

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Review of the Lockdown Regulations' Impact on Informal Businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown regulations caused enormous changes in all business sectors because many businesses were not allowed to operate. Only a few were regarded as essential businesses, such as pharmacies and grocery shops, and allowed to operate. Lockdown regulations negatively affected the South African informal sector. As a result, it is difficult to provide accurate statistics on the entrepreneurs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are no official statistics from the informal sector. This paper aims to examine how the informal sector was affected by the lockdown down restrictions within South Africa. The paper adopts a systematic review methodology using Google Scholar and Web of Science or Scopes to search for articles on informal entrepreneurship, COVID-19, and South Africa to draw a conclusion from the analysed data. The findings indicated that most of the businesses in the informal sector were negatively affected, including workers because some of them lost their jobs and others did not receive their usual salaries due to limited working hours. There were disruptions in the supply chain and pricing of goods and services, and people could not have sustained their income during the lockdown in South Africa. In conclusion, the informal sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors that lacks access to appropriate risk management structures, and most people live on a hand to mouth basis. COVID-19 has negatively affected the informal sector, mainly through distribution and marketing systems.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; entrepreneurs' disruption; informal sector; lockdown restriction

Introduction

According to Battersby and Marshak (2016), around 70 percent of families in poorer South African neighbourhood's source food from the informal sector. This is because they are closer to the people, there is no need to travel, and some people can buy food from the taxi rank on their way home (Wegerif and Hebinck, 2016). Informal workers are identified as regular and casual workers who do not have employment contracts and are unregulated, own-account workers and employers (Benhura and Magejo, 2020). Etim and Daramola (2020) describe the informal sector as consisting of small-scale, self-employed activities (with or without hired workers) which is usually a low-level company or small business with the primary objective of generating employment and income. They also note that it has regular unpaid workers in family businesses, and some are casual workers who earn wages. Others sell in the streets as street vendors. Bartik *et al.* (2020) argue that small businesses consist of a small number of employees, ranging from one to five or one to 50 employees depending on the kind of business, and the majority of these employees are not registered. Bartlett III and Morse (2020) acknowledge that small businesses play a fundamental role in the country's economy by creating employment, particularly for people who are skilled or unskilled.

Islam and Alam (2019) state that the informal sector has been a source of employment that has existed for years and it helps generate income in many different homes through selling different products in the streets as a street vendor. Musara and Nieuwenhuizen (2020) agree that there have been many families that have been surviving

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and are still surviving through income from the informal sector. It has decreased the unemployment rate and it is estimated to make up 23.71 percent of the South African GDP. The South African informal sector also helps in providing job opportunities for the greater population who cannot find jobs in the formal sector (Narula 2020). The decrease in the labour force because of the COVID-19 lockdown had a brutal impact on the overall economic activities needed to keep economies afloat at a global economic scale. Khambule (2022) states that the sustainability of livelihood can still be seen in a country of uneven development with a high level of poverty and unemployment as people are able to find different ways of surviving. Buheji *et al.* (2020) explain that the 2008 economic global pandemic created poverty in the country. There were so many challenging impacts after that pandemic, such as high food prices, spending scale increases, and that most people who suffered spent 50 to 70 percent of their income on food in both rural and urban areas.

Rogan and Skinner (2020) state that in the second quarter of the 2020 lockdown in South Africa there was a 29 percent drop in informal employment compared to the eight percent decline in formal employment. The informal sector is a vulnerable segment of the labour market because it relies on daily earnings to survive. Chakraborty (2020) explains that some of the informal workers did not lose their income, however, they earned less than before. Rasul *et al.* (2021) state that 1.5 million informal workers lost their livelihoods over the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the 840,000 job losses for formal workers. Monitor (2020) explains that the eight percent decrease that happened in the informal sector caused a 29 percent decrease in the economy. Benhura and Magejo (2020) state that South Africa was also on the list of the investigated countries to check if they have discovered any new recovery in terms of the worked hours and real hourly wage since the country was eased from the lockdown regulation from level five (April 2020) to level 3 (June 2020). The results were based on gender differences and 72 of informal sector employed men saw a decreased income, which was much higher compared to the decline experienced for formally employed men. Informal workers in urban areas also experienced an 81 percent decline in wages, which was significant compared to urban formal workers. Furthermore, the results show a significantly higher decrease in hours worked among men and women in the informal sector relative to those in the formal sector. Informal workers in urban areas were more vulnerable compared to those in rural areas. Other results also showed that the rate of job loss was higher (36%) among informal workers compared to formal workers (11%) (Benhura and Magejo, 2020).

