

Covid 19: A Defining Moment in our Story of Inclusion

"...the biggest enemy in this epidemic is not the virus, we can deal with the virus. The biggest enemy is the inner demons and our hatreds...they are all coming up..."

Yuval Noah Harari....

Corona Virus pandemic has brought the world on its knees. The rapid spread of the disease has put the whole of the humanity under a lockdown. Fear is reigning in every sphere of life. Social distancing being the only most effective way of curbing the spread of the virus, has left people isolated in their homes.

There is a deep impact on the mental health due to the loss of human connections, on people all across the globe.

The need to interact socially and to have diverse experiences is an undeniable factor to live an enriched life. However the lurking fear of the virus that kills ruthlessly, will perhaps see a world closing doors on its overseas guests, in times to come. In India, already the plight of the migrant workers and the communal discord has made the situation worse beyond comprehension. These stories of human trauma will come back to haunt us in the future.

This brings us to certain pertinent questions about how the world and India will define its story of Inclusion. This also makes us question the effect of accepting diversity wholeheartedly and building strong communities to see us through this unprecedented crises. It is time to cross the class, religious, caste, race, colour and all kinds of barriers to find ways to heal ourselves, our communities, our social fabric, our nation and our world.

It is a collective trauma and it is a collective responsibility to come together and redefine our ideas, beliefs and perceptions about each other, to find a way ahead. We have been presented with an opportunity to see through the dysfunctions that have kept us separate, for a long time. It is a perfect time to sieve what is important for us and what has kept our existence small, what are the issues which are more pressing and need our undivided attention; like human connections, climate change, healthcare, cooperation amongst people and nations, and building harmony.

Objectives:

1. Understanding the importance of human interactions/inclusion in the society.
2. Understanding psychological impact of isolation
3. Understanding the importance of community bonds and inclusion in moving ahead to combat Covid-19.
4. Understanding 'global cooperation', the way ahead to fight the pandemic.

Twelve students from Indraprastha Institute of Information and Technology Delhi, worked on this project as a part of their Summer Community Work.

It was their first experience of working on a qualitative research project of this kind.

The Reachout experience added value to their perspective regarding empathy and inclusion, the most needed human values during a pandemic that has every life battling against it, in some form or the other.

Reachout hopes to have deepened their engagement with life, for them to become compassionate and inclusive leaders, once they assume roles of responsibility in the society.

Nitin Gupta



“Isolation creates a completely different working environment for learning as well as for working. We need to be highly efficient. While learning online, procrastination becomes a serious problem. In the online learning process, the flow of ideas is heavily hindered as communication becomes difficult amongst peers. We know that not everyone in this country has access to high-speed internet, so online learning/working must be a problem for them. I also believe that learning needs a quiet and non-intrusive environment. So, households that don’t have a suitable environment with decent internet speed, for them learning in isolation will be quite hard.”

“Every single action of the government as well as individuals can have far reaching effects on the lives of many people.

Even a simple act of providing food to the needy and giving minimum wages to people working for us will surely have immediate effect in their lives.”

Case Study

The project helped me to interact with different people. The interview took place over a call. I believe this story is worth your time.

I interviewed Mrs. Priyanka Sharma who worked as a housemaid in 3 homes in my

locality. She is 34 years old. She lives with her husband and her only boy. She originally belongs to Uttar Pradesh. She has been living in Delhi for the past 12 years. According to her, before the lockdown, she was able to meet her needs. She was satisfied with the earning and the living conditions. But due to the pandemic and the global call for self-isolation drastic changes occurred in her life.

Every household she used to work for asked her to stop working in their homes until the lockdown ended. Only 1 family out of the 3 was ready to pay her for the lockdown period. The other 2 households blatantly denied her the wages as she was not working. This unkind action had an adverse effect on her life. She was barely able to meet her basic needs.

By the end of the lockdown, even her family was planning to leave for UP as they didn't have enough resources left for proper living. Nearly 30 % of the people in her building have left for their hometowns due to the same issue. Almost all the people in her building left by train.

She has a 10 year old boy. The boy studies in a school where the school has not initiated the prospect of online classes because of the lack of internet facilities. This has disturbed his education.

She informed me that some NGOs used to visit her to supply free food and the NGO was able to maintain social distancing norms while distributing. This came as a relief for people, as there was not a single earning member in some of the families. This caused another hurdle to go back to their hometowns.

She believes that this pandemic has created many problems but it has also brought people together as she has seen multiple incidents where people came forth to help others. She was touched by the help extended by the NGOs.

She finally decided to not go back to her hometown as all 3 houses that she used to work for called her back to work after the lockdown was lifted. They all made sure that she washes her hand as soon as she enters their household and always wears a mask while moving from one house to another.

Place: Delhi

Name: Nitin Gupta

Institute: IIITD okhla phase 3

Yash Vats



“Getting the project approved from college was another challenge. This project deals with human behaviour and sensitive matters like social inclusion and discrimination. We as a society are quite ignorant concerning these things as they cannot be expressed in statistical reports. One cannot quantify human emotions, and that’s when it becomes our responsibility to increase awareness about human value, mental health and social involvement of every individual.

At some point in our lives, we all need to listen to those things which are wrong in us. We carry that darkness somewhere inside us, and extreme times like these makes us more vulnerable and exposed.”

Case Study

Kamla Aunty

For this project, I interviewed my press-vali aunty. Her name is Kamla Pal. She’s been in our locality for the last 4 years, and everybody knows her. I’m the one from my home who generally goes out to give clothes for ironing. So my interaction with her is the maximum. She always treats me like her own son. We mostly giggle on my lame jokes. I’ve kind of developed a rapport with her now.

I believe that she’s one of the happiest and most optimistic people. I went to her rented home, which is in our neighbouring locality(with all necessary precautions). Her home comprises only 1 room having a double bed, an old box TV, a little bit of furniture (4 plastic chairs and 1 wooden table, precisely), a wall attached showcase in which 8-9 photos of her family were put up and some more of usual things with an attached washroom and kitchen.

When I entered her home, she was working in the kitchen and her 17 years old son Kishan was watching the news on TV. Kishan saw me at the door, and he warmly welcomed me and asked me for water.

In no time, Kishan and I were talking on various topics. He was telling me about his

school online lectures.

*Before I proceed, I want to tell you more about Kishan. Kishan is an exceptionally brilliant student. He scored a star 10 cgpa in his 10th boards which helped him in getting admission in one of the prestigious schools near his home. His fees are waived under gareeb kota (below poverty line). This year he passed his 11th std with 92% of marks and currently is in 12th std.

So I asked him, "How're your studies going?"

To which he replied that he had no books for the last 3 months as all the stationary shops were closed. So all he had was his outdated second-hand smartphone which apparently didn't support many useful apps.

He also shared his views about online lectures and a real classroom. About which he felt that in online classes he's losing his zest to study as it's painful for his eyes to look at the bright screen for 4-5 hours. He wasn't used to that. He also mentioned that on some days, even 1.5 GB of data which JIO provides isn't enough to attend all the classes. He runs out of data on most of the days, and he feels that WiFi has become a necessity now.

Learning online is taking a toll on his health and interest in studies. Also, he said he doesn't like to study alone and misses his school friends. This complete isolation thing is quite irritating for him. But he's adjusting with it now as he knows what the whole world is combating with.

We were just talking more about COVID 19 when suddenly Kamla aunty showed up. My first question to her was - How are you doing nowadays in this lockdown? To which she replied - kise fark padta hai hamare bare me, beta? (Who cares about us? Son.) The world only cares about blue bloods. I wanted to have my husband around me in this pandemic, but he couldn't get here as the government is not letting anyone cross borders.

I didn't know about Kamla Aunty's husband, so I asked her about his work and whereabouts. She told me that her husband is a daily wage firm worker in the outskirts of Rajasthan. He's been there for the last 7 months, and all their savings are on the margin now. Left exhausted in terms of options and resources, he also tried to head to his home on his own under the scorching Sun but police officials still didn't let him cross the border under safety measures of the pandemic. So, he's stuck there now.

Kamla Aunty also shared one of her husband's friends, Mr Pramod Kamat's story. Mr Kamat just lost his 30 years old brother due to hunger in Bihar, and he badly wanted to go for his last rituals. He begged and left no stone unturned to plead the government officials to let him go, but all his efforts were futile. Moreover, he got answers like - "ab kya karoge jaake, tumhare jaane se vo zinda to ho nahi jaenge." (What's the point of going there now, the person won't come alive again). These kinds of answers broke his heart, and he felt that disharmony and nasty behaviour of people in such a situation.

