

Community-wide mask-wearing: A realistic approach amidst the second wave of Covid-19 in Pakistan

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Madam, with 426,412 confirmed cases to date,¹ Pakistan now stands with most developing countries in the war against controlling the second wave of Covid-19. According to the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC), Pakistan's case positivity rate has climbed to 9.71% for the first time in five months.² This alarming situation calls for a nationwide lockdown. However, considering the economy of Pakistan, this approach is not sustainable in the long

than half (48.90%) of the general public had information that it is a pandemic disease.⁵

Therefore, we urge the government to work with different NGOs and distribute free masks to those who cannot afford them. There is also a dire need for effective methods for public awareness regarding the role of facemasks in mitigating the virus's transmission. This can be achieved through advertisements on social

Table-1: Areas observed correlated with mask-wearing.

Areas observed (least to most socioeconomically stable)	Total (n=1621)	Wearing mask		P-value
		Yes (n=721)	No (n=900)	
Gulshan	537 (33.1%)	133 (24.8%)	404 (75.2%)	0.001 (statistically significant using Chi-Square Test)
PECHS	580 (35.8%)	208 (35.9%)	372 (64.1%)	
Defence	504 (31.1%)	380 (75.4%)	124 (24.6%)	

run. Considering the high mortality rate of the virus and the uncertainty of a readily available vaccine, we believe that the only solution is the immediate imposing of mass masking. This approach has previously been proved to contribute to the control of Covid-19.³

To inspect public compliance towards mask-wearing, we conducted an observational study on pedestrians in Karachi, Pakistan. Three socioeconomically diverse areas were studied from 20th till 27th November 2020. Mask wearing and the area observed were found significantly associated (p-value: 0.000 - Table-1). The hoarding practice has led to a consequent spike in masks' prices, making them unaffordable for the people belonging to low socioeconomic areas. The increasing demand for surgical masks and respirators has also led to a global shortage of supply and raw materials.⁴ Additionally, a lack of awareness regarding Covid-19 in low socioeconomic areas may also be a reason behind people not wearing a mask. Punjab reported that less

media and mass media. The advertisements should be conveyed in the national languages to spread valuable information to the masses. Moreover, policymakers need to take immediate and strict action against people with non-serious attitudes towards mask-wearing. Although the government has made it mandatory to wear face masks in public places along with the imposition of a fine for the violation, the real challenge of convincing the public to follow these guidelines otherwise remains.

Acknowledgement: None to declare

Disclaimer: None to declare

Conflict of Interest: None to declare

Funding Disclosure: None to declare

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.2316>

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