



WWJMRD 2021; 7(5): 53-57
www.wwjmr.com
International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal
Impact Factor SJIF 2017:
5.182 2018: 5.51, (ISI) 2020-
2021: 1.361
E-ISSN: 2454-6615

Gunathilake K.L.W.I.
Department of Geography,
University of Colombo, Sri
Lanka.

Chandrasekara C.M.K.N.K
Department of Geography,
University of Colombo, Sri
Lanka.

Amarasekara D.D
Typefi Systems Pty Ltd,
Australia.

Chandrasekara CMPB
Ministry of Community
Empowerment and State
Infrastructure Development,
Sri Lanka.

Gunathilaka K.L.S.K.
Business Head, Logistics and
Operations EFL 3PL,
Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Correspondence:
Gunathilaka K.L.S.K.
Business Head, Logistics and
Operations EFL 3PL,
Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Socio economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the rural and urban lifestyles of Sri Lanka

Gunathilake K.L.W.I., Chandrasekara C.M.K.N.K, Amarasekara D.D and Chandrasekara CMPB, Gunathilaka K.L.S.K.

Abstract

COVID-19 is a new virus drastically impacting on the human lives all over the world. Sri Lanka implements a monitored and coordinated set of guidelines to mitigate the present pandemic situation in the country. The present study was carried out to assess the consequences of **COVID-19** on urban and rural lifestyles in Sri Lanka. A questionnaire survey was conducted via off site communication methods to collect data using a total of 60 randomly selected families consisting of 30 urban and 30 rural settings. Results of the study revealed that, awareness of the disease, employment, food, and sanitation are the major factors impacted on lifestyles of both communities. While, 55% of urban dwellers have had a medium level awareness of the disease, 10% of rural dwellers have had no knowledge on the disease. 24% and 27% of rural and urban dwellers respectively, got half salary payments, especially those employed in the private sector. Further, 7% of non-urban dwellers had lost their jobs. The majority (70%) of urban dwellers depended on online and door to door food delivery systems where 20% have reported dissatisfaction on efficiency and the quality of services. During the study, it was observed that more than 85% of the urban dwellers depend on municipal garbage collecting Lorries for their house hold waste disposal while 80% of non-urban dwellers convert them to compost. 50% of the urban dwellers have reported poor functioning of municipal garbage collection during the present pandemic period. The people faced some other problems such as bad smell and increasing fly and rat populations. 90% of the rural and 70% of the urban families confirmed smooth functioning of water and electricity supply during the pandemic period. On an overall, poor awareness of the pandemic and losing of jobs were identified as major issues in rural areas.

Keywords: COVID 19 pandemic, rural, urban, health precautions

1. Introduction

1.1 Global overview

Rapidly spreading pandemic is a threat to a country as it has the ability to paralyze its entire socio economic system. **COVID-19** which is also known as Corona virus which was first reported in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province, China, in December 2019, has now invaded more than 215 countries in the world causing a huge threat to the lives of the people (Desai, 2020). This deadly pandemic has no reliable cure, although several vaccines have been developed and are in use with the authority of WHO. So far, 163 million confirmed cases have been reported around the world, and it has caused nearly 3.37 million deaths at the time of writing this report. This pandemic is a stern mounting hazard not only to the least developed and developing countries but also to the developed countries which are medically, financially and socially more advanced and interconnected (Muggah, 2020).

The urban areas are at the frontline during a period of pandemic in a country as they serve as hubs of essential services, transportation, communication and economy. The impact caused on such a frontline attack from a pandemic can disrupt the entire socio economic structure of the country causing an unaffordable loss to the peripheral areas including semi urban and rural areas (Null & Smith, 2020). Most of the advanced and developed economies have declined and stand still due to sudden lock downs and the resulting disruption in the supply chain networks all over the world. The scholars have found that the pandemics often emerge from the edges of the cities which have the equal ability to getting spread in both

urban and non-urban territories located in either side of the edges of the cities (Sampaio, 2020). And also at the same time, the global supply chain, travel networks, airports and specific neighbourhoods are identified as the sources of contamination of infection in urban areas.