She remembers, she had a helper named Anwar at her press work who used to collect charcoal for her press. Later on, he left and set up a fruit and vegetable store. His store was working well. But after this lockdown and Tablighi Jamaat incident, people have started boycotting him, humiliating him. Nobody is buying from his store now. He's totally devastated and broke. A few days back, he visited Kamla Aunty and cried about his condition and how unfair it is to connect him with Tablighi Jamaat . Kamla Aunty helped him. She herself doesn't have so much to give, but that doesn't stop her from helping one of her needy friends. She said that if you help someone by the skin of your teeth, it'll definitely come back to you as well because that's how karma works.

She's not being selfish and unkind to anyone because she knows that if the people didn't get help at the very moment, then it would be too late. This is completely "A day late and a dollar short" condition.

I was overwhelmed after talking to her for so long.

At last, she said that she's way too happy that someone came to her home, talked about her life and interviewed her, she felt like a celebrity!

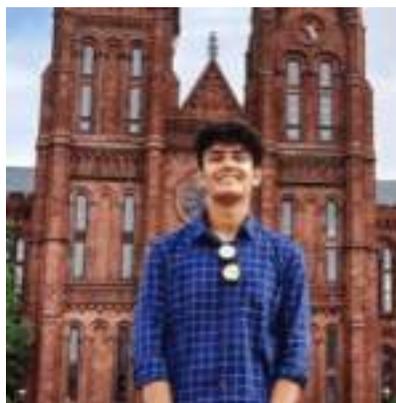
At that moment I realised that even our small contribution could bring immense happiness in someone else's life. The least a person must do is to support other people, talk about their problems and feelings. That will bring a huge change in the entire society.

Place: Delhi

Name: Yash Vats

Institute: IIIT Delhi, Okhla Phase 3

Ansh Kumar Sharma



"Learning in isolation has been a boon for some and a curse for others. Those who are privileged enough to be with their family and have adequate resources to work/learn from home are doing well in this lockdown. However, those who don't have enough

resources like laptops or those who are stuck in some remote places with poor internet connection are facing extreme difficulties in work. Some people are living in complete isolation and so have to do daily chores like buying groceries, cleaning, cooking along with work which results in a very hectic routine and may affect their mental health. Also, many people like labourers have lost their jobs due to this lockdown.”

Case Study

One of the people I talked to during this study was Mr Dharmendra Lodhi. He is a 28-year-old man who lives and works in Old Delhi. His hometown is a small village near Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh where his parents, wife and kids live.

When Dharmendra first came to Delhi, he used to work in my house as domestic help. After some time, we helped him get a job at a clothing shop, and he left working for us. However, he kept in touch with my family and came to visit us frequently about twice a month.

Just before the lockdown, he was doing three jobs a day. In the morning he worked with a vegetable vendor. In the day he worked at the clothing shop and moved handcarts at night.

However, after the lockdown was announced, he didn't have any work. The vegetable vendor left for his village, the clothing shop closed down and there were no handcart jobs to do. He used to live in a place inside the clothing shop, and he continued to live there but had no source of income. We, being familiar to him, helped him through this by giving him food, money for milk and other essentials. On some days he even used to go to places where they offered free food like Gurudwaras.

When a massive crowd emerged at Anand Vihar Bus Terminal, we advised him not to go there as there were high chances of catching Coronavirus. People were facing a lot of difficulties. He didn't go there, listening to our advice.

When governments started to arrange for the movement of migrant workers, he decided to leave for his village. He tried to get a train reservation, but to no avail. So he decided to go by himself. He got in touch with a tempo driver and managed to go to Ghaziabad Bus Station for Rs 2100. On reaching Ghaziabad, he left for Garhmukteshwar in UP. He travelled to Garhmukteshwar by different means and also walked for 8-10 km.

According to him the authorities in Uttar Pradesh had excellent facilities. His temperature was measured, he was given fresh water bottles and food in the day. At 8 in the night, he was sent towards his village in a private bus arranged by the authorities. The authorities also told people that they will ensure the passengers reach their homes safely. The bus stopped at a place, midway where people had to buy food on their own if they wanted to. Before leaving that place the bus conductor started asking Rs 500 from the passengers to go further, but people rebelled. A police van stopped by, and the policeman scolded the conductor. People agreed on giving Rs 50 to the conductor. From

there, it was a smooth journey to his village. On reaching his village, his temperature was checked once more before allowing him entrance.

He is currently working as a farm labourer in some field in his village. He is struggling economically but is still in a better state than living unemployed in Delhi. However, he plans to return to Delhi soon and continue with his jobs.

Place: Delhi

Name: Ansh Kumar Sharma

Institute: IIIT Delhi, Okhla Phase III

Anunay Yadav



“Online platforms have bridged the gap well and even in isolation I am connected more with people than before. Learning has improved, but cannot say the same for people without the internet because I think the internet has played a major role in connecting everyone.

Learned a lot of new things. this Period has overall increased my work limit per day, sitting on a screen and working on a problem for 1-2 days with nothing else to focus on is just great.”

Case Study

I interviewed more than 8 people and from one such interview, I interacted with Tushar who was a student at IIITD CSD branch, Interview took place on cellphone and He was very much angry as well as depressed because of the huge number of online classes and assignments taken by professors, internet problems and frequent light outs. At the time of interview he stated that 1-2 coronavirus cases were found in his society because of which the whole neighbourhood was quarantined. Assignments given by professors were graded thus contributing to CGPA which is of great importance for students in college and because

of which he had no choice but to complete those assignments. Because of lockdown he was not able to get internet providers to fix his internet . Also he had to manage everything with Frequent light outs in the society since his quizzes, assignments deadlines, interviews everything needed constant supply of electricity .

His family had plans of going to Uttarakhand (his hometown) because of the Coronavirus spike in Delhi but they were not able to because of lack of supplies needed to travel by road as traveling by train and plane was not possible because of the high possibility of coronavirus spread. He informed me that people from his society came to help him in any need possible helping him with groceries etc.

He believes that this pandemic is the cause of many problems but it has also brought communities together to help each other. He said that he did not expect how considering and helpful his society is. There are positive as well as negative aspects of lockdown. Even till the end of lockdown he was facing the same problems.

Naman Tyagi



In this project, I interviewed many people and some of them shared their problems and stories and how this crisis has affected them. While analysing the responses, I came to know that according to most people, this isolation is the best time to work upon themselves. They strongly feel that it is the best time for an individual to work on his/her personality.

Case Study

I spoke to a student Amit from Delhi University. According to him, this lockdown is not helping anyone and it has made him exhausted and depressed. Hence the impact on his

learning was also negative because it had drained him mentally and had hampered his ability to think. He said, this crisis has impacted the confidence of people and generated a fear amongst them. He also said that this has affected the economy of our country and people are losing their jobs. He thinks that communities are unable to follow lockdown properly and this is leading to increased coronavirus cases. Also, nations have not shown empathy towards each other as people are not sensitive enough, and they are not acting responsibly.

After analysing these responses, I contacted him and asked further questions in order to find the root cause for these negative answers. During the discussion, I came to know that he had been placed in a company but due to the lockdown, he lost his job and is unable to find another one. This loss has affected him mentally and psychologically. His situation made me realise that this is one case which I interviewed and came to know. But there could be thousands of such people in our country. This has in turn affected them psychologically, giving rise to negative thought patterns in their minds.

Arka Sarkar



I understand that many people are facing problems during this pandemic, they are not able to concentrate on the task at hand. However my experience is different. I find that this lockdown has given me a lot of time to learn new things, since we are not going to the gym or to play, we have a lot of time at hand which enables me to concentrate on my studies and my career. I thought that most students might also feel the same but apparently it's not.

The government hasn't taken much initiative for the underprivileged, I think we as a community should take a stance and do something about it. I have read about various NGOs and business organizations who have started distributing food and clothes to the needy. If our student community could also take such steps then it would certainly be great. This is the time for the

youth of our country to channelise ourselves towards Nation building.

There has been one drastic change in our lives during this lockdown, that is the lack of domestic helpers. I am now realising how crucial they are to our everyday lives. For the past few months my mother has had to do a lot of the household work apart from her work. I and my dad also helped out several times in the household chores. In India we take the household chores for granted as right from our childhood we have domestic helpers for the job and we never really get to do it ourselves like in foreign countries. I think this is the time to become empowered to take on bigger roles in life as professionals, inclusive and compassionate team leaders. Connecting emotionally with the society at large in order to be of help.