Köhler *et al.* (2021) clarify that the South African lockdown has affected a range of vulnerable groups, particularly the poorest households, it has also affected the less skilled, including low-wage workers. The research conducted by the Department of Labour indicated that there was an employment loss amongst the younger generation, especially those who earn lower incomes, have formal education, do not have union memberships in the secondary sectors (manufacturing and construction), and who were low and semi-skilled workers. The aim of this paper is to examine how the South African informal sector survived the COVID-19 lockdown regulations and the impact of the pandemic.

Methodology

The COVID-19 lockdown regulations' undoubtedly impact on the informal sector businesses. In this study, the researchers applied a systematic review methodology (Rother, 2007). The study was conducted following the PRISMA statement guidelines for methodology design (Page *et al.*, 2022). The study characteristics were used to determine the study eligibility for inclusion and the PICO framework was also used for the eligibility variants. The population of inclusive studies were those from the informal sector. The article only focused on one country, South Africa. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are represented below:

Table 1: Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
a. Journal articles and Thesis	Duplicate article
b. Articles in English	Article not published in 2020 to 2022
c. Article published in 2020 to 2022	Book section and working papers that are not complete
d. Article with open access	

The pertinent publication search regarding the South African informal sector was conducted on Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus. The search threads were "Informal sector in South Africa", "Informal sector and COVID-19", and "Informal sector and coronavirus".

The keyword search was limited to the title, abstract, and a keyword search for archived articles published between 2020 to 2022. They also had to be open access articles. A total of 51 articles were retrieved, 14 from Web of Science and 26 from Google scholar. Endnote software was used as a referencing tool to store and manage the search and selection results. Excel sheet was used for the Scopus selection, which had 11 articles. Five duplicate articles were removed, and from the three databases, 46 articles were left. Nineteen publications were screened and (16 were found that were not from South Africa, they did not have full-text excess, and three were not journal papers) were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria and 27 publications satisfied the full-text assessment. The title, keywords, and abstract were used to determine the acceptability criteria presented in Table 1. Seven pieces of literature related to the impact of COVID-19 in the South African informal sector were included; they were screened and selected.

The extraction form was designed to record the information captured from the included studies to answer the research question. Microsoft Excel was adopted to organise and tabulate data in this phase.

