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GENDERED EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The feminist discourse in this paper has been produced regarding the repercussions of COVID-19 and has mostly overlooked these complexities and instead focused on violence against women and caregiving. This has diverted attention away from other crucial issues like the depletion of livelihoods, inadequate food and nutrition, debt, increasing impoverishment, and the usually low resilience of women in developing nations. Even caregiving and domestic violence have subtle nuances that are sometimes ignored. The paper uses examples from India to discuss the different gendered implications we could expect, how much of these has been discovered in past investigations, and the data gaps. Additionally, it raises awareness of the potential for group activities to hasten the economic recovery of women and provide social safeguards against the most severe worldwide effects—approaches that could put us in the direction of effective policy avenues for 'building back better'.

Introduction

To completely understand the gender-specific repercussions of COVID-19, it is important to take into account both the immediate consequences of the lock downs and the nationwide epidemic, as well as the long-term consequences that are just now beginning to become apparent and could get severe over time. These delayed effects can result in a lack of food items, shortages of money saved,

diminished financial standing, an impairment in intra-household bargaining strength, and other problems because women may not be able to recoup from the troughs they experienced while the pandemic's immediately apparent onslaught in the form of livelihood loss (Agarwal, 2017). Globally, the majority of emphasis has been focused on the rise in violence against women and the impact gender inequality on the labour market. These two

effects—while important—do not fully account for the effect on women or take into consideration the impact as a sequence of instances rather than a single incident. Furthermore, if only two characteristics are continually emphasised, it detracts from other important aspects of women's welfare in developing nations.

Building on our knowledge of pre-existing gender disparity and people's coping methods during various types of catastrophes (Agarwal, 2021a, 2021b), this research first outlines the gendered repercussions we may predict using India as an example. The next step is to assess the COVID-related evidence to see how well recent surveys have captured these potential implications and to address any additional information gaps. Furthermore, it highlights collective actions that have preserved or can continue to keep women better protected from the harshest economic effects of the epidemic and identifies prospective paths for developing effective future policies.

Direct Effects

The outbreak and associated lockdowns were expected to have the most immediate and direct effects on jobs and way of life. In addition to aggregates, we would predict that the impact would differ according on the work status (paid, self-employed, or casual), the industry or service in which one is engaged, the locale (such as rural or urban), as well as the nature of the job (formal or informal). Both men and women spend the majority of their time working in India's informal sector, which employs 90%

of women and 86% of men (Gol, 2019), but it also offers a very wide variety of pay levels. Other areas show significant gender variations as well. To begin with, women are concentrated in a very small number of occupations. 75% of women work in agriculture in rural India, in comparison with 55% of men (Gol, 2019); the majority of the aforementioned are low-wage farm labourers and craftspeople, or they labour on family farms without compensation. Only a small number of jobs in metropolitan areas are at the higher end of the salary scale, such as teaching or nursing (mainly in primary schools), while the majority are at the lower, more unstable end of the spectrum, such as street hawkers or domestic employees. Construction and manufacturing are among the surviving occupations.

In general, women have less options for a living than men do, are more likely to work in low-paying, unsafe, or unpaid positions, and some of the growing urban employment, such as domestic assistance jobs, is "touch heavy" and hence more susceptible to a pandemic. Women have less physical and vocational mobility than males do because of housework responsibilities and physical insecurities. Therefore, after being relocated, they are less likely to reconstruct their economies. In contrast to domestic workers, those who came from rural areas are less inclined to be in a situation to do so and easily find work and accommodation. Self-employed people, like employees, might not be enabled to purchase stocks or other beneficial resources.

Sequential Effects

The result of unemployment could be a number of things. In urban areas where there aren't sufficient supplies to buy food, lockdowns can result in food shortages and starvation (Scroll, 2020). Before beginning to sell their belongings, we would assume that the unemployed will initially employ their retirement funds, and then turn to relatives, close acquaintances, banking institutions, and moneylenders for loans. Based on prior research on rural populations' coping mechanisms during environmental catastrophes like severe droughts, we draw attention to the fact that household members witnessing starvation mostly lowers utilisation initial and decrease supplies of cereal grains fodder, and numerous other basic necessities previous to offering economic resources that are crucial to their subsequent likelihood of recovery. Additionally, there is frequently a hierarchy in the order in which assets are parted with of: households typically sell of minor assets like jewellery or pets first while holding onto larger ones like cattle and land for as long as possible.