Several communities have come together to fight against covid-19. We as humans have certainly shown empathy towards one another by helping anyone we can, the doctors, police, people in the public health sector have all worked day in day out for these past couple of months. But I feel the government failed to show any kind of empathy towards the poorer people, like the migrant workers, they are starving and dying without any jobs to support their families, despite the news and social media screaming to help these people the government simply ignored their pleas. There are many articles on social media with the title "If Corona doesn't kill me, hunger will", it's really heartbreaking to see the level of ignorance displayed by our government.

Anuneet Anand



"The pandemic has strained the social fabric of our nation. It has exposed various vulnerabilities and incapacities of our social system. There has been a continuous upsurge in the number of COVID-19 cases even after imposing lockdown. Many people

have lost their jobs and there has been an economic downfall. The poor section of the society and daily wage workers are in a miserable condition. There is widespread resentment and fear among the people.”

The anxious young adults...

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a profound effect on our lives in the past few months. In the course of this project, I interviewed many people from different backgrounds and got to know about their experiences and struggles during the lockdown. In one such interview, I interacted with Rhythm Patel, an undergraduate student pursuing a degree in Computer Science.

Rhythm is a very humble and friendly person who likes keeping himself busy with various exciting activities. Unfortunately, the past few months have been quite challenging for him. He is a DASA student and his family is settled in Doha, Qatar. In the earlier half of March, the number of cases in our nation was relatively low and most of the students were able to return to their homes safely. However, Qatar had denied immigration in the country as a safety measure. This brought in fear and anxiety for Rhythm but he tried to keep calm and act wisely. He considered that it was best for him to go to his grandparents' house in Anand, Gujarat. The journey was quite a tussle and he had to keep himself safe from getting infected in the crowded places. He managed to reach Anand just before the nationwide lockdown was announced but was anxious about the upcoming challenges.

As the lockdown continued, the college decided to conduct online classes and assignments. Rhythm is a person who likes socializing and is motivated by people around him; thus, he found it difficult to continue with the studies in isolation. He missed the enriching class discussions and debates over various topics. Another problem was poor internet connectivity and frequent power cuts in his area. A reliable and fast internet connection has become an absolute necessity during this crisis. He attended most of the online lectures on his phone and even had to miss a few. He tried his best to stay motivated and cope with these obstacles.

Prior to this pandemic, Rhythm had got an internship at the reputed Qatar Computing Research Institute. He faced a lot of difficulties in working remotely for the same and felt distressed. According to Rhythm, a diverse group of colleagues and fellow learners, play an essential role in our growth and regular discussions bring in some wonderful ideas.

Rhythm missed his parents a lot and felt miserable at times. But his grandparents were supportive and caring and helped him cope with sadness and loneliness.

When the lockdown relaxed, Rhythm made friends with some of his neighbours. One of his neighbours even offered to share Wi-Fi so that he can continue attending important meetings. A group of young adults in his area helped to bring supplies for the older people and he too volunteered for the same. He understood the value of community bonding and as the days passed, he made efforts to make more contributions to his

society.

According to Rhythm, this pandemic created a turmoil on his mental health but constant support from his grandparents and his new neighbours helped him a lot. Looking at the news, he felt quite sorry about the plight of migrant workers and wished for their well-being. He insisted that we all should try to be more empathetic and help people around us in this crisis. We should be more inclusive and should not let this crisis drift us apart.

Place: Delhi

Name: Anuneet Anand

Institute: IIIT-D, Okhla Phase 3

Divyam Gupta



“Social constructs like racism can be broken down instantly if one understands the history of the community being discriminated against and letting go of long-standing biases against them.

A careful observation of the Indian society reveals that we tend to be more servile as compared to Westerners. We can trace this phenomenon to the classroom setting, where the teacher-student relationship is essentially that of a master-pupil with the pupil being subjected to the orders of the master. Flow of ideas, critical and creative thinking are not encouraged. Thus, as adults in a workplace, we seldom put forward new ideas and serve as the working class as compared to being innovators and leaders.”

I am Divyam Gupta, a 20 year old student at IIIT Delhi, pursuing Bachelors in Computer Science and Engineering. Though I was born and raised in Delhi, I've lived in various parts of the country owing to my father's transferable job. I am a kind, compassionate person who takes interest in a diverse range of subjects, from technology to the social sciences. As an introvert, I find socialising to be a daunting task. Yet, I've been lucky

enough to be blessed with a fantastic set of friends who've not only guided me through academic hurdles but also supported me during vulnerable times. I hope to meet similar people in the future, who'll ensure an upward trajectory of my professional and emotional development.

Case Study

On a warm May afternoon, I interviewed Ms. Indu Gupta, a 52-year old principal of a government school in East Delhi. The previous day had recorded over 5,000 new COVID-19 cases in the country, at a time when lockdown restrictions were relaxed by a bit. As a student, I couldn't help but wonder how the backbone of the education system, i.e., our teachers, were being treated in these trying times.

Dismally, she recounted the evening of 24th March 2020. She had just sat down to have a hearty dinner with her family after a strenuous day at school, not anticipating the shock she was about to receive. In a matter of a few minutes, she witnessed the imposition of the nationwide lockdown, which would later be touted as the longest one in Indian history. As a diabetic patient, she was slightly relieved, as she feared to contract the virus while in school. Her relief subsided when she realized how the dynamics of her household would be disrupted. She had to appease the domestic help employed at her house by paying advance wages while managing the tasks they were assigned. As a joint family member, she had to take care of her parents-in-law, who were mentally impacted due to isolation. One of her children, Ritika, a 12th grader, was supposed to appear for the JEE (Mains), 2020. With no revised date in sight, Ritika wailed at the uncertainty of her future. The world seemed to be crashing upon Indu, as multiple aspects of normal life were shaken due to the lockdown.

To compound her troubles, she was assigned to a ration distribution center in North Delhi. She pleaded with the district administration to relieve her of these duties owing to her co-morbidity only to realize her pleas were falling on deaf ears. Moreover, she was forced to be on-duty lest she wanted to be removed from her current post. She couldn't afford the latter as she supplemented her husband's income to ensure a modest lifestyle for her family.

Reluctantly, she would head over to the center in Rohini daily, only to find an old and poorly maintained building. She had to wear protective gear in a room with minimal ventilation, unbearable heat, and tiny windows that were used as booths for the ration collectors. She lamented the apathy shown by the Delhi Government towards the teachers. A limited supply of ration meant that she would have to ask people to go home empty-handed, after having maintained social distancing protocols for several hours. She would feel helpless in these moments and wished she could've personally helped those people.

As her shift ended, she would hastily remove the protective gear that had been suffocating her. On her way back home, she'd witness various langars and NGO workers distributing food to the needy, educating them about the virus's effects, and providing

them essential items for short-term survival. It is in these moments that she felt that a ray of hope existed at the end of this dark period. Another bout of relief would come when she would reach home and find her children engaged in activities that reduced the household's burden on her. She'd take a bath to cleanse herself and maintain a strict distance from everyone until she bathed. Her colleagues would narrate a similar story when she'd get a chance to talk to them.

Even after three months of following this draconian routine, and adhering to hygienic practices, she still fears that she'd contract the virus and infect her whole family. Yet, she bravely allays those fears, by contributing to a noble cause at the center, with immense support from her family.

Place: New Delhi

Name: Divyam Gupta

Institute: IIITD okhla phase 3

Anshul Raj



“No matter how diverse/open we think we are , there are always things we don't know about others, things which might be troubling them, things which they are afraid of talking about.”

Looming economic crisis

One of the people whom I interviewed was a friend of my uncle named Abhishek who works in the accounts department in a company in Delhi. He is a married man 40 years old and has children both of them relatively younger (3-4th grade). He has recently shifted to Delhi from Ranchi and currently lives in a rented home. He is the only earner in the family and has to take care of all the expenses in the family.

I interviewed him on a video call, he seemed to be a very polite, humble person. I asked him about how he feels about working in isolation, to which he replied that it was all well and good till the company decided to fire him at very short notice. He explained that as he is the only earner in the family, they have no source of income and have to

pay the rent monthly from their savings which are running short.

He said that if the lockdown continued and if he couldn't find a job soon then he could run out of savings which would be disastrous. He also added that this is the story of many of his colleagues who were also fired with him.

Then I asked about what he thinks about the social fabric of India and how it has been affected, to which he said that as all the people are facing problems and trying to solve them. There are very few people who are worried about others, "Every man for themselves". He also added that nowadays when he goes out to buy groceries, he notices that people are very irritated. Probably because there haven't been many things recently to keep people in high spirits, it is just one bad news after another.

When asked about empathy, he had a very strong opinion "NO, If the people would have been empathetic then I wouldn't have got fired." He also added that his boss never asked about his mental health or the problems he was facing in his work.

