

THE IMPACT OF COVID – 19 ON WOMEN IN INDIA : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTARCT

Government the world over are struggling to contain the covid -19 pandemic. While some voices have flagged the impacts on Women , Gender concerns are not yet shaping the decisions that mainly male leader are making . At the same time , many of the impacts of covid -19 are hitting Women hardest. In this ,Social, Economic, Health and Educational impact can be seen . The report of data indicates that the Covid-19 pandemic has been harsher on women. After India went into the lockdown last March .cases of domestic violence saw a sudden rise .Data trends drawn from routine surveys show that women are more likely to have lost their jobs than men as overall employment shrank under the economic impact of the covid outbreak. In general, it is clear that women have suffered greater income losses than men. Not only in the Economic field ,Social Educational and health also have a strong negative impact on during Covid-19 pandemic. In this paper ,We are going to discuss the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Social, Economic, Health and Education status of women.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemic, Women, Social, Economic, Health Impact, Government.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life. The Coronavirus disease pandemic ,which originated in the city of wuhan,china has quickly spread to various countries with many cases having been reported worldwide. In india as of 08 may 2020, 56,342 positive cases have been reported. The Indian government implemented a 55- days lockdown throughout the country that started on March 25th 2020, to reduce the transmission of the virus.

The pandemic and the lockdown are trying times for every individual but for the already helpless group , the women and the young children specifically girl children , are facing the worst of it all. Fueled by mandatory stay-at-home rules, social distancing ,economic uncertainties and anxieties caused by the coronavirus pandemic , domestic violence has increased globally. Empowering women is the need of the hour . Women getting an education, healthcare ,safety ,equal opportunity and a life of independence and dignity has been a mission for visionaries around the globe .However the mission and hopes of million of women make to equal as men have come to a sudden pause in the midst of the recent pandemic of coronavirus diseases .Due to this Coronavirus the economic ,social and educational status of women is being affected very badly. Talking about private institution within the economic sector ,women had to lose their job or salary has been reduced and the women labour who work in factories had to leave their jobs due to the closure of factories, violence against women can also be seen in the social sector like, domestic violence ,marital rape and non-marital rape ,mental abuse. The potential impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on women education are numerous and diverse. Most obviously , many school ,college around the world remain closed affecting girls education directly.

Economic Impact

Emerging evidence on the impact of covid-19 suggests that women's economic and productive lives will be affected disproportionately and differently from men. Across the globe ,women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. In india , covid-19 pandemic on labour market highlight that women in india are 7 times more likely to lose work during the national lockdown and 11 times more likely to not return to work after a job loss.

CMIE data , which perhaps is the best indicator to determine job losses, shows a persistent decline in the employment rate for urban women .Before the start of the pandemic ,7.5 percent of women in urban areas were employed . The number fell to 5 percent in April and has barely recovered since. In august 2016 , the employment rate for urban women had dropped to 6.9 percent in December 2019. The pandemic , in that case, just accelerated the trends.

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When government of India imposed nationwide lockdown has left millions of migrant women unemployed and starved for food, placing a huge financial burden on these women, who contribute substantially to their household income. Though men account for over 80 percent of all internal migration for work, female migration more than doubled in the decade to 2011. Yet the issues particulars remain largely ignored in policy and programme interventions.

From April onwards, job recovery has risen steadily, but has been lopsided in terms of gender. For men, the job graph has been a steady rise, while for women there has been a dip in October and November figures, economist Mitali Nokore told *indiaspend*. In November 2020, eight months after the lockdown began and five months after the phased reopening, there were still 13.5 Million fewer people, out of which 6.8 Million Men and 6.7 Million Women in the labour force compared to November 2019. In percentage terms, the force had shrunk by 13 percent for women but just 2 percent for men. This means that 13 percent women had dropped out of the labour force they were neither employed nor looking for a job.

Social Impact

Women constitute the first line of helpless class in any crises but Covid-19 has made their life highly challenging and complicated. As millions of people have been forced to stay at home due to pandemic caused lockdown, women's livelihood stands still but the burden of work has increased at home.

