

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES OF THE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATED WITH THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN PUNE CITY

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ABSTRACT

The end of year 2019 engrossed the whole world with the outbreak of Covid 19 virus being transmitted from one human being to another in no time.¹ The disease spread so rapidly that it crossed the boundaries of China ;where it originated from ; to many other countries, bringing them to the knees. Within a span of a month or two total lockdown was announced in majority of the nations.²The lockdown in India was enforced on 24th March 2020.³The World Health Organization (WHO) shows the statistics of India with 3,46,48,383 confirmed cases as against 4,73,757 deaths due to the novel corona virus infection till date.⁴The lockdown brought along with it a radical change in the lives of people which instigated hike in suicidal cases and mental health risks, drug abuse, economic crisis, hunger, uncertainty, domestic violence, loss of income, huge debts, fear of the virus , life threatening questions , sleeplessness, depression, anxiety disorder, panic attacks and many more sequels disturbing the frame of mind. ⁵ The spine-chilling scenario picked up the need to examine and assesses the impact of Covid 19 on the mental health issues of persons associated with the hospitality sector(this sector being affected the most). Questionnaire method was used to collect data and the result shows that there has been a devastating impact on the employees of the hospitality industry in Pune. Most of the current research are concentrating on operational and organizational factors. Research from employee perspective is the need of the hour. This paper helps to understand the mental health issues and recommend suggestions for bringing the employees work life balance back to normalcy.

Keywords: covid-19 pandemic, socio-economic, hospitality, travel, mental health.

1. Introduction:

The Novel corona virus outspread causing the unique pandemic of the century, evolved in Wuhan- China; led to an overnight shutdown of the world and thus its economy since March 2020.⁶The pandemic has forced many industries including the hospitality sector to face unrivalled challenges. The organizations were required to shut businesses due to the law enforcement such as lockdown, travel restrictions and social distancing.⁷ The stay-at-home orders and overall restrictions on travel directly affected the revenue generation of the overall hospitality sector.⁸ The aviation industry also saw a toppling effect. According to IATA the airlines would face a loss of \$84.3billion worldwide resulting reduction in net profits by 20.1% and shrinking it furthermore to \$419 billion.⁹

The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown compelled the industry to layoff their employees due to undetermined cessation.¹⁰Several major hotel chains, airlines and travel organizations announced thousands of job cuts and hiring freeze.^[11, 12]According to WTTC, job losses in the hospitality sector has

seen one million job losses everyday may reach around 300 million this year.¹³This has had an unprecedented impact on the mental health issues of the employees associated with this sector. ^[14, 15] Post relaxation of some restrictions of covid-19 norms, the industry has slowly begun the reopening process.¹⁶

In spite of phase wise opening, the hospitality sector still continues to have a profound effect on the way of their operations.¹⁷Due to the fright of the dreaded novel corona virus majority of individuals are yet not finding it suitable to visit dine-in restaurants, travel in flights and unwilling to stay in hotel rooms. With the reduced rate of travel and acute slash in the room rates, hotels are operating with very few or no customers. The domestic hospitality sector may see some recovery within a span of year or two; but may take years together internationally for the sector to recover back.¹⁸

According to the UN world tourism organization (UNWTO), 22 million people constitute around 25% labor force which is associated with the hospitality sector in India. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), total contribution of this

industry was \$194 bn which is about 6.8% of total GDP of India in 2019 and supported 39.8 million jobs i.e. 8% of total employment.¹⁹ Hospitality industry comprises of tourism, aviation, travel services and others.²⁰ The growth and sustainability of this industry is largely dependent on the leisure activities, travel, accommodation, tourism, entertainment, and other ancillary services provided to the people on the move. The provision of food and beverage is a part and parcel of the industry. The covid 19 restrictions, put an unprecedented and a sudden halt on movement of people domestically and internationally.²¹ Moving out of own houses were also restricted under the lockdown guidelines.²² All the industries except the manufacturing industries were completely closed for operations. Consequently major sectors had to wind up businesses, offer pay cuts, lay off employees which triggered mental stress and pressure.²³ Due to financial crisis, fear of getting infected, number of increasing casualties and deaths engrossed the employees with chronic stress.²⁴ Many employees needed help as they developed mental health issues due to the uncertain future and unraveled times.²⁵ According to World Health Organization (WHO) "Mental health is defined as a state of well being in which every individual realize his or her own potential, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."²⁶

Keeping in mind the current scenario, it has become imperative to deep dive in the subject and to assess the reasons that has affected and consequently impacted the social, economic and mental health status of the employees associated with the hospitality sector. Thus the objectives of the study are:

1. To study the circumstances that gave rise to mental health issues of the labor force in the hospitality sectors. The circumstances being the Covid 19 pandemic.
2. To study the impact of the pandemic on the mental health issues of the employees of the hospitality.

