




COVID-19

Changing
Socio-Economic
Landscape In
Urban Periphery

A Situation Analysis
Report by
Islamic Relief Pakistan

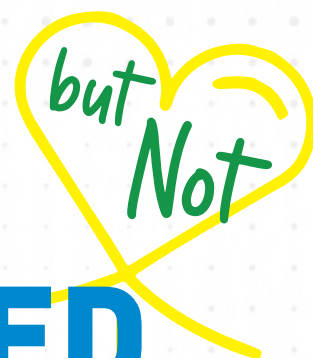




“I used to sell chaat on streets, now because of this virus not only am I unable to earn any money for my family but I can’t even go to school. We barely have enough money to eat two meals a day

Hajra – 9 years old ”

**「DISTANT
DISCONNECTED」**



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Executive Summary

Urban settlements and slums are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19 pandemic and the most affected are the children, women, elderly and people with different abilities. The risk of pandemic explosion in these settlements is not far from reality, the behaviors of people will be the foundation of it. This pandemic has led to lockdowns, resulting in halt of economic activity giving rise to multitude of challenges being faced by the most vulnerable of the area. It is believed that isolation may help relatively affluent population limit the spread, but these measures are having devastating effect on nearly hundreds of thousands of people across the urban areas which were reached out within this study.

COVID-19 has created an environment with unprecedented challenges while pushing children, women and people at risk into a crisis. The scenario clearly indicates that risk factors for violence, abuse, and neglect are on the rise for the marginalized segments of society under containment. The outbreak has affected all segments of population but particularly those who are less fortunate and are already struggling for their survival. The urban communities supported by Islamic Relief Pakistan (IRP) are composed of the population who are living below poverty line and are already marginalized. To gauge the impact of COVID-19 and its associated challenges in urban settlements and slums of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, a situation analysis of the communities from the target areas of IRP was carried out. Due to lockdown and precautionary measures, the study was conducted remotely by engaging randomly selected 100 respondents from different walks of life and geographic spread.

The study reveals that the pandemic has hit children and women and the impact can exacerbate with every passing day. Pakistan with an existing number of 22.8 million out of school children and 32% to 40% of its female population affected with gender based violence is now even at higher risk of child abuse and women protection issues. As a result of this situation, increased rate of school drop

outs, unequal and exploitative employment opportunities for women and gender based violence are feared to deteriorate the state of children and women and especially young girls in the coming years. Widowed families or female headed households seem to be affected more than other segments of society as a result of increased poverty and food insecurity followed by the loss of jobs and incomes. Children are unable to access educational services and support mechanism in the form of schools and care programmes due to barriers and lockdown. Disruption of social support networks for children and adults both have added to the stress and anxiety level. Non-functional protection support mechanisms have further exposed children and women to risks of abuse and exploitation making them even more vulnerable. Preventive measures also seem to have snatched away support mechanisms and relationships from children they rely on including friends, teachers, extended family and community.

Children are out of school while economic pressures and debt burdens continue to grow. 100% of the selected sample of street children families who were dependent on daily wages with no savings are bearing the brunt of this situation and are surviving by borrowing money. This may push millions of children into hazardous and exploitative labor with a high raise in the ratio of school dropouts. The fear and uncertainty associated to this situation is causing several mental health issues in the targeted population and has erupted domestic violence in the communities in general. Loss of livelihood and inability to access the existing support mechanism has evolved anxiety in the society. The pandemic has affected the economy and especially the small scale business owners; due to lockdown and market closures, they have missed the sale of products and are facing a serious issue in terms of demand and supply.

The communities need support more than before as economic challenges are increasing



due to immobility, social disconnect, closure of semi and micro enterprises and suspension of development work. The study shows that the economic and social impact of this pandemic is being borne disproportionately by the people who are already vulnerable, who do not have access to basic rights and are already suffering. Most of the residents of these slums are migrants from different parts of the country which outlines the fact that they lack social/communal support mechanisms around. The challenges if not properly addressed, may increase exclusion of certain marginalized segments of society, inequalities and discrimination.

Inclusive and integrated community led programming will pave out short and long term solutions to the needs and issues arising from this crisis and will minimize the damage caused by the pandemic. Creating equitable economic opportunities, strengthening existing community forums, promoting youth leadership and protection support mechanism will prevent a new wave

of foreseen exploitation of child and women rights and marginalization of these vulnerable groups. In addition, through smart use of technology, enhancing their skills in Covid-changed-world, connecting women and youth to decent work opportunities on the basis of their skills and market demand may reduce the debt burden on the families. Promoting smart solutions to bridge the gap between the communities and service providers such as digital referral mechanism and gender sensitive back-to-school campaigns will help prevent children's exposure to various forms of abuse. Preventive measures are also direly needed to protect girls from school drop outs and early marriages while engaging faith leaders to sensitize communities on this issue. Strengthening government services and increasing their outreach while linking communities to the referral pathways and increasing awareness on safeguarding and protection in post-COVID scenario exponentially is highly recommended to control the damage and disruption created by the pandemic.

