Discussion and insights on the South African experience with poverty and COVID-19

Amina Ebrahim

WIDER Webinar Series, 7 July 2020
Between a Rock and a Hard Place

**The paper:** Lockdown poses challenges for those living hand-to-mouth. The trade-off between poverty and getting C-19.

**Findings:** Work-related mobility during lockdown is higher in regions with high poverty rates relative to regions with low poverty rates.

**Interpretation:** Lower levels of lockdown compliance due to the necessity to work. Poorer areas comply less with shelter-in-place.

**Data:** Google COVID-19 mobility [data](#), survey data and C-19 data
Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.

Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide - Data last updated 6th Jul, 11:55 (GMT+02:00)
Regional Context – South Africa

• Lockdown largely viewed as a necessity to “flatten the curve”
• Complete lockdown not possible
  • Food supplies required
  • Need hospital staff and municipal workers = “essential workers”
  • Transport and grocery store workers also essential
• National lockdown started 27 March and continues (102 days)
  • **Level 5** (23 March – 30 April): Essential services and groceries only
  • **Level 4** (1 May – 31 May): Limited movement, Exercise between 6am-9am
  • **Level 3** (1 June – present): Business travel, phased return to work and schools.
The Rock and Hard place in South Africa

Density of living space in poorer areas much higher

Schools/daycares are closed

High concentration of co-morbidities in poorer areas.

Source: Johnny Miller - Unequal Scenes
Support

Price controls on essential items

Social relief of distress food parcels and vouchers

Increase in Social Security (top up and new grant)

Source: Brenton Geach/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)
Reality

Food protests and looting

Implementation problems

Food parcel corruption

Source: Mary-Anne Gontsana/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)