The study revolves around two hypothesis statements:

H1. There is a positive relationship between the pandemic and mental health of the employees of hospitality sector.

H0. There is a negative relationship between the effect of pandemic and mental health issues of persons associated with the hospitality sector.

2. Literature Review

Maharashtra declared its 1st covid positive patient on 9th March 2020 in Pune city. On 18th April 2021, the state saw its single day highest number of patients 68,631 positive cases. Maharashtra has been the hotspot and accounts for about 22.35 % of the total covid patients of India. Pune the educational capital of Maharashtra is the worst affected city with about 930809 total cases as on 10th May 2021. The increasing number of covid positive patients forced a countrywide continuous lockdown of around 3 months w.e.f. 24th March 2020. This hit the education sector, transport businesses, entertainment industry, religious places, and all other sectors very badly. The hospitality and the tourism sector being the worst affected. All the hotels, restaurants, malls, food courts, theatres, etc. were forced to lay off employees, close businesses, shut operations for uncertain period of time. The tourism and hospitality sector of the city lost about Rs.2200 crore business from international tourists per month.²⁷ This had a serious impact on the mental health and economic status of the employees and employers associated with the hospitality sector in Pune city.

The extensive review of literature on the current topic, brought in the urge to study more deeply and assess the real-life impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the workers of the hospitality industry in Pune. The author Mini P Thomas –in her article in - The Week Magazine of April 16, 2020 says that just by reading the news about Covid 19 causes fear of getting infected by common people. During lockdown the family dynamics have changed drastically. It has had devastating effect on the mental health of Indians too. Shreya Mohit has never felt so lonely ever before. She opened her ice cream parlour and shut it within a month due to forced lockdown in Pune city. Whereas other lady says that she felt so helpless when she had to sit back home and was in dire need to pay a lakh rupee rent per month; which made her broke completely. The corona virus pandemic can worsen the mental

health of people suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) as they continuously keep washing, cleaning, sanitizing whatever they come in contact with. All this is happening because of the effect of the pandemic triggering anxiety, panic, restlessness and fearful thoughts showing symptoms of disturbed mental health.²⁸

In her paper the author (Hamouche S., 2020)²⁹ mentions that more than the virus, it is the stressors and moderating factors that has increased the impact of Covid 19 on the employees mental health. According to her research the stressors included the perception of safety and security, quarantine, stigma, isolation, exclusion from the society, defaming, loss of job, financial crisis. She also identified organizations, individuals and institutions as the moderating factors for causing tremendous impact on the workers mental health.

There are two dimensions of mental health – positive and negative. Occupational stress aggravated the risk factor of mental health. The stress indirectly impacts the positive and negative mental health status. (Moreno Fortes, A., Tian, L., & Huebner, E. S. 2020)³⁰. The investigation probable that anxiety, depression and stress are the most common features of mental health in relation to Covid 19 affecting even the sleep of an individual. The observational study showed that Covid 19 pandemic shows multifaceted responses and that mental health has gained considerable importance in the studies carried out by many researchers. As the number of people getting affected by the virus are on the rise day by day, it has led to countries face it as a challenge and as an opportunity. Challenge to understand limitations and barriers; while opportunity to find ways on implementation of various suggestions and recommendations to improve the situation which has an impact on mental health of individuals (Rajkumar R P, 2020)³¹.

According to (Kelly Greenwood, Vivek Bapat, Mike Maughan; 2019)³² mental health has gained much importance that its study and its awareness has reached a flex point. The author mentions that normally most of the people do not feel very safe to talk about their mental health. Around 60% of employees do not speak about their mental health at work, in spite of the factual figures that around 200 million

work days are lost due to mental health issues and is equivalent to \$16.8 million employee productivity. Vice-a-versa there are many celebrities, who are outspoken about the mental health condition that they had experienced in their past and have discussed the problems they faced in public and in front of media. The article thus reinforces the need to take heed and tackle the mental health issues of the employees of the organization by leading from the front.