When moving on to the non-urban setting, the rate of spreading seems to be less than that of in urban areas due to the lesser density of population and the lesser availability of pandemic contamination sources. The disease has affected all aspects of rural society directly and indirectly impacting largely on the household incomes and rural businesses in every sector within the diverse rural economies (Muggah, 2020). During the period of complete lock downs and partial lock downs during COVID-19, which prevailed during the past few months all over the world, the non-urban settings were identified as the most vulnerable group of people who suffered mostly due to inadequate accessibility for food and essential services unlike in the urban settings. Most of the countries such as Ghana and Rwanda in Africa, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka in Asia, showed a remarkable downfall in socio economic and cultural aspects during this period. Therefore, a detailed assessment of impacts caused to the rural and urban settings in developing countries is indeed a necessity during the post **COVID-19** era.

1.2 COVID 19 and rural- urban settings of Sri Lanka

The recent studies have revealed an exponential growth in the economies of countries where the interdependence played an important role before the period of **COVID-19**. With the sudden pandemic outbreak, the chaotic situations taken place in the giant economic agglomerations such as USA and China have made a great impact on most of the developing and least developed countries in the world. When it comes to the Sri Lankan context, the socio economic impact is remarkable. A research conducted by the Overseas Development Institute has identified Sri Lanka as one of the most vulnerable middle income countries as a result of the economic setback of China (Acuto, 2020). Sri Lanka was expected to see economic growth of 4.5-5% following the 2019 Easter Attacks, but is now estimated to grow only by 2.2% provided that the viral outbreak is contained by June 2020.

In addition to the economic downfall of the country, most of the essential sectors like manufacturing industries, tourism, agricultural activities, education system and transportation have become stand still and malfunctioned due to the impose of curfew in all districts and due to the temporary hold of the import of essential goods and raw materials from other countries. Majority of Sri Lankans who are engaged in private sector, semi government and informal economic activities, have lost their sources of income in the period of work from home during the pandemic outbreak causing non affordable socio economic burdens on their day today lives. When it comes to the Sri Lankan setting, the impact of **COVID-19** pandemic outbreak is different in urban areas than in non-urban areas where it highlights the necessity of sector specific measures to mitigate the issues caused by this deadly pandemic outbreak. Therefore, a study which identifies the issues and impacts of **COVID-19** based quarantine curfew, is an essential necessity in Sri Lanka.

2. Objectives of the study

This study consists of two main objectives and they can be presented as follows.

- Identification of the impacts of **COVID-19** on urban and non-urban areas of Sri Lanka
- Bringing out recommendations on the precautionary measures that should be taken to minimize above impacts arising from the on spread of the pandemic.

3. Methodology

Methodology of the study can be discussed mainly under three sections viz. data collection, data analysis and information presentation.

3.1 Data collection

This study conducted during the first wave of COVID-19 outbreak in Sri Lanka (May-June 2020), is mainly based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire survey which was carried out using 30 randomly selected people from urban setting and 30 randomly selected people from non-urban setting. Colombo and Kalutara districts were taken as urban areas while, Kegalle and Ratnapura districts were selected as non-urban areas when selecting the informants for the questionnaire survey. Data collection was done using reliable off site communication methods such as Google Forms and email, and through social media networks.

The questionnaire survey mainly covered the details on awareness of the people on **COVID-19** and their perspectives, employment and its status, delivery of food and essential items online ordering systems, online financial transactions, and sanitation and health care.

3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was done interactively with Microsoft office Excel, SPSS and using Google sheets and documents.

3.3 Information presentation

Graphs, charts and diagrams are used in information presentation.

