

**SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY,
SUSTAINABILITY AND COVID-19**

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RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY VOLUME 29

SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND COVID-19

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

With thanks, the editors dedicate this volume to COVID-19's essential workers, including medical personnel and our children, Sandhu, Camille, and Cyprian.

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PREFACE

Introduction to the Collection: Understanding the Scope of COVID-19 Effect on Social and Health Inequalities and on the Environment

The global spread of COVID-19 has had devastating effects on countries worldwide in terms of population health, economy, politics, and countries' sustainable development. This particular volume of *Research in Political Sociology* provides an opportunity to engage in a critical dialogue on the consequences and interactions of COVID-19 with social inequalities and environmental sustainability. The volume explores the pandemic's global devastating effects on countries' development, including populations' health, economy, and politics, and demonstrates COVID-19's impact on the environment. This book's chapters address how the pandemic amplified the already profound social inequalities in developed and developing countries and exposed limitations to environmental protection and vulnerabilities of ecological sustainability and environmental justice.

In particular, understanding that it is critical to determine the scope, magnitude, and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic effects on the most vulnerable groups, this volume addresses the pandemic's impact on countries' development, exploring the consequences and interactions of COVID-19 with social, economic, and health inequalities. Simultaneously the book addresses the problem of sustainability engaging in a dialogue of whether the sustainable development and environmental sustainability were jeopardized or enforced by the pandemic. Chapters of the volume represent studies conducted across major geographic regions from North America, and South America, to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

The volume is organized into two sections; the first section describes the effects of COVID-19 on social inequality, and the second focuses on environmental sustainability. Subsequently, the first part of the volume addresses the impact of COVID-19 on countries' development, exploring the consequences and interactions of COVID-19 with social inequalities concentrating on pandemic's exposure of the enduring social-economic and health inequalities existing across the globe. From Southeast Asia, South American to Europe and North America, the pandemic overwhelmingly impacted poor communities and disadvantaged minority populations. This section is organized into two subresearch categories (1) healthcare inequality and COVID-19, and (2) socio-economic inequality and COVID-19.

The first three chapters of the volume address interactions of COVID-19 with the systematic health inequalities. Unequal allocation of resources, inadequate access to healthcare service, and unfavorable to the poorer population healthcare

policies have created an unprecedented disparity among rich and poor populations' access the healthcare system across the world. Systematic inequalities in access to healthcare services are one of the leading factors responsible for the loss of millions of lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, a paper by Aladuwaka, Alagan, and Mishra (Alabama State University, Montgomery, AL) and Wejnert (University at Buffalo, NY) demonstrates the effects of social determinants of health on outcomes of COVID-19 in Black Belt communities in Alabama. This paper uses geo-spatial analysis (Geographic Information Systems) to examine the association between COVID-19, social determinants of health, and the systematic health disparity to open a debate on the influence of poverty and racial inequality on outcomes of COVID-19 in the Black Belt region in Alabama. The Black Belt region is home to a predominantly African American population, with limited access to medical care and limited use of preventive healthcare services. As the authors claim, substantial poverty, limited economic resources, mistrust of healthcare professionals, and vaccine hesitancy amplified the severity of COVID-19 effects.

Continuing the focus on minority populations' unequal access to health care, Żaklina Skrenty, from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, explores existing discrimination against the elderly in the Polish healthcare system and intensification of the unequal treatment of older patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the author argues, protective policies are urgently needed to prevent insufficient access to health care by the elderly population; measures are especially needed during health crises with more severe consequences to older populations. The need for policies correcting existing inequalities in the healthcare system also addresses Jagriti Upadhyaya from Sardar Patel University of Police, Security & Criminal Justice, Jodhpur, India, studying frontline healthcare workers in India. She demonstrates the irreplaceable role of community healthcare workers, the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), whom the author considers the invisible frontline warriors of COVID-19. Moreover, Upadhyaya addresses discrimination against frontline healthcare workers in India, illustrating the ASHA workers' pivotal role in securing communities' access to health care during the COVID-19 pandemic but being rarely appreciated for their services and remaining underpaid by the administration of the Indian government.