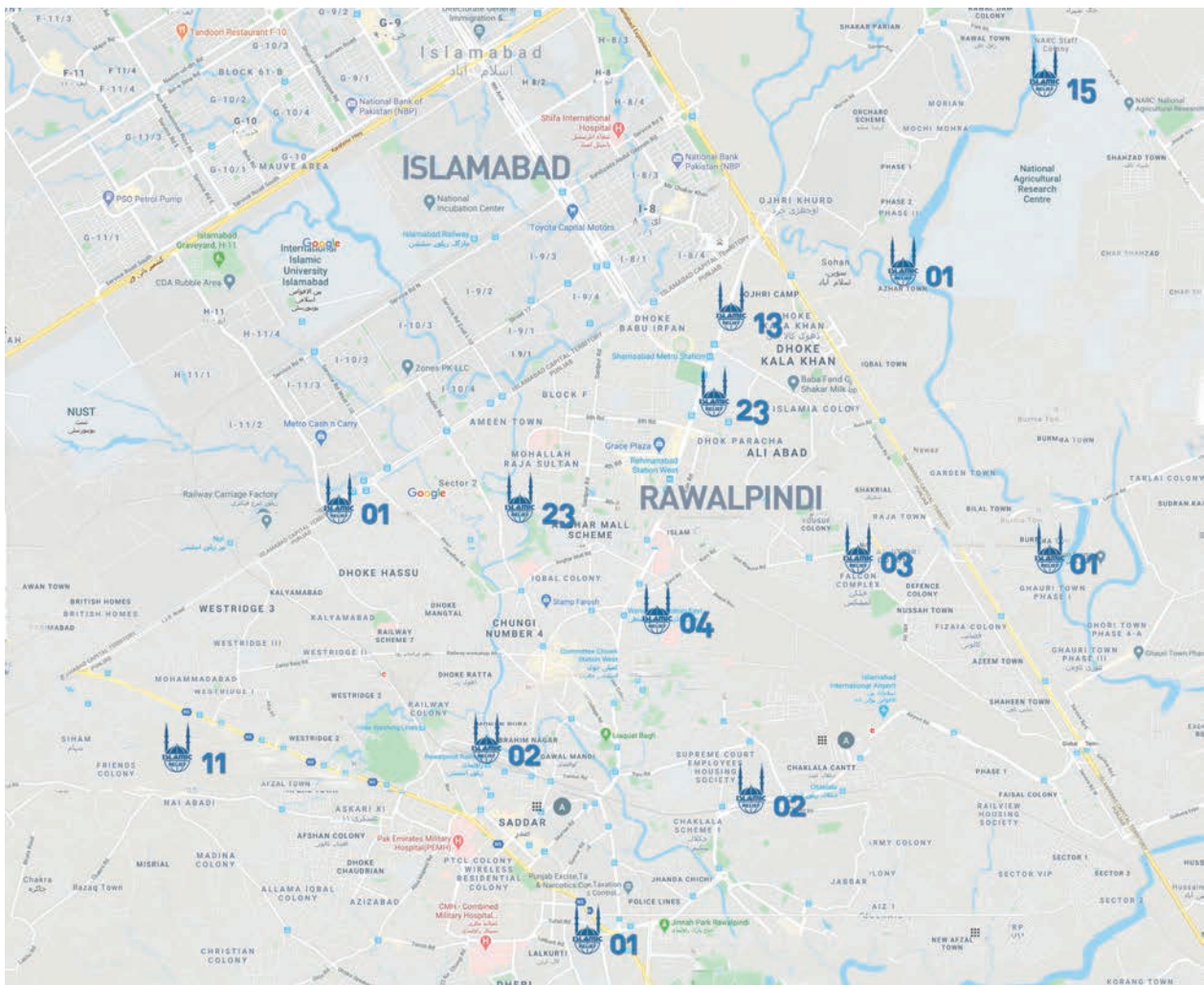
Background and Introduction

COVID-19 has transformed this globe and the ways of living with lockdowns to stem the outbreak. Apparently, the pandemic came up with the challenges associated to health only but soon it revealed its multidimensional impacts on the economic, social and religious aspects of life. Additionally, the precautionary measures and lockdowns introduced this world with a new series of challenges.

These challenges demand for a transformational approach towards our social, economic and other aspects of life. The pandemic not only disturbed the whole economy but also halted the social life affecting different groups of society in multiple ways. It disrupted the social environment in which children grow and develop. Their lifestyle, daily routine, access to basic rights, friendships and social interaction with wider community, everything has affected and seems to have negative consequences

on children's well-being, development and protection.

In relation to this unfolding situation and its impact on the communities IRP is serving, the duty of care calls for an urge to hear from the ones who are the most affected as a result of this situation and lend support in every possible manner. For this purpose, a situation analysis was designed to have an insight into the communities we serve and share the sense of the feeling our right holders are going through at present. The aim of this situation analysis and brief is to understand the transforming dynamics of life in the wake of COVID-19, adapt and design our interventions and steer our strategic and programmatic direction accordingly. It will help us to respond to their needs in an effective manner and reduce risks emerging as a result of during and after pandemic itself.



Map illustrating IRP's geographical presence in twin cities with number of respondents

