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Impact of Pandemic on Women Workers in Informal Sector

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Abstract

For any country, Labour mobility and employability play an important role as these factors determine the sustainable development of the country. Today women's work participation plays a significant role in women's empowerment. Women's work participation needs to increase their standard of living as it helps to develop the economy. Concurrent to this, research in this area has repeatedly proven that exhibiting empathy along with fathoming of a family and patient's necessities, opinion or perception and considerations will enrich the experience of family and patient. Subsequently, proper care and gender equality may lead to quality in clinical results and productivity, because of augmented patient coordination to doctor's treatment and health plans. This manuscript focuses on economic distress that would augment the prevailing inequalities most particularly the gender discrimination in the labour market. The COVID-19 pandemic has stressed how lockdowns and residence orders affect women's rights, namely the increased risk of gender violence about the economic impact of the crisis on women who are more likely to work in the informal sector and are disproportionately influenced by the economic impact. More broadly, rule of law and recourse to justice continue to form the basis on which individuals, irrespective of the necessities of our moment, have the freedom to defend their interests, pursue remedy and protect those who are most likely. (UN Women) ¹

Thus this paper attempts to analyse the opportunities and challenges of Women workers in the informal sector during COVID 19.

Keywords. Women, work participation, employment, empowerment, COVID 19, pandemic crisis, crisis management, gender equality, informal sector.

¹ UN Women, IDLO, UNDP, UNODC, World Bank and the Pathfinders (2020), Justice for Women Amidst COVID-19, May-2020.

Introduction

In December 2019, the spread of the Novel Coronavirus Disease COVID-19 took not only life but also the promise of the whole of the human race, but the battle for survival has been the main concept of its being on earth since that time. Several tests have shown that women have a higher immune system than men, and COVID-19 thus affects men rather than women. There are a lot of plague-like horrors women in the world, regardless of age, class, sex, and race. They cultivated the capacity to struggle, battle the warrior's victims, emancipate and emerge as a socially motivated individual. This self-efficacy of women keeps them excel in academics, business, leadership, and what not on earth to conquer for her. The migrant labourers wanted to go to their native places in the belief that they can make their living in their native places. Policemen and doctors have endless duties day and night in protecting the public from the corona. Socially conscious people continue to assist the elderly, homeless people, and those in need, such as food and drugs. Thanks to the coronavirus, folk musicians were without a scheme, so they began spreading the news about the virus by singing and dancing in the streets and on social media. Classes and examinations were held online when educational institutions were closed. In the middle of these circumstances, the plight of women, who are the backbone of civilization during the Corona Virus, is worsening. Women's standing in society is poor, and they are under the influence of men, even though that they labour as hard as men and occupy top managerial positions. (Mrs. K. Priyadarshini) ²

COVID-19

Coronavirus is a type of virus creates infectious disease among living creatures that cause throat pain, tiredness, cough, and cold, breathing problem and fever. According to World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. Before the epidemic in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, no one has heard about this new virus or disease. COVID-19 is now a pandemic that has spread too many countries across the world. When a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or talks, tiny droplets from the nose or mouth are removed, which transmit the disease from person to person. These droplets are relatively heavy, fly a short distance, and fall easily. COVID-19 can be contracted by inhaling the virus's droplets from an infected human. This is why it is important to stay at least one meter away from others. (World Health Organization) ³

Impact of Covid-19 on Women in General Perspective

Besides limiting or rolling back girl's and women's access to basic sexual and reproductive health rights, economic problems pose a grave danger and expose young female employee's and entrepreneurs to the possibility of exploitation and violence. Naturally, girls and young women face extreme economic disruptions and strive to migrate to high-risk employment to survive economically. For housekeepers, during that time they should play a double function in the treatment of family welfare, must restrict the expenditures to a very small amount of cash, carry out home analysis of their children by online method, etc. This adds to a great deal of strain on women's

² Mrs. K. Priyadarshini (2020), Violence against Women and Covid 19 Pandemic: A Symbiosis, Shanlax Publication, First Edition, Sep 2020, pp. 58-59.