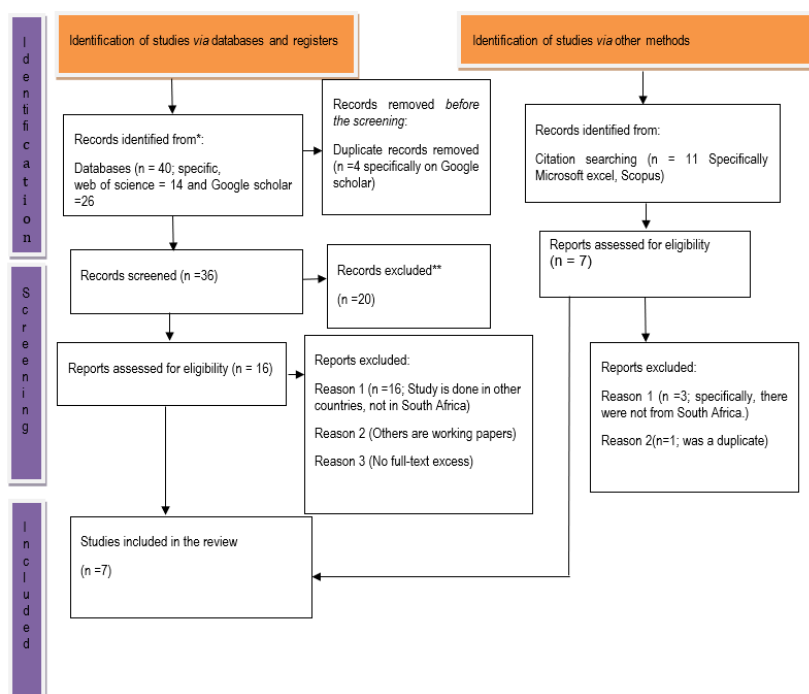


Figure 1: PRISMA diagram

Findings

Seven of the selected studies were used to analyse the impact of COVID-19 in the informal sector. The analysis of these studies indicates that there was a negative impact on the informal sector. Different studies from different South African industries indicate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the informal sector.

Table 2: The analysis of research 7 selected studies for the informal sector in South Africa

Title of the paper	Method paper and result	Reference
Environmental and Occupational Health Exposures and Outcomes of Informal Street Food Vendors in South Africa: A Quasi-Systematic Review	Quantitative study Results indicate that informal workers are exposed to workplace risk that affects their health and wellbeing. Exposed to COVID-19 due to the lack of access to water, waste disposal facilities, and basic hygiene awareness and practice.	(Sepadi and Nkosi, 2022)

<p>COVID-19 and the informal economy in a small town in South Africa: governance implications in the post-COVID era</p>	<p>Quantitative study The poor people are the ones who face the consequences of the lockdown restrictions because of not having secured jobs. They are losing their income, running out of food and savings, face an inability to afford rent and other living expenses, loss of assets, and setbacks in paying employees.</p>	<p>(Khambule, 2022)</p>
<p>COVID-19 Pandemic and Food Security in South Africa: The Government's Response</p>	<p>Qualitative study The impact of the lockdown regulations has also caused a disturbance in the food supply system products, with the instability of the food supply demands affecting poor people who rely on the informal sector to buy their food from street vendors. They were forced to go and purchase food at the expensive supermarket that they cannot afford because of the lockdown regulations which forced informal sector to not operate.</p>	<p>(Mbatha, Ndimande, and Tembe, 2021)</p>
<p>Leadership and early strategic response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic at a COVID-19 designated hospital in South Africa</p>	<p>Quantitative study South Africa announces country worldwide lockdown, and many people were concerned about what will happen to South Africa because of the informal settlements that the country has, with overcrowding and poverty facing the country. Part of the lockdown regulations was that no gatherings were allowed and people must quarantine should they have symptoms, but people who stayed in the informal settlements did not have the opportunity to do so because the environment does not allow them. There is no space in their households and there is a risk that they might infect their colleagues at work.</p>	<p>(Parker <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p>
<p>A Study Protocol to Assess the Respiratory Health Risks and Impacts amongst Informal Street Food Vendors in the Inner City of Johannesburg, South Africa</p>	<p>Quantitative study The study addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led many people to go back to informal work, such as street trading opportunities in big cities. However, this work is in the same cities where air pollution is of concern. The result of the study indicates that informal entrepreneurs who work in the streets or sell in the taxi ranks and street vendors were at risk of being affected by air pollution which risked their health because there were no measures of COVID-19 were in place to protect them.</p>	<p>(Sepadi and Nkosi, 2021)</p>
<p>Urban-Sensitive Social Protection: How Universalized Social Protection Can Reduce Urban Vulnerabilities Post COVID-19</p>	<p>Qualitative study The study is about the urban protection programs that aim to help and reach the vulnerable and poor people who might benefit from the program in case of natural disasters. These programmes were limited in Africa and Asia. COVID-19 has shown this big gap in coverage, given the impact of lockdowns on the livelihoods of the urban poor. South Africa lacks the social insurance that would have protected the poor people who are dependent on informal sector jobs and street vendors to have some sort of income during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. This insurance would aim to boost them while everyone is instructed to stay at home and still be able to afford to buy the basic needs. When the informal sectors are not allowed to work that meant there is no income for their workers because they are no-work, no-pay type of jobs.</p>	<p>(Devereux and Cuesta, 2021)</p>
<p>"Informal" food traders and food security: experiences from the Covid-19 response in South Africa</p>	<p>Qualitative study Informal entrepreneurs were expected to have all the new hygiene products that the government had instructed them to use to clean with before and after they saw a client. Already, that was a disadvantage to the informal sector because that increased expenses while they did not have any customers to buy. Most of them could not provide all the cleaning products because they did not have the money to spend on sanitiser.</p>	<p>(Wegerif 2020)</p>