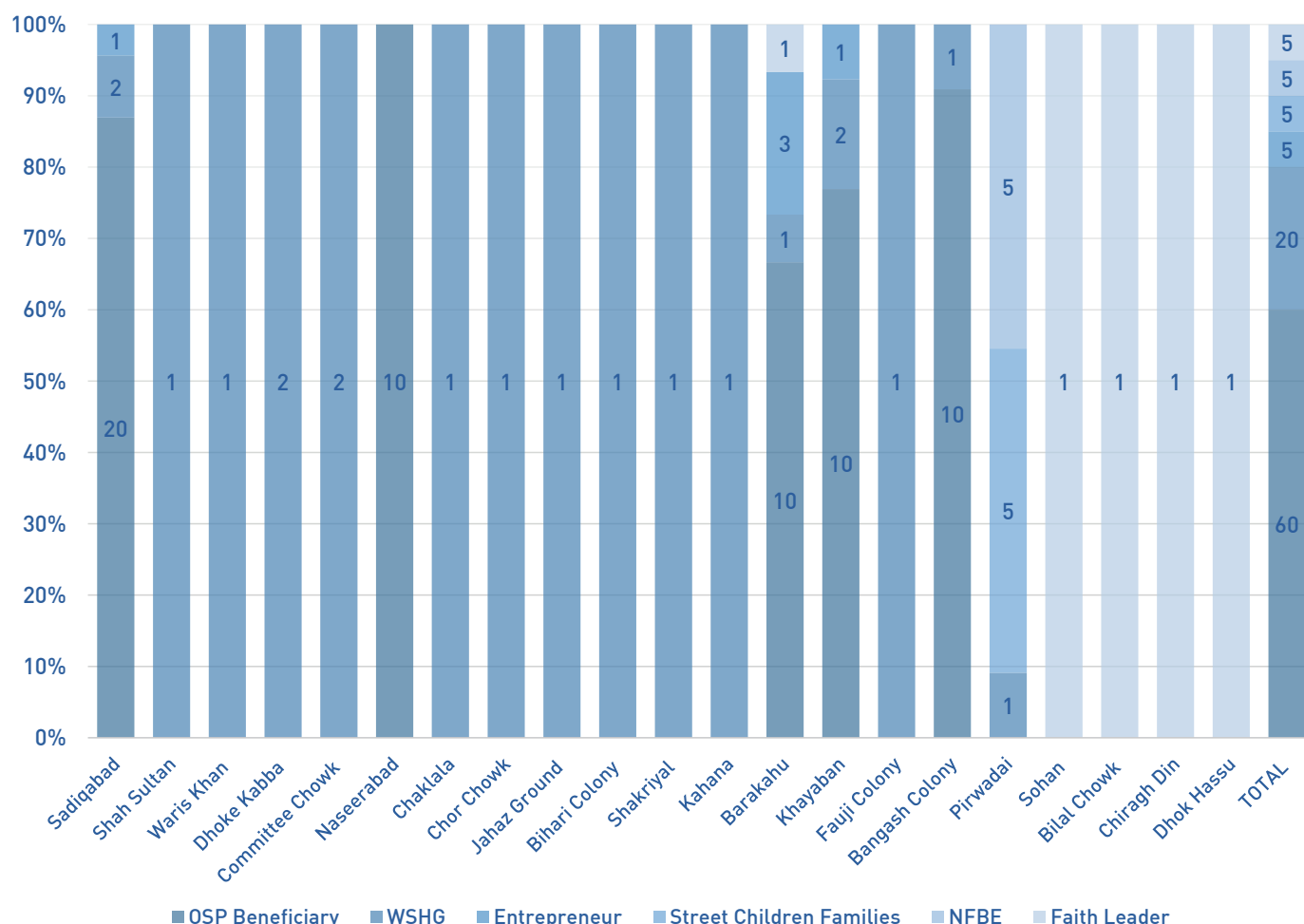
Methodology

In this connection, a sample of 100 individuals was selected from Child and Woman Development Programme (CWDP) communities and working areas in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The selected sample represented IRP's sponsored orphan families, teachers and families of street children, Women Self Help Group Leaders, entrepreneurs and faith leaders. The respondents were asked a set of questions (open and close ended both) framed in a way to elicit insights and perspectives from respondents on impacts emerging from COVID-19. The study encompassed different aspects of life from various groups of communities to bring forward an inclusive overview of the situation. For this assessment, families located in urban and slum areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad were selected to capture their challenges and situation which has affected their economic, social, religious and other aspects of life. CWDP team members

conducted telephonic interviews. The respondents were briefed on the background and scope of the study.

Most of the CWDP working areas and communities are affected or suspected to be affected with the infection. Carrying out the assessment remotely was a challenge as quality of signals was not similar across the resident areas and telephonic engagement reduces flexibility for data collector and respondent to clarify points or put up supplementary questions on this complex issue. Team encountered limitations to reduce exposure of communities and team members to risk associated with pandemic. Despite these challenges, the assessment has earned an interesting account of impressions, feelings, thoughts and emotions of people from diverse group of age, gender and social status.

BENEFICIARIES AND AREAS-WISE SAMPLE COMPOSITION



Covid-19 and its Impact on IRP's Sponsored Orphan Families

IRP is serving its sponsored orphan families for more than two decades through various interventions under the banner of its flagship programme of Child and Woman Development. The situation analysis provides with an insight into the impact of COVID-19 on IRP's sponsored orphan families especially, in an urban set up. Dynamics of urban life are altogether different from rural lifestyle and the families who migrated to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities are more exposed to the associated risks. A sample of 60 sponsored families were selected from different areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad for this situation analysis. Mothers/guardians of IRP sponsored orphan children were interviewed to grasp a feel of how this situation has changed their life. The findings depict a variety of challenges and feelings associated to it.

“A spirit of cooperation and kindness has evolved during containment which is truly a legacy of Islam.” (Naheed)

Some of the respondents see this situation as an opportunity as one of the mothers added in response to a question,

“It is an opportunity to rediscover and redirect priorities regarding our life style.”

The outbreak itself and the containment has caused anxiety, uncertainty and fear in the society on one hand while the other side of coin tells another story as shared by a respondent,

“We are experiencing a true essence of family life during lockdown by keeping ourselves indoors. (Rashida, Shakrial)”

Some of the sponsored families are living in the areas where COVID-19 positive cases are located in their neighborhoods and the streets have been sealed by the administration as a result of security protocols. One mother of an IRP sponsored child has been tested positive and is receiving medical care in an isolation ward managed by a government hospital. Another sponsored child's uncle got affected by corona and consequently infected nine family members including mother of sponsored child. Out of these nine family members, six have been hospitalized by the health authorities while remaining have been quarantined at home.



Living Conditions

The families selected for this study (widowed families living in urban settings) happened to have the average family size of 4.8. Only 25% of IRP's sponsored families possess their own houses, 67% reside in rented houses while 8% of the families live in shared spaces. In this situation, these 8% are the ones who are at high risk of contracting the virus due to congested living spaces and hygiene

issues in urban localities. A significant segment of this population are living in rented premises; out of the hundred families selected for this study, 88% are local residents while 12% are migrated families from other parts of Pakistan. Of these, 8% local and 18% migrated Orphan Sponsorship Programme¹ (OSP) families share living spaces with other families, relative/non-relative both.



25% own their house



67% reside in rented houses



8% families live in shared spaces



88% local residents



12% migrated from other parts of country



¹ Islamic Relief Pakistan is providing support to nearly 5500 orphan children and their families for their basic needs like food, shelter, health and education in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, AJK and Mansehra through its flagship programme of Orphans Sponsorship. The programme has already benefitted 10,000 families in different parts of the country. These children are supported up to the age of 24 years, meanwhile their families are linked with social safety nets and support mechanisms for sustainable development.