³https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/risk-comms-updates/update-28-covid-19-what-we-know.pdf?sfvrsn=62ebd9ab_2

responsibilities, whether they belong to the employees sector or house-maker, obviously require their company and their family members to provide their tasks at least fun psychological and emotional help. In this context, a certain amount of technological literacy is really necessary in order to make your job clever and time-efficient. (Plan-international) ⁴

As such, within the society, the issues faced by the women during this pandemic have an extra edge as supposed to their counterparts elsewhere. The clear classifications of women who are affected by the pandemic in various levels. About 9 out of 10 frontline health workers are women, not men. Thus proving, women in the COVID-19 pandemic situation is the most affected variable in society compared to men. In fact, they are overburdened with the care economy for example they could not replace their service or withdraw from their service at times of peak crisis. Though, health care jobs provide income for their family, protecting their society will be the primary responsibility. Humanity concern overcomes the materialistic concern in the mindset of women in health care services.

The burden of the family is jointly in the hands of men and in the hands of society, contrary to this tendency COVID-19, and is in the hands of women who are versatile to treat and nurture victims of the epidemic. Even in this atrocious moment of COVID-19, it is unavoidable that the world has seen women health workers exuberantly service. COVID-19 is significantly affected by social disparities, such as income gaps, among women and other communities, and is also heavily impaired by jobs, including elder/kid care, which has all become more demanding during this pandemic as schools and other facilities are closed (Wikipedia).⁵

The Women's Enhanced Principles are designed to promote equity between men and women at work, in the economy, and in society and should enable any person to recognize the gender impacts of COVID 19 and to react thereto.

The Informal Sector

The informal economy is divided into two sections which can be described. Firstly, informal work involves working persons hired on a seasonal, day-wage basis by formally registered employers as well as livelihood players such as self-employed persons. This covers individuals and companies that will work in their own facilities, street salespeople, and the majority of household employees. They lack protection from payment of salaries, cutbacks without warning, and sometimes operate with no sick leave and benefits under limited workplace safety conditions. In addition, informal sector businesses, such as basket sellers, restaurants, and independent ad hoc production companies, participate in organised commercial activities. They may or may not be structured according to the need for the companies' resources or outputs and activities (and employment) that expand or decline. They are based around an actor or businessman who associates with clients, vendors, and staff in a sequence of on-the-spot transactions, which rely on demand (Geertz, 1967). Informal companies cannot obtain (formal) loans and have little access to social and public goods programmes. Informal companies seldom invest in equipment to improve production, improve the capabilities of employees or create economies of scale

⁴ <https://plan-international.org/emergencies/covid-19-faqs-girls-women>

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student>

and prefer to operate on the thin margins of the razor-scale. If consumers refuse to pay and will give their employers no safety or taxes and violate minimum wages laws they have no access to legal protection.

Usually, a significant proportion of the population of developed countries relies on the informal economy. Support or small unbundled companies operate as their primary source of employment or revenue production. (Blades et al., 2011).⁶ According to the ILO study, more than 40 informal Crore employees in India could become deepened because the COVID-19 epidemic has led to a deepening of poverty and to the loss of hours and jobs from sectors such as the hospitality and lodging sector, retail and wholesale sector, the services business sector, industry, and the building industry. More than a third (37.5%) of the world's jobs are at high risk of the 1.25 billion workers in all of these sectors. In the low and middle-income countries where factories and utilities are employed by a significant proportion of these jobs, 61 percent of the global labour force or 2 billion people, and there is no social security or safety net, the situation for low-paid and low-skilled informal workers is very troubling.

Given the bleak reality of Indian's occupational system and suffering, the national lock-down has subjected millions of people to famine, malnutrition, and death in a visceral manner. The most recent study from the Periodic Labor Force Survey (2017-2018) reports that about 57 percent were self-employed in rural households with a main source of income and 25 percent were casual work. 12.81% of rural households represented the percentage of daily salaried workers/wage earners. The related estimates in urban India were 37.57%, 12.68%, and 41.66% (Kannan, K. P., and G. Raveendran)⁷

Many of these rural self-employed host families are small-scale farmers and small-scale craftspeople, whereas small markets, small enterprises, or intermediary operations are involved in urban areas. These figures – self-employed and seasonal workers – give our eyes to the misery that millions of families would suffer as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak's suspension of their business operations. And if we are dealing only with casual labour shares, we are talking around a quarter of the household population that's incredibly poor and vulnerable to the tsunami.