Frequency Analysis

Figure 2 indicates the number of publications focusing on the impact of COVID-19 in the South African informal sector per year, from 2020 to 2022. In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread in South Africa and the President announced a national lockdown, there was a high number of research articles published. Twelve studies were published in the year 2020, which is higher compared to the following year 2021, with only five studies published. The year 2021 shows a decrease of published articles compared to 2020. The decrease could be because COVID-19 was already in the country for a year and solutions on how to tackle or manage the COVID-19 were coming through to avoid rampant spreading and harmful effects on vulnerable sectors.

Six articles were published in 2022 (last updated 29 August 2022). There is a slight increase from the previous year 2021 with one additional article. There is a positive sign that researchers are still trying to find solutions to what happened during COVID-19, even though South Africa is no longer in a state of disaster. Givetash (2022) states that President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the end of the country's state of disaster on the 4th of April 2022, hence, many restrictions were lifted. Normal daily life and business operations, which were placed on hold for 750 days, were officially restored.

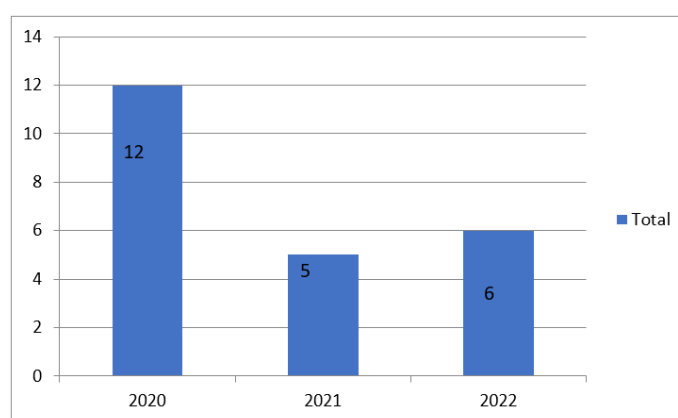


Figure 2: Number of publications per year in the informal sector

Subject Area

The subject area analysis in Figure 3 shows branches of the study researched. Observations from the COVID-19 era show that it impacted different areas. As Oparinde and Govender (2020) note, the novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has presented several challenges worldwide. From the year 2020 to 2022, Social Sciences published seven articles, which is the highest in these studies, followed by Medicine with six articles, and the lowest with one article published in Agriculture and Biological Sciences. Figure 3 indicates that the impact of COVID-19 on the informal sector negatively affected six different sectors in different ways. Researchers needed to find solutions to prepare the informal sector in the future should COVID-19 or a similar pandemic arise again.