Livelihood Status of OSP families

The analysis depicts the average income of these families as PKR 11,000 per month which is being spent on monthly house rents/utilities, health and education related expenses. Unfortunately, all the respondents are jobless or unemployed at the moment. Sample of 60 OSP families having different income levels do have access to markets and food is available to them but unfortunately due to financial challenges their expenses have increased over their income and the situation compels them to borrow money from their relatives and neighbors. Many of the male family members of OSP families are

still going to work which is very risky. Entrepreneurs along with skilled trainees working under EWIN² project are making masks at home. Apart from it, there are no business orders

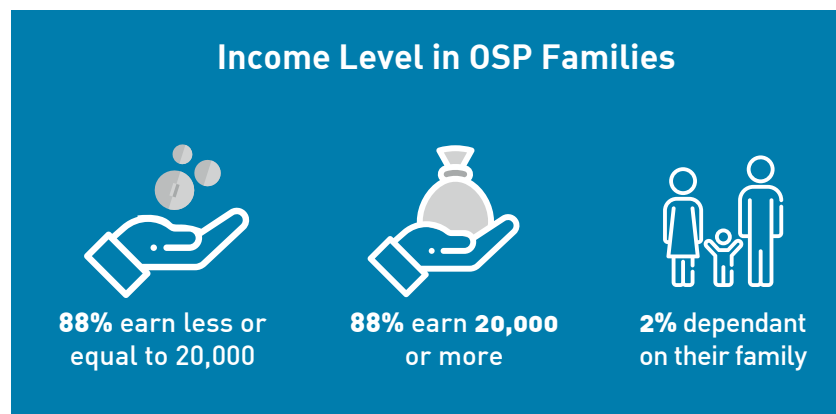
for home based workers. The assessment revealed that 87% of the respondents earn an average income of less or equal to PKR 20,000, 11% of the respondents have an average income of PKR 20,000 and above while 2% of the respondents are dependent on their family members or others for their basic needs. Thus the findings reveal that 60% of the respondents showed their inability to sustain household food expenses or are currently unable to purchase their food due to livelihood challenges. One of the respondents shared her anxiety which has developed due to financial challenges following loss of income by saying,

“Hunger is the biggest threat to our lives, we will not die because of virus but surely die of hunger.”

Keeping in view the aforementioned circumstances and disparities between income and expenses, it is quite evident that these

families are facing severe financial crisis leading to debt burdens. The respondents shared their concern on the limited food stock (average 8 days stock) at their homes and subsequent food shortage. A mother shared her feelings while saying,

“Home is a place where we all are safe and secure, but if the lockdown continues then we won’t be able to manage our lives as I haven’t earned a single rupee from the day lockdown has started.”



85% of the respondents appealed for the financial support to pay house rents, utilities, food items and medicines. They also shared that they used to get food and additional

financial support from the houses of their employers but that support is not there at the moment. Since these mothers (widows) are the only breadwinners in most of the families, they are worried for survival of their children. One of the respondents shared her concern in the following words,

“I know education is basic human right but I do believe that food comes first to a starving body.”

The economic stability built through IRP programming over more than two decades in these sponsored orphan families, has now been challenged due to this situation. Sponsored orphan families are now compelled to borrow money to pay their house rents and manage other basic utilities of life. The debt has not just added stress on their household economy but it has caused mental stress.

² The project aims to contribute towards widows' empowerment and development through integrated sustainable development approaches in Rawalpindi/Islamabad (Punjab) and Bagh (AJK). This intervention envisages improving socio economic condition of 3200 widowed families through livelihood support, healthcare, education and building their capacity through social empowerment in Rawalpindi, Islamabad and Bagh.

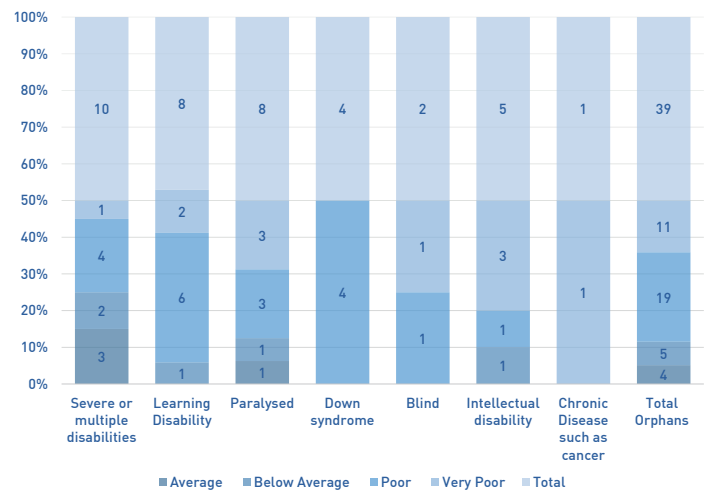
Health Related Issues

Over past 27 years, IRP has learnt that health needs of these families are pressing as a result of malnutrition and inadequate and unaffordable healthcare facilities. Living in stressful, unhygienic and congested environment further add to this vulnerability. There are 39 children in OSP families based in Rawalpindi and Islamabad with pre-existing special needs as can be seen in the graphical presentation. COVID-19 or associated scenario has not just added to the barriers to access healthcare but it has an overall impact on these children and their health conditions.

There are a number of children sponsored by IR who have other reported health issues such as:

- Physical appearances such as malnutrition, obesity, over weight and underweight
- Special needs such as severe multiple disabilities, deafness, disability, down syndrome, blindness and paralysis
- Illness types which are due to multiple reasons such as kidney problem, depression,

CHILDREN WITH PRE-EXISTING SPECIAL NEEDS



trauma, heart problem, cancer, panic attacks, diabetes, skin diseases and other chronic diseases.