In the fight against Covid-19 pandemic, the women are in the high risk of contracting Covid-19 because they are the main caregivers in their homes, communities and health facilities. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2020 women make up to 70 percent of global healthcare workers and as much as 95 percent of long-term care workers. However, their sufferings are more than their male counterparts.

The women at home are also facing multiple problems. These problems and sufferings are higher for women in the underprivileged group that have single room accommodation for the whole family or living in makeshift accommodations. The surveys and media reports during the lockdown period also suggest an increase in gender crimes across communities.

Gender- Based Violence

There has been steep rise in crime against women across the country due to the novel coronavirus outbreaks. As per the record of the National Commission for Women (NCW), a total of 587 complaints were received from March 23 to April 16, out of which 239 are related to domestic violence. The incidence of gender-based abuse and violence is a "Shadow Pandemic", as highlighted by the UN Women and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Women and girls are not only experiencing stress, enhanced workload and limited resources but they are also the victims of physical, sexual and mental abuse.

Concerned on the rising number of complaints related to Domestic Violence NCW launched a Whatsapp Number- 7217735372- on April 10 to report domestic violence on an emergency basis during the lockdown. Today women and girls are highly technology-savvy but they are helpless in using this number because of the patriarchal society. The male members of the family generally have control on mobile, computers and other forms of technical devices resulting in rarely reported cases of gender-based violence.

Health impact

The Covid-19 pandemic and strict lockdown in India have affected the health services especially for women such as maternal health, family planning and abortion services adversely. While the medical facilities were exempted the availability of health providers were also less due to the enhanced fear of infection among them. Although the Government of India deemed RMNCAH+N (Reproductive, Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health and Nutrition) services made these services essential and available in mid-April it continued to be a big challenge. The limited availability of essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, stockouts of supplies of contraceptives and menstrual hygiene products were a big challenge. The pregnant women find it difficult to access antenatal and post natal care or get to functioning health posts for delivery. Limited resources and fear of contracting infection have led to significant reduction in tubal ligations, IUDs insertions in the private sector.

Impact on Education

Girls education has been specifically challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for girls from low-income household and girls in rural areas. Girls have faced threats including increases in child marriage, teenage or early pregnancy, and gender based violence, many girls were married off in exchange for money as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic on families.

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There is now a rising concern that COVID-19 might intensify these barriers and increase the gender gap in education. Girls are at more risk than boys of being discriminated against in terms of access to technology, household chores, and child marriage. Before COVID-19, India had 30 million out-of-school children, out of which 40% were adolescent girls. It is projected that post COVID-19, close to 10 million secondary school girls might dropout and a large number of these can be from India.

The potential impacts of COVID-19 on girls' education are numerous. The most direct impact has been through the shutting down of schools to curb the spread of the virus. Since then, distance learning facilities (online platforms, TV broadcasting, radio, etc.) have been adopted to facilitate children's learning during school closures. However, it has failed to reach all students due to the massive digital disparity across wealth, location, and gender. In India, the poorest girls and those living in rural areas have much less access to technology than boys. There exists a 50 percent gender gap in mobile internet users in India where 21% of women and 42% of men use mobile internet. Moreover, an assessment on issues faced by adolescents during Covid-19 found that more boys than girls had access to digital infrastructures such as mobile phones, internet services, radio, and media. With such low access to technology, digital schooling will further disengage girls from education and widen the educational inequalities among learners.

Even if girls do have access to technology at home, they are more likely to be disproportionately burdened with domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, sibling care, collecting water, especially since schools, anganwadi, and child care centres are closed. The burden of household responsibilities keeps girls away from education and limits their learning opportunities. Household chores is one of the most commonly cited reasons by women for discontinuing their education. Among the percentage of ever enrolled women (3-35 years) currently not attending education, 30.2 percent reported engagement in domestic activities as their reason for discontinuing education.