Most research regarding Covid 19 pandemic is focused more on epidemiology, clinical features, how does the virus transmit itself, and how to manage the outburst of the pandemic. There is very less research gone in finding the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the people. Due to the closure of offices, institutions, transport, entertainment, hotels, restaurant, tourism, all people were forced to shut themselves behind the locked doors of their houses. But these restrictions affected their mental health at large. Stigma, social distancing, isolation, quarantine, loss of freedom, boredom, uncertainty, loss of job, etc. have negatively impacted the mental health of people during the ongoing pandemic. (Javed, B., Sarwer, A., Soto, E. B., & Mashwani, Z. U.; 2020)³³

Unemployment in hospitality sector reached 37.3% within a span of 1 month as the corona virus engrossed the globe and forced for a complete shutdown worldwide. The psychological toll of losing the jobs at hospitality and change the sector happened due to loss of job because of the Covid 19 pandemic. The employees who were laid off, complained about being financially drained off, strained, depressed, socially isolated which has had a negative impact on their mental health and socio economic conditions. Due to the prevailing conditions and the uncertain future increased the intention of many young talent to leave the industry completely and voiced for a career change.³⁴

3. Research Methodology

The pandemic situation continues to pose a threat to the mental health and economies across the globe. Within Pune city- state of Maharashtra; out of the total 3400 restaurants, 700 closed for operations post 1st lockdown

while 20% more did not open ever again post the 2nd Lockdown with stringent restrictions on the hospitality sector . According to the President of the Pune Restaurants and Hotels Association Mr. Shetty, only 5% could manage their business with only the home delivery and take away option.³⁵ Many countries are facing the 3rd and 4th wave of the spread of Covid 19 virus with constantly emerging new variants.³⁶To assess the impact of the pandemic a questionnaire was prepared and distributed via social networking sites to the respondents. Out of the total of 125 sample size identified and invited to participate in the investigation, 75 respondents actually participated. Thus 60% respondents of the total sample size participated in this` study.

The sampling method used for the study was a mixed kind of non-probability convenience and judgmental sampling. The samples selected represented the entry level, associate level, supervisory level and management level employees of the A grade restaurants, 5star hotels, travel and tourism and hotel management institutes and Quick Service restaurants in Pune city. The samples also included some owners of catering businesses. While collecting data from the entry level staff members, telephonic interviews were conducted and responses were noted down, as they were not well-versed using technology.

To assess the impact 5 factors were considered; sector associated with, income before and during the pandemic, mental health status during and after the lockdown, exact impact of covid 19 pandemic on finance status, family income or cash flow status and occupational

status. Some more open ended questions had to be introduced in the questionnaires respondents wished to give some additional inputs about their experience and status that helped detailing the impact on mental health status of employees.

The details of respondents who participated in the study are tabulated in Figure 10. It also elaborates their positions in the organizations they are associated with. Along with the collection of nominal data; the study collected ordinal data like economic status, impact of the situation on the mental health and total income status of the family and number of dependents and rating the overall experience. The results are showcased by graphical representation in the discussion section.

4. Discussions

The multifaceted results showed that there is a continuing impact of the covid 19 pandemic on the socio economic status and there by on the mental health status of the employees connected to the hospitality sector in Pune city. Out of total 75 respondents 16 were females and 59 were male respondents(Fig: 1).18.3% were entry level employees,20.3% assistant and supervisors, 38.6% were managers and 22.7% were self employed business owners. 26.7% represented the QSR's, 22% 5star hotels, 22% A grade restaurants, 9.3% business proprietors 21.3% represented the HM and Travel and tourism sector. The major chunk of respondents 46% were of age group 18-35with about 38.7% have 3-4 dependents and 17.3% have 5-6 dependents within the family.(Fig:2)