Apart from health hazards, there is stigma associated to this virus and affected families so the infected persons either try to hide the symptoms or deny it. They also resist hospitalization or quarantine measures.



Education

100% of the mothers of sponsored children, street children and teachers of Non Formal Basic Education (NFBE) raised their concern on the continuity of their children's education during the lockdown. Since closure of educational institutes, parents are struggling to keep children connected with studies/education. Virtual educational arrangements are not affordable for the parents in these communities, therefore, education of children seems to be suffering for quite long until situation improves. Where a few parents can afford to provide facilities, intermittent supply

of electricity or internet makes it difficult for children and parents to manage this situation. 51% of the respondents' children are unable to continue their education at homes as there are no tutors and children are profusely inclined towards games or entertainment. Children of the 13% of the respondents are somehow involved in studies. In essence, closures of educational institutes for an uncertain duration has disrupted academic progress of children and inadequate facilities at home have further added to it.



Impact of Covid-19 on the Business Community (Entrepreneurs)

Empowering Widows in Need (EWIN) project engages a number of entrepreneurs in the communities to develop employable skills of widowed families, provide them with decent job opportunities and link them with the market to sustain their economic status. With lockdowns in place, all the skill development centers established under EWIN project are also closed and there are no business opportunities for these entrepreneurs and their workers. The situation analysis sought their opinion on the impact of this pandemic on their lives and business. Nazish, an entrepreneur shared a candid comment while saying,

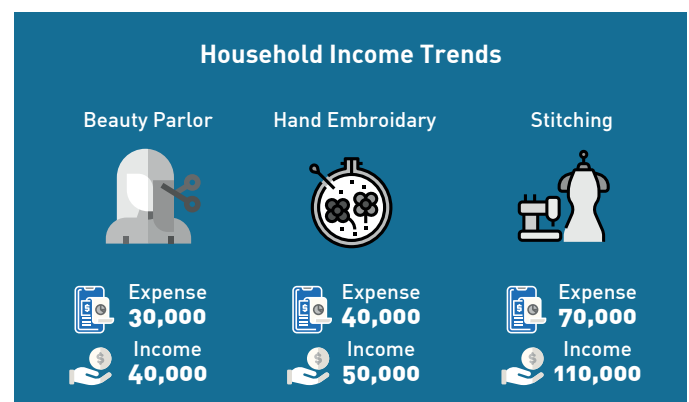
“During lock down, we are surely locked but not down.”

The analysis revealed that small scale entrepreneurs have had a serious impact due to this pandemic and the situation arising as a result of this lockdown. Both entrepreneurs and their skilled workers do not have any work opportunities due to unavailability of clients and business orders. Skilled workers are deprived of monthly income of PKR 6,000 to 15,000. Entrepreneurs face business loss of PKR 20,000 to PKR 110,000 per month and now started exhausting their savings. The graph depicts average family income and expenses analysis of different businesses where IR beneficiaries are engaged either directly as self-employed/businesses or employees.

Entrepreneurs have to pay recurring and non-current/fixed business expenses such as office or factory rent, utilities and other cancellation of orders due to non-availability of skilled workers.

Residents of the areas which are badly affected have migrated to their hometowns or villages and it seems to be a challenge to continue business as usual. There is uncertainty and the business is disturbed and it seems to have

a long term impact on their economy. Demand supply chain is affected as they have missed the season and there is no sale or demand of produced items. Skilled labor is not available, even if they are available, government SoPs cannot be followed due to limitations of space at skill centers and unavailability of public transport. All these challenges have made it difficult for the small scale business owners to regain the momentum of their business.



Female entrepreneurs shared that they have household responsibilities too and the situation has become over demanding due to their stay at home and school closures. Time management is an issue for them. One of the respondents was asked if the lockdown has added to the protection issues of girls/women and she responded,

“Home based work opportunities are safer for women but there are other certain challenges associated to it like social disconnect, confinement or emotional abuse by family members.”

It seems that when the lockdown will be over, there will be less opportunities for female workers and males will be given the only available opportunities. Women working as domestic helpers are in trouble, as their employers are not calling them for work due to risk of pandemic.

“Home based work opportunities are safer for women but there are other certain challenges associated to it like social disconnect, confinement or emotional abuse by family members.”



Covid-19 from the Lens of Women Self Help Group Leaders

Over a period of 26 years IRP has extensively mobilized and developed these communities to evolve vibrant and dynamic leadership in the shape of Women Self Help Group (WSHG) Leaders who are the mothers of

IRP's sponsored children. These widows have proven their resolve to break the vicious cycle of poverty not just for their children but for their communities with their tireless efforts.



Socio-economic snapshot

These determined and dedicated leaders are the social accelerators and common interest group of IRP. Since they are one of the important stakeholders and community representatives, their opinion is of great value in this situation analysis. According to them, community in general is following government's instruction with few exceptional cases. Ramzana, a WSHG leader from Naseerabad said,

“This pandemic is an experiment of nature; Allah SWT is renewing the earth.”

They see a lot of positive coming out of this situation while expressing that overall community environment has improved due to COVID-19 as people are confined to their homes, very scarce traffic in the streets or roads and people are practicing religion. Mothers are able to spend more and quality time with their children which has a positive impact on their physical, mental and emotional well-being. The lockdown has

provided a window for parents and children to bridge the generation gap and nurture friendly relationships between them. On contrary to this, mothers find it challenging to make their children concentrate on education whilst at home. Children are more interested in entertainment and spending most of their time on phones or computers which is also dangerous. This routine is also worrisome for mothers as their children have lost the momentum and interest in their studies.