The economic standing of the household is probably going to have an effect on these subsequent effects. Families with plenty of money to save and valuable assets can get through the crisis. Those who have modest wealth and savings may eventually lose them due to the time it takes to restore their employment and livelihoods; however, individuals with no savings or assets that are

marketable would fall into distress and be incapable to even draw due to their lowered creditworthiness.

Indirect Effects

Women may face a range of various indirect and covert consequences as a result of gendered social norms and shifts in intra-household power relations. This can have an effect on female family business employees who are paid and unpaid.

First off, if their husbands or other men in their household members also suffer local, national, or worldwide employment losses in addition to their own, women are far more inclined to be impacted by a fall in household wages. The migration of migrants to rurals may also contribute to the overpopulation of the few available local jobs for women.

Second, since food shortages are likely to have a higher impact on women and girls than on men and boys in many countries due to social norms in place, we should expect dietary distinctions between the two genders and nutritious inequities within households. Government relief efforts, which are discussed in the final part, may, at best, lessen this, but they won't make it go away entirely.

Third, despite the possibility that women have an inherent advantage that reduces pandemic deaths (in the majority of countries, men died from COVID-19 at a higher rate than women), this advantage may be outweighed by health problems that put specific groups of women at higher risk. For instance, the fact that pregnant

women are considered more vulnerable to pandemics is well accepted on a global scale. Due to a number of circumstances, including the virus, worse nutrition, and the lack of hospital care alternatives for illnesses unrelated to COVID-19, this is more likely to occur in India.

Fourth, the fact that men outlive women under COVID-19 has unintended consequences for women that I haven't seen discussed anytime, including with regard to the economic and social precarities widows may encounter, as detailed in more detail below.

Fifth, consider the frequently discussed impact on caregiving. Pre-COVID gender disparities were large, according to a 2019 all-India time usage study (Gol, 2020a), with women and men, on average, dedicating a total of five and 1.6 hours per day to unpaid home labour, respectively (rural-urban variances are insignificant). Women's household obligations are expected to increase in the case of a COVID-lockdown as unemployed partners and children stay at home. Urban homes that previously hired part-time domestic help may spend more time providing care as a result of an absence of this outside assistance. Even while many of the more laborious household chores may be shared by professional couples, women typically provide the vast majority of care in most houses. Additionally, this might require consuming a greater amount of time and effort in the countryside of India fetching water, gathering fuel, gathering fodder (animal care is typically a woman's job), and looking for

different kinds of food in nearby forest (Agarwal, 2020). Much of the global discussion on women's care work during the epidemic focused on urban middle-class nuclear families in the Global North rather than expansive agrarian communities in the Global South.

Sixth, as a result of men's unemployment and the concentration of family members in small locations, it's possible that the risk that women may face domestic violence will increase. Also it has been found that men who are jobless are more likely to experience domestic abuse (Agarwal & Panda, 2017). This indicates that women might get hurt by both their own lack of money and employment and their spouses' unemployment. Again, it is to be anticipated that the behavior of women from different social classes will differ. When compared to women who don't own any property, property owners have been empirically proven to be significantly fewer likely to have encountered domestic abuse (Agarwal & Panda, 2017). In order to avoid violence, a woman should be able to ask her partner to leave if they are cohabitating or have a viable way out if she owns a home.

Much of the foregoing gender effects are bound to become apparent not just in the short-term but also in the medium- and long-term because women frequently display far less levels of resilience than men, both economically and socially. It is simply a broad instance of a few of the various possible gendered effects—both measurable and undetectable—that we may have predicted. More could be incorporated (or

some omitted) by context and place, given the variations in norms of society and pre-existing gender disparities across India, which was decided particularly among the north and south states. Furthermore, a household that has some savings or that owns a farming operation and raises food crops would not immediately face the adverse effects that a poor urban everyday earner might. As will be shown in the section below, current, mostly one-time surveys have generally missed even the impact kinds indicated above, with some limited covering up by a few more recent research.

