



COVID-19 AND NEW GENDER EQUATIONS

RESPOND, RECOVER, AND THRIVE

March 2021

About UN Global Compact Network India (UN GCNI)

Global Compact Network India (GCNI), the Indian Local Network of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), New York is the first Local Network globally to be established with full legal recognition. As the UNGC local arm, GCNI has been acting as a country level platform in providing a robust platform for Indian businesses, academic institutions and civil society organizations to join hands for strengthening responsible business practices. Our '10 Principles in areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-corruption' provide a common ethical and practical Framework for Corporate Responsibility - and the 17 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' adopted in September 2015, by all 195 Member States of the United Nations including India in order to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect our planet - understood and interpreted by businesses around the world, regardless of size, complexity or location.

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UN GCNI Executive Director Message



Shabnam Siddiqui
Executive Director

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been numerous warnings by gender-based advocacy groups and international development agencies on its disproportionate impact on gender. The progress made towards achieving the targets under SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is at a risk with significant socio-economic impact recorded across the globe. It is estimated that there will be a 5.2% contraction in global GDP because of the pandemic.¹ This has already translated into loss of employment for many women, especially in the informal sector, where women are employed in the highest numbers. Around 70% of frontline workers (health and social work) are women and fall in vulnerable category because of the extremely high exposure risks. On the domestic front as well, the challenges have amplified with increased burden of domestic and care work.² The lockdown measures introduced to curb the spread of the virus has resulted in increased risk of violence against women and girls, with

a 30% increase in reported cases, in some countries. The pandemic has also added an additional layer to the existing gender equality challenges in education, with girls aged 12 to 17 years at higher risk than boys of dropping out of school in low and lower-middle-income countries.³

With an intention of comprehending and demystifying this contextual understanding, we along with Deloitte, are proud to present a knowledge paper titled "*COVID-19 and new gender equations: Respond, recover, and thrive*". The current paper analyses the impact of the pandemic through a gender lens and highlights new gender equations that have been observed around the world as a response to the pandemic. It further explores measures that can be adopted to ameliorate the situation. The immediate measures to respond, medium term measures to recover from the negative impact, and the long-term approach to thrive in the coming future is documented in the paper.

The knowledge paper will provide its readers with critical insights on the gender-based consequences of the pandemic. It will also help readers to understand that gender inclusive solutioning is key to address the long-lasting repercussions of the current pandemic and be better prepared for the unforeseeable future.

Best wishes!

¹ World Bank. 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>

² UN. 2021. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

³ UNESCO. 2020. GEM Report

Foreword



Viral Thakker

Partner and Leader, Strategy,
Analytics, and M&A, Consulting

We are delighted to partner with the UN ecosystem to promote gender equality and release our report *COVID-19 and new gender equations: Respond, recover, and thrive* during the fourth edition of the Gender Equality Summit.

The pandemic has had widespread implications on economies and societies. Our research indicates that the economic, social, and health consequences on women and girls have been significant, widening existing gender gaps and reversing decades of positive gender shifts.

As businesses and communities attempt to rebound from lockdown cycles and continue social distancing, the gendered economic impact is the most tangible. The female labour force participation in India is already one of the lowest in the world. Per the Global Gender Gap Index, India ranks 149 out of 153 nations on economic participation and opportunity, 112 on educational attainment, and 150 on health

and survival.⁴ These existing gender inequalities seem to have widened during the pandemic.

The negative economic impact in terms of loss of livelihoods has been observed largely with women employed in the informal sector. Globally, 72 percent domestic workers (of which, 80 percent are women) and 40 million women in the food and service sectors have lost their jobs during the pandemic.⁵ Similarly, correlating statistics when observed locally portrayed an overall loss of agency. Before COVID-19, women employed in low-medium skill jobs saw wage disparities, and during the pandemic, women experienced significant job and income loss. In addition, women have reported an increase in unpaid care and domestic work—amplifying gendered time poverty across India.⁶ Migrant women workers also experienced loss of income, lack of social protection measures, and largescale displacement as a result of the pandemic.

With limited social mobility, women experienced challenges in accessing health care services, resulting in an increase in sexual and domestic violence, setbacks in reproductive health, maternal and child health, menstrual hygiene, mental health, and nutrition levels for women and children.

Women across walks of life, be it an urban or a rural setting, have been at the forefront of tackling the pandemic, whether in the workplace, as frontline

health workers, providers for their families, or as community leaders addressing social and health issues.

Deloitte is committed to gender equality. Our flagship Corporate Social Responsibility initiative “WorldClass” aims to impact the futures of 10 million women and girls in India by 2030 through education, skill development, and enterprise development initiatives. The firm was also quick to pivot online during the pandemic, launching various initiatives to retain women in the workforce through gender-friendly work-from-home programmes, sessions to help practitioners with physical and mental well-being, and opportunities to volunteer virtually for community initiatives.