I asked him, "Do you think this crisis has divided us further or brought us together as a Nation?" he had a mixed response. He said that even though there are not many people around to talk to in this chaos, we have grown closer to the people who are physically near. He added that he has recently been spending more time talking to his neighbours, to whom he only met during the society meetings before.

He finally added that despite all this chaos in his life, he is trying to be optimistic and trying to find a job online, and hoping that this will all come to an end shortly and we will return to normal lives.

Name: Anshul Raj
Institute: IIIT Delhi

Kinshuk Chopra



We love to take life for granted and this pandemic made us realise that life is the most unpredictable thing there is. We should start cherishing moments even more and

understand the importance of every person in our life from daily workers to friends to families.

I would want our college to be a bit more empathetic towards the students and try to understand that it's a completely new experience for us. A few of the professors were very empathetic towards us but the general attitude was more about continuing college the way it would if there wouldn't, have been any pandemic.

I interviewed people from different communities, and reading their responses made me happy that I took up this project.

One of the responses that I received was of Mr. Sushil Gupta who owns a stationary shop in the market nearby my house. I read his response and felt like he might be a person who wanted to share his story so that he could feel mentally relaxed. I contacted him.

He has had a shop since 2010. He had been personally going to his shop since 2014. I have been a regular customer. The best thing about his personality is that he always tries to share small jokes with his customers to make them feel happier.

Since the lockdown was imposed his shop was shut. Stationary shops were not considered as essential commodities by the government. That was the only way of earning his livelihood.

He told me that like him almost every shop owner in that market was in the same situation, that is no earnings and only had expenses to account for. He is the only earner in his family of 4 people. The lockdown forced him to deplete almost all of his savings.

I was a bit surprised when he told me that money wasn't the major issue, the major issue was staying at home. Mentally it had started taking a toll on him. His shop used to be open 7 days a week and only closed on holidays. He was a person who loved to be in his workplace.

But as lockdown kept getting extended his family which belonged to the lower middle class started moving towards a financial crisis especially with all the rent dues and EMI's he had to pay.

Then, as a ray of light, he got an opportunity to sell the majority of the stuff that he had in his shop as bulk order to a few companies which needed supplies. He also mentioned that his shop was recommended to those companies by people who were once his customers.

It's been twice that I have met him since lockdown got over and still, he's that same old person who always cracks small jokes. At times it hits me that had people not helped

him during this pandemic a good person like him would have lost all his savings and would have been in a much worse situation.

Place: Delhi

Name: Kinshuk Chopra

Institute: IIITD okhla phase 3

Himanshu Raj



The social gap increased because of this pandemic. The upper-class people are able to afford everything they need. While the lower-class people are opting to move to their hometown due to no support from the government and officials in this testing time. Many of them lost their lives walking tirelessly for thousands of kilometres on highways.

Though many communities helped a lot in this pandemic, the social/political/religious differences can be seen in a lot of cases. This is the time when we should be standing united facing this pandemic.

The educational institutions should have considered everyone before making everything online. Not everyone is able to get the internet due to financial crises or demographics. Also, the trauma that a family goes through when someone gets infected is unimaginable and this is never considered. This is the reason why many foreign universities put an end to the ongoing semester.

We Indians lack the understanding of mental health and this is not only the problem with the general public but with everyone including the top decision-makers and officials. The above stated three observations clearly show this.

This is a story of March 2020 and about me, a second-year undergraduate at IIT-D who is working hard and doing all the deadlines. One day I got to know about the unfortunate demise of one of my close family members. I went back to my hometown to attend the funeral and at the same time the COVID-19 cases started rising in India. When I and my family were about to come back to Delhi, the sudden lockdown got imposed and we got stuck in the hometown but far away from our home.

Imagine a situation where a person gets stuck in a place with no proper electricity (an average of 8-10 hours of electricity cut) and a hot place like Bihar. I being an engineering student of an Indian institute was forced to continue my studies online in this traumatic situation. The assessments and classes were going on like normal in this global pandemic, where you have no idea who is suffering how much either due to COVID-19 infection or with this sudden lockdown.

I was also worried about the fact that almost no one was aware about the COVID-19 there. Life was going on as usual in my village.

However, we came back to Delhi using E-Pass in the middle of May. My life didn't go back to normal but it was better than before. I can very easily term these 2 months as the most challenging period of my life till now, the basic routine of a human life like sleeping was also very hard during that time. (sleeping in 45 degrees with no fan and stretch this situation for 2 months)

After reaching Delhi, I could perceive the change in my life. I could attend classes, exams, etc. normally like any other student. I also took up some new skills and courses to learn and work on. I learnt how much life changes from village to city. At the same time I do realise the situation of students who are stuck somewhere, not having proper resources for attending online classes. This saddens me deeply and I totally empathize with them.

My experience taught me how the life of a college student changes when his college management makes a bizarre decision of continuing with online assessment at the time of global pandemic. It made me realise how much mental health education and the idea of inclusion, that we lack, needs to be incorporated.

A supreme decision maker imposed a big decision like sudden lockdown without any planning and it resulted in numerous migrant workers dying on the roads. If they had considered the case of poor people and made better arrangements, then this chaos

wouldn't have happened. It exposed the lack of thought and empathy that goes into making such arbitrary decisions.

I hope these lessons will stay with me and help me act wisely in the future.

Vishwesh Kumar



Working on this project has helped me expand my viewpoint regarding multiculturalism in India. A new side of things has been opened for me . I have become more perceptive of the daily challenges faced by people ,and hope to induce the same into others around me .

Simple actions that matter.

I have gone on a journey of coming across many perspectives , viewing this pandemic through different lenses.

On a day to day basis , the lockdown has made me highly self dependent . Majority of my day is spent cooking small meals , making shakes etc (small things , which I am capable of doing right now) , for the family, which I am sure will help me in the future.

A major effect of this pandemic has been on my education , and learning virtually was quite a slippery slope. I was able to score a decent grade point , but what I actually learnt was quite a different story. With deadlines still intact thanks to the college not being ready to back down on that front , a majority part of my mental strength was sapped by my college and an internship I was applying for .There were many days when I had to deliberately pull myself away from the screen , as that was slowly becoming the only

way to progress. A decent method I apply to separate my work and fun is to make different workspaces/devices for both of them. This is a great psychological booster, and something I'd recommend others to do too.

My physical strength has gone down, despite the bi-weekly jogs and regular skipping I do. Possibly a cause of that is that earlier on, I had become accustomed to having a social motivation (badminton team practices in college) behind every workout session. However, the current motivation is to keep my immune system intact. With a corona case occurring in my neighborhood, I have come to the understanding that at the end, one's immunity is the last resort that one can rely on, despite all the social distancing one does.

I felt that Online communication has pushed me to interact with people outside my group again. These apply to both new and old acquaintances. This really has helped me get back in touch with my soft skills. This project has also helped in that.

A major part of the project I undertook dealt with community strength, bonds, and social fabric of India. The responses helped me model what the current outlook of individuals has been towards society. The most important front I came across was that of unity, and the communities that have been on the forefront of this pandemic. Every person fends for themselves now, and with social distancing in place, a lot of the physical exchanges in life have now been reduced to null. For quite a lot of people, these were what kept the relations intact (seeing each other on the walk, talking to one's neighbour while taking out the garbage). I feel the pandemic has brought us apart at a community level, due to lack of social interactions. However, we have had better time to bond with family.

A shopkeeper near my house is on the verge of shutting down, due to the fact that his main source of sales were luxury items. Unable to procure those goods anymore, he has tried to expand his business to selling grocery items. I learnt that helping others may not only be in the form of monetary help, but also simple acts like buying from struggling shops. My father and I consistently tried to buy things from his shop, and encouraged our neighbours to do the same. With some encouragement, soon the sales picked up, and the money flow to the shop increased gradually. I am happy to say that the community was able to come together to help each other out.

Ish Dutt



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Ish Dutt. I am currently a second year BBA L.L.B (Hons.) student at Jindal Global Law School. I have completed my senior years of schooling from Mayo College, Ajmer. My education has given me the opportunity to interact with individuals from multi-cultural environments and has further nurtured me into having a very nuanced and empathetic understanding of the contemporary world set-up.

As an exchange scholar I have also had the opportunity to engage with students from various parts of the world. Within the rich blend of culture and heritage there emerged a mutual understanding of trust and camaraderie which was ironically the first time I turned a page in the chapter of inclusion, without realising the same.

The amalgamation of all these experiences ,fuelled with a constant desire to learn and contribute more, has acted as the anchor leading me towards pursuing a virtue full life.