4. Results and discussion

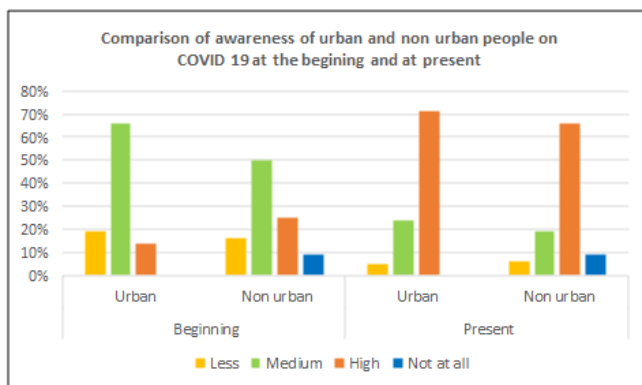
The results of this study are discussed under few main sections such as awareness on the disease, employment related issues, sanitation related issues, transportation, and health sector issues. When the general household information obtained from the informants in this study is considered, 60% of non-urban families had around 4-5 members and 85% of urban families had around 3-5 members in each. The study also identified a significant difference in the percentage of members living away from the house for educational and employment purposes reporting around 72% of non-urban families which had around 1 to 2 family members away from the family for jobs and education, whereas 61% of urban families had no one living away from the house. It suggested that the movement of people from urban to rural areas has become the major root cause behind the flow of infection from urban to non-urban areas. The movement from urban to rural and vice versa became restricted due to the curfew imposed in the last few months in 2020. The study identified 6% of the non-urban families who had their relatives stranded in their places for 2-4 weeks due to the sudden impose of curfew throughout the country. The

sector specific results revealed from this study are discussed below.

4.1. Awareness on the disease

Awareness of the people on this rapidly spreading deadly pandemic is really an important factor to be considered when measures are taken to mitigate its spread. This study mainly focused on the identification of people’s awareness on the disease at its initial stages and at the present time through a conducted questionnaire survey. The graph 4.1 clearly depicts that the majority (66%) of urban dwellers had a medium level awareness on the disease at the beginning and at present 71% of them have a high level of awareness on the disease. When it comes to the non-urban setting, only 50% of the dwellers had a medium level awareness on the disease while around 10% have never had an awareness or knowledge at all. At the present context, only 66% of non-urban population is having a high awareness whilst 9% of them still have no any awareness or knowledge on this disease which is spreading all over the world. Awareness of public on the causative agents of the disease, its symptoms, and prevention methods are the major factors that should be always up to date during a period of pandemic in a country.

Graph 1: Comparison of awareness levels of people o COVID 19.

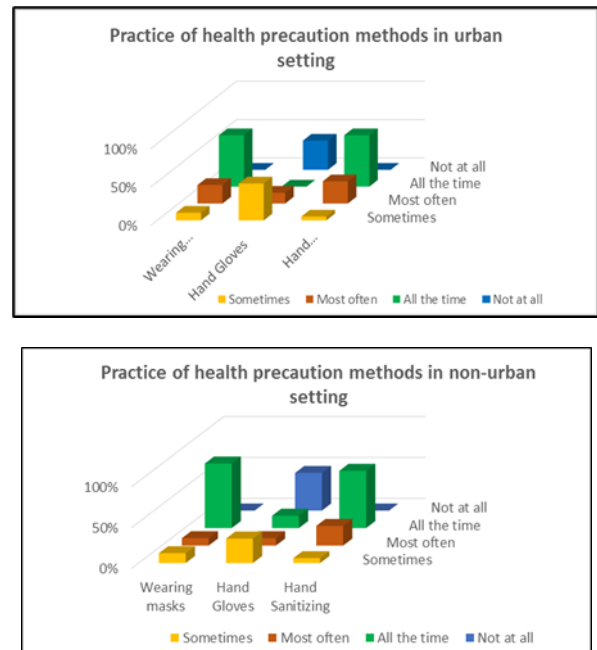


Source: Field survey, 2020.

The study further reviewed the perceptions and attitudes of people on the causes and measures of mitigation of this pandemic, as human perception becomes one of the most important tools in compiling precautionary measures in the post COVID-19 era. The people’s perception on the disease in both urban and non-urban areas were relatively same where 66% of the non-urban settlers and 71% of the urban settlers suggested having better individually practiced health precautions as the best way to mitigate the spreading of the pandemic and 40% and 10% of the non-urban and urban dwellers respectively, suggested better preparedness of individuals for the pandemic as the best way to mitigate the rate of spreading the pandemic.

