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## FACTOR AFFECTING THE JOB SEARCHING DURING COVID-19 IN PAKISTAN

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**ABSTRACT**

*COVID-19 had savagely affected the economy of Pakistan. This article aims to access the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on job searching. A cross sectional study was conducted from September 2020 to December 2020 to find out the 'Factors affecting the job searching (career) during COVID-19 in Pakistan'. Convenient sampling technique was used for the data collection. Majority of the respondents 32% responded that lack of vacancy was due to the pandemic. 69% responded that lacking experience affected the job searching (career). 24.2% respondent relied that lack of the workshop/internship affected the job hunting while lack of the virtual training also played the role in job searching accounting for 27%. Pandemic is the prime reasons behind the lack of vacancies accounting for 32%. The result indicates that most of the population was affected in term of job searching by the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. Technical and Soft skills were helpful in job searching.*

**KEYWORDS**

*COVID-19, Job Searching, Pandemic, Unemployment, Virtual Training.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

World Health Organization (WHO), which is an international public health agency, proclaimed health emergency amongst public due to up rise in COVID-19 disease, an acronym for Corona Virus 2019 on 30 January 2020 (Ho, Chee, & Ho, 2020; Organization, 2005). This announcement was as a consequence of cases of infection discovered in all 34 regions of China and additionally, due to outweigh of COVID-19 against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) of 2003. It was presumed that this virus emanated from a seafood market in the city of Wuhan, which then spread globally. Believed to have originated from a seafood wholesale market in the city of Wuhan of Hubei Province in late December 2019, the number of cases increased exponentially within and beyond Wuhan, spreading widely across the world (Ho et al., 2020). With this rampant increase of reported cases, WHO declared COVID-19 as a 'pandemic' on March 11, 2020 (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Martelli Júnior et al., 2020). WHO reported 597,583 deaths as of July 19, 2020 with 14,043,176 confirmed cases in 216 countries (Brown & Horton, 2020). This respiratory infection is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which is highly transmissible and twofold than seasonal influenza (Alon et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020). Amongst outburst of the virus worldwide, the escalating fear is usual amidst individuals because any gender irrespective of race can be infected (Alon et al., 2020). The first case of COVID-19 in Pakistan was notified on February 26, 2020. Due to the influx of pilgrimage from Iran via Taftan Border to Pakistan, the number of confirmed cases arose abruptly in March 15, 2020. Furthermore, consequently, prompt lockdown was implemented producing tumult amongst migrant, where they were in haste to return to their native places thus exasperating the situation and dilapidating social distance. (Shafi, Liu, & Ren, 2020) Within ten days from March 15-25, 2020, there was an escalation of cases from 53 to 1078 (DAWN, 2020). Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Pakistan were 5038 accompanied by 86 deaths. The topmost cases were in Punjab province followed by Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhawa, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Islamabad and Azad Jammu Kashmir (Saqlain et al., 2020). The Corona Virus had infected more than 1.2 million people, where 72 thousand people died from it spreading globally as of 7 April 2020. Due to COVID-19 there is an approximation of \$1.3 trillion loss to the economy in Pakistan. Although before the pandemic third of the population was already living below poverty line the proportion is anticipated to increase above 40% by June 2020. It was reported by Pakistan Workers Federation that till 28th March 2020; half million workers of textile industry have become unemployed. Impoverishment and nonemployment rates are at all-time high (Asghar, Batool, Farooq, & ur Rehman, 2020).

Due to public health emergency declared after spread of COVID-19, quotidian routine activities were interrupted emphasizing on student's health. During this public health emergency, where COVID-19 effected were filling up hospitals, giving priority to students' health led to disruption in many regular and routine activities (Lee, 2020). Following the WHO practical guidelines for instance, social distancing, majority of universities and schools have delayed their educational activities and shifted to online education. This created panic and distress with immense pressure on medical students with enduring transformation in medical education (Cao et al., 2020; Juang & Schachner, 2020; Rose, 2020).

