Chapter 11
Pandemic:
A Crisis for Social Work

Zeynep Aca
Bandırma Onyedi Eylül Üniversitesi, Turkey

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan, China's Hubei Province in December 2019, and human beings have faced a global crisis resulting from spreading the virus across the world, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Social work has become one of the fields that the pandemic has disproportionately damaged the most with its severe consequences in every respect. In this context, the study aims to reveal the impacts of the pandemic on social work comprehensively. These impacts are discussed under four topics: increasing inequalities (economic, healthcare, access to services, digital divide, and education), changing services due to lockdowns, social well-being (impacts of economic changes, unpaid labor, and lockdowns and social isolation on social well-being), and ethical dilemmas.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan, China's Hubei Province, in December 2019 and spread across the world in record time. On March 11, 2020, the number of countries reporting cases increased to 114, and more than 118,000 people were infected (World Health Organization, 2020a). Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic on March 11. At present, the virus has not been brought under control, and as of January 5, 2021, the number of confirmed cases reported globally is 84,474,195, and the death toll has reached 1,848,704 (World Health Organization, 2020b).

The pandemic has posed disproportionate impacts, and social work has been one of the fields disproportionately harmed the most. The pandemic has undermined the historical value commitments to social justice and human rights by social work, whose subject is human and which prioritizes human well-being. The measures to combat the pandemic, such as activity restrictions, transferring public resources to priority areas, suspending some services, and similar practices, have led to interrelated impacts on several domains of life, from health to work and family life. Inequality and poverty have been

elevated among people due to the economies ruined by the pandemic. Remaining healthy and accessing to healthcare services have not been possible for everyone due to job losses, social security gaps, income inequality, low socioeconomic status, overload on the healthcare system, and similar reasons. While many services have been switched to online, those who do not have access to online environments have remained deprived of such services. The lockdowns have led to changes in the nature of many services. Besides, the pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the social well-being of people in many ways: domestic violence has increased, the time women spend on unpaid labor has been prolonged, and social isolation and distance rules have caused people to experience mental problems. In this period, ethical principles of social work have also become questioned.

The present work, which aims to reveal the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work comprehensively, has been designed in four headings.

The first heading is related to inequalities increased due to the pandemic. It has five sub-headings: growing economic inequalities, healthcare inequalities, inequalities in access to services, inequalities in the digital divide, and educational inequalities.

The second heading deals with the services that have changed due to lockdowns.

Under the third heading of the study, the social well-being issue is grounded according to the impacts of economic changes, unpaid labor, lockdowns, and social isolation on social well-being.

The fourth heading includes discussions on ethical dilemmas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to utilize a holistic framework to discuss the impacts of the pandemic on social work. Consequently, the researcher reviewed the relevant literature, international documents, and reports to expand the topic. Ultimately, the research presented a perspective on the apparent pandemic-related problems in social work.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged, but not the first, in the 21st century. Three major pandemics already come out in the first two decades of the century: SARS, H1N1 Influenza, and Chikungunya. These pandemics highlighted the shortcomings of state-level capacity in outbreak detection, prevention, and response (Jain et al., 2018).

Pandemics cause complex and detrimental economic, health, and social problems, which poses new social work challenges. For example, the global financial short-term cost of the SARS pandemic was estimated to be approximately $ 80 million. Economic deterioration in Singapore, one of the countries affected by the SARS pandemic, caused the unemployment rate to rise to 5.5% (Tiong, 2012). Also, the SARS pandemic disclosed a greater need for public health investments in countries hit by the pandemic. The pandemic also placed a massive burden on international healthcare systems struggling to address many other severe conditions (Knobler et al., 2004). The pandemic caught many countries unprepared (Mehta et al., 2004) and affected these countries' social well-being in many ways. The SARS and other pandemics also documented inequalities around the world. For example, in the flu epidemic in 2009,

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/pandemic/279544

Related Content

New Public Management Reforms and Modernization Changes in Australia
Tarek Rana (2018). *Handbook of Research on Modernization and Accountability in Public Sector Management (pp. 1-17).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/new-public-management-reforms-and-modernization-changes-in-australia/199455

Digitalization of Public Diplomacy: An Instance of Nation Branding and Its Use in Southeast Asia
Martin Petlach (2023). *Global Perspectives on the Emerging Trends in Public Diplomacy (pp. 75-101).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digitalization-of-public-diplomacy/327772

Utilizing Radio Frequency Identification in Libraries: The Case of Qatar
Parameshwar Ganapathiand Emad Ahmed Abu-Shanab (2019). *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 14-29).*
www.irma-international.org/article/utilizing-radio-frequency-identification-in-libraries/241264

Citizen Attitudes Towards E-Government Services: Comparison of Northern and Southern Nicosia Municipalities
Tuberk Kaya, Mustafa Sasan, Mete Yldz, Tunç Medeniand Tolga Medeni (2020). *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 17-32).*
www.irma-international.org/article/citizen-attitudes-towards-e-government-services/247946

Self-Organized Social Solidarity (SoSS) Initiatives in Greece: Exploring Their Scope and Their Relationship to Online Media
Eleni-Revekka Staiouand Dimitris Gouscos (2014). *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 21-43).*
www.irma-international.org/article/self-organized-social-solidarity-soss-initiatives-in-greece/119976