Another timely research on healthcare policies and practices during COVID-19 are chapters discussing uneven healthcare and food distribution policies during the pandemic. In many countries, the lack of uniform healthcare policies added to the spread of the pandemic and augmented healthcare crisis. It generated distrust of the government and public confusion concerning public health safety measures and prevention, including mask-wearing requirements and availability of personal protective equipment (PPE). In particular, Rossi (Alabama State University) and Andria Moore (Arizona State University) explore "a naturalistic observation of mask-wearing behavior" during the COVID-19 2020–2021 pandemic in a southeastern town of the United States. Authors conclude that the mask-wearing requirement has generated an unprecedented hesitance among some groups in the U.S., believing that this requirement violates personal freedoms. Sunita George's (Western Illinois University, IL) study

focuses on unequal food distribution policies and food provision during the pandemic in Chennai, India.

Several chapters of this volume focus on social inequalities that broadened during COVID-19. The chapter by Jeeva Niriella, from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, discusses the critical issue of gender-based violence and COVID-19. Niriella's research mainly focuses on the legislative and judicial measures for protecting and supporting victims of domestic violence in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 situation. Kamalaveni from Bharathiar University in India explores gender relations and gender inequality within administrative institutions. Using case studies from private and public institutions in India, Kamalaveni assesses the perpetuation of gender discriminatory practices among the members of institutional committees and the dynamics and constitution of internal committees in government and private offices magnified during the pandemic. Naima Mohammadi (Padova University, Italy) and Fattah Hatami (University of Tehran, Iran) discuss the experiences, seclusion, and discrimination of married Muslim women resorting to online dating sites for psychological support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, a paper by Malik, Prakash, and Suman addresses growth of existing social inequalities among disadvantaged populations, i.e., the rural, impoverished communities in India showing the "Impact of Covid-19 on Employment in Himachal Pradesh" addressed a critical aspect of COVID-19 and economic disparity in India.

The second part of the volume focuses on sustainability, including environmental sustainability and practices of sustainable living as affected by the spread of COVID-19. A chapter by Camille Wejnert-Depue from John Hopkins University focuses on ecological sustainability exploring two examples of biodiversity loss (1) the tragedy of the commons and (2) deforestation. The author provides potential policy solutions to combat the tragedy of the commons and deforestation, especially while considering implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on biodiversity supportive policies and their execution. Following the sustainability topic, Profs. Jauk, Gill, and Everhardt with graduate student Caruana argued that the global spread of COVID-19 continues to have devastating effects in all the world's societies, and it has also exacerbated existing social inequalities within the US carceral complex. Authors demonstrate the inequality while providing a sociological exploration of women's prison gardens in pandemic times.

A chapter by Ligaya Lindio McGovern from Indiana University (USA) examines the interconnection between environmental sustainability and sustainable development. She argues that countries' sustainable development must include human rights observed by political regimes, including economic, social, cultural, and political rights and environmental rights. Nevertheless, as the author argues, in the Philippines, the experience of indigenous communities with corporate mining shows a tremendous disjuncture between environmental sustainability and human rights and sustainable development. The indigenous people's fundamental, inalienable rights are set aside, violated as if they do not matter. Such violations put barriers to realizing the U.N. 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and these barriers are particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. While COVID-19 provides a risk to people's

health, militarization, and suppression of dissent movement defending rights of indigenous populations compound the risk to health with an extreme violation of indigenous populations' right to life.

The sustainable development issue is addressed in a paper by James Linn from the U.S., Jorge Chuaqui University of Valparaiso, Chile, and Aristoteles Alencar from the Federal University of Amazonas, Brazil, exploring Chile's political and economic sustainable development during COVID-19. In particular, the authors provide a comprehensive description and in-depth analysis of Chile's COVID-19 pandemic and political crisis, considering a structural analysis of the Chilean economy and discussing how Chileans in different social strata are coping with both COVID-19 and the social revolution. Similar in character is a paper by Izabela Skorzynska, from Adam Mickiewicz University, in Poland, reflecting on whether today's consumer attitudes promoted and practiced as the pursuit of sustainable development have their genealogy in the everyday life of Polish women. Skorzynska argues that women's past practices of sawing wardrobe, canning, and economic frugality that constituted a segment of living conditions during communism can teach a lesson on using modest resources frugally and inventively, to ensure sustainable development living. The author asserts that old everyday practices of saving resources through ingenious, creative use are returning to favor in a time of sustainable development. With the awareness of contemporary civilization threats, their usefulness may once again turn out to be helpful for humanity.

Overall, this volume contributes to studies on this extraordinary moment in human history using a global perspective. Such analyses are vital to understanding countries' progress during and after the pandemic to build a future where opportunities and advancement rise for all and environmental sustainability flourishes.

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