

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Social Wellbeing and Resilience Mechanisms of Three Rural Communities in Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has led to strict social distancing measures around the world, which, in turn, led to a massive impact on the social wellbeing of people. This study aims to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social wellbeing of three selected rural communities in Anuradhapura district, Sri Lanka. An exploratory qualitative study was conducted, using solicited participant diaries to reflect on the day-to-day activities of community members in three purposively selected rural communities in Anuradhapura district. Twenty-seven diaries completed by community members were returned, and diary entries were typed and subjected to thematic analysis. Five themes were identified from the analysis; relationship with (1) family (2) friends (3) neighbours (4) other community members, and (5) social contribution. Both positive and negative impact on the identified dimensions had been reflected. Positive impact on family relationships, including family support and desire for protecting the family from COVID-19, were reflected. Relationships with neighbours and friends residing in the village were not negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as they could maintain regular in-person contacts with each other. Sense of belonging to the community and supporting community members were also notable. Changes in the facet of 'social contribution' was identified during the analysis, as the community itself had adjusted the social activities, events, and activities of community-based organizations (CBOs) while adhering to COVID-19 precautions. Workload due to work from home regulations, increased social threats, reduced friendly conversations, quarrels among children in the house, reduced participation in CBOs/events, not being able to visit relatives/friends who live far from the village had led to a negative impact on social wellbeing. Our study findings reveal the potential for avoiding severe impact on the social wellbeing of rural communities during crisis situations, and it is important to understand the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on the social wellbeing of rural communities in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *COVID-19, social wellbeing, rural, Sri Lanka*

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