Low salaries are another aspect that leads to vulnerability. In 2017–18, an incidental worker's average salary is Rs 254.83, and an autonomous employee's average earnings are Rs 276.09, compared to the regular-person salary of 530.76. Approximately 68 percent of the total employee earns less than the proposed national minimum wage 375 (or salaries in the case of self-employed people). Of this, 84.62% and 52.83% of the daily workforce benefit little more than the national minimum wage respectively. The difference between their wages/income and the recommended minimum wage is not only 41%, which means that their income is 41% lower than the minimum wage, and the expert committee established by the Ministry of the Interior also recommends this minimum wage. In 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of India,

⁶ Blades, Derek, Francisco HG Ferreira, and Maria Ana Lugo (2011), The informal economy in developing countries: an introduction, Review of Income and Wealth, Vol. 57, pp. S1-S7.

⁷ Kannan, K. P., and G. Raveendran (2019), From jobless to job-loss growth: Gainers and losers in India's employment performance during 2012–2018, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 54, no. 44, pp.38-44.

informal work/occupation exacerbated the safety gap. More than 90% of workers in India are informal workers without social security regulations. In absolute terms, this is 411 million out of 461 million.

The involvement of labour forces decreased at an all-time low in March 2020, with a sharp increase in the unemployment rate, according to the Center for Indian Economic Monitoring (CMIE). Jobs have dropped, from 443 million in January 2020 to 434 million by March 2020; there have been steep declines of 9 million. This decrease is due to a 15 million decrease in working people (from 411 million to 396 million). In March 2020, there was an increase in six million unemployed people (from 32 million to 38 million). The CMIE data indicates that the highest unemployment rate of the last 43 months has increased to 8.7 percent. However, according to a Business Standard survey, only 430.8 million workers, compared to 273.96 million for the same time in the 2019-2020 period, were given during 15-29 April 2020 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. MGNREGA's study has been stopped to reduce the spread of the virus and this is very expensive for rural workers. With informal workers struggling for survival in the context of the current crisis, there is good reason to think that more strain will come into the already vulnerable sector in the post-crisis era. The effect on the informal economy of the COVID-19 epidemic continues. Faced with a long crisis, demand for goods and services from informal sector companies is expected to decline in the global economy. (Chandra Shekar and Kashif Mansoor)⁸

Women in Informal Sector

Women in informal industries, who demand near human contact will be more affected by the distance exercised by online methodology, than sectors like technology and the formal fields. Women employees in the informal sectors prefer to engage where minimal risk, high wage, less working time can be expected. The women in the informal and the less productive industries are especially vulnerable to shocks. The government has directed certain kinds of social distance and guidance, which will probably be implemented even after the lockdown.

Yet economic activities are closely linked to human activity in most informal industries, so either their functions are on the verge of closure or stagnated. This is the list of low-paid women employees.

- **Daily Wageworkers :** The recession affects the everyday working future of employees, how their wages are hurt and how little to no state funding has compelled many people, leaving many heavily indebted to borrow widely across illicit networks, to achieve their ends. Daily drivers with bigger families in towns that had chosen to stay were expected to beg for an extravagant travel fare to get home.
- **Construction workers:** Construction women labourer must still serve on the building site as unskilled labour bearing building material on his shoulders, while qualified and semi-expert labour is carried out by men.