ABOUT REACHOUT FOUNDATION

The Reach out foundation is a non-profit foundation that is involved in advocating for social change across various facets by creating awareness and curating solutions for the different socio-cultural injustices that have prevailed across the landscape of this country.

The principle for the same lies in the foundation's core values-'*Defy Stereotypes, Fight Prejudice, Eliminate Discrimination*'.

SYNOPSIS OF THESE ISSUES

The issues with regards to injustice in the form of discrimination through oppressive practices have prevailed across generations in different permutations and combinations. To further streamline and build on this thought, it is essential to understand what these issues are and how can the same be analysed. At the outset it is important to understand that none of these issues can be seen in solitary as the principle that has and will prevail would have done the same for any of the issues mentioned henceforth.

The problem lies in the fact that there is an intersection between caste based community discrimination and class discrimination. The same further gets stemmed from the inegalitarian traction that is created in the name of caste and creed. It can be seen through every day examples and sometimes cannot be seen at all, due to its systemic nature, but it has had an underlying effect on our social interactions.

An illustration of the same is the ill treatment of Dalits based on the apparent caste they were born into. The examples cited above are just a figment of the entirety of what prevails but it paints a picture. The problem is not just the discrimination of certain communities. For instance- the individuals from the seven sister states are not only treated like outsiders but are also subjugated to a large of amount of discrimination based on their physical features .Another example is our society's sexist attitude due to its patriarchal nature.

The understanding of the above will bring us back in touch with reality. The same reality that the people who face discrimination face on a day-to-day basis. Acceptance and acknowledgement of the fact that there are major problems that are getting boiled up in extremely normative ways will drive us towards an understanding which will ultimately call for a change. The lockdown has seen a major amplification of this discriminatory behaviour in form of a higher caste and communal violence and a substantial increase in domestic

violence cases. Not only was the discrimination limited to the aforementioned instances but we have also seen instances of professional discrimination where doctors and other medical faculty were pelted upon with stones on the course of our fight in this pandemic. Even though the previous contention might have bamboozled us, this is the reality of our current geopolitical atmosphere. The sudden increase was, ironically, not actually sudden at all. It is the result of years of socialization, day to day training of the subconscious mind through what was heard, seen and understood. The sudden increase can simply be attributed to people having the opportunity and time to tap what has already manifested within them and additionally, have the tools and resources to elucidate upon their thought.

The principle aim and scope of this report lies in creating awareness for the people who are subjugated to the 5 faces of oppression- Exploitation, marginalization, violence, cultural imperialism, powerlessness- and beyond. The Foundation, as a whole, and I, through this report would hope to make some headway in our attempt to collectively spread awareness of the unfortunate struggle of the underprivileged. The broader questions that this report also tries to tap is the state and circumstances people are currently living in, and what has been the effect of the lockdown in their personal, professional and family life. Further, this report will try and seek a silver lining, a glimmer of hope through certain instances of inclusion that might have prevailed by a subject of the case study.

PRIMARY SCOPE OF THE REPORT

The principle aim behind this report is to develop a comprehensive response from different people in order to gain perspective of what they have understood and gauged from the pandemic. The primary objectives of the report are as follows;

- ⊠ To understand the impact of isolation on people's psychology especially in terms of the paradigm shift in the work and learning life during this period of the lockdown.
- ⊠ The report also strives towards understanding what was the collective response of the communities, especially in terms of inclusion and how it was measured or perceived during the period of the lockdown.

- ☒ To further understand the importance of global and domestic cooperation.
- ☒ To promote a few instances of inclusion that have prevailed during this period of the lockdown.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Successfully conducted 10 interviews virtually through telephonic conversations and questionnaires.
2. The data was collected from respondents residing in different parts of India and belonging to different socio-economic strata's, among other things.
3. The geographical and professional working of the students varies from
 - One University student from Kashmir, Gorakhpur, Sikkim and two from Delhi.
 - Two university professors from Jindal Global Law School and the state university in Goa respectively.
 - A captain of a cruise liner.
 - Professional in low paying jobs (A househelp and a labourer)
4. Engaged in deep and meaningful conversations with all the respondents. Due procedure was followed while engaging with the respondents. The conversations also lead to a lot of thoughtful introspection personally.
5. The data collected then was interpreted and answered question which will further be discussed in the following sections.

RESEARCH ON KEY SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

The entirety of this process was two-fold in nature. While the first aspect was dependent data collection, the interpretation for the same in terms of conceptual understanding could have only be done through reading and understanding various sociological concepts like inclusion, exclusion, oppression among other things. To understand what constitutes oppression as a whole and to further build on how the effect of the lockdown on the populous and what triggered the spike in the various discriminatory

actions that followed various contemporary academic papers from different journals which analysed the impact of the same. The concepts were also understood through the interviews conducted as different respondents had different perspectives which was quite interesting. Secondly, the knowledge base was built through various newspapers articles, internet articles, and journal articles, as well as academic videos to further understand the intricate aspects of this problem.

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION AND INTERPRETATION

The data collection process was mainly conducted through telephonic interviews and video conferencing. This was an interesting experience as both- I and the respondents- were conducting such an interview through the virtual medium for the first time. Regardless, the interviews were extremely insightful and comprehensive. The same was possible only due to not only the plethora of open ended but also the same time specific questions that followed. Every answer was different and had a unique perspective to it. The entirety of the process can be a little daunting owing to the disadvantage that data collection and interpretation can be a long and tedious process. The accumulated data was then presented in the form of visual graphs. The same were further categorized in the (i) positive, (ii) negative and (iii) neutral.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

The following is an analysis of some of the pertinent questions put forth by us to the respondents, a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the same will follow in this section.

- Impact of a diverse workplace on personal growth and development.

The statistics that followed for this specific section was as follows, 7 out of the 10 respondents felt that working in a diverse workplace has had a positive impact across various facets of their personal and professional lives. 2 out of the 10 respondents felt that the same had a negative impact with regards to their personal growth and development the

same will be elucidated upon shortly and lastly one respondent felt like there was no impact on their personal or professional growth.

The majority of the respondents who felt that the aforementioned had a positive impact on their personal growth and development believed that a diverse workplace is synonymous to diversity in ideas and conversations. Additionally the respondents were also on the opinion that a difference in opinion and thought has attributed significantly to their personal growth and development as they have been able to engage in meaningful debates with their counterparts, resulting in some very eye-opening revelations which didn't necessarily lead to them changing their stance but made them more empathetic and considerate to their counterparts perspective. The respondents that felt that the diverse environment in the workplace had a negative impact on their lives opined this way because they believed that they have been the victims of unfair discrimination and exclusion and have been isolated due to their race, religion and ethnicity.

- Impact on the nation's social fabric and the community's response to the pandemic.

There was a lot of deliberation in the respondents' head with regards to this question while some had personally witnessed some very kind acts of humility and kindness they felt that the trend that prevailed in the majority was quite starkly from what they had experienced thus 6 out of the 10 respondents felt like the impact on the nation's fabric and communities response had been negative especially considering the social environment of the country. They felt the same was majorly due to various political, communal and caste centred reasons. However, no one really wanted to further deliberate on the same.

There were 2 respondents who felt like the same had a positive impact with regards to the social fabric of the country as they felt like they had been instances where communities as a whole had gone out of their way in order to help people in desperate need for some help. These respondents were also aware of the situation on the flipside but believed that the instances of acts of kindness must not be negated and thus stood strongly with their

response. One respondent felt like there wasn't any change in the social fabric of the country and were rather unopinionated on the same.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

1. Setting a date and time for the interview- Considering the same was done during the period of the lockdown, one would think that it would be easier to fix a time for a meeting. However, this wasn't the case and far from actuality. From differing sleep schedules to class and other commitments, these variable factors played a significant role and could be attributed as a hurdle as it resulted in a lot of rescheduling etc and thus some of the respondents contributed by answering a few questions through answering written questionnaires. Thus, resulting in a hybrid sort of interview.
2. The elimination of personal biases- While the elimination of personal biases at its lengths is not possible, given the fact that various sociologists believe that elimination of the common-sense sociologically is not possible. However, being aware of any contentions that may arise personally and noting down the same is a good way to eliminate any personal biases during the analyses part.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND INSIGHTS.

1. There are people coming from different economic and social strata's whose experiences vis a vis the lockdown has been differing in nature while there are different forms of discrimination that have been prevalent across generations the same has seen a sharp rise during this period of the lockdown
2. The five faces of oppression which entail cultural imperialism, exploitation, violence, marginalization and powerlessness are the discriminatory tactics used against communities which have been facing subjugation due to historical prejudices, geographical boundaries, physical appearances among other things.