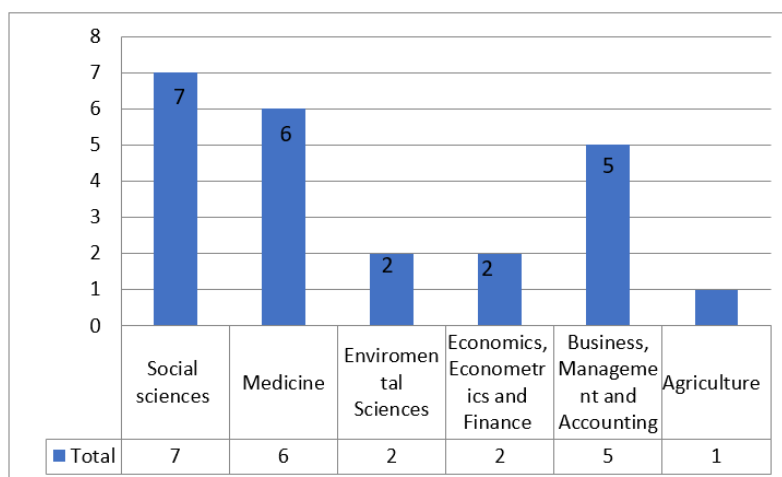


Figure 3: Subject areas that were impacted by COVID-19 in the informal sector

Methodological Analysis

In the methodology, a lot of researchers used various methods to conduct research. These include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Figure 4 presents the methods used to conduct studies on the impact of COVID-19 on the South African informal sector. Figures show that Systematic Review and Analysis Variance (ANOVA) has the same result as the method being used in the publication (N=4). Furthermore, other methods shown were analytical cross section (N=1), critical review (N=3), descriptive analysis (N=1), multimethodology (N=1), the observation method (N=1), opinion piece (N=1), quasi-experimental (N=2), questionnaire (N=3), secondary data (N=1), and semi-structured interviews (N=1).

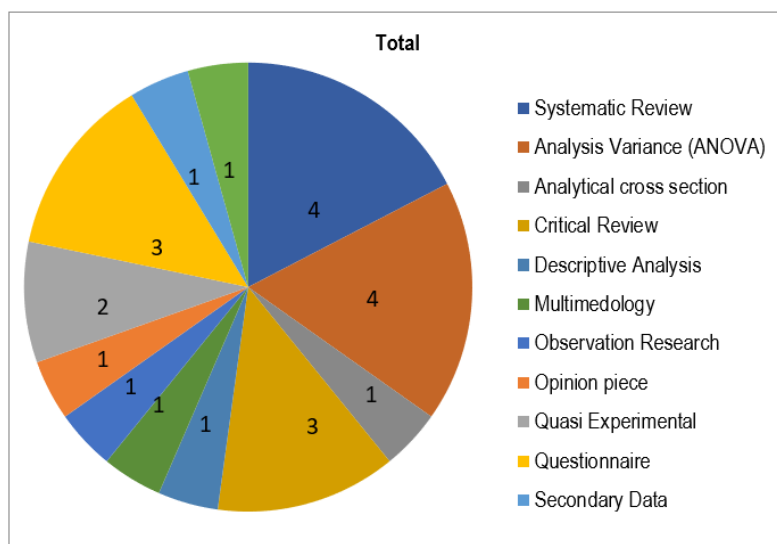


Figure 4: Distribution of methodology approach used by 23 publications

Publication Affiliation

There was a collaboration among different authors in different universities and countries to compare and gather all the necessary information that was needed to publish the papers. Figure 5 shows the South African universities that participated in the publication of the 23 studies. Different authors came together. Articles published in 2020 indicates that seven South African universities participated: The University of Cape Town had the highest publications (N=5) followed by the University of Witwatersrand (N=3). The other results show that Cape peninsula published two papers, the University of Pretoria published two, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal published one along with Stellenbosch University, Rhodes university, and North West university.

The articles published in the year 2021 indicate that only two universities were able to publish: The University of Johannesburg (N=1) and the University of Pretoria (N=1). The articles published in the year 2022 indicate that the University of Johannesburg published two, which was the highest number. Other results show the University of Free State published one along with the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of Zululand, and the University of South Africa.

