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Its Fate Or Structural Flawed: Exploring Covid 19 Pandemic Through Gendered Lens Case Study Of South African Society

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Abstract:

The social and economic repercussions of the coronavirus outbreak a year ago have the potential to have a long-lasting impact on gender equality, putting progress at risk and potentially pushing an additional 47 million women and girls below the global poverty line. The Beijing Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, adopted at the United Nations 25 years ago last year, has significantly impacted the status of women worldwide. While progress has been made, there is still a long way to go before true gender parity is achieved. This paper will examine the position of women in South African society in terms of employment, earnings, and fundamental societal structures.

Keywords: Covid 19, gender equality, and South Africa, Society and politics.

Introduction:

"Women and men, girls and boys, must all work together to achieve gender parity. Everyone needs to pitch in."

Mr Ban Ki-moon

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic due to the spread of the Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) Disease, also known as COVID-19. While some preliminary research has been conducted on the epidemic's effects on women, there has only been a small amount of reporting on the crisis's impacts, focusing on gender. Furthermore, the gendered effects of the pandemic have not been explicitly addressed in government policies or public health campaigns to date (Wenham, Smith, & Morgan, 2020). Gender norms pose a threat during epidemics because women are more likely to be exposed to the virus in their roles as primary carers within families and frontline healthcare workers and because they are less likely than men to have power in decision-making around the epidemic, which can lead to their needs going unmet (Korkoyah & Wreh, 2015; United Nations [UN] Women, 2020; Wenham et al., 2020). Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women, has

called attention to the growing amount of violence against women and girls as a "shadow pandemic" that is only getting worse in the midst of the covid 19 crisis.

Understanding the context of gender in South Africa requires familiarity with the country's history, culture, and gender norms, which are "heavily influenced by the historical effects of apartheid, post-apartheid, and globalized pressures" (Mayer & Barnard, 2015, p. 342). However, since the fall of the apartheid regime in 1994, South Africa has made significant strides in protecting and advancing women's rights. The new democratic government wasted no time in making sure these rights were respected; in 1995, it ratified CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and in 1996, it ratified CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, on a regional level.

Women make up the majority in South Africa (51.2% as of 2019, according to the Department of Statistics South Africa [Stats SA]), so the fact that they are labelled as a "powerless" population is indicative of the oppressive social and economic conditions that they face because of their gender. Consequently, in the context of our developing democracy, we need to look at current gendered tensions to understand better how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected cultural circumstances and social expectations and how these affect South African women's lives.

An Economic Analysis of the Impact of Covid 19 on Society:

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, women are likely to bear the brunt of reduced work opportunities and job losses. About 60% of women worldwide work in informal jobs, making, on average, 16% less than their male counterparts due to the gendered pay differential. They are 25% more likely to live in poverty than males, according to the United Nations (UN, 2020). This indicates that women are more likely to work in the informal sector, where they earn less, invest less, and have less stable employment than men.

Unemployment and job losses spiked during the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, and women were hit harder than men. Korkoyah and Wreh (2015) found that in contrast to men, who worked in higher-paying, wage-based professions like skilled labourers and teachers, the majority of women were self-employed in petty trading (42.6%) and food manufacturing (19.3%).

Feminization of the South African labour market coincided with the end of apartheid, suggesting that the traditional paradigm of men as financial contributors and women as domestic suppliers and carers may have begun to erode in the wake of this trend (Gordon, Roberts, & Struweg, 2013). Sadly, this is not the case; in Sub-Saharan Africa, 74% of women are engaged in informal work and need access to social protections such as health insurance, paid sick and maternity leave, pensions, and unemployment benefits (Durant & Coke-Hamilton, 2020).

Women in South Africa have already faced significant obstacles in their daily lives due to the feminization of poverty and the disproportionate number of women who work in low-wage, informal industries. Stats SA's "Labour Market Dynamics in South Africa Study, 2015" found that compared to men, women earned 23% less monthly than men, with men having a median income of R3500.00 and women of R2700.00. Similarly, the "Report on the Status of Women in the South African Economy" data from 2015 shows that "while poverty has decreased since the end of apartheid, females are more likely to be poor than males."

A family in which the woman is the primary breadwinner:

In 2018, women headed 42.6% of South African households (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018). When it comes to money, the aforementioned gender gaps are especially noticeable in households where women are the primary breadwinner. The feminization of poverty has led to a rise in the number of women working in low- and semi-skilled occupations, where they earn lower wages (Bhorat, van der Westhuizen, & Jacobs, 2009).

The COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to exacerbate these gendered inequalities, making life even more challenging for female-headed households, which are already disproportionately represented among the poor. UNDP research on the socioeconomic impact of coronavirus 19 in South Africa found that "households headed by casually engaged, black African women who had not finished secondary education had a 73.5 percent risk of slipping into poverty due to the coronavirus lockdown" (Kassen, 2020, para. 4).

