

PRESENT COVID-19 PERIOD ON WOMEN HEALTH ISSUES**Dr. VEENADEVI**Professor, Dept. of Political Science,
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Abstract:

The role that women play in society – the caregivers, places them in much more danger of contracting the virus than anyone else. According to a 2007 report by the World Health Organization, Typical gender roles can “influence where men and women spend their time, and the infectious agents they come into contact with, as well as the nature of exposure, its frequency and its intensity.” We can take this one step further. If as a result of the lockdown, gender roles within the household revert to the 1950s, flattening the pandemic curve would have flattened all the gains made by women towards equality across the globe. We need to be mindful of how we kill the pandemic, without making women’s equality and mental health collateral damage. As a first step towards that, we need to recognise and highlight the disproportionate gender impacts of the lockdown. While the state machinery can step in relation to IPV, the intra-household sharing of domestic chores is within the private domain. However, women that are valued for their economic contributions outside the home are also more likely to be respected inside the home. Once the lockdown ends, employers need to be especially mindful of not laying off their women employees disproportionately. Overall, policies aimed at ensuring gender equality in labour force participation and in wages will go a long way towards paving the way for gender equality inside homes.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Health care, Gender Issues, WHO, Political Polices, Self Help Groups.

Introduction:

Social distancing is the most effective way of reducing the chances of virus spread. However, this comes at an economic cost. As the world is dealing with a lockdown situation, layoffs are expected, including cancellation of recent job offers. And this has a

disproportionately negative impact on women. Owing to economic uncertainty, informal and part-time jobs stand at the forefront of jobs that are most likely of being suspended. And a major chunk of these jobs is occupied by women. The role that women play in society – the caregivers, places them in much more danger of contracting the virus than anyone else. According to a 2007 report by the World Health Organization, Typical gender roles can “influence where men and women spend their time, and the infectious agents they come into contact with, as well as the nature of exposure, its frequency and its intensity.” A virus most commonly spreads through contact, and women being the primary caregivers, come in contact with every member of the family, more frequently than others. When schools and offices are suspended for a while, women’s vulnerability to the virus is compounded. Even the burden of domestic chores increases for a woman in a lockdown situation in India. This is the reason why the rate of transmission in the household is **higher than that** in the hospitals, an Ebola virus study conducted in 2017 substantiates. When it comes to treating a patient, nurses stand at the front line, from drawing blood to collecting specimens. Their exposure to the patient is much more than the doctor, and since a majority of nurses are women, this increases their vulnerability to the virus. In fact, in the Washington State, the nursing homes have been the epicentre of the corona virus outbreak.

Objectives:

- To the COVID-19 hits the healthcare workers harder.
- To the World Health Organization report, around 88.9 percent of nurses and midwives in India are women. Globally, 70 percent of health care workers are women.
- To the Corona virus outbreak was identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and by February 2020, more than 3,000 health workers in China had contracted the disease.
- To the Owing to economic uncertainty after corona virus, informal and part-time jobs stand at the forefront of being suspended. And a major chunk of these jobs are occupied by women.

Current Social Status on Women:

Gender-based violence exacerbates with the tensions around security, money and health conditions. Within confined spaces, living conditions for certain families are not even healthy and can lead to violence against the vulnerable members of the household. So many

women are stuck with their perpetrators in the lockdowns imposed to contain the virus and helpline numbers are limited in scope due to restrictions on relocation or mobility. Across the world, but more specifically in India, the instances of domestic violence against women and young girls have increased by 100%. Feminism has been locked-down and the progress of achieving gender-equality seems to be slowing down, arrested in the cuffs of the pandemic. In content emerging from across the world, the pandemic has been declared a disaster for gender justice.

Kirthi Jayakumar, Founder, The Gender Security Project, Saahas app for survivors of Gender Based Violence says, “Across the sectors, there are a lot of indicators which predispose certain communities to more violence. Communities, where there is more alcoholism, lack of access to alcohol, can lead to violence due to withdrawal symptoms like frustration and aggression. Also, in single-income households where women are sole breadwinners, they are now unable to get the money due to lockdown, even when employers are empathetic and paying. That lack of money leads to more violence. Then there are senior women facing domestic violence and because they are immune compromised, getting out of the house is not an option at all.” Even at those homes where every day, non-physical friction exists, the chances of that converting to emotional and physical abuse in such circumstances is high. New cases of violence are being reported along with sectors predisposed to violence where there is a marked increase. Work from home due to lockdown is disorienting for many people, leading to mental health issues. Mental health issues in these times are genuine. There are a lot of people who experience disorientation and discomfort working from home with the challenge of handling so many things. While early reports that emerged from different parts of the world provide evidence that more men are dying compared to infected women, more women are likely to catch the virus in the first place by comprising 70% in the front-line healthcare workforce.