8. Chandra Shekar and Kashif Mansoor (2020), COVID-19: Lockdown Impact on Informal Sector in India.

<https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/covid-19-lockdown-impact-on-informal-sector-in-india/>

- **Maid services or Domestic workers:** This job category is aimed primarily at women, particularly young girls. There were about 1.68 million domestic female jobs in 1997-98 and just 0.62 million male employees. Partial and full-time household labourers are included.
- **Tailoring & Handicraft or Garment workers:** These women are working with some major drape-shops, shops, and shops. Even the same prejudice is obvious here that women are working to assist the male customer (called masters). These employees have knitters of woolen.
- **Vendor:** the most dispersed group comprising women who market various types of goods, such as bulbs, cane baskets, utensils, cosmetics, bracelets, vegetables, and tea stands along the roadside, etc. Almost 4 of the overall sellers are women and 30% of their households are single earners.
- **Sales girls:** these jobs are further broken down into two categories: one, those employed in shops that go from door to door or location, and the other (mostly women-related items like jewelry, garments, and cosmetics or Parlor services, etc.).
- **Helper in hotel business:** Kitchen helpers in restaurant kitchens, hospitals, schools, and infant homes perform different tasks of washing, repair, planning, and storage. They wash food, help cooks make foods, and clean kitchens.
- **Daycare services:** Women staff employed at daycare centers encourage parents to see their children through breaks and allow them to concentrate on their work by alleviating concerns about their child's welfare. Childcare is a priority and services like a daycare system help one to combine work and family life with any worker.
- **Tuition services:** many others teach at home early the morning and after school hours. Teachers take courses in their residences. Pensioners and college students depend on these groups for increased money. The Covid-19 epidemic and the subsequent nationwide lock-down influenced both of them alike. It was similarly difficult to visit or invite students to return home and many have failed to fulfill these purposes. It was difficult to introduce online education.
- **Tea leaf pluckers and Tea packing:** Tea leaf pluckers: Many women are active as leaf pickers, and packaging jobs as day-to-day wage workers in the tea plantation market. These female workers are in extreme poverty because of a pandemic
- **Gardening work in tourist spots:** the cleaning and maintenance of vast gardens on tourist sites were often done by female staff. Yet locking has a detrimental effect on the life of these employees, as no job and no payment is guaranteed.
- **Firewood collection and Forest products:** many tribal women are engaged in forest products such as honey products, herbal products, and firewood collection, and aim to market them for their daily income to major hotels and frequent customers.
- **Bakery and pastry work:** The bread bakers are preparing the dough, letting it rise, shaping it, testing it, baking, and cooling it. Pastry bakers thaw dough, shape and fill it if necessary - for tarts, tarts, pies, etc. Cake bakers, cupcakes, and muffin bakers, with a degree of consistency, measure batters in pots. Cookie

panels often weigh cookie dough using regular scoops or use a softer dough pipe bag. Women who are talented and home-based employees also experience this pandemic when no bakery is open and orders canceled.

Review of Literature

Chakraborty S (2020),⁹ In his research, women employees at home reported that they had no income from their household since mid-March 2020 because of factories closure, supply chains interruptions, transportation constraints on raw materials, and payments withdrawn even for jobs already executed by subcontractors/employers. Women waste pickers had problems gathering waste because of travel constraints, separating them from stores, and having to market them at slightly lower rates. They have found it hard to market the garbage. The effect of the pandemic on domestic workers' profits or their earnings was less pronounced because most announced their employers' incomes before they were locked down.

According to ILO (2018),¹⁰ a smaller share of women employed is a smaller proportion in informal jobs than men, while the actual figures are larger. And a worldwide rising informality. The ILO report states that the degree of informality is inversely different from that of socio-economic growth and schooling.

B. Breman, J. (2016)¹¹ also considers that the establishment of informal household enterprises is a popular resort for those without or geographically marginalised non-agricultural jobs.

Benjamin and Mbaye (2015)¹² observe the role of the informal urban economy in the absorption of rural migrants. The heavy female presence is a remarkable feature of the informal economy. The informal economy represents 60 percent of working people in the developed world.

Challenges of Informal Women Workers in India

The remarkable truth is that, because of their desperate need for money, informal women workers have no choice but to work. The limited opportunities for women in the informal sector are mostly low-wage workers; jobs that do not have opportunities to improve, to increase productivity, or to receive training so that they can find better work at a later date. Women are secondary to men in the job race in the general unemployment and the absence of opportunities. Women find it difficult to join the integrated sector structured environment. Furthermore, there is no economic excuse to pay lower wages or to offer women employees just a specific job. When they work for themselves, their salaries and their work are very similar to those of men (For example in the case of vendors). Wages, the nature of employment, and the provision of jobs on the grounds of gender are discriminated against. Most of the negotiating power is with the entrepreneurs, and corruption is of course the destiny of these bad employees. They come from that part of the population that must make a living and which is

⁹ Chakraborty S. (2020), Impact of Covid-19 National Lockdown on Women Informal Workers in Delhi, Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi, May 2020, pp. 5-8.