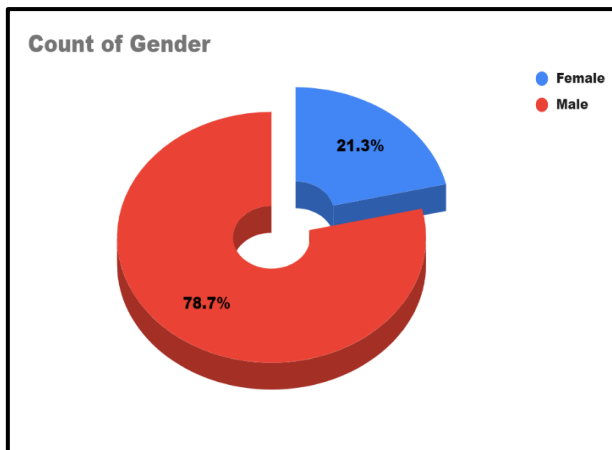


Figure : 1

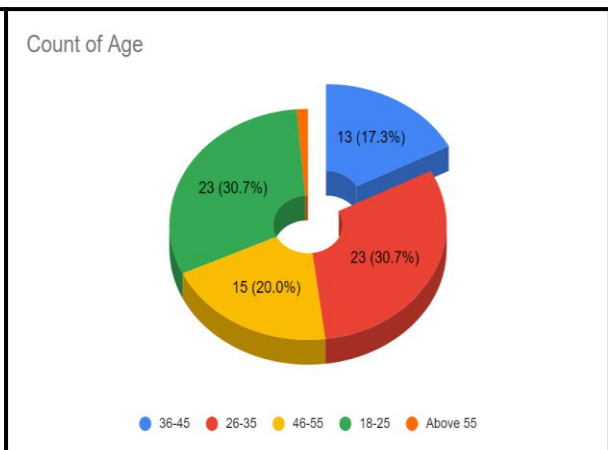


Figure: 2

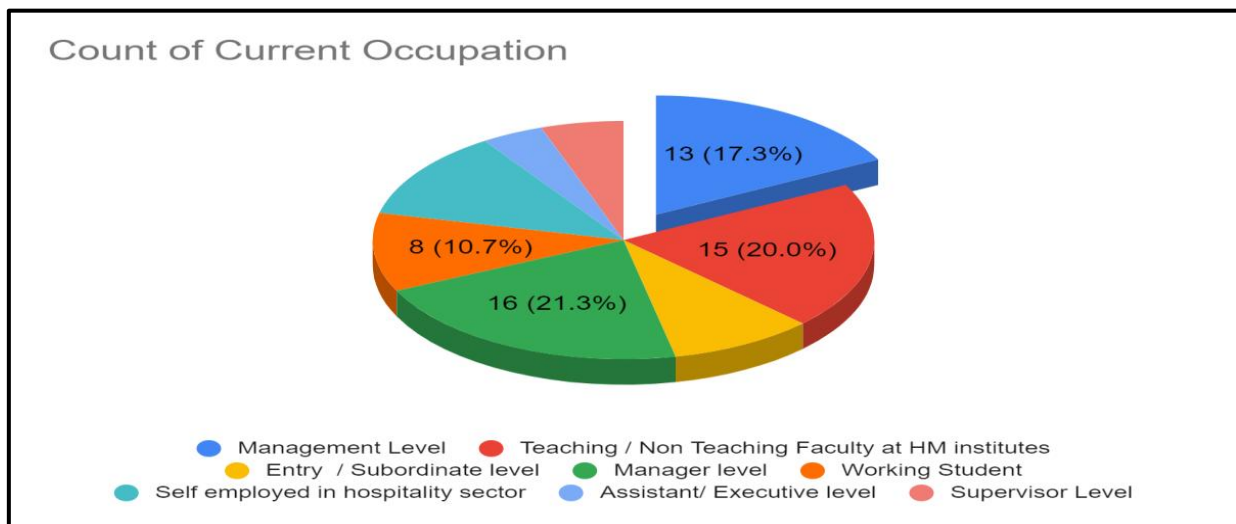


Figure : 10

4.1 Impact on the employee as a part of the family and as a family members

37.8% respondents had to face a circumstance of loss of job which was a well-paid job earlier while 13.3% of the respondents had to face the same circumstances as they were forced to close down their business due to the ongoing uncertainty, many restrictions, curtailed timings and a long lockdown period and due to which they were not able to sustain the payment of equated monthly bank installments, salaries and maintenance costs, electricity bills and heavy recurring rental expenses. 20% personnel's had to face a heavy debts situation due to loss of pay and / or pay cuts (24%), business closures, heavy medical expenses (6.7%) as some of the family members had to

be hospitalized due to deadly virus infection and serious health condition. There was a strong positive impact on the mental health of the family due to the demise of a family member (8%) or a close family friend (10.7%) due to the novel corona virus infection. A continuous fear prevails at the back of the mind that oneself or some of the near and dear ones may get infected due to the virus (22.7%). The mental health becomes stressful just by imagining about the Social avoidance (20%) a consequence arising as soon as any family member contacts the virus and is declared as covid positive. In spite of the chaotic situation 9.3% employees had no impact on their mental health due to the pandemic situation. (FIG 3)