Domestic responsibilities of Women:

Due to pandemic and lockdown, women have to bear the lopsided burden of unpaid care and unequal share in household responsibilities. Being the de facto caregivers within the homes has put an outsized portion of the domestic workload on women. The children are out of school with numerous online-from-home-classrooms, sick and needy elders, probably office-work assigned by a manager who is under the impression that work-from-home is a single-way ticket to exploit employees has thrown a lot of challenges towards women. With

emotionally detached husbands, women are shouldering more than their share in this pandemic. The time which might seem unproductive and non-functional to the world is most exhaustive for women in families. The weight of the underpaid industry of house helps, nannies, cooks, housekeepers, teachers/tutors, who are now out-of-work have automatically geared towards women. According to a delivery app (Dunzo), pregnancy kits, condoms, contraceptives, and sanitary napkins are the top four products being ordered and delivered during the lockdown period. The class-divide paints a darker picture for the women who do not even have the awareness means and knowledge to access these services, and under normal circumstances would be taken to a government hospital. However, the persisting fear of lockdown norms and catching viruses in the hospital will keep many of them away from accessing these services.

Sushmita Dev, former Member of Parliament and All India Mahila Congress President said, – “There is a gender angle to poverty. It is because when the resources are limited women tend to cut down on their own requirements. She even feeds the man over herself. In such times, households’ re-budget their priorities and menstrual hygiene and related products do not feature in the list. Therefore, Mahila Congress has been at the forefront for distributing thousands of sanitary napkins in the slums of New Delhi”. Economic Regression of Compared to men, women are usually earning less, saving barely, mostly engaging in contractual, temporary, unorganized and insecure jobs as per the availability of jobs in the market offered to them. In the post-pandemic world, women are predicted to comprise of major-share of lay-offs by corporations. Women getting back to work after a lay-off may see an impact because of the cut in jobs and budgets, a shift in employers’ attitude and inclination towards hiring a male employee due to obvious reasons of Regression of Compared.

Women in Politics during Pandemic Times:

Women leaders across the world are showing better handle over the situation. The countries which have managed to flatten the curve, and reduced the spread of the virus-Denmark, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Ice Land, Norway, Taiwan have one thing in common; women as the head of the states. While the so-called world leaders and politicians like Bolsonaro, Trump, Xi-ping, Modi, Putin, Netanyahu have exemplified ignorance, suppression of data and facts, delayed action and arrogance or irresponsibility, the leaders of the above mentioned countries acted with composure and brought out measure that benefited

the country in fighting the pandemic through empathy and compassion. Ms. Sushmita Dev shares, “Despite that the women in politics have been questioned, demotivated and heckled in politics around the world they have shown the world that they are better at leadership roles and are much more efficient. A crisis is a situation where one sinks or sail and it requires nothing short of competence to come out of it. Women politicians, not only belonging to these countries, but also MLAs like Seethakka (Telangana) are leading from the front with empathy and conviction”. She also points out at the paradox of the situation given that on the other extreme “lockdown has pushed women deep into the gender-roles against which they have been fighting for years”.

Women across sectors are feeling the social and economic impact of COVID-19. In the political sphere, women are stepping up to take new roles to take care of fellow women in these troubled times. The social and economic inequalities foreseen in the post-pandemic world would be better handled with more women leadership in politics and strong anchoring of sisterhood which would help women at the other end of spectrum thus building an equitable world. Kirthi Jayakumar, “Feminism as a movement has faced a lot of obstacles. It is not a kind of movement that will stop existing because COVID has come. Rather feminists are very vocal and active in responding to multiple challenges whether calling attention to domestic violence survivors, or to people with disabilities or senior citizens. A lot of feminist work and advocacy is still going on and will keep happening. Intersectionality lets you see these things and I think feminism will definitely employ these tools to look at the areas and respond to them through either civil society work culture or advocacy in larger sector.

Kanksshi Agarwal, is a gender activist, researcher working at the intersection of technology, society, gender and politics. A former LAMP Fellow, she also works towards increasing women’s participation in politics at NETRI. You can find her on Twitter and Face book. Anjali G Sharma is a writer, social activist and development sector enthusiast. She leads Education initiatives at Charter for Compassion for North India. You can find her on Twitter and Face book.

