

## **Covid-19 and lockdowns make differences clearer**

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First in December 2019, the people of Wuhan in China's Hubei province had it. Then the ordeal of those in Italy's Lombardy region that began in late January shocked the world. Gradually, all of us around the globe have experienced, in various degrees, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Initially, in some western countries, Chinese-looking people experienced coronavirus-related racist and discriminatory treatment. In early March, one Singaporean student of Chinese descent suffered attacks on Oxford Street in London.

The victim suffered fractures to his face, as his attackers swooped down on him when he was walking past them. One attacker punched him in the face and told him "I don't want your virus in my country." In Australia's Melbourne, in April, two Chinese students were attacked, robbed and told to "go back to China".

Coronavirus-related racist incidents may have stopped now, but all of us are under suspicion simply for being human. For good reasons, human beings are trying to maintain a physical distance of one or two meters

from one another. In many instances, people with Covid-19 suffer from stigma as well as alienation from society and even from family members.

There are two types of Covid-19 sufferers. Primary sufferers are mainly three groups of people: 1) those who have tested positive for, or shown symptoms of, Covid-19, 2) frontliners, especially healthcare providers looking after patients with Covid-19 and 3) their family members.

Countries around the world introduced lockdown measures to reduce the rate of Covid-19 infection, and this disrupted the normal rhythm of life. The vast majority of us who have had to follow – again for good reasons – multiple restrictive measures are secondary sufferers. This group also includes the non-patient victims of coronavirus-related hate crimes.

At the macro level, innumerable national and global financial institutions have sustained heavy losses. As a result, the world economy is in recession verging on depression.

At the micro level, many people have lost their sources of income and, like the rest, face a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty. Millions have suffered job losses and pay cuts, while the stress levels of many more have increased.

In addition to exposing the shared vulnerabilities of us all, Covid-19 has made clear the distinctions between different groups of people, which I discuss below.

While most people and economies have remained vulnerable in the Covid-19 times, those with considerable capacity to acclimate have turned this difficulty into an opportunity. For instance, most businesses have suffered financial losses, but most technology industries – such as Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Zoom – have benefited from the Covid-19 new normal.

Millions of individuals with outdoor work have experienced a sudden shock because of lockdown restrictions. On the contrary, those with good reading habits or immersed in research and writing have taken the condition of limited movement as an advantage. They have made use of it to seek and produce knowledge.

During the stay-home period, boredom is the most common complaint especially among the privileged. On the contrary, conditions of hunger and economic insecurity have gripped the underprivileged.

While the leisured and educated gentry complain of feeling “bored” at home, the poor and vulnerable are squeezed from all sides and their subsistence resources are stretched to the limit. They have greater odds of experiencing household food insecurity and are more prone to take risks of working outside the safe environment. All these tell us about the yawning gap between the haves and the have-nots in society.

Covid-19 has affected human life and livelihoods around the world. The impact of it on people varies greatly depending on their circumstances and considering the symptoms they experience. Accordingly, their responses to the pandemic have been diverse and multifaceted.

While most people have found themselves unprepared and floundering during the lockdown period, those who are well developed mentally and intellectually have made the best of it. Covid-19 has helped define our abilities and ourselves.

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