¹⁰ ILO (2018), Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (third edition), International Labour Office, Geneva, First published 2018, pp.24-32.

¹¹ Breman, Jan (2016), At work in the informal economy of India: A perspective from the bottom up (OIP), OUP Catalogue from Oxford University Press.

<https://econpapers.repec.org/bookchap/oxpobooks/9780199467716.htm>

¹² Benjamin, Nancy, and Ahmadou Aly Mbaye (2014), Informality, growth, and development in Africa, World Institute for Development Economics Research, WIDER Working Paper 2014/052, February 2014, pp.7-9

backward and less fortunate socially, culturally, and historically. The essence of the work is diverse. Some of them are building workers, others are housekeepers, though few are small merchants of various commodities. Yet there is little to no change in jobs, such as pay inequality, employment uncertainty, vacation, and other benefits. (Samapika Mohapatra)¹³

Suggestions

COVID-19 is not only a health issue but also a test of our human spirit. The following are some of the prioritized measures to be taken:

- ❖ Steps to be taken by various state governments in India to support the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and women involved in the informal sector.
- ❖ Women workers including migrant workers, such as providing compensation to daily wage and construction workers respectively for wage loss due to disruption of economic activities.
- ❖ Women's employment guarantee program must become a priority.
- ❖ Specifically, for low-income women, skills should be scaled up to overcome gender disparity.
- ❖ Introducing new measures such as providing welfare pensions, free food distribution, and that can be implemented at low cost to eliminate the poverty among poor women workers.
- ❖ Continued attention for the newborn and delivery services should be ensured even under any crisis circumstances.
- ❖ Take the opportunity to start a new local business, avail MSME loans, etc, especially with women as they are affected by the crisis.
- ❖ Communicate to women to acquire new skills that will be required for post-COVID-19 survival.
- ❖ Donate protective equipment, food, and sanitizers for women in the plantation sector.

Conclusion

A new adjustment shall be allowed by COVID-19. First, there may be a temptation to use vendors (but closer to big markets) at more costly places to replace work with money. Secondly, in the long term, the global supply chains would see larger isolation from the informal market with economic practices. Both countries can benefit from their low labour costs by participating in the supply chain for production. The 'aversion behaviour' is responsible for much of the economic influence of COVID-19 on informal trade. Contrary behaviours are the acts citizens do to avoid infection with the virus such as decreased outflows and government prohibition of 'non-essential' stores, etc. These measures influence all economic sectors and result in lower wages on the supply (declining production) side and the demand side (reduced consumer demand). The closing of companies leads in many cases to loss of wages for jobs, notably in the non-paid leave in the informal sector. The COVID-19 pandemic intensifies previously established inequality and exposes the vulnerability in all spheres, from health to economy, defense, and social justice, with this informal workforce with its ongoing gender segregation. Informal jobs are also feeling the acute economic effects of the pandemic lockdown. Women are likely to bear the brunt of

¹³ Samapika Mohapatra (2020), Women Workers in Informal Sector in India, Course Code/Name: MADVS2003C04/ Gender & Development, pp.no.2-3.

job losses the most, provided that the pre-lockdown substantial and widening gender disparities in labour participation rates, jobs, and salaries were projected to escalate during the post-lockdown era.

The fear of the epidemic and the non-availability of protective devices are the key reasons why income falls, due to a lockdown and police patrols. The struggles that women encounter at the workplace are being faced with, the domestic pressure on women, the challenges they have to gain access to social and public facilities, and the coping strategies that they use to keep them secure in the post-lockdown era, to gain further insight into these people's circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic thus had raised emotional stress in their families and the fear that their livelihoods would be destroyed outweighed by the fear of the disease.

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