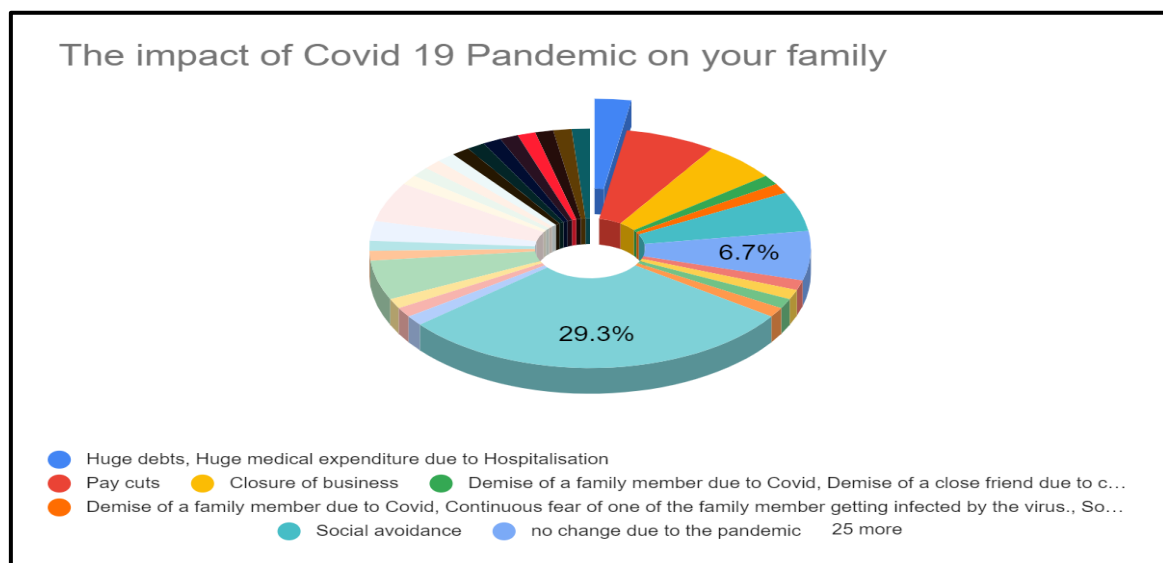


Figure : 3

4.2 Impact on the mental health from the occupational angle.

Loss of monthly pay (44%) was the major factor that affected the mental health followed by loss of job (32%). Increased expenditures towards medical expenses as someone being

infected by the virus within the family circle and thus increased debts (13.3%), The mental health of the owners was affected due to business closure (13.3%), or curtailed business hours (10.7%) and thus not able to make both the ends meet. (Fig : 4)