COVID-19 has disturbed the routine of all the walks of life, including the education. Award of degree is delayed for some batches. This makes the batch late for the introduction in the market. When their time comes, they will have to compete for their careers in a more saturated environment. There's also a considerable impact of COVID-19 the the skill level of graduates. Learning was shifted from on-campus to online mode of studies. Majority of the degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan offer conventional mode of studies and a sudden shift from on-campus to online mode was hard to adjust for the students of a country like Pakistan which technologically lags countries like Turkey, Malaysia, UK etc. As a consequence, there is a considerable lack of knowledge amongst students which is ultimately going to have an effect in a competitive corporate market. The aim of this research is to look at the elements that influenced the job searching process in Pakistan during COVID-19. This study is deemed necessary since many student's careers are at stake because they are unable to obtain their first job after graduation. This study is an estimation of the impact of COVID-19 on the graduate's careers by focusing on all of the possible variables required to gain job during job hunting and serve as a guideline for eliminating all shortcomings that are impeding their careers.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The COVID-19 health crisis has turned into a global economic crisis in no time since 2019, not only putting health at risk but also led to unemployment and financial instability of millions of people around the globe. Many people were unable to go to work and most of the businesses collapsed during the pandemic. Just after few months of COVID-19 prevalence between February and April 2020 industrial production reduced by almost 28 percent in most of the countries (Aucejo, French, Araya, & Zafar, 2020).

Moreover, employers are no exempt from the impact of COVID-19, people who established their small business setups are also bearing the heat of overhead costs and

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expenses. One study shows that most small business owners and laborers were at the target of the crisis of COVID-19 as over 91 million people in India lost their job in April 2020 (Kumar, 2020).

Similar results shows that impact of COVID-19 on the career is 10 times greater than that of the global financial crisis as one of the reports by the Eurostat stated that because of absence and reduction of working hours, the overall employment income has reduced by the 4.8%.

According to 'International Labor Organization' (ILO) (2020), almost 7% of working hours are no longer exist which roughly left 200 million people unemployed, particularly self-employed and small business owners providing their services in retail, tourism and travel. Moreover, almost 25 million people would lose their jobs worldwide (Shafi et al., 2020).

COVID-19 is not only responsible for major unemployment but it also led to reduced wages of employers and workers and made them live from hand to mouth, resulting in an increase of 8.8 million in the number of 'working poor' (Akkermans, Richardson, & Kraimer, 2020).

A recent report by the International Labor Organization reveals that nearly 81% of the total global workforce are fully or partially affected by lockdowns. It was also stated in the report 'COVID-19 is the worst global crisis since the Second World War'. One of the first studies was conducted on Belgium employees in April 2020 explaining the anticipated impacts of the COVID-19. According to this study, the career would be most jeopardizing by the effects of COVID-19 as 21% of the employees were under the stress of losing their jobs and 14% were sure to be jobless in the coming days. Moreover, 26 % of made COVID-19 is responsible for missing out on their chance of promotion. COVID-19 also changed the vision and priorities related to the job in the labor market (Baert, Lippens, Moens, Sterkens, & Weytjens, 2020).

COVID-19 affected different employees differently. Among those at the highest risk of unemployment are mostly young people, recent graduates and women. They are attached mostly with less stable employment and working in sectors which are affected severely by the covid19 as compared to others as tourism and restaurants are mostly filled by young people and women (OECD, 2015).

COVID-19 also proved one of the major causes of declining the economy of Pakistan. One of the recent reports published by the 'United Nations Conference on Trade and

Development' (UNCTAD) said that Pakistan would be the major victim of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 'MSMSE' (micro, small, medium-sized enterprises) were the major target of an outbreak of the COVID-19. More than 83% of small companies were impotent to make any backup to cope with a situation and 2/3 of the enterprises also anticipated that if lockdown lasted more than two months their survival would be at high risk (Shafi et al., 2020).

All these factors are a clear indication of how COVID-19 profoundly caused the career shock for a significant number of audiences including workers, business holders and entrepreneurs. COVID-19 is one of the disruptive and extraordinary events in human history that drastically impacted the globe with its negative effects and triggered a deliberate thought process concerning in people about their future and career.

#### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

1. To assess the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on job searching.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. What are the factors affecting the job searching during COVID-19 in Pakistan?

#### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

1. There are some factors affecting the job searching during COVID-19 in Pakistan
2. There is no factor affecting the job searching during COVID-19 in Pakistan

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A cross sectional study was conducted from September 2020 to December 2020 to find out the 'Factors affecting the job searching during COVID-19 in Pakistan.' For this purpose, the questionnaire developed from Literature Review and expert opinion was used. Both male and female participants, graduate and post graduate of any age were included in this study. Sample size was 178 calculated on the basis of pilot study resulting in 35% response distribution by using 7% confidence interval and 95% confidence level through online calculation (Raosoft, 2004). Convenient sampling technique was used for the data collection. In addition, the research protocols were reviewed and approved by the Departmental Review Committee (DRC) of Department of Health Professional Technologies (DHPT), Faculty of Allied Health Sciences (FAHS), University of Lahore with reference code 'Ref # DHPT/03'.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

SPSS V. 20 was used for data analysis i.e., descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. EndNote was used for the references.