Women Self Help Groups in India:

Women self help Groups in India Have risen to the extraordinary challenge of COVID-19 pandemic. With 1.3 billion Indians in the midst of an unprecedented 40-day lockdown to defeat the corona virus, the collective strength of women’s self-help groups (SHGs) has come

to the fore. In over 90 percent of India's districts, away from the limelight of the cities, SHG women are producing facemasks, running community kitchens, delivering essential food supplies, sensitizing people about health and hygiene and combating misinformation. "The women's movement that started as a leap of faith some 15 years ago has proved to be an invaluable resource in these difficult times. Our partnership with the Indian government in building social capital among the rural poor has paid off in spades," said Gayatri Acharya, who leads the World Bank's \$750 million support for India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission. NRLM is India's flagship program to reduce poverty by mobilizing poor rural women into self-help groups and building community institutions of the poor.

Over the past two decades of the Bank's association, India's SHG movement has evolved from small savings and credit groups that sought to empower poor rural women, into one of the world's largest institutional platforms of the poor. Today, 67 million Indian women are members of 6 million SHGs. "Women at the center of development has been an important story in South Asia. In these extraordinary times, when we are all united in our fight against the Covid 19 virus, these women's groups are playing a critical role. Now, more than ever, these women - many of whom escaped poverty through the SHG route and know what it is like to be destitute and poor - are living up to their motto of self-help and solidarity. Groups across the country are working furiously to make up the shortfall of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE). In Odisha, for instance, poor rural women who were once engaged in stitching school uniforms are sewing masks instead. Over the past couple of weeks, these women have produced more than 1 million cotton masks, helping equip police personnel and health workers, while earning something for themselves.

Importantly, the SHGs are helping curb rumor and misinformation. Providing critical support to the government in this hour of need. The recent devastating impact on migrant labor, where huge numbers of suddenly out-of-work families started walking back to their villages hundreds of miles away, shows how critical it is for authentic information to filter down to the grassroots," explained Varun Singh, the Bank's social development specialist. Women's groups are also disseminating Covid related messages among hard-to-reach populations. In Kerala, Kudumbashree is spearheading the government's Break the Chain campaign by raising awareness about hand hygiene and social distancing through mobile phones, posters and weekly meetings. In Bihar, one of India's poorest states, Jeevika - the state's SHG

platform – is spreading the word about hand washing, quarantine and self-isolation through leaflets, songs, videos and phone messages.

Since access to finance is critical for people to sustain themselves during the lockdown, SHGs women who also work as banking correspondents have emerged as a vital resource. Deemed as an essential service, these bank sakhis have continued to provide doorstep banking services to far-flung communities, in addition to distributing pensions and enabling the most needy to access credits into their accounts through direct benefit transfers (DBT). Banks have given these women special orientation and provided them with financial incentives to enable them to continue to work during the lockdown. "Women at the center of development has been an important story in South Asia. In these extraordinary times, when we are all united in our fight against the Covid 19 virus, these women's groups are playing a critical role," said Junaid Ahmad, the World Bank's country director in India. "Across the country, women's SHGs have risen to this extraordinary challenge with immense courage and dedication," summed up Alka Upadhyay, Additional Secretary in India's Ministry of Rural Development, which manages the NRLM. "Their quick response to food insecurity and shortages in goods and services shows how this decentralized structure can be a vital resource in a time of crisis. The strength of India's rural women will continue to be essential in building back economic momentum after the most critical period is over." Women's SHGs are being supported by Government of India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) which is co-financed by the World Bank. NRLM has scaled up the SHG model across 28 States and 6 Union Territories of the country, reaching more than 67 million women. The women have saved \$1.4 billion and leveraged a further \$37 billion from commercial banks.

Conclusion:

It is often assumed that all members of a population experience the impact of disasters in the same way. In the pre-disaster context, women's and girls' unequal access to social, political, and economic resources influences their access to post-disaster assistance and compensation for damage and losses. While the post-disaster context presents a host of challenges for women, it is important to recognize that women are not just victims of disasters. The strength of post-disaster recovery lies with how well it responds to the needs of both women and men. This guidance note aims to provide action-oriented guidance to local and national government officials and key decision makers who face post-disaster challenges and to assist them in incorporating gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction efforts

across all sectors through robust gender assessments that lead to concrete needs identification and gender-specific recovery strategies and frameworks. Implementation of such actions will facilitate both a more resilient, sustainable recovery, and advances in reducing gender inequality. The note addresses the different challenges that women face in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction caused by underlying issues of inequality and marginalization. The note provides guidance on how to turn a post-disaster situation into an opportunity to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment, with a focus on building back better, as the aftermath of a disaster can present opportunities for new and more progressive gender roles and relationships to emerge. The guidance note is structured around three key areas: identifying and prioritizing gender-specific recovery needs; protecting women and men from physical and psychosocial harm; and planning for gender-responsive recovery in the disaster recovery framework and empowering women for sustainable and resilient recovery. The final section of the paper provides a long-term outlook on strengthening gender responsive recovery systems.

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