As a result of lingering sexism and ethnic prejudice, many people around the world's homes actively work to limit their members' access to banking services (Ratele, Shefer, Strebel, & Fouten, 2010). For instance, the high proportion of single-mother households in South Africa can be traced back to the apartheid government's migrant workers scheme, which forced black men to find employment far from their homes. Their potential to become devoted parents may be diminished (Clowes, Ratele, & Shefer, 2013).

The colonial history of government control and segregation strengthens its binary gender roles, providing a context in which family breakdown and a firm belief in men's gender ideal of financial responsibility for the position of a parent but no treatment are typical. Taking care of children and the elderly are two of the many domestic responsibilities that women in South Africa who are the heads of their households take on. They tend to have a more significant number of female offspring and shoulder a larger share of the financial responsibility for their large families.

Despite women's contributions to South Africa's economy, studies (Boutron & Constant, 2013; Hall, 2012; Stats SA, 2013) show that they make less progress in education, continue to face a pay gap based on their gender, and are disproportionately represented in the sex trade, all of which exacerbate existing inequalities. More unpaid care work for the sick and elderly, as well as child care and education in the event of school closures, would fall disproportionately on women during a COVID-19 pandemic.

Some women may feel compelled to give up paid employment or accept reduced hours so that they can provide unpaid family care. They may also be disproportionately affected by layoffs and outsourcing due to the global economic downturn. As a result, women's ability to provide for themselves and their families, especially those of lower socioeconomic status, is further constrained.

Women continue to make up a disproportionate share of the world's discriminated population, which includes those who are underpaid and undervalued. Statistics South Africa reports in their 2018 Quarterly Labor Force Survey that men are more likely to be employed in full-time, formal, wage-earning jobs in South Africa than women. It is the same in South Africa. This gender gap survey in South Africa found that women held only one in three managerial positions. Black women are disproportionately represented in the domestic workforce, and nearly half of them (47.6%) are employed outside the formal economy. (South African Census Data)

Women of colour are overrepresented in the informal economy, and those who work in the formal economy tend to do so in the service or retail sectors, where the pay is typically lower because of a lack of professional training. Many of these women now face an uncertain future because of the spread of COVID-19. As might be expected, research shows that women are more likely than men to report being unable to meet basic needs for more than a month after a loss of income. Among black women, this risk is three times more likely (Power, 2020).

As was previously mentioned, the informal female workforce and the economy are expected to be disproportionately impacted by the current COVID-19 pandemic, especially in low-security and low-benefit industries (e, for example, family vacation and paid sick leave). During a pandemic, many women may be especially vulnerable because they are reliant on their employers for information, assistance, treatment, shelter, and supplies but do not have formal contracts of service that would allow them to be paid for their work (Haneef & Kalyanpur, 2020)

Women, who make up an average of 70% of the healthcare and social service workforce worldwide, are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infections because of their frequent contact with COVID-19 patients in the course of their work (Haneef & Kalyanpur, 2020; UN, 2020; United Nations Population Fund [UNPF], 2020). Unfortunately, most women in healthcare do not hold decision-making positions of influence. According to the 50/50 (2020) Public Health Report, for instance, only 5% of the CEOs of international health organizations are female.

Summary and Suggestions:

The acute effects of gender in the COVID-19 pandemic have been reported by UN Women (2020) in three ways. As a first step, the COVID-19 response involves women and women's groups (UN Women, 2020). As the primary carers in their households, women are in a prime position to identify social and health needs on a community level, strengthening the role of women's voices and improving emergency preparedness and response (Wenham et al., 2020).

Second, according to UN Women's (2020) guidelines, we need to end economic inequality between men and women and pay more attention to the value of unpaid care work. Governments and public health agencies worldwide, not just those responding to the COVID-19 epidemic, must consider the sex aspect of this. The gender expectations, roles, and relationships that affect women and men must be considered and responded to for responses to disease outbreaks like COVID-19 to be effective and not replicate or exacerbate sexual inequality (Wenham et al., 2020).

Moreover, finally, the hidden pandemic must be uncovered. Realizing that the wave of abuse against women in our country cannot be converted through egalitarian laws, it is essential to acknowledge that IPV (intimate partner violence) is a significant infringement of human rights in South Africa. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to resolving IPV not only as the shadow pandemic of COVID-19 but also as a daily, hourly, and overwhelming pandemic for South African women. COVID-19 will be a transfusion for South Africa, a country known for its strength, as the plague of IPV and gender-based abuse spread like wildfire. Equal attention and seriousness must be paid to this so-called gender-based shadow pandemic as is given to the spread of COVID-19. As shocking as it is, violence against women has a long history. Rather than focusing solely on ensuring gender equality, we should address pervasive fundamental issues like the structure of power, which has been the source of the problem since the health crisis first hit the news.

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