This lockdown has severe impact on community livelihoods, children's education and social life. There is fear of health issues associated with elders, people with weak immune system, and unavailability of basic commodities such as medicine, grocery and severe financial crunch. Consequently, psychological issues have started to pop-up in society such as depression, fear, aggression, tendency to commit crimes, feeling pressure of debt burden, possible overdue



liabilities of paying house rent/utilities and suicidal tendencies. People are also depressed due to the uncertainty as to when it will be over. On another note, community women leaders added that shortage of food and house rent are major issues in their vicinities. WSHG leaders also shared that 69% of the communities are observing government lockdown instructions and 31% communities are maintaining social interaction with their friends, families and are regularly going outside thus 31% of them are more prone towards corona virus and making society more vulnerable to outbreak. There are reports of Corona positive cases in their respective communities which has resulted in complete lockdown of the society. One of the group leaders shared her worries by narrating,

“Everyone is required to abide by the rules and regulations imposed for lockdown but

it sounds good only when your basic needs are fulfilled.”

These WSHG leaders and their families were actively engaged in livelihood activities and they used to fetch their household income from different jobs/self-employment categories such as home based work, home based tuitions, sales, beautician services and labor work at factories. Women working under different categories were earning an average of PKR 12000 to 18000 per month but are unemployed now or their jobs or businesses have ceased as a result of COVID-19. Most of them are the sole breadwinners for their families. Furthermore, they shared that access to healthcare is a huge challenge for people suffering from health issues other than COVID-19. Health facilities are focusing only on Covid, however they are underutilized until now.



An Insight into the Lives of Street Children

IRP's integrated development intervention for street children and their families in the shape of POCAR³ project provides with an opportunity to look into the lives of street children and the ways COVID-19 has impacted their lives. The study encompassed the trends of child labor, impacts on street children education and risk associated with street children families. Average family size of street children is 9 per household. Most of the parents of these children are daily wagers and have been deprived of work opportunities due to this situation. Unemployment and financial issues are their major challenges which are causing high stress level amongst these families. One of the

father of street children shared,

"We do not have any savings and our survival is dependent on daily wages. There is no work opportunity outside. We are borrowing money to survive and make both ends meet."

Their average family income is PKR 500 per day and PKR 25,000 per month while children are earning an average of PKR 150 to PKR 200 per day. Though they have access to markets and required items are also available in markets, they do not have the purchasing power. The situation has further inclined them towards dissaving or borrowing from



³ IR Pakistan's Protection of Children At Risk (POCAR) project is an integrated approach focusing on the wellbeing of street children in urban peripheries of Rawalpindi and Islamabad by providing enabling environment where children are availing quality free education, alternative livelihoods opportunities for their siblings and parents to improve their income generating ability, psychosocial support for child development, self-confidence and provision of child protection services in collaboration with state authorities and child protection service providers.

relatives or neighbors due to which they have lost their self-esteem and respect. Most of the street children and their families have migrated from different rural areas of Pakistan as well as some belonging to Afghanistan. These families live in shared and rented houses and all family members are engaged in different jobs to earn money for their survival. One of the respondents answered a question about child labor in an interesting way; he said,

“Our children are working with their own choice and we do not want to refrain them from their jobs.”

Teachers of street children teaching at Non-formal & Basic Education Schools expressed their views about the impact of COVID-19 and its impact on the communities of street children. They said,

“Unfortunately school closures have impacted street children more than other children as there is reduced supervision, and increase in child neglect and other forms of abuse. Some children are still going to work and rest of them are roaming around in the streets.”

Their major concern is that schools are closed and children have no constructive activity to do. There is no one at their homes to teach them and we do not

have online facility to continue our classes. Tele-school (Taleem Aam Channel) on PTV is a good option but lack of awareness or interest on the part of their parents or caregivers makes it a challenge. Very few of children come to teachers' homes for guidance in studies. Street children are not able to continue their assignment due to illiterate parents/caregivers or lack of scholastic materials. Some other findings of the study outline as:

Non-formal Basic Education Schools are rented Semi Government Facilities with an average strength of 52 street children per school.

Street children are struggling to remember previous lessons and subsequently it will erode their learning curve. Furthermore, it will be a great challenge to retain them to school and maintain their level of interest in the studies.

Teachers' wellbeing is at stake due to low salaries and job insecurity as the schools are closed for an uncertain period.

There is a dire need to strengthen existing supporting mechanisms and services for these street children and their families keeping in view the expected rise in ratio of child labor and exploitation in the name of supporting household economy.



Psychosocial Needs of Women & Children

The study also focused the social and psychological aspects of this lockdown and its impact on different community group. It was discovered that all families are facing depression, anxiety, loneliness, aggressive behavior, fear syndrome, stress, fatigue and main causes are burden of household chores, income worries and lack of social interaction. Although mothers are having quality time with the children and are actively involved in meditation, cleaning, preparing meals, washing dishes, offering prayers and taking care of children, however there is a visible impact of Corona on the mental health of these families. The study highlighted that 100% of the respondents are going through stress and anxiety associated to this situation but only 35% of the respondents explicitly shared the need for psychosocial support to combat the above listed issues.

Children also seem to be in distress due to the fear of death, illness or separation of a loved one. The individuals with diagnosed mental health issues are at risk of worsening of pre-

existing mental health conditions. Moreover, children or mothers with pre-existing mental health conditions are unable to access usual support or treatments. Quarantine measures seem to have created fear and panic in the community, especially in children, as they do not understand what is happening. Health facilities are not working, OPDs are closed and people are worried due to this. The situation analysis included respondents with pre-existing health issues like diabetes, high blood pressure, disability and other health issues. Rashida, one of the mothers of IRP sponsored children from Shakrial expressed herself by saying,

“Now, life seems to be more insecure, vulnerable and tough than past.”

Mothers taking part in this assessment appreciated virtual psychosocial support provided to these families by IRP team in this hour of need. They feel that provision of online psychosocial support is an important element of duty of care. A respondent shared,



“In time provision of psychosocial support has helped us overcome and manage our response towards stress related to disease (Covid-19) and made us realize that it’s social isolation not elimination.”