**Table 1:** *Demographic Values*

Demographic variables	Variable category	Study participant, n (%)
Gender	Male	121 (68)
	Female	57(32)
Age	Less than 20	19(10.7)
	20-25	155(87.1)
	26-30	4(2.2)
Marital Status	Married	19(10.7)
	Unmarried	159(89.3)
Educational Qualification	Bachelor	147(82.6)
	Master	31(17.4)
	PhD	-
Institute Name		
Institute Sector	Government	109(61.2)
	Private	69(38.8)

Table 1 shows that most of the participants were male 121(68%), A large number of participants 155(87.1%) were between the age of 20 to 25 years. Most of participants were unmarried 159(89.3%) and bachelor 147(82.6%) degree holders.

**Figure 1:** *Pivotal characteristics for getting job in Pandemic.*

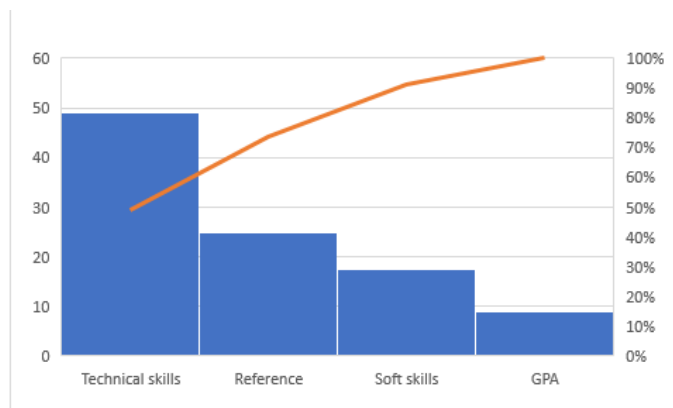


Figure 1 shows that technical skill 79% were more important in job searching and GPA 15% was less effective in job searching.

**Table 2:** *Factors affecting job searching (career) in pandemic.*

Sr no	Questions	Not at all	Small degree	Moderate degree	High degree	Very high degree
1.	Pandemic is responsible for the lack of a job vacancy.	9 (5.05%)	24 (13.4%)	39 (21.9%)	49 (27.5%)	57 (32%)
2.	Lack of experience is affecting job career in pandemic	41 (23%)	37 (20.8%)	41 (23%)	33 (18.5%)	26 (14.6%)
3.	No Internship/Workshop is affecting job career in pandemic	42 (23.6%)	37 (20.8%)	43 (24.2%)	31 (17.4%)	25 (14%)
4.	Lack of virtual training is affecting job career in pandemic	47 (26.4%)	33 (18.5%)	48 (27%)	28 (15.7%)	22 (12.4%)
5.	Lack of vacancies is affecting job career in pandemic	20 (11.2%)	37 (20.8%)	28 (15.7%)	25 (14%)	68 (38.2%)

Table 2 shows that most of the participant were in favour that lack of a job vacancy due to the pandemic (Moderate to very high degree) 132 (91.7%) and that ultimate effects the job career in pandemic (Moderate to very high degree) 121(87.9%). Lack of virtual training was affecting job career in pandemic (Moderate to very high degree) 98(56.1%).

## DISCUSSION

Result of this study shows that majority of respondents were male graduates. Most of the participants agree or highly agree that in current situation of pandemic work experience affects the job searching (career) of all qualifications. Research also identifies that most of the participants agree that technical skills were helpful in job searching.

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Work experience and skill is significant for job purposes peculiarly in this span where COVID-19 pandemic is at its pinnacle. The pandemic has not only affected human psychologically but also economically where people are being terminated from their job or are being unemployed. Besides, Pakistani's face pays cuts or layoffs. Furthermore, Unemployment proved to be one of the major issues emerged during pandemic and fear of unemployment amongst Pakistani is escalating day by day (Hanif, 2020).

In our study total of 178 participants were assessed in which 121(68%) were male participants and 57(32%) were female participants. Majority of survey was filled by population aging 20 to 25 with 87.1 %, mostly were Bachelor students which shows these categories of individuals are either recent graduates or are still pursuing their degree.