3. They have been massive leaps in terms of working and learning in isolation. While there have been dynamic changes in terms of learning and working in isolation the same has led to a plethora of issues in terms of monotonous work culture, limited social interaction, loss of jobs and fewer monetary benefits. The need for inclusion or to feel included is needed across parameters of sex, caste, race or religion.
4. There was a common understanding and acceptance about the fact that there is an issue which is affecting all of us. There is a call for communities to work towards these issues with synergy and develop a certain amount of empathy when dealing with such issues.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevailing circumstances, under the conditions of the pandemic, has highlighted the systematic and structural form of oppression a large proportion of the Indian society has been subject to. Through this study, I have understood that the forms of discrimination and exclusion that have been prevalent throughout this period has not stemmed from the pandemic, rather it has been amplified by the pandemic. These aforementioned injustices have existed systematically in our society for centuries. The pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to take the a step against atrocities by accepting and acknowledging these forms of oppression and further develop solutions for the same.

It is essential for educational institutions like schools and universities to inculcate an awareness of the oppression a large amount of unprivileged individuals are going through. This will facilitate an understanding of the same in the youth of our nation and further, motivate them to take part in the process of inclusion. Additionally, educational institutions can collaborate with NGOs with likes of Reachout Foundation to conduct seminars and provide internship opportunities to provide students with an exposure to the ground reality.

CASE STUDY

This period of the lockdown has brought about many challenges. There have been battles that are getting fought every day for simple and common commodities like food and water. The severity of these battles are variable in nature but rest assured people are suffering across various facets. One such story is that of Anish Babu. Anish Babu works as a labourer in Goa. Like most of the labourers who come from either Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, Anish is a resident of a small village in the Banka region of Bihar.

While they are two parallel stories of inclusion here. One revolves around the struggles of a labourer living thousands of kilometres away from home, where they need to deal with incidents of a paradigm shift in terms of adapting to a new culture, life away from home, finding ways to send back their earning, among others. The story here especially focuses on the lockdown. During the first lockdown on receiving a frantic call back from home regarding some critical complications with his father's health.

Anish decided to leave and go back to his hometown, if the same were normal circumstances, Anish would have taken the train but these weren't normal circumstances. On understanding the gravity of the situation from a ticket collector, Anish decided to take a few packed buses that would get him to the next state and decided to continue this trend till he reached Bihar.

What followed was something Anish had never experienced before. With a grin on his face, he explained, the journey ,of course, was very tedious with different state restrictions and paperwork issues but at every major city juncture, he would find people who were offering food, water and clothes to labourers just like him.

He elucidated upon the same by stressing upon the fact that after some time, he couldn't attribute them to their looks or what socio-economic strata they came from or what language they spoke. They just came across people who wanted and were willing to help. Anish made it home and he felt blessed that he did.

His Father is making a steady recovery. Anish came back to Goa and with his new experience and now works towards helping other labourers who have come to Goa seeking employment opportunities and settle down with regards to various changes that they are set to face. He attributes his new helpful nature towards what he experienced during his travel back home.

There have been various such instances of inclusion and mutual respect. We must strive towards community building and bonding with an aim towards a virtuous future.

Ahaan Bhatnagar



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Ahaan Bhatnagar. I am enrolled in Jindal Global Law School, Sonipat, where I'm pursuing a dual degree in the BBA L.L.B (Hons.) Programme.

I spent a substantial amount of my childhood in Bangalore, India, before moving to Dubai, UAE, where I completed my 11th and 12th grade in the International Baccalaureate curriculum.

I have always considered myself to have certain privileges, while being aware of the fact that there is a large proportion of the population that is struggling to meet their basic necessities. The same is the rationale for pursuing my studies in the legal field. My personal mission statement is to contribute my very best to my personal endeavours and more importantly, to the society at large.

ABOUT REACHOUT FOUNDATION

The Reachout Foundation is a non-profit organization with the mission to create awareness and develop solutions to the socio-cultural injustice that a large section of the Indian society is subject

to. It aims to *'Defy Stereotypes, Fight Prejudice, Eliminate Discrimination'*.¹ At the outset, Reachout Foundation create awareness and defy any form of negative generalization existing in our society.

SYNOPSIS OF THESE ISSUES

Ever since early civilization, certain sections of the society have been subject to socio-cultural, economic and political injustice as a result of discriminatory and oppressive practices. Unquestioned for centuries, these practices have been absorbed by our society, normalizing them and ultimately making them systematic in nature. This powerful and profound pandemic has exponentially amplified the impact of these practices on those who are on the receiving end. The aggrieved parties have been subject to the deprivation of socio-cultural, economic and political benefits to such a large extent where they unable to meet their fundamental necessities. The prevailing circumstances have made us question the society we live in.

Human behaviour, under the conditions of the pandemic, has had a wide spectrum of impact on different segments of the society. The economic struggle of migrant workers has made it extremely challenging for them not only to safely return to the comfort of their homes but more dangerously, make them unable to satisfy the basic necessities for themselves and their families. The North-Eastern Indians have been subject to racial discrimination by their fellow countrymen, given the origin of the virus. Certain religious groups have been unreasonably targeted solely based on the selective perception of certain events. Even professionals who are leaving the comfort of their homes to serve the society, such as healthcare workers, have been discriminated. The aforementioned examples are a fraction of the wide range of unfair, unjust and unreasonable generalizations and discrimination of certain sections of the society. However, this has also given us an opportunity to accept and acknowledge the systematic and structural oppression individuals have been subject to on a daily basis. It has provided us with a platform to spread awareness and become aware ourselves, to develop our society into one where all

individuals are being treated as equals, regardless of their caste, sex, religion, profession, among others.

The primary scope of this report is to do the same. Through this report, an attempt is made to create and spread awareness of the systematic oppression and exclusion taking place under the prevailing circumstance. With the valuable guidance of the Reachout Foundation, I hope to spread awareness about the unfortunate struggle a large number of unprivileged individuals are subject to. Through this report, I will attempt to comprehensively analyse and evaluate the ground reality of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the everyday life of different strata's of our society.

The pandemic has not only disrupted the equilibrium on a macro-level in terms of certain sections of the society but also on a micro-level, in light of the everyday lives of different individuals. Additionally, the report also provides an overview of the impact of the lockdown on the learning and working under these isolated environments. In this digital era, individuals are absorbed in the virtual world. Has the lockdown strengthened familial relationships? Has it led to enhanced productivity? The report will examine these broad questions.

PRIMARY SCOPE OF THE REPORT

This report aims to gauge a multifaceted perspective on the impact of the pandemic on our society. The objectives of this report are as follows-

1. To understand the community's response to the pandemic, particularly the sociological concept of inclusion to reduce the adverse impact on the society, at large.
2. To gauge the importance of domestic and global cooperation during such unprecedented times.
3. To analyse and evaluate the significance of human interactions, particularly inclusion
4. The psychological impact of isolation on everyday life, particularly on learning and working in isolation.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Successfully conducted interactions in the form of interviews and written questionnaires of a total of 10 respondents.
2. The data was collected from an amalgamation of respondents. The key characteristics of the respondents include-
 - a. University students from Delhi, Bhubaneshwar, Bangalore and Mysore. (2 from Bangalore and 1 from each other city)
 - b. Students from varying socio-economic backgrounds- professional and non-professional parents.
 - c. Professionals from the IT, banking and education sectors. (1 each)
 - d. Professionals in low paying jobs- a security guard and house help.
3. Successfully engaged in insightful conversations with the respondents. The discussion assisted in gauging the opinion of the respondents and the impact of isolation on them.
4. Data interpretation and analysis which will be discussed in the following sections

RESEARCH ON KEY SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

To clearly and comprehensively interpret the information through the data collection process, it was imperative to understand certain concepts on the various sociological phenomena taking place throughout the structure of our society. These concepts included the likes of inclusion, exclusion, multiculturalism, discrimination and racism. It was essential to understand what these concepts meant, how they took place and the rationale behind them.

Further on, the impact of isolation on mental health and familial relationships were studied. Possible solutions and coping mechanisms to the same were analysed and evaluated.

These concepts were studied through secondary sources such as academic papers and journals, reliable newspaper articles on contemporary and historical issues etc.

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION AND INTERPRETATION

The data was collected mainly through secondary resources such as telephonic conversations, video conferencing and written questionnaires. The primary advantage of this form of data collection was that a holistic understanding was obtained through this. A 360 degree perspective obtained through open-ended questions helped in satisfying any additional specific questions. The disadvantage of this form of data collection is that it is often a time consuming form.