Immediate and Sequential impacts

Let's begin by discussing the labour market. Periodic panel statistics under the programme have been provided across the entirety of India by a single thorough survey conducted by the CMIE (Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy) which encompassed more than 50,000 homes. Women had an approximate 20% point smaller chance of finding employment among those who were employed prior to the pandemic, according to Deshpande's (2020, 2021) review of the three phases in 2020 for what employment opportunities have been eliminated (in the sense that men lost more jobs than women in April 2020 considering more men than women were employed). And while both women & men experienced a resurgence in August 2020 when compared to April, it was much less significant for women. despite the fact that the difference in wages between men and women returned to its levels from December 2019,

employment then decreased for both sexes. The CMIE data does not include information on wages or the overall number of days worked. Because of this, it is impossible for us to tell if everyone who have job opportunities are making money to support themselves or if they have merely joined the ranks of of the "working poor."

Kulkarni et al. (2021) found a similar pattern in their study of widowed and lone female farm labors in western part of India. The absence of harvesting labour and access to financial markets caused these women to lose their harvests, while those who had the chance to sell had to do so at prices that were much lower than they had been prior to the pandemic. Many people either had access to any form of transportation or were unable to pay the prices to get their agricultural produce to markets. The loss prevented them from repaying the loan with high rates of interest they had obtained from dubious sources of credit. As a result, their creditworthiness suffered. They were also unable make investments in planting seeds and other items they would require for the subsequent cycle of production since they were hesitant to borrow money. Some people suggested that they could now lease the land out or let it fallow. In essence, a rapid adverse consequence has the capacity to trigger an income fall cycle, with each cycle of declining revenue lowering the likelihood of recovery.

Additionally, 10% of rural Indian households rely on regional transfers of money received migrants for over thirty per cent of their yearly family expenses, and many more depend on remittances from abroad, according to Tume (2011). These flows have largely been prevented by COVID-19 rules (Reja & Das, 2020). We can assume that women will be the ones compelled to make do with less even though we don't know much about how this loss would impact food dependent households, notably how it will affect the women.

Impacts Hidden Within Families

The emergence of indirect gendered effects as a reaction to direct gendered effects can be influenced by changing intra-household gender dynamics in addition to pre-existing discrepancies. Due to their complexity, these effects could possibly become undetectable or less obvious. Some of the manifestations of these effects include an upsurge in dietary insecurity and hunger, difficulties pregnant women have accessing healthcare, a rise in the burden of caregiving and domestic violence, the exploitation of young women and the child marriage of girls, the anxieties and requirements faced by widows and widower families whose husbands died of COVID, and challenges with schooling for young girls. Consider a few situations.

The pandemic has had an especially negative direct impact on access to food. The surge in food scarcity and malnutrition during the lockdown was the subject of multiple one-point queries and stories in the press in early 2020,

but none provided information specific to gender. Even the above mentioned CSO (2020) report for rural India omitted data on the relative sacrifices made by male and female family members, although noting a drop in the frequency of daily meals and the amount of food taken per meal during the epidemic.

The most recent study conducted by Gupta et al. (2021) is a positive step in this case. Based on primary and secondary data sets, it examines the impact of the pandemic on women's varied eating habits and family accessibility to food at the state, federal, and district stages, ranging the latter in four fiscally distressed districts of three separate states in the northern and eastern parts of India. It discovers a drop in food for households consumption in May 2020 when compared with May 2019 at all geographical levels, notwithstanding public grains supply and government cash transfers. Notably, the study finds that women consume less non-staples than males do, including meats, eggs, vegetables, and fruits. Other investigations bolster this. Women farmers were substantially more likely to report a considerable decline in their daily consumption of fruits and vegetables and milk products, especially because of a result of expensive expenses, in accordance with Harris et al. (2020), who focused exclusively on vegetable growers. In addition, Kulkarni et al. (2021) found that Maharashtra's single women farmers reported food shortages and contemplated moving from textile to food

grains to improve their ability to sustain themselves in times of need.

