled white-collar and blue-collar internal MW in Pakistan experience several problems such as exploitation, low wages, and hazardous work conditions. While earning a livelihood in Karachi, they are geographically isolated from their families.

These factors make them disproportionately vulnerable to psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown. This research aims to identify the level of vulnerability and various psychosocial issues of MW due to Karachi's COVID-19 lockdown. It specifically aims to identify and understand the effects of geographical isolation, and how this lockdown challenges MW psychosocial wellbeing and general public health. The short- and long- term recommendations will be suggested for the stakeholders and policymakers as there seems to be inadequate policies and support for the internal MW.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. Determine the needs of internal MW during the COVID-19 lockdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the top concerns of internal MW during the COVID-19 lockdown? • Are these concerns specific to the lockdown only? • What is the psychological state of the internal MW for example—fear, anxiety, depression, apathy and/or denial? • What impact is it having on internal MW physical wellbeing such as sleep, appetite, energy levels and overall health et cetera?
2. Determine how internal MW's needs are different from the general population during the COVID-19 lockdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify relevant literature on the needs of the general (non-migrant) population • Do the main concerns of the internal MW differ from the concerns of the general population?

3. Explore the effects of geographical and social isolation during the COVID-19 lockdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the psychosocial effects of being in a lockdown in a different geographical location or living situation within Karachi? • What are the psychosocial effects of being in a lockdown without a social support system? • Investigate if there is any causality between the effects of geographical and social isolation and the specific needs of the internal MW
4. Critical analysis of the policies and implementation by the stakeholders with regards to the internal MW using Policy Triangle (Walt and Gilson, 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there policies that identify internal MW as a distinct group with their own set of needs? • Are there policies that address the distinct needs of the internal MW? • Is there any systemic bias against the low-skilled internal MW in the policies?
5. Proposal of short- and long-term interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate policy interventions • Long-term policy interventions and preparedness for future endemics/pandemics • Stakeholder alignment, actions, and resource requirement to enact short- and long-term interventions

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

Internal migrant worker definition: This research defines internal migrant workers (MW) as low-skilled white-collar or blue-collar workers who have moved to Karachi without their families. It includes both rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban internal migrants, who are at least 18 years old with no upper age limit.

Sampling and recruitment: Key informants in Karachi having expertise in internal MW will be selected. The research will involve contacting government organizations, non-government organizations, trade unions, academia, media, medical professionals, members of the chamber of commerce, and tribal communities. Snowball sampling will identify additional key informants until researchers agree that data saturation has been reached.

Data collection and analysis: A semi-structured interview guide will be developed using existing literature and media reports. These guides will be customized according to the key informants' organizational and professional profiles. Between July and August 2020, in-person and/or online interviews will be conducted. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed in English while maintaining data accuracy at all steps. After concurrent data analysis, a thematic analysis will be performed using NVivo 12 Pro software.

Ethics: Ethical approval will be obtained from Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University Islamabad, Pakistan. Key informants will be contacted via publicly available telephone numbers and email addresses. We will seek written consent of participants for interviews and recordings. Although the health and welfare of internal MW are not sensitive issues in Pakistan, participant anonymity will be ensured.

Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:

Our project aims to dissect and analyze the views of both the internal MW and stakeholders regarding the issues faced by internal MW during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be followed by a qualitative survey of internal MW. We will use Policy Triangle framework (Walt and Gilson, 1994) to critically analyze existing policies and propose new policies.

We might conduct workshops as a platform for open discussions among stakeholders, where we intend to present and promote our study's outcomes. The mixed-method design will help us to triangulate the issues and develop guidelines for both policy development and implementation.

This Working Group has completed literature searches on the past and present pandemics in the context of internal MW. Several group discussions identified stakeholders and key informants. An initial draft of the interview guide has been developed. The group continues to conduct weekly online meetings.

Contributors:

Working Group Lead

Fahad Ahmed, Department of Pediatric Oncology, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

Working Group Co-Lead

Anum Khan, Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Karachi, Pakistan

Sana Hashmi, Independent Researcher, London, UK

Other Contributors

Ebru Inal, Department of Emergency and Disaster Management, University of Canakkale Onsekiz Mart, Turkey

Edip Kaya, Department of Therapy and Rehabilitation, University of Agri Ibrahim Cecen, Turkey

Hira Imam, Suleman Roshan Medical College, Tando Adam, Pakistan

Khurram Iqbal, Independent Researcher, Karachi, Pakistan

Ighat Nisar, Department of Community Medicine, Dow University of Health Science, Karachi, Pakistan

Sara Baggia, Department of Community Health Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles

Sibel Kiran, Institute of Public Health, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

Sundas Sahar, Indus Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan

Talal Khurshid, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University Islamabad, Pakistan

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