Apart from awareness, the practice of essential health precaution methods such as wearing a face mask, use of hand gloves, and hand washing are also identified as the compulsory practices that should be adopted in public places. The study could identify different levels in the adoption of these health precaution measures among the people mainly in public places as follows. (Graph 4.2).

Graph 2: Practice of health precaution measures in urban and non-urban areas



According to the above graphs, it is evident that 79% and 67% of non-urban and urban populations respectively, use face masks in almost all the times, and the use of gloves is relatively less in both urban (15%) and non-urban (1%) areas. These observations suggest that a proper monitoring system is an essential necessity to promote adoption of the above practices in public places to ensure the health security of people during a period of pandemic. Further, more than half (75%) of the informants from both the settings suggested protection of themselves and their family members from the pandemic, as the main intention of practicing good health measures in their daily activities. It clearly suggests that the people’s perspective on this pandemic is relatively same in all the settings although the level of practicing varies in different environments.

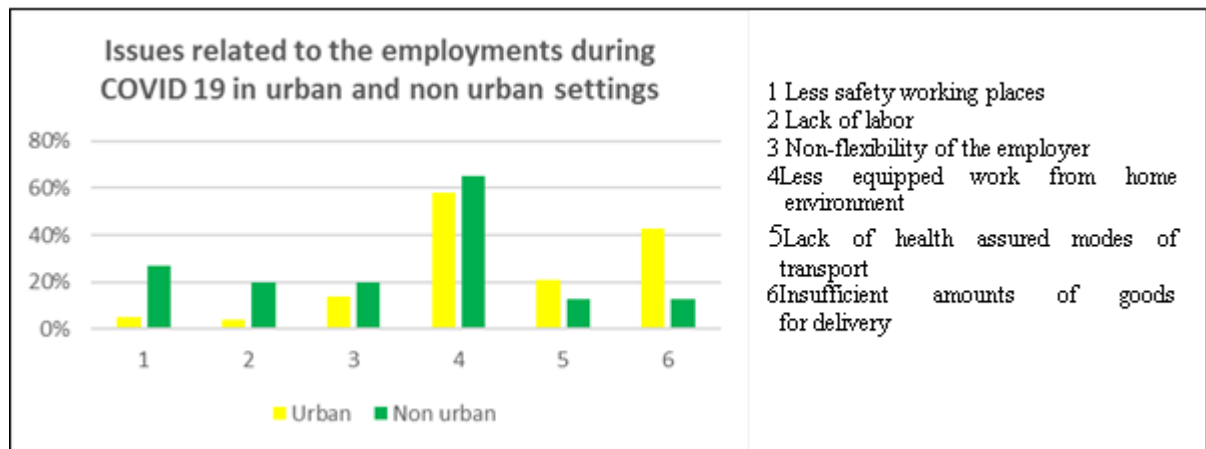
4.2 Issues related to the employment and income.

During the period of a pandemic in a country, the economy is the major component that is highly affected and it can in turn directly or indirectly affect the employment and income levels of the people. Among the informants took part in the questionnaire survey, 50% were from the government sector and 33% were from the private sector. 17% of the informants were self-employed in non-urban settings whilst 41% of urban informants were government job holders and 59% were working in the private sector. When the current status of their employment is considered, more than half (50%) of the non-urban dwellers were working from home while more than half (56%) were reporting to work in urban areas. The reason for having a high percentage of people working from home is the distance they have to travel to their work places from hometown. As the majority of non-urban dwellers were working in the towns and cities located away from home, they have to work from home restricting their daily movements to long distance working places. This condition is relatively different in the urban context where the number of people working from home is less as they have to travel shorter distances to working places which requires daily or shift basis attendance.

When the issues related to employment and sources of income during the **COVID-19** pandemic in Sri Lanka are considered, inadequate safety at working places, lack of labor in small scale self-employed centers, non-flexibility

of the employer, lack of health assured modes of transport, less equipped work from home environment and insufficient amounts of good stocks in small scale delivery based shops, became much prominent (Graph 4.3).

Graph 3: Issues related to employment during COVID 19 in Sri Lanka.