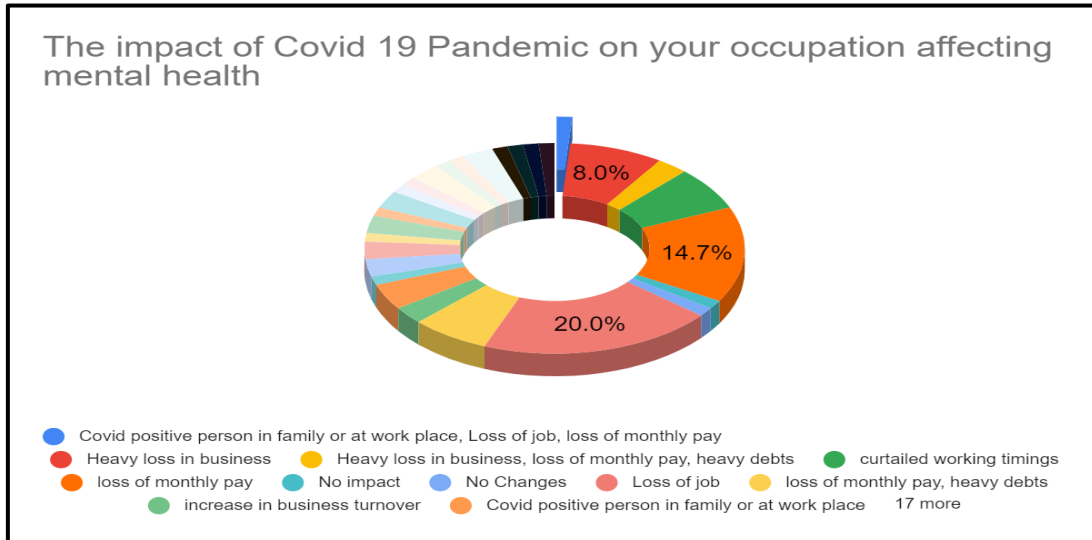


Figure : 4

4.3 Financial Implication

The financial status had a positive impact on the mental health of 33.3% employees due to loss of job and 15% due to forced business closure decision. 22.7% respondents could not continue or save their jobs, as work from home option was not available which landed them in a stressful mental health. 40% of the total respondents had increased stress levels as their total family income reduced to a large extent

due to the ongoing pandemic, while 9.3% were fearful as the monthly expenses grew tremendously against the income being steady or all-time low. Having said the above, there were 5.2% respondents who had a positive mental health as their business flourished, some received promotions or increments and some had no impact on their businesses at all (Fig : 5)

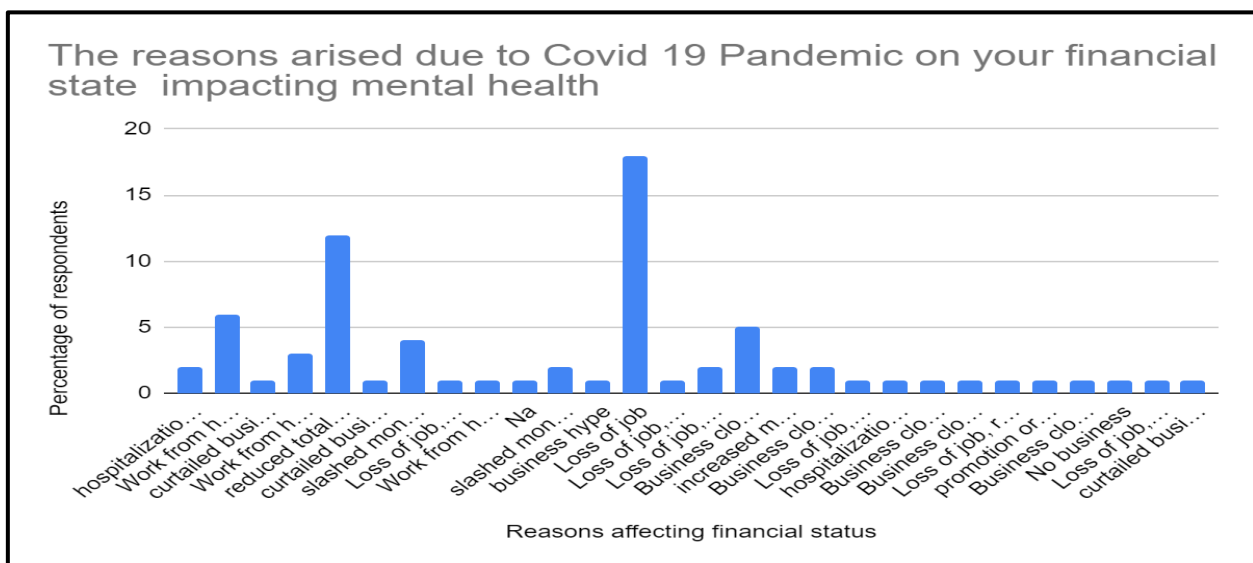


Figure : 5

4.4 Impact on individual sample

The covid 19 pandemic impact was seen on 78.7% of the total sample size. 13.3% had no major impact on them, while the remaining 8% were neutral towards the situation. (Fig:6) The study proves that H1 hypothesis is true. There was definitely a positive relationship between

the pandemic and the mental health issues of the employees associated with the hospitality sector. 30.7% respondents felt depressed, 42.7% felt frustrated and 13.3% had to experience chronic stress levels while 1.3% felt very restless and aimless(Fig : 7)