Government, industry, intermediary organisations, and not-for-profits will play a key role in any gendered recovery. Our report provides actionable insights for stakeholders to advocate and invest in gender-inclusive and gender-responsive policies and programmes.

⁴ WEF. 2020. Global Gender Gap Report 2020

⁵ UN Women. Sep 2020. COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers

⁶ UN Women. From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

Setting the context

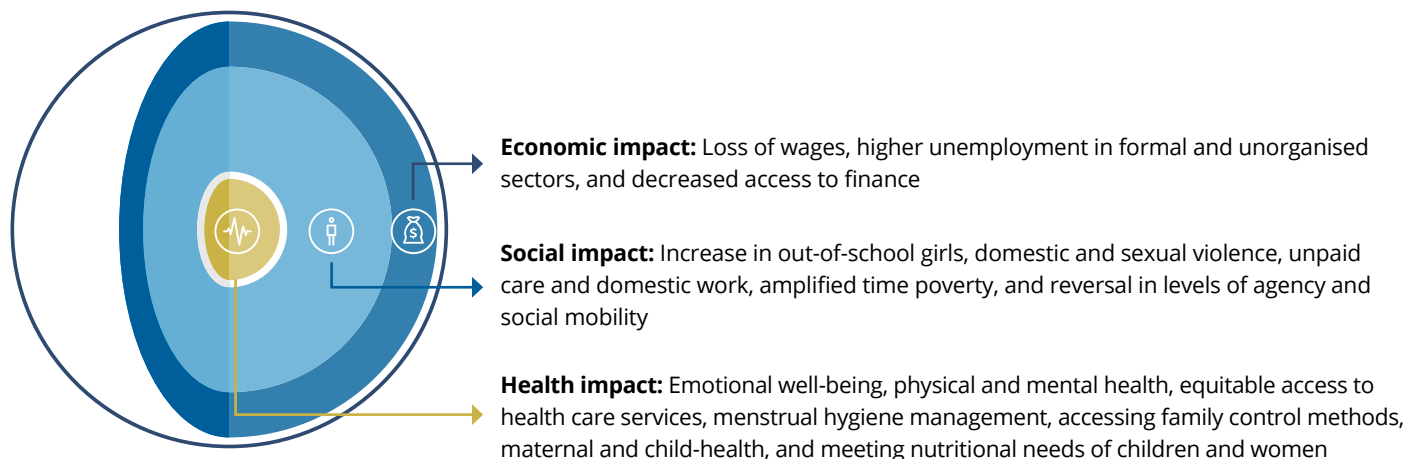


The pandemic brought the entire world to a standstill with populations across the world going into extended periods of lockdown and practicing social distancing. Governments, industries, and communities weathered the effects, from large-scale to supply-chains disruptions. Apart from the overall economic and social impact, the report aims to evaluate the gender impact of COVID-19 and identify a set of measures to assist in addressing the widened disparities and inequalities.

Globally, programmes and initiatives aimed at narrowing the gender imbalance were thrown off-track due to the pandemic. As a result, girls and women are facing challenges across their life cycle, even while being engaged as key ecosystem leaders during the crisis, whether in the workplace, community, or their household. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, highlighted that, “COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights”; a generation of progress of women and girls can be lost.⁷

⁷ Talha Burki. The indirect impact of Covid-19 on Women. The Lancet, Volume 20, Issue 8. Aug 2020. <https://secure.jbs.elsevierhealth.com/action/getSharedSiteSession?rc=1&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thelancet.com%2Fjournals%2Fflanin%2Farticle%2FPIS1473-3099%2820%2930568-5%2Ffulltext>

Layers of negative gender impact due to COVID-19



Source: UN Women. From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

The negative economic impact in terms of loss of livelihoods has been largely observed in women employed in the informal sector. Before COVID-19, women employed in low-medium skill jobs saw wage disparities, while they experienced significant job and income loss during the pandemic (25 percent women vs. 21 percent men).⁸ Around 740 million women are employed in the unorganised sector and 60 percent of them experienced lower incomes in the first month after the spread of the virus.⁹ The recent report by UN Women provides perspectives on the extent of the indirect impact on social and health factors and a disproportionate negative impact on women.

740 million women



Employed in the informal sector

Income fell by 60%



19% women
employment more
at risk than men's



54% women
Accommodation and food
services sector hit the
hardest by the pandemic

72% domestic workers



80% are women who lost their jobs during the pandemic

75.4 million workers

Source: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

⁸ UN Women. Sep 2020. COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers

⁹ UN Women. From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

It is expected that in 2021, there will be 118 women in poverty for every 100 poor men globally, and this ratio could rise to 121 poor women for every 100 poor men by 2030, with sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to be the most affected.¹⁰

The World Bank's database indicates an increase in the number of women being educated and participating in the workforce.¹¹ However, world over, contextual limitations on gender equality are apparent and the imbalance has only widened during the crisis.