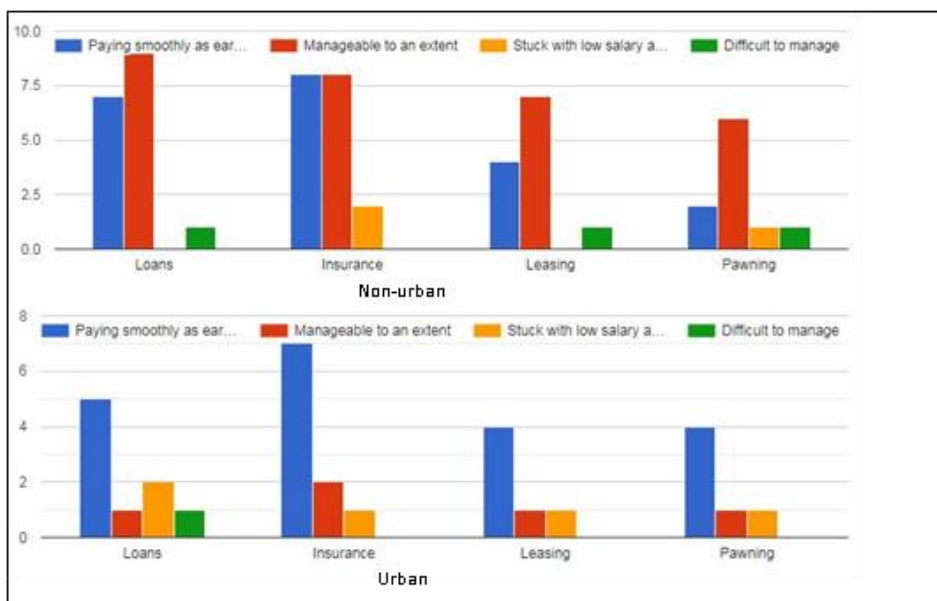


According to the graph 3, it is clear that the less equipped environments available in both urban and non-urban settings mostly due to the less accessibility to internet connections, electronic communication devices and the poor signal coverage is prominent among the issues related to the job. Also the non-flexibility of employer (20% in non-urban and 14% in urban) is also an issue identified with relation to the employments during COVID 19.

The issues related to the employments have created different chaotic situations in the incomes of the people. The study could identify several changes in the incomes of people with relation to the impose of curfew during last few months of COVID 19 in Sri Lanka. Around 65% of both urban and non-urban dwellers go their monthly income as

same as earlier where 90% of them were engaged in government sector jobs. But around 27% and 24% of non-urban and urban dwellers respectively earned a low income due to the half salary payment by the employer and 7% of non-urban dwellers were suffering from no income due to the loss of job during this period. These variations that have been taken place in the income of the people have resulted in many indirect issues related to the loan payments, insurance payments, leasing and pawning payments (Graph 4.4). Especially in non-urban areas, these payments have become stand still and they are managing them only to a certain extent with the economic downfall of the entire family.

Graph 4: Indirect impacts of variations in income of people from COVID 19



Accordingly, it is much clear that, during a period of pandemic in a country, more preparedness is required as its consequences can affect the country's entire economy both directly and indirectly. Therefore, necessary measures should be taken under a well monitored and coordinated

program to prepare the country to face a pandemic situation more effectively.

4.3 Issues related to the food supply and delivery services

Food security is an essential factor which should be addressed with a proper approach during a period of pandemic in a country. Also the food supply and delivery should be carried out under proper health precautions in such a way that, all sections of the society receive them with same quality and same efficiency rate. This study revealed that the majority of the people from urban settings (70%) tended to use online delivery systems to get their essentials delivered to the door steps while the majority of non-urban dwellers (56%) were getting their essentials from door to door delivery services as well as from small shops located at working distances in the area. The reason for existence of this difference in online services is less accessibility to the technology in non-urban areas when compared to that of in urban areas. A significant factor is that, at present around 10% of the non-urban dwellers are practicing their usual methods of getting essentials that prevailed-before **COVID-19** whilst at present no one in the urban areas is following their usual methods of shopping that prevailed before **COVID-19**. This is mainly due to highly monitored movement restrictions imposed by the government in urban areas.