The Psychologists engaging with these families and providing them with psychosocial support highlighted that these factors can increase the potential for over-stressed caregivers to become violent or abusive. These new stresses are occurring at a time when children are less visible to individuals and professionals who are normally engaged in their protection, and when child and family welfare services are over-stretched and disrupted.

Parents of street children shared that their children and themselves need online health consultancies and care facilities. The anxiety to arrange and pay house rent and utility bills, fear of unemployment, corona virus and food insecurity has affected mental well-being of these children and their families. Due to closures of schools and lack of educational support at home, they are engaged in household chores and watching TV or surfing internet which has a negative impact on their academic progress. Lack of social engagements such as attending marriages or social networking has also caused frustrations in these families.

WSHG leaders also shared their feelings and thoughts in relation to psychosocial impact of this lockdown. They stated that although they are enjoying their time with their families but this restriction has made them uncomfortable as it has disrupted their mobility and social life. They are facing difficulties in maintaining their communication and coordination with their group members and communities and consequently, they are unable to address their problems or guide them. They have dedicated their lives for volunteerism and to serve their communities. This lockdown has confined them to their homes and has taken away their passion to work for their communities which is their passion for life. One of the group leaders shared her passion by saying,

“My life belongs to my community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to serve them in any possible manner. I want to

make best use of my life before I die.”

Since they are confined to their homes, they are spending most of their time in the following activities:



Containment and lack of mobility and social life is causing them stress and has raised anxiety level. Robina, one of the group leaders expressed her mental stress in these words,

“I am trying to do something each minute of the day to keep my mind focused and occupied. Though it’s difficult but I try not to dwell on what has happened and happening around.”

Most of the group leaders shared that there is need for psychosocial support to themselves and their group members due to psychological problems such as depression, fear, anxiety and aggression associated to this situation.

From entrepreneurs’ lens, this situation has a positive side as it has provided them with an opportunity to strengthen their ties and relationships with their family members by staying at home and sharing quality time. Social media, gardening, family time and chats, recreational activities and internet are their pass time at home thus reducing tension and mental stress being faced due to COVID-19. According to these entrepreneurs, apart from the financial challenges associated to this lockdown, it is a rare opportunity to spend time with their families.

Child Protection & Gender Based Violence

Several media reports indicate that COVID-19 and associated situation has increased the risks of child protection and incidences of gender based violence for women and children. When the mothers of IR sponsored children were asked about reports or incidence of child protection concerns or GBV related issues, they shared that no such issues have been observed or reported in their families or vicinities so far. They also shared that none of their children are involved in labor at present. Mothers or their female family members feel safe at homes and have not come across any protection issues so far. Apart from this, they added that anxiety and stress as a result of loss of income and lack of socialization

has caused aggressive behavior which further leads to domestic violence in some cases in their communities and neighborhood. The analysis also captured views of teachers of street children and according to them, children are more prone to risk of physical and sexual violence and drug addiction at home, work place or streets. They further shared that educating children about their safety and protection with limited resources and opportunities is a challenge. Also, unsafe working environment and ignorance on the part of employers adds to the vulnerability of these children.

WSHG leaders shared two different aspects



of this lockdown in relation to Gender Based Violence (GBV). On one hand, women are more at risk at homes as there is an increase in domestic violence as a result of stress and depression associated to unemployment and food insecurity. On the other hand, lockdown has caused a decline in GBV at work place which is partly due to lack of social engagements and livelihood activities but simultaneously it has increased potential risk of domestic violence with obvious psychological and financial reasons. Female workers are also facing the following threats at work place as a result of lockdown:

- Job insecurity
- Unemployment
- Underpayment by employers/clients
- Pressure from employers, clients
- Irritating behavior of the employers and clients

The skill development or vocational centers established under EWIN project have provided these widows and their daughters with a safe and comfortable work places where they can engage with employers and other women of the community and share their knowledge and skills in a respectable manner. In response to a question regarding trends of gender based violence as a result of lockdown, the entrepreneurs responded that there are issues related to GBV in homes and markets such as harassment and domestic violence due to increased stress level associated with financial challenges and unemployment. People are more concerned about their livelihood which leads towards psychological problems such as stress, depression, anxiety and fatigue in homes. Entrepreneurs further shared that financial insecurity has resulted in incidences of GBV and domestic violence in their communities as reported by their contacts.



Faith Leaders' Perspective

Role of faith leaders in our society or faith communities is pivotal, from shaping opinions to guiding individuals and communities on certain issues in the light of faith. The situation analysis also engaged some faith leaders who are part of IRP communities and keep contributing in different initiatives taken by Child and Woman Development Programme. In their opinion, 65% of people in their communities are observing government guidelines on lockdown while 35% of the community is not following any guidelines. They further added that people are compelled to go out of their houses in search of work opportunities and are struggling to cover-up food insecurity for their children. Daily wagers and home based workers, small scale businessmen and students seem to be among the most affected

segments of society as a result of this pandemic.

The lockdown has had an impact on faith leaders and their religious proceedings and educational programmes in madaaris and mosques. People used to donate generously to their religious institutes which has stopped for now. One of the faith leaders shared,

“We used to receive food as gift from community at mosque or madrassah but due to lockdown we do not receive such gifts. Our families are mostly dependent on such giveaways but since the closure of mosques and madrassahs, this support is not available anymore which has made our life difficult.”



The faith leaders also shed some light on the positive aspect of this pandemic and the situation associated to it. This pandemic has inclined people to practice their religion. People are more compassionate towards each other which has boosted up social density on the whole. They are helping and supporting each other without any discrimination and especially the ones who are less fortunate and deserving which has improved social harmony. Many philanthropists came forward and started distributing food packs.

At one hand we see that unawareness is an obstacle to fight against this pandemic but on the other hand, this pandemic has raised massive awareness amongst masses on health and hygiene like hand washing practice and boosting immunity level. Some other interesting findings of the discussions with faith leaders came up as:

Modalities of philanthropy and charity have changed. Their religious and social activities have come to a halt which has impacted their income. This Ramadan will be different for them.