After the accumulation of data, the data was processed and interpreted through visual graphs. The answers were trisected into (a) positive (b) negative and (c) neutral. Further, the results were analysed and evaluated.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

The following sections comprehensively analyses and evaluates the data collected from the broad range of questions put forth to the respondent. The detailed graphical charts for the questions have been included in the appendix.

1. Thoughts and impact of working in isolation and familial relationships.

The aforementioned question attracted an amalgamation of responses. 6 respondents believed that working and learning in isolation had a negative impact on their productivity. They believed that working in isolation through virtual classrooms was monotonous and resulting in to a short span of concentration. A substantial number of respondents deemed it as *boring*. Further on, certain respondents believed that working or learning in isolation was nearly impossible due to the nature of their profession, immediate environment and socio-economic status. 4 respondents believed that working in isolation led to a higher amount of productivity due to the convenience of working from home. They responded that there was minimal disturbance and distraction at their homes.

Subsequently, 8 respondents believed that staying at home improved the relationships with their respective family members. Staying at home at all times of the day naturally resulted in spending time with family members which they could not do prior to the lockdown due to various reasons such as difference in geographical location,

conflicting schedules etc. 2 respondents believed that staying at home, led to a increase in conflicts between family members.

Lastly, in light of the impact of isolation with themselves, 6 respondents believed that they have improved the relationship with themselves. Their time in isolation led to introspecting and evaluating who they are as a person. 2 respondents believed that time in isolation has had a negative impact on themselves as a result of the accumulated frustration of staying home. Lastly, 2 respondents believed that the lockdown did not have any impact on the relation with themselves.

2. Impact on the nation's social fabric and communities' response to the pandemic.

A majority of the respondents believed that the society's actions, during the pandemic, has led to a negative and adverse impact on the nation's social fabric. In lieu of the society's first response and governmental restrictions has led to an adverse impact on certain groups amongst the likes of migrant workers, north-eastern Indians, healthcare workers and religious groups. 8 respondents believed that there has been a negative impact on the social environment of the country, while 2 respondents were unaware of any impact of the pandemic on the social fabric of the nation.

A large majority believed that although human behaviour, under the prevailing circumstances, did lead to some unfortunate events, the community's response to the pandemic has been rather positive, in the larger picture. 6 respondents believed that the individuals in our community have united to help each get through these unprecedented times. 3 believed that the community is still not as united as it ought to be and is still largely divided. 1 respondent did not have a view on this issue.

3. Impact of a diverse workplace on personal growth and development.

Most of the respondents felt that working in a diverse environment resulted in substantial growth and development. 6 respondents believed that a diverse work environment facilitates the exchange of a wide spectrum of ideas, opinions and thoughts. As a result, this makes them more perceptive in terms of the way they perceive their environment. Additionally, this also enables to develop traits such a compassion, kindness, tolerance and acceptance. 3 respondents believed that a diverse workplace environment

negatively impacted their personal development as negative attitudes of co-workers such as sexism, discrimination, racism etc. hindered their growth. 1 respondent believed that this did not have an impact on their growth and development.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

1. Eliminating personal biases- To garner the most accurate form of reply from the respondent, it was essential to stay objective as the interviewer. To tackle this challenge, the question had to be read out exactly as it is, repeated if needed, and avoid any interpretation of the question for the respondent. Additionally, choosing the respondents from a wide range of sections of the society was important to avoid any favouritism while selecting the respondents.
2. Conflicting schedules- Given the busy schedule, it was a challenge to set up audio calls with the respondents. Initially, it was a challenge conveying and making the respondents understand the significance of the survey. More importantly, conveying the importance of their contribution to this was challenging. Further on, due to the uncertainty and conflicting schedules, there was a lot of rescheduling. As a result, a part of the respondents contributed through written questionnaires.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND TAKE-AWAYS

1. Forms of discrimination such as exploitation based on racism, sexism, casteism, cultural marginalization and imperialism, among others, have structurally existed in our society for centuries. However, these practices have been unquestioned for centuries, as a result of which, they have been systematically programmed into the algorithm of our society to such an extent where we don't acknowledge their existence.
2. The pandemic has amplified these systemic and structural oppressive practices as a result of which the society has been made aware of such negative generalizations. This has given us the opportunity to evangelize these challenging times to

something positive by firstly, acknowledging these problems and secondly, striving to neutralize them.

3. Learning and working in isolation has a largely negative impact on the lives of individuals. This is due to a number of reasons such as lack of social connectivity, the monotonous nature of work etc. This reminds us that humans are social beings and social interaction is essential for each and every individual. This stresses on the importance of the inclusion of all individuals, regardless of their age, sex, caste, race or religion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the various forms of discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices that certain sections of the society is subject to. However, it has also provided us with an opportunity to acknowledge, spread awareness and find possible solutions for the same. Subsequently, the pandemic has had an amalgamation of impact on the mental and emotional health of individuals. A majority of the respondents believed that it has had more of a negative impact than positive. This only goes on to validate that positive social interaction is essential for all individuals. Therefore, negative generalizations deprive certain sections of these essential interactions, further leading to hardships.

It is essential for universities to inculcate the awareness of negative generalisations, stereotypes and prejudices that are prevalent in our society. Universities should regularly stay in contact with NGOs and other governmental organizations ,such as Reachout foundation, to spread awareness of these through seminars, webinars, workshops and recruitment of interns.

CASE STUDY

The equilibrium of the entire country was disrupted on the 24th March, 2020, when the honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the immediate implementation of a

nation-wide lockdown. This lockdown would go on to disturb the lives of thousands of socio-economic deprived migrant workers in the country. The account of Mrs. Laxmi Vinay is one such narrative. Laxmi is a 35 year old resident of the metropolitan city of Bangalore and lives along with her husband and 2 children- a 5 year old daughter and 12 year old son. Originally from the small town of Dharwad, Laxmi moved to Bangalore 4 years ago and has worked as a house help ever since.

The story of Laxmi is the most peculiar one of all the interviewees. The interview was held through a telephonic conversation throughout which Lakshmi explained her unfortunate struggle. Laxmi and her partner, a security guard, earned enough to support the families basic necessities. Her daughter had just begun attending pre-school while her son was enrolled in a private school through a scholarship program. Initially, the lockdown didn't affect Laxmi much as her employers' continued to avail her services. However, with the rising number of cases in the country, employers soon asked her to stop coming to work and many apartment complexes restricted the entry of house helps. This rendered Laxmi unemployed. Depending solely on her husband's income placed financial constraints on her family.

This resulted in a number of complications at her home. Her family was barely meeting their basic necessities due to the financial constraints. Although she did possess a smartphone, her son was unable to attend classes due to the lack of an internet connection. This was accompanied by the threat of her son being dismissed from school as he was not able to meet the minimum attendance requirements. Laxmi admitted that the hardships were so extreme that even considered ending her life. However, the thought supporting her children and husband kept her going. Laxmi anxiously looked forward to some sort of relief, either directly by the government and local authorities or even the lifting of the restrictions, so she could re-join work. She tirelessly searched for any employment opportunities, be it for a meagre salary.

As time passed by, one of her former employers mystically offered her a job to feed the stray dogs in the morning and evenings. Laxmi humbly accepted the job offer. This has reduced the financial constraints on her family. With the help of the stipend offered, Laxmi

was able to subscribe to an internet data pack, using which her son attends his classes daily.

Laxmi's story is one that fills me with energy and vitality to strive and never give up, no matter what challenges life puts in front of you. This beautiful example also illustrates the community bond during such challenging times.

Niyati Kothiyal



About me –

My name is Niyati Kothiyal. I was born and brought up in Dehradun where I grew up surrounded by a large, extended family and friends. I am a very laid back, easy-going kind of person but can get quite opinionated and stubborn at times. I aspire to be a journalist someday because I believe that good journalism can help revolutionize the world. I really appreciate good stories, which is why I have a love for books, movies and tv shows. I am someone who overthinks about everything, right from everyday conversations to national politics. When my mind gets really weary from all the random thoughts, two things help me relax – music and writing. I also have a blog called "Overthinkers' Anonymous with Niyati", where I write down my thoughts and my feelings.

Summary of Report -

What did the project set out to do in this specific reporting period?