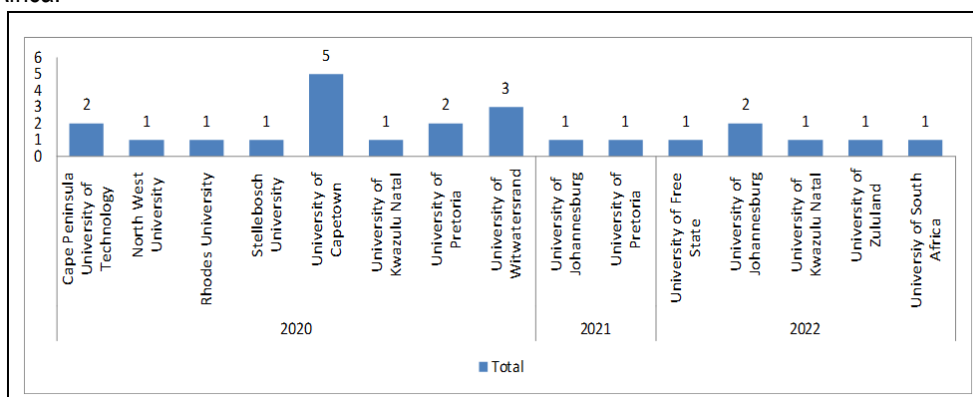


Figure 5: South African universities that participated in the 23 publications of the study.

The study only focused on South Africa (SA), however, South African researchers collaborated with other researchers from outside SA, representing their universities as shown in table 2 which indicates the year that the universities participated in the publication of the papers. In 2020 there was the highest number of collaborating universities; eight other universities participated in studies on the impact of COVID-19 on the informal sector. Nottingham Trent University, University of Africa, Toru-Orua, University of Cambridge, University of Manitoba, University of Nairobi, University of Strathclyde, University of West Indies, and the University of Yaoundé. The 2022 year included the universities that contributed to the 23 publications, which are University College Dublin and the University of South Florida.

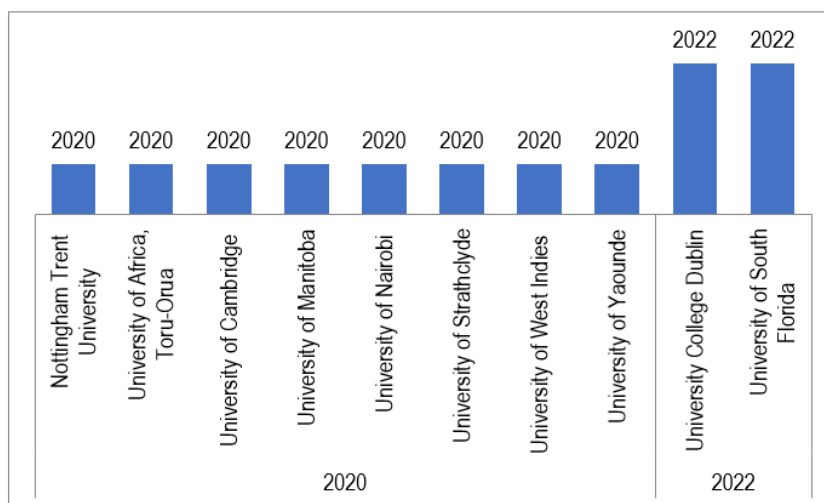


Figure 6: Other universities that participated in the publication

Besides the universities that collaborated with other researchers, other South African organisations also published. Other countries and organisations are also listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Organisation that participated in the study

Organization	Year
Institution of development studies	2021
Bar Hostess Empowerment and support program (BHESP)	2020
Partners for Health and Development in Africa	2020
Sex workers outreach program (SWOP)	2020
Health options for young men on HIV/AIDS/STI (HOYMAS)	2020
Ministry of Health Nairobi	2020
Centre for AIDS Program of Research in South Africa	2020
Development Policy Research Unit	2021
MRC Epidemiology Unit	2021
South Africa Medical Research Council	2020
Kenya Medical Research Institution	2020
Caribbean Institution for Health	2020
University of Witwatersrand Faculty of Health Science	2020
Economic Social Cultural Council (ECOSOCC)	2020
Strathclyde Business School, United Kingdom	2020
College of Business and Economics	2020
Emergency Medical services	2020
Environment and Urbanisation	2020
African Centre for Cities office	2021
Faculty of Health Science	2020
Partnership for Economic Policy	2020
South African Medical Research Council Faculty of Health Science	2021
Women in Global Health	2022
Vayu Global Health Foundation	2022
Harvard Medical School	2022