However, upon analyses of data from questionnaire regarding the impact of lack of experience on job career from 178 participants 14.6% of participant agreed to very high degree, 18.5% of the participants agreed to high degree, 23% of the participant went for the moderate degree, 20.8% of the students agreed to small degree and 23% of the students agreed lack of experience is not affecting the job career in pandemic (see Table 2). From the above findings it can be concluded that most of the participants were in dilemma about that whether lack of experience is hindering their way in securing job during the pandemic or not. According to Future Workplace, experience of employee is becoming important factor among HR and Business Leaders as COVID-19 is waving across the world. A survey titled, 'The 2020 HR Sentiment Survey' was conducted by Future Workplace where HR and Business leaders were asked about their topmost initiative for 2020. 50% of respondents opted for Employee experience compared with other variables. This signifies that experience matters for job purposes especially in this time of pandemic (Meister, 2020).

According to Target Jobs UK, there were less internship and placement vacancies in 2020 due to pandemic. The Institute of Student Employers (largest graduate employers) members reported in November 2020 that generally it was predicted to produce interns and placement recruitment between 5,000–6000, as compared to more than 7,000 in 2018 or 2019 (Jobs, 2021). In terms of degree whether no internship or workshop is affecting job career in pandemic, the result was average as 14% population went for very high degree, 17.4% population agreed to high degree, 24.2% of participants were neutral about the situation, 20.8% marked small degree and 23.6% of the population considered there is no effect of internship or workshop training lack to the job career (see Table 2). On the basis of above findings, it was found that

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individuals considered lack of internships and workshops as important aspect in affecting job career in pandemic.

Additionally, same results as the former question were seen to the question relating to degree to which lack of virtual training is affecting job career in pandemic whose results are given below in (Table 2). As unemployment has increased in post-pandemic, there has been significant demand in training skills. During this lock down period, technical education has plummeted. Hands-on training cannot be easily delivered online and majority of the vocational programs has impeded. Some countries like South Korea has promoted the use of its virtual training platform for instance, 'Smart Training Education Platform' (STEP–<https://step.or.kr/>). 'STEP' is an online-based lifelong vocational ability development learning platform. Similarly, in Canada, the Ontario School board in collaboration with Apple has created applications, books and videos assisting tutors to provide fascinating lessons for students at their home. Free one-to-one virtual session is also available where professionals mentor the students (OECD, 2020).

When question was asked to what extent pandemic is responsible for the lack of a job vacancy 59.5% of the students agreed that pandemic is responsible for the lack of a job vacancy, whilst 21.9% were not sure if pandemic is responsible or not. 18.5 % of the students disagreed that pandemic is responsible (see Table 2). From the above findings it was obvious that the majority of the participants admitted that pandemic is one of the major factors responsible for declining the job vacancy. The next question of the second section was of confirming either the pandemic is major reason behind job loss and unemployment. 33.7% of the whole population agreed pandemic is responsible for most of the job loss, while 32.6% disapprove this statement and 33.7% of the populations was not even sure pandemic has any effect on job dismissal and unemployment (see Table 2). An estimation made by the 'Asian Development Bank' (ADB) was that in this corona virus pandemic, young Pakistanis may lose between 1.5 and 2.3 million jobs as a result of strict lockdown imposed by authorities and resulted in decline of economy in the country (PAKISTAN, 2020). Numerous firms deferred recruitments during the pandemic. According to CNBC, a few companies repealed the job offers they made prior to Corona virus pandemic (Benefits; Hess, 2020).

The demand for soft skills is growing comparing to the technical skills of an individual (Robles, 2012). Demand for effective communication skills is increasing in the highly competitive market (Lazarus, 2013). The foremost skills that economist is focusing in the market place are soft skills. These soft skills also called non-cognitive skills are significant tool for future success specifically in school and adult life (Almlund,

Duckworth, Heckman, & Kautz, 2011). National Association of Colleges and Employers conducted a survey in 2017 and found that team work especially written and verbal communication skills was prevalent quality of new 'college graduates (Deming, 2017). In addition, generic skills are more searched comparing to technical skills in industry amongst students (Harris & Clayton, 2018).

As it is common believe that one of the factors i.e., technical and soft skills, GPA and job reference are important for getting job, when asked the question surprisingly roundly one half with 48.9% favoured that the technical skills play the pivotal role in acquiring job in contrast with soft skills accounting for 17.4% while reference was the second most important for procuring job with 24.7%. GPA accounted for 9% overall.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that further research is needed to find out which type of technical or soft skills will be helpful in job searching during pandemic. For enhancing technical skills various special skills training workshop should be conducted for students. Furthermore, seminars such as physical or online should be arranged for awareness among parents to provide guidance to their children in job searching during pandemic.

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