[**Living with Covid**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1653352/living-with-covid)

[Zubeida Mustafa](https://www.dawn.com/authors/975/zubeida-mustafa)Published October 22, 2021 - Updated a day ago

Zubeida Mustafa

WITH new Covid cases in Pakistan having fallen to below 1,000 per day, some semblance of normality seems to be returning. But the normality appears to be a bit surreal because of the masks and the required social distancing. These are not always observed.

The fact is the SOPs just cannot always be followed by everyone. How can they when there is not enough water for a family to wash their hands frequently? Neither can a family of seven space themselves out in a small room that is their entire home.

Even where SOPs can be strictly observed, the majority blatantly disregards them as a huge number of people never believed that there was in fact any coronavirus around. So the SOPs were not taken seriously. People shook hands and hugged one another in the traditional way as they have done for centuries.

**Read more:** [*Reopening under Covid*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1652105)

Many attribute this behaviour to ignorance or lack of education. It is a fact that an overwhelming majority of our countrymen are not educated in the true sense of the word. But I feel that people defy the SOPs to assert their personal choice in a society which does not allow them any control over their lives. This also reflects the deficit of trust and credibility between the haves and the have-nots into which our society is so neatly divided.

Covid has also brought with it a depression crisis.

How did the lockdown induced by the pandemic affect those of us who observe the SOPs? Here I will speak about the sociocultural and educational aspects. The pandemic threw us into forced isolation in the initial few months which were unprecedented. Families and friends were cut off from one another in a space of timelessness. Sometimes it became difficult to remember which day of the week it was as one week merged with the next and the months went by. The professions that allowed it went into work-from-home mode. But that did not compensate for the enjoyment derived from the diversion provided by colleagues. As for the retired ones like myself, the activities which had kept me happily preoccupied suddenly vanished from the scene. No seminars, no literary festivals, no music and art events which I frequently attended with friends. The lockdown robbed me of the joy of friendly human engagement and kept me focused on work, the zing factor that had made life interesting. Some activities have retuned but they now lack the earlier excitement. Or have we changed?

**Read more:** [*Covid has decreased opportunities to lead an active life: WHO*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1652073)

Amer Hussain echoes the same feeling in his “fragmented memoir” Restless, as follows, “Instead he’d written a piece just before Rafay died about how human contact, virtual or real, had become more important to him than books ... [that he] abandoned to spend hours consoling others”. For me, the phone brought no relief as a time came when there was nothing left to talk about. With hardly any vision, I find comfort in the tactile.

It is no wonder that mental health professionals [have been warning](https://www.dawn.com/news/1605108) that Covid has also brought with it a depression crisis. But who listens?

Education is another sector that has been hit badly by the pandemic. Initially, the lockdown caused the [closure of all educational institutions](https://www.dawn.com/news/1537635). The equity in the move was strange. No one was prepared for this unprecedented phenomenon. Then the privileged private sector scrambled to put together an arrangement for online teaching. It required an expensive infrastructure — training teachers, preparing teaching schedules of a more challenging kind and getting students and their parents to acquire smart devices. This approach worked for the more privileged who had the resources. The less privileged had nothing and in spite of some efforts by NGOs their learning loss was absolute. As time wore on, it was clear that Covid was here to stay until the vaccine worked. The idea of EdTech caught on. Why not teach students through technology? The Punjab government has gone for it in a big way with the help of the World Bank. The idea seems exciting. Great minds from foreign universities could be brought into our classrooms and educational resources such as the Khan Academy made accessible to Pakistanis.

**Read more:** [*Children’s education badly affected due to pandemic: survey*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1653043/childrens-education-badly-affected-due-to-pandemic-survey)

But not much attention is paid to the fact that it is those with resources that can benefit from EdTech. The bulk of our students are denied access to uninterrupted electricity supply and internet connectivity. Even smartphones and laptops are not universally available.

Above all, human engagement that is absolutely essential for students is not present. Besides technology is no substitute for human kindness and knowledge, the two basic qualities that make a teacher indispensable.

Disparity and inequity will characterise the post-Covid education system and that will in turn have a severe impact on society. That will not be a happy world — isolated and unequal.

[**www.zubeidamusafa.com**](http://www.zubeidamusafa.com)

*Published in Dawn, October 22nd, 2021*