Discussion

This study adopted a systematic review methodology to review the literature on the South African informal sector. There were 51 publications received, however, the paper utilised 23 published articles following the criteria needed for study. Many organisations and different universities also participated and published to find a solution to how the informal sector can survive the negative effects of COVID-19. Many research projects were conducted to prove that the informal sector was negatively affected, whether from a business perspective or food trade and supply perspective, which also affected the informal sector. Khambule (2022) explained that the lockdown regulations were implemented globally to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 affected working hours for many employees. Workdays of the week were reduced and other people lost their jobs because some small business could not survive. Job losses were recorded at 71 percent in the year of 2020 because of the low economic activities (Monitor, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 has affected many industries in South Africa, including the informal sector. The South African informal sector constitutes about a third of the total workforce, approximately five million workers in 2020, and it is regarded as an important sector of the economy that has the potential to help reduce the 55 percent poverty rate (Ionut, 2021). President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a complete lockdown for 21 days, from 26 March 2020, due to 927 confirmed cases and no deaths. The strict lockdowns stopped most economic activities, further impacting other areas of the economy. However, the severe lockdown's negative impacts weighed heavily on the poor. They had a higher risk of starvation than the risk of dying from COVID-19. This raised doubts on the authenticity of a full lockdown (De Groot and Lemanski, 2021). The COVID-19 showed a negative impact on the informal sector. Regulations had to be followed during the South African lockdown. Measures were supposed to be implemented by the South African government, but those measures caused catastrophic consequences for firms and workers (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2020). Feder and Yu (2020) noted that with the lockdown measures that were put in place many informal workers were affected because they were dependent on their informal job incomes for basic survival needs such as food and water. Most of the workers did not have savings kept aside for emergencies and pandemics.

De Groot and Lemanski (2021) note that as part of the South African lockdown measures, the World Health Organisation (WHO) advised social distancing to limit the spread of COVID-19. This meant no gatherings for more than 100 people as part of the pre-lockdown. For example, the president's national lockdown speech demanded that "everyone must do everything within their means to avoid contact with other people". In urban South Africa, low-income households typically rely on roadside informal trading and small-scale spaza shops that are spread throughout settlements for daily shopping. Daily shopping is common because they do not have the means to buy in bulk, hence, they buy food supplies from street vendors. The informal food sector is essential for the food security of the urban poor, and their capacity to comply with lockdown restrictions were limited. Naidoo (2021) explains that the lockdown restrictions affected many informal entrepreneurs, the township salons were also closed and many of them were dependent on the daily income that they received from each customer that visited their salons. Informal entrepreneurs did not have any contingency plans to survive the first 21 days.

Mbatha *et al.* (2021) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic disturbed the food supply system by decreasing buying power, increasing food prices, and causing high food demand. The more food cost increases, the more tuck-shop owners and street vendors need to increase their prices. Their regular customers were not able to afford, support, and buy food from them. The South African government intervened by providing food parcels to the poor people to make sure that they were taken care of in this critical time of the lockdown restriction.

Conclusion

The lockdown restrictions had a huge negative impact of the informal sector; however, it also showed the significance of the informal sector within the country's economic growth. A big gap was revealed during the lockdown restrictions. The need for government to try and protect the informal sector, including developing a social protection plan or security plan for the sector, was conspicuous. The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions also had an impact on the high unemployment rate because some of the businesses could not survive the restrictions. There were limitations in the study because it only focused on South Africa. The study did not include any other countries that were also affected by the pandemic like South Africa. Lack of data due to the limited timeframe of 2020 to 2022 was also a limiter, although researchers are still attempting to explore the pandemic.

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