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Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Lebanese Health, Economy and Social Wellbeing

Hiba Deek

Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Beirut Arab University, Lebanon.
Email: h.deek@bau.edu.lb

The COVID-19 pandemic was a shock to the Lebanese community. A tragedy that the already destroyed economy could not withstand. This all started with the entry of a single woman from Iran and her confirmed COVID-19 on the 21st of February. The country went into a complete lock down for almost 2 months where the airport was closed from March 19 till the 1st of July, curfew was enforced for long hours and store closure was a must from the early hours of the night. This action plan was able to limit the escalating numbers and bring it down to zero on the 21st of April. However, with all these restrictions, how does a small country with already drowning economy pick up after the wave of shocks it is subjected to when developed countries with strong based economies have been rocked due to this pandemic?

The Lebanese economic situation had been deteriorating for years. On the 17th of October, 2019, the Lebanese people could no longer hold in silence their social and financial conditions, thus breaking the Lebanese revolution. People went into the streets for months requesting change and improvement. The days spent on this revolution took time and space from the economy and thus along with the COVID 19 pandemic and the closure caused the loss of more than 85% of the Lebanese Lira's value in relation to the US dollars; the currency used for importing goods into the country.

On the 4th of August, the world's third largest explosion went off in Beirut Port causing more than 200 deaths, 6000 injuries and total destruction of 300 houses in the surrounding area. This in turn has caused another shock to the Lebanese community and loss of hope. Even the corruption that blew its whistles in 2019 was speechless after all these events. People gave in to their destinies with no action to change their

current situation while signs of poverty started to manifest. While the numbers indicated that more than 22% of the Lebanese population are currently living below the extreme poverty line and more than 43% below the upper poverty line, these numbers are expected to increase with the sky soaring prices of goods. Horrifying stories were reported of poverty victims crossing the sea in illegal boats with no goods that have led to the death of babies and youth. A man reported carrying his few months old baby in his arm for hours after he died from dehydration till he was forced to throw him into the ocean. Other signs of poverty were reflected in the rising numbers of crimes, suicide and lack of shelters.

Since the blast, the numbers of COVID-19 confirmed cases increased uncontrollably to reach number of four digits. The country reached a complete loss with conflicting decisions between different ministries calling for closure of schools, stores and towns while others fighting against these decisions to save what's left of the economy and the academic year. However, the calls for closure are justified to avoid the European scenes in Lebanon with the limited number of hospital beds, ventilators, medications and medical supplies and the rising numbers of migrating frontline workers of nurses and doctors.

The year 2020 has been a turmoil on the Lebanese community with the lack of actions for improvement and the constant decline in the overall health, financial and social status. The COVID-19 pandemic has played a major role in this turmoil and will continue until a good action plan and hopefully an active vaccine is formulated.

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