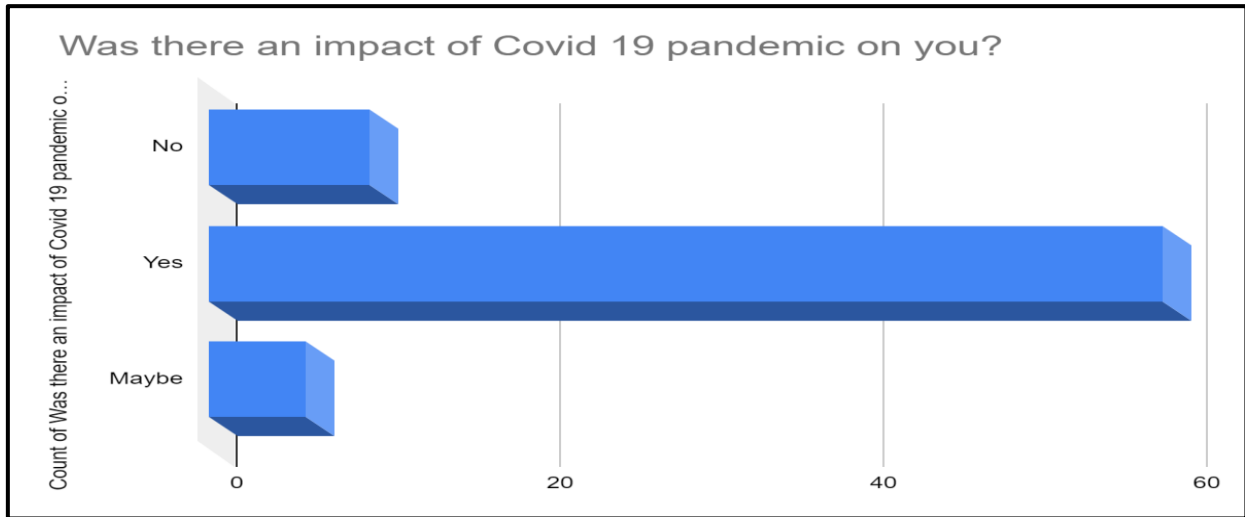


Figure : 6

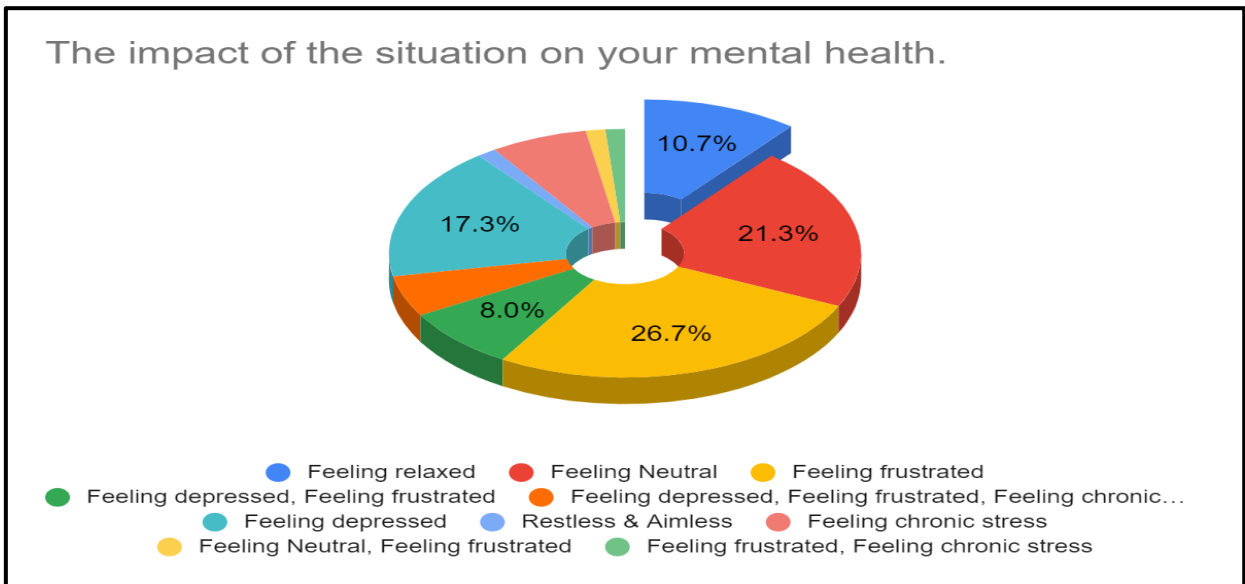


Figure : 7

4.4 Impact on the individuals yearly income before and during the pandemic.

The yearly income of 58.7% respondents was between 0-3 lacs and 25.3% were in a pay bracket of 4-6 lacs before the pandemic whereas 12% earned around 7-9 lac and 4% had a pay package of 10 lac and above.(Fig :8) The same figures went down drastically in such a way due to the pandemic that 74.7%

respondents came under the pay bracket of 0-3 lacs and only 12% respondents received a salary package upto 5 lacs. (Fig : 9) With these kinds of huge pay cuts or slashed monthly incomes left the respondents with an immense mental stress and pressure .The respondents expressed their feeling in the open ended question answer section. Some of the responses were really heartfelt.