Besides school closures, the extensive loss of livelihoods due to COVID-19 will also impact girls' education. Many might dropout of the education system as the financial and opportunity cost of girls' education is higher than boys', especially for poor households. Thus, as families go through economic hardships, it is likely that they reconsider the above costs associated with their daughters' education. This becomes a bigger issue for adolescent girls since secondary education is not free of cost, unlike primary education. Further, there already exists a pro-male bias in the intra-household allocation of education expenditure, which gradually increases from primary up to the secondary stage. This can be through the non-enrolment of girls in schools or lower expenditures on her schooling.

Both, the lack of access to schools and economic hardships due to COVID-19 puts girls at a higher risk of gender-based violence and forced child marriage. Early marriage robs girls of their childhood and pulls them out of the education system. Economically over-burdened families consider it as an opportunity to free themselves from the liability of raising a girl child. Further, in situations of a crisis, families often view marrying off their daughters as a measure to ensure the safety and well-being of the girl child's future. India already bears the world's largest share of child brides equalling 23 million and is predicted to rise due to the pandemic. ChildLine India has reported a 17 percent increase in distress calls related to early marriage of girls this year in June and July as compared to 2019.

Policy Recommendations

- The government should map out a plan of action to counter the short and long-term effects of the coronavirus on women keeping in view their health, livelihoods and domestic violence. For this purpose, large-scale consultations with women organizations especially with government, civil society, and women rights bodies need to be initiated.
- Women representatives in parliament should be involved in the decision-making process to form public policies and ensure that these policies are gender just.
- Innovative crisis counseling support services should be provided to women in times when social isolation and distancing is being practiced. This can be done by making use of technology in smart phones and internet as an opportunity to better support mental health through applications that offer free mental health counseling. Create blogs or vlogs that encourage contacting counselors to talk about everyday stresses and how these can be mitigated.
- A national database should be set up immediately to register reported cases of violence against women under lockdown.
- There is a need to scale up existing health services wherever possible specifically targeted for female beneficiaries for instance by allocating a bigger budget in the health sector. By having different research and development cells in the health ministry which work on preparedness and prevention of pandemics even in normal circumstances. Increase

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doctornurse ration. Invest in paramedical care and build capacity through training of lady health workers to lessen shocks caused by pandemics.

- Action Research from a gender lens with organizations helping at the grassroots to examine what works; what is the dynamics of delivery; the impact of women's inclusion; the dynamics of collaboration between government and civil society organizations
- The efficacy of civil sector organizations should be enhanced by giving them outreach and the space to work at that level
- There is an urgent need of a robust local government system to plan and deal with local issues and priorities at their doorstep.
- Health services for all that include Family Planning and Reproductive Health facilities.
- Foolproof mechanisms should be in place to evaluate gender justice programmes being run by the government and to assess if women's needs are being addressed through policy actions.
- Provincial and district governance systems in addition to COVID-19 response teams should be used to impart safety trainings to the women, especially medical staff, who are at the frontline to deal with coronavirus patients.
- Domestic workers need to be documented and informal sector should be taken into formal database.
- SOPs should be formulated as to how respectfully the government can distribute money among women and take into account their dignity to ensure universalized distribution of cash transfer or income support is as smooth as possible.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has infected and affected men, women and non-binary groups differentially. This study has summarised the key areas in which women have been disproportionately affected by the outbreak. This is an important distinction to highlight: it is not the virus itself that causes socio-economic impacts on women, but rather the mechanisms introduced by administrations to alleviate against disease transmission which cause the downstream effects which have disproportionately affected women. Women's economic security and future economic participation has also been affected by COVID-19, both at macro and micro levels. Women have also had changes to their paid work due to the additional demands placed on them through school closures, and the unpaid care which has significantly increased within households. Women have absorbed more of this care than men, with the result that they have either not been able to continue with paid employment, or have had to juggle this paid and unpaid labour with the impact of greater psychological and mental health concerns. This was particularly acute for single parents, the majority of whom are women. As we face month 6 of these restrictions, the concern is economic security for many women and we must mitigate against the very real risks of increased rates of poverty across the world, particularly amongst single parents.

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