Women are safe at homes. Markets and such places are closed which has reduced the ratio of different forms of abuse in the society.

Religious scholars lack protective measures including masks, gloves, disinfectants, sanitizers and other hygiene items for their institutions. Educational activities of their students will affect this Ramadan as there is no online teaching facility.

During this catastrophic situation, faith leaders are playing their role to raise awareness and educate masses in every possible manner. In Friday sermons, they are encouraging their communities to observe precautionary measures. They are also guiding people on how faith can play a key role in reducing stress level and keep them safe from many mental health issues. They urge people to stay at home, offer prayers regularly at home and avoid any social engagement not only for themselves but also for their children, elders, disabled and people having weak immune system.



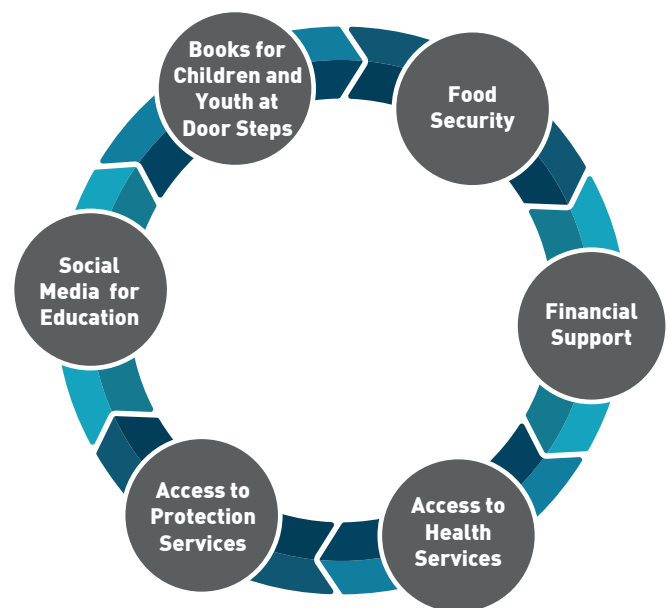
Conclusion

COVID-19 has completely transformed the context in which our communities live, especially most marginalized segments of society like children, women, elderly and persons with disabilities. Lockdowns and quarantine measures such as business and school closures, restrictions on movements have disrupted routine life and social support while placing new stressors on different segments of society. The study clearly illustrates that the pandemic has further worsened the economic condition of the population who were already living below the poverty line. For now, Pakistan has not happened to have witnessed the peak of the pandemic which can bring disastrous and long lasting impression on these communities and most marginalized categories of society. Most of the respondents of this study are the ones who belong to lowest stratum of the society, surviving on daily wages or community support. Disruption of livelihoods has somehow disturbed family connections and support. The fear of uncertainty and financial hardships has further unfolded in the shape of certain mental and emotional health issues. Limited services or lack of access to basic services has made these communities more vulnerable. Moreover, existing child protection risks are likely to exacerbate. Children and families who are already vulnerable, excluded or marginalized due to socio-economic exclusion or those who live in shared/overcrowded settings with compromised health are particularly at risk. With no academic activities and opportunities to engage children and youth in constructive activities, parents seem to have challenges for now as well as in the future. Consequently, a high ratio of school drop outs and pressure or expectation from children to take part in economic activities can be foreseen. The pandemic has also increased obstacles to access support mechanisms or to report incidents.

The study clearly illustrates that the pandemic has further worsened the economic condition of the segments of society who were already living below the poverty line. However, the

pandemic also has a silver lining under the clouds of economic crunch, uncertainty, fear and distress in the form of revival of family structures, rebuilding relationships and bonding. Social density seems to have improved even in the urban settings where people were disconnected and living in alienation. Faith communities have proved to be more resilient and the pandemic has strengthened their weakened relations with the Almighty.

The assessment also determined pathways for designing of future Child and Woman Development Programming interventions to mitigate risks associated to COVID-19; respondents from different segments of society categorized priority needs for future programming.



This situation analysis will enable us to understand the transforming dynamics of life in the wake of COVID-19, adapt and design our interventions and steer our strategic and programmatic direction accordingly. It will help us to respond to their needs in an effective manner and reduce risks emerging as a result of during and after pandemic itself.

In the light of key findings from this situation analysis, the following recommendations can be made while focusing on the immediate, mid-term and long-term needs assessed during this study:

- Introducing digital referral mechanism, strengthening and collaborating with existing support mechanisms and linking communities to the service providers will address immediate needs of these marginalized groups at first hand.
- There is a dire need to create equitable and inclusive economic opportunities through focused interventions by various stakeholders similar to existing IRP programmes for the widows and street children families to uplift their economic status and prevent child labor and exploitation.
- Engaging faith leaders to promote gender sensitive back-to-school campaigns will help prevent children's exposure to various forms of abuse

especially girls' school drop outs and early marriages.

- Multi-sectoral community led comprehensive programming around social protection system is crucial to address multidimensional needs of these marginalized groups and communities which may ultimately lead to their sustainable development and a better future in the long-term.
- Promoting community and youth leadership and building resilience while enhancing people's capacity to overcome these challenges will strengthen the communities and will take them towards self-reliance.
- Close coordination and collaboration between all stakeholders, particularly social safety nets such as Ehsas Programme, Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal, is critically important to ensure efficient and effective response to the immediate, mid-term and long-term needs of these communities.

As one of the mothers of sponsored children, Azra said,

“There will be ‘no return to normal life’ after these restrictions will be lifted”,

we need to adjust and adapt our life and plan future accordingly. Our duty of care requires

us to come forward with a whole of society approach and context sensitive service delivery while keeping our core values at the center of our strategy and programming. The situation demands us to reshape the perspective of existing and future programmes and regain the momentum of excellence in our actions in the light of these findings and recommendations.

“Staying homes means to starve and hitting the streets can get us infected with Corona”





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Islamic Relief Pakistan
AN-Arcade, Street 87, G-13/1, Islamabad, Pakistan

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