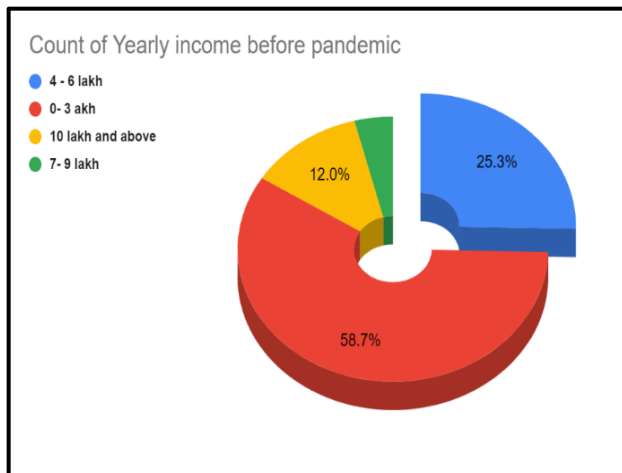


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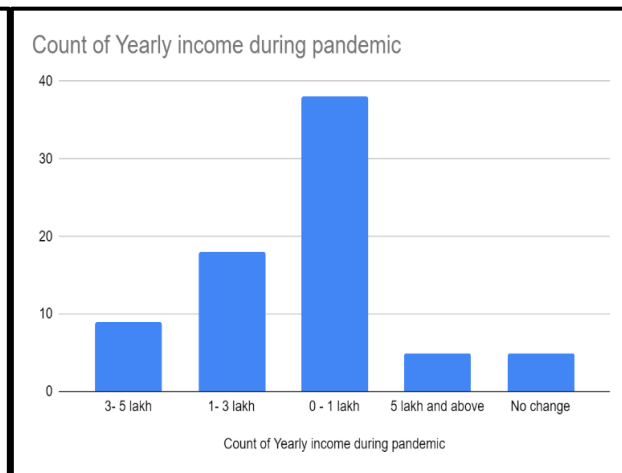


Figure : 9

5. Results

The respondents towards the end of the questionnaire shared their views about the impact Covid 19 had on their mental health with some specific reactions and comments. They are shared in the accompanying table for reference. To describe in short a few are mentioned here. The respondent number 69 said that she is just trying to sustain in these hard times. RP no.23 said that he/she is facing chronic frustration and boredom. Many have reacted saying that they are under tremendous

stress, chronic depression and surviving under fierce condition of uncertainty about the future. In spite of the dreaded mental health status, economic crisis and all other associated problems, all the respondents assured that they would continue to being associated with the hospitality industry. Some respondents felt very bad that there was no help to the employees and employers from the statutory bodies neither did they work on any policy and strategy for the survival of this industry.

Figure : 10

Respondent	Please drop your comments explaining how the pandemic has impacted your mental health
RP 1	ok
RP 2	Nil
RP 3	It has given time to think on the things that need change and at the same time, it has shown a mirror for upgrading on personal level.
RP 4	Mental health - It has been fluctuating but controlling it by meditation
RP 5	Uncertainty about well being which leads to unnecessary stress.
RP 6	Due to pandemic family income is reduced also increase in other expenses like electricity bill, etc ultimately affected on mental stress level
RP 7	More discipline is now required and the awareness. Will not be able to live in 100% freedom.. restrictions will now be there.

6. Contribution of the present paper

The present paper tries to examine the impact of the pandemic on the employee’s mental health who work with the hospitality sector. The information is gathered by personally interacting with the respondents and then getting the questionnaire filled by using social networking site. The data collected is 1st hand information and is not manipulated in any sense. The paper can be considered as a base for further empirical research from human

resource management angle to find out solutions to resolve the issues of these employees. It may also help the industry to formulate policies that may bring in desired change and improve the quality of mental health of these workers. The hospitality sector may make use of techniques like counselling, training, mentoring, supporting and constant follow ups ,may also help the employees overcome their mental health issues and become more efficient and productive at workplace.

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