As the majority of urban dwellers depended mainly on online delivery systems and door to door delivery systems, the issues faced by them in that process are really significant. More than 50% of the customers are satisfied only to a certain extent on the efficiency of the services provided by the online delivery systems. Around 15% have reported the low quality of goods, and misplacing of orders due to incorrect delivery addresses related to online delivery services. It suggests that the retail and wholesale traders which provide their services via online modes should be more prepared and efficient enough to provide their services with high quality and efficiency.

4.4 Issues related to common amenities.

The study could identify sanitary services such as garbage collection, as well as providing other common amenities such as water and power supply need more attention during a period of pandemic. Especially in the urban settings, the garbage collection should be regular and efficient as the urban dwellers are unable to store their garbage for a long period of time due to limited space available for their accommodation in the city areas. The study found that more than 85% of the urban dwellers are depending on municipal garbage collecting lorries while 80% of the non-urban dwellers make their own compost using household waste. 50% of the urban dwellers reported that the garbage collecting service is relatively irregular during the pandemic period.

With respect to water and electricity related services, 90% of non-urban dwellers were of the view that, the water and electricity services are good and efficient, while 70% of the urban dwellers have mentioned about the sudden breakdown of services thus leading to less efficiency. When all these facts are considered it is much clear that, during a period of pandemic such as **COVID-19** extensive coordination is needed for both urban and non-urban settings in a country to regularize their services along with necessary health precautions.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Identification of socio economic consequences of **COVID-19** pandemic in a developing country like Sri Lanka is a

vital necessity to compile further measures to prevent the rapid spread of this deadly pandemic. The present study mainly identified lack of awareness of people, especially among the non-urban communities as the major root cause for rapid flow of the pandemic towards semi urban and non-urban areas. Secondly, employment related issues were identified as the urgent issues which required immediate solutions, as the majority were facing issues related to lack of appropriate working environment at their homes, to work from home. Lack of equipped environments, lack of proper network coverage, and less accessibility to modern technology were the worst issues identified in relation to 'work from home' during this period of pandemic.

Further, the study highlighted direct and indirect impacts of the changes in incomes of the people who are working specially in the private sector. Lowering of income due half paid salaries and loss of jobs were observed in both urban and non-urban communities. Food supply and sanitation were identified as the two major factors to be considered during a period of a pandemic in a country. This study could identify several issues related to the efficiency and quality of the online food item delivery services and also issues related to irregular services of municipal garbage collection during this epidemic period. These issues while creating several uncomfortable situations among the communities they have also encouraged the potential to increase the spread of disease over the physical territories. Therefore, our study further recommends the necessity of continuous monitoring and coordination of all the existing health precaution methods in the country, in order to eradicate the **COVID-19** pandemic from Sri Lanka, in the near future.

Reference

1. Acuto, M., 2020. **COVID-19: Lessons for an Urban(izing) World.** *One Earth*, 2(4), pp. 317-319.
2. Desai, D., 2020. *Urban densities and the Covid-19 pandemic: Upending the sustainability myth of global megacities*, Mumbai: Observer Research Foundation.
3. Muggah, R., 2020. *World Economic Forum.* [Online] Available at: <https://www.weforum.org> [Accessed 12 6 2020].
4. Null, S. & Smith, H., 2020. *COVID-19 Could Affect Cities for Years. Here Are 4 Ways They're Coping Now*, s.l.: TheCityFix: World Resource Institute (WRI).
5. Sampaio, A., 2020. *World Economic Forum.* [Online] Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-coronavirus-slums-urban-growth-cities-pandemic-urbanization/> [Accessed 13 06 2020].
6. Strange, W. C., 2016. *Urban Agglomeration*, Switzerland: Springer Nature.
7. WAHBA, S. & VAPAAVUORI, J., 2020. *World Bank Blogs.* [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org> [Accessed 13 06 2020].
8. World Health Organization, 2020. *Strengthening preparedness for COVID-19 in cities and other urban settings: interim guidance for local authorities.*, Geneva: World Health Organization.