It is anticipated that these nutritional disparities between women & men during the pandemic will have long-term health repercussions, specifically for women of reproductive age and nursing mothers. Several qualitative research and media reports on a small number of expectant and nursing women claim that they faced a number of difficulties, including inadequate nutrition (NLS, 2020). Poor women were also reluctant to travel to hospitals for delivery due to transportation limitations during the lockdown (Bisht et al., 2020), but there is no systematic way to document these cases. In addition, men, who often occupy lower levels in the medical system, are more likely to use protective equipment than women in the healthcare sector (Times of India, 2020).

Conclusion

In order to demonstrate how we understand pre-existing differences in gender and customs in society, as well as how people cope with economic and social crises, this paper has outlined an extensive spectrum of gender imbalances that COVID-19 is anticipated to have. It also includes those that were evaluated by the telephone survey surveys conducted in India. While some of these effects can be concealed, long-term, or indirect, others might be immediate. But between the effects assumed and those actually assessed in most surveys, we found considerable differences. These shortcomings were mostly caused by inadequate perception, failure to draw lessons

from previous crises, and insufficient application of gender analysis. There are very few exceptions to this norm, and some of those instances are only now beginning to emerge, around a year or even longer after the pandemic's first onset.

For the purpose to track assessments that would otherwise pass unnoticed and to provide guidance for the construction of policies with the objective of minimising negative impacts, it is imperative while developing inquiries on this global epidemic that a statistical understanding of its prospective impact on women be taken into account. Media reports issue cautions regarding fresh effects that polls can look into. Furthermore, if surveys are properly conducted during a pandemic, they can correct legislation.

The Indian polls did provide useful policy recommendations on several fronts, particularly with relation to targeted relief programmes like the government's PMJDY Rs. 500 transfer of money initiative. Numerous investigations showed that the cash rarely reached disadvantaged women since the majority lacked the required bank accounts. This proved the need for the rule to be changed to allow payments through any bank account the women owned rather than just one particular bank account. The surveys, however, failed to take advantage of many other chances to provide advice on how policy may be enhanced, such as monitoring problems with the fuel cylinder money back scheme, discrimination based on gender in the offering of PPE kits to women who work in healthcare

reported in media updates, the demand to give vitamin and mineral supplements instead of just grains to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and so on.

For the purpose to track assessments that would otherwise pass unnoticed and to provide guidance for the construction of policies aimed at minimising negative impacts, it is imperative while developing inquiries on the pandemic that a statistical understanding of its prospective impact on women be taken into account. Media reports issue cautions regarding fresh effects that polls can look into. Furthermore, if surveys are properly conducted during a pandemic, they can correct legislation.

On certain fronts, the Indian polls did offer useful policy suggestions, particularly with regard to specific relief initiatives like the government's PMJDY Rs. 500 cash transfer programme. Numerous studies revealed that because most poor women lacked the proper bank accounts, the funds rarely reached them. This demonstrated the necessity of changing the regulation to permit payments into any bank

account that the ladies had as opposed to only one specific bank account. The surveys, however, missed numerous other opportunities to offer guidance on how policy could be improved, such as keeping track of issues with the petrol cylinder reimbursement scheme, gender bias in the provision of PPE kits to women health care workers mentioned in media alerts, the requirement to give nutritional supplements rather than just grains to pregnant and lactating mothers, and so on.

Similar studies show that women who are employed by groups have greater protection and provided more financial and social influence within households, marketplaces and social groups than women who work individually. The benefits of a cooperative effort also apply in pandemic situations, as demonstrated by the examples I gave of SHGs making PPE kits or women farming in groups. In reality, group tactics and intercommunal collaboration may present new opportunities for overcoming this pandemic economically and enhancing crisis readiness in the future.

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