The year 2020 started like any other year with celebration and hope, resolutions and plans. Going in, we innocent humans did not have the faintest idea that each of our lives was going to be turned upside-down by a virus that kills silently yet ruthlessly. The Covid-19 pandemic struck so suddenly that the world could only watch helplessly as it wreaked havoc everywhere. The crisis made the world literally come to a standstill for a certain period, seen as both a boon and a bane. But through all the darkness looming over the world, some rays of light still shone through in the form of kindness and courage shown by many around the globe. In this project, I have tried to understand the good and bad that has come out of the situation that the world is in. I have tried to talk to different people and find out their problems, their silver linings and their thoughts on the present and future.

Why did you approach Reachout for this project?

I had approached Reachout Foundation for this project with very materialistic aims. The things that drew me here were the chance to get some experience and to build my CV. But then I browsed their website and realised that the fight that they are fighting against discrimination is one which is worth fighting and one which is necessary to make the world a better version of itself.

Progress of Activities -

During the duration of this project we undertook broadly three activities namely research, data collection and writing the report. The same are elaborated below :

1. Research - We started the project with online research on topics such as social inclusion and exclusion, multiculturalism, diversity, racism, community and community bonds, and isolation and mental health. This activity was undertaken in order to increase our own knowledge and understanding of the subjects. The

knowledge came in handy later when we were taking interviews. We were able to explain the questions better to the people and thus, get the information we needed.

2. Data Collection - The second week of our project was dedicated to planning and conducting interviews. For this task I roped in my friends, family and acquaintances whom I knew would have the relevant experience and would be willing to be a part of the project. I formally interviewed six students and four professionals from different backgrounds. Most of these interviews were conducted through telephonic conversations and messaging, although I also took two in person. Apart from this, I have talked to a lot of people around me including friends, relatives and other guests that have come to my house in this duration. I found that all people differed in their socio-political views, but each one of them were same in the sense that they all had some or the other problems that they were facing because of the pandemic.
3. Report Writing - The last one and a half week we have spent in writing our reports - mainly the experiences and observations that we've had while researching and collecting data. A lot of analysis was needed to be done during this time to understand how we have been impacted by all that we have learnt. It was also time for us to decide which story influenced us most and to write a case study based on the same. This task, in my experience, was the most difficult because every story impacted me differently and was special in its own way.

In addition to these, we've had weekly progress meetings with our mentor to discuss any doubts that we've had or any problems that we've faced. We also got valuable advice and motivation from her without which this report would still be unfinished.

Key Achievements -

1. I have conducted ten formal interviews. Six of them were from students, both college and school going. Four interviews were from professionals, one of whom went to office even during the lockdown.

2. Apart from the formal interviews, I have talked to a lot of people from different backgrounds and different professions. This has been a big help in forming a general idea of the different situations that different people have been in.

Challenges and Obstacles -

As such, I did not have any problems in implementing the project because the participants that I had chosen were very cooperative. I had no difficulty in getting the information that I wanted from them. The problems that I did face though, were from my own side. For starters, I had to take some time to gather the confidence to schedule and conduct the interviews, especially from people that I don't often talk to. Secondly, I had a hard time motivating myself and getting myself to work, be it while researching or writing the end report. Managing my time was also something which gave me trouble. Another problem that I had in the end of the project was getting relevant pictures. Since I was in a village at the time, there was rarely anyone in sight taking any precautions. There were no signs of an ongoing pandemic, like wearing masks or gloves, the pictures of which would be relevant to the project.

Lessons learnt and Insights -

1. When I analysed the interviews that I had conducted and the talks that I had had with different people, I realised that even though everyone differed on socio-political views, they had one thing in common - the problems they were facing due to the pandemic. Be it the toll that spending hours in front of a screen takes to the anxiety that people faced when not able to meet their family and friends, each person had one or the other problems to deal with.
2. Through the interviews, I realised how scared the people actually are of this virus. Everyone that I talked to said that they felt uneasy going out of their homes because they did not want to bring the virus back with them and spread it to their family members. Having heard of cases where people tested positive even when they never stepped out of their houses is additional cause for worry. The tension was especially evident in those that live with small kids and elderly people.

3. I learned how helpful and caring the people have been during the pandemic, in some cases even to strangers. Bringing groceries for neighbours so that they don't need to step out unnecessarily, taking the workload of juniors to help them stay with their families, or providing class notes to fellow students that they haven't even met, I have heard lots of stories from people to say that the world has come together in this time of need.
4. I have realised the importance of human relationships. People living alone, far away from their families, are an important example of this. But even people who are living with their families told me that they feel jittery from staying cooped up in their houses because going out and socialising was a way for them to relax after work.

What would you recommend to the Foundation and your college based on this project?

Having worked on this project I have got to learn a lot of things for which I am grateful. But through the interviews that I have taken, I have also noticed that people tend to remain preoccupied in their own worlds and feel hesitant in coming out and working for the welfare of others. Especially in the youth, I have seen a lack of awareness as well as an uncaring attitude towards societal problems that do not concern them. Most just say, "Why think about something that I can't fix". I would recommend to the Foundation and to colleges to spread awareness among students about how even just taking the right stand on problematic elements in the society can bring about a change for the better.

Any other observations and comments

1. One thing that really interested me during the research was the debate on Multiculturalism. People in favour of multiculturalism say that it will help in the fight against social exclusion and discrimination while those against say that it leads to a high rate of violence, in extreme cases even rioting and terrorism. But even after reading both sides I could not bring myself to go against Multiculturalism. The reason behind this is that I find the reasons given against the concept invalid. I feel

that the violence they talk about is caused not due to the presence of many different cultures existing together but due to politics and greed of men.

2. Another thing that I observed during the data collection period was how humans really are social animals. As I've written earlier also, this is evident from the stress caused by social isolation and the jitters that people are feeling due to being unable to go out and socialise. But another proof of this I observed in my own self. As I talked to my friends and loved ones for the interviews, I realised that I really missed meeting them in person. I also realised that I was really excited to take the interviews that I took offline because it presented me with the opportunity to go out of my house. In fact, this was in contrast to before the lockdown, when I used to find excuses to stay at home.
3. I also noticed the difference between village areas and towns or cities. While I was hearing of covid cases in every nook and corner of even the smallest of cities, I could not see even one around me in the village I am staying in. So while my peers in the city told me about all the precautions they were taking, I have neither undertaken nor seen such activity around myself. Since my village has remained quite untouched by the deadly virus, the people living here are leading their normal lives to a great extent.

Case Study -

In the mighty hills of the Garhwal region lies a small village called Chaumpa. It is a peaceful place that houses not more than a hundred people. Most of its young population stays in the bigger towns and cities for work or studies. When the pandemic struck and the lockdown was implemented, many of these people came back home. While cases were spreading like wildfire in the rest of the country, our small village remained relatively untouched. But in the 'new normal' everyone has faced some or the other problems and so did the people of Chaumpa.

One such story is of Tanisha, a girl preparing for her class 12th at the moment. She studies in a boarding school in Paukhal, Tehri Garhwal and is right now studying online from her

home. As we talked about how her life was going, she reminisced about the time she had been in school. She talked about all the fun that she and her friends would have in the hostel and how much she was missing that. Of course, she talked to them on the phone and through social media, but can online presence ever compete with the offline fun? She also felt a bit restricted at home as compared to her school, which is to be expected.



When the conversation shifted to her studies, she told me that her half-yearly exams, to be conducted online, were starting in a week. She had scored above ninety in her class 10th boards, but when I went to meet her in September, she was yet to start preparing seriously. The reason for this lack of concentration was the change in her environment. In contrast to her school, where she had had a set schedule, she had additional duties as well as distractions at home. Apart from such changes, she was also facing a problem that almost every student faces everyday in their online study - connectivity issues. She told me that when she does not get any network at home, she takes her phone and books and goes to a spot which is a bit higher than her home. She then sits in the sun till her classes end. As someone who belongs to the same village and goes there often, I can tell you that the hills get direct rays of the sun in which you cannot stand for even 10 minutes without feeling

baked. In the current situation, there is also a lot of uncertainty as to how and when the board examinations will be held. When I asked her about the same, she said that none of her teachers seem to have any idea and when asked just tell them to focus on their studies. Not having the relevant information just adds to her anxiety and is another distraction.



Meanwhile Tanisha's sister Siddhi, studying in class 10th, has other unique problems. Siddhi studies in a Government school in the village itself. She is also preparing for an important exam, but she does not have any online classes. She only gets notes from her teachers on the mobile phone and has to go to school once in a while to get her note books signed.



The thing that has stayed with me through this entire interview, though, is the sisters' positivity. They both have their fair share of problems arising due to the pandemic, but they



both are taking it in their stride. Both girls smiled and laughed their way through the interview and exuded such positive vibes that I couldn't help but come back filled with hope and motivation.

Date : 18 October, 2020

Place : Dehradun