Interestingly, in countries with women in leadership roles, deaths from COVID-19 are six times lower due to better response and emphasis on social and environmental well-being.¹² The paper conclusively identifies the need for gender-responsive policy making and accelerating solutions that result in social and economic women empowerment.

The Indian context

The COVID-19 crisis has only amplified the gender imbalance in the country. Apart from the negative economic impact (labour force participation: 11 percent women vs. 71 percent men employed),¹³ women have also faced the brunt of higher volumes of domestic work and unpaid care—increased time poverty across India. In comparison with men, women spend more time on household duties and chores—cleaning, childcare, tutoring their children, and preparing meals.¹⁴

Migrant women workers experienced large-scale displacement and loss of income and social protection measures as a result of the pandemic. As indicated in the global data, female domestic workers and those working in the services sector suffered majorly from job loss, difficulty in accessing finance, and overall loss of agency.

In crowded slums, women once again faced challenges in accessing basic resources such as water and food, while in rural areas, despite the pandemic women continue to scavenge for water and firewood, increasing their exposure to the virus. Additionally, issues related to domestic violence, sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, and nutrition levels for women and children have all suffered setbacks.

Reverse migration and loss of livelihoods also affects children's education, specifically that of the girl child. The education system was unprepared for the sudden lockdown, resulting in lower enrolment levels and potentially, an unmeasurable number of out-of-school girls. Parents of lower economic groups in rural areas, largely have their children, both boys and girls, attend government schools (84 percent) with less than 50 percent families having access to smartphones.¹⁵

¹⁰ UN Women. From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

¹¹ World Bank. Labor Force Participation Rate. 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS>

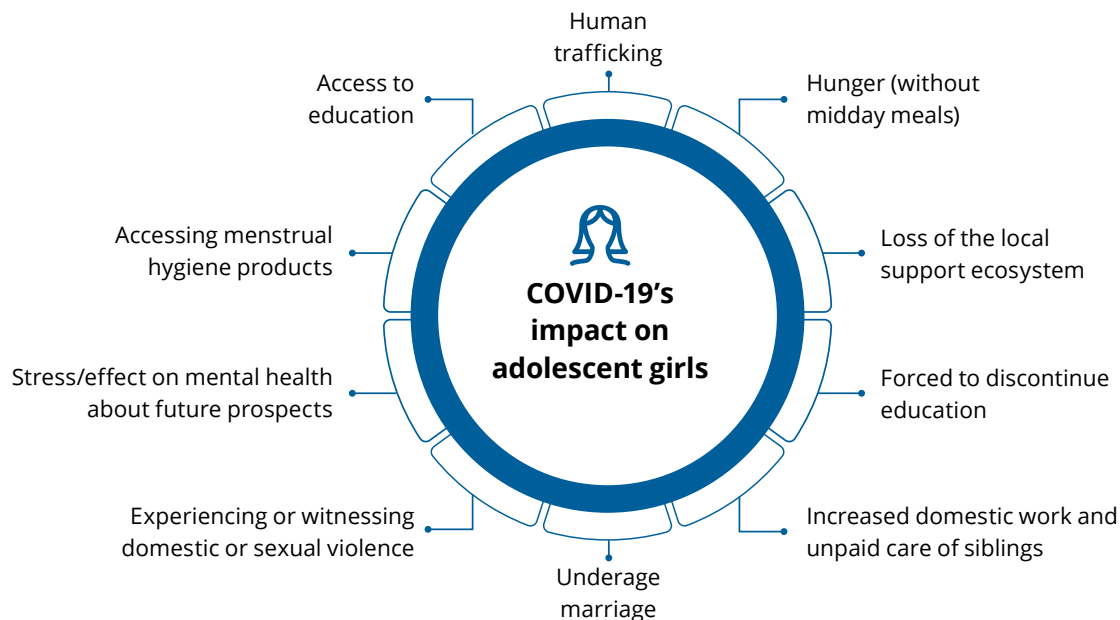
¹² UN Women. From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

¹³ Shruti Rajagopalan, Women won't recover easily from India's pandemic. Dec 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-12-20/india-s-covid-19-pandemic-recession-hurts-women-most>

¹⁴ UN Women. From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

¹⁵ ASER, Rural, Wave1. 2020. http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202021/ASER%202020%20wave%201%20-%20v2/asr2020wave1report_feb1.pdf

Essentially, the challenges of young and adolescent girls vary from being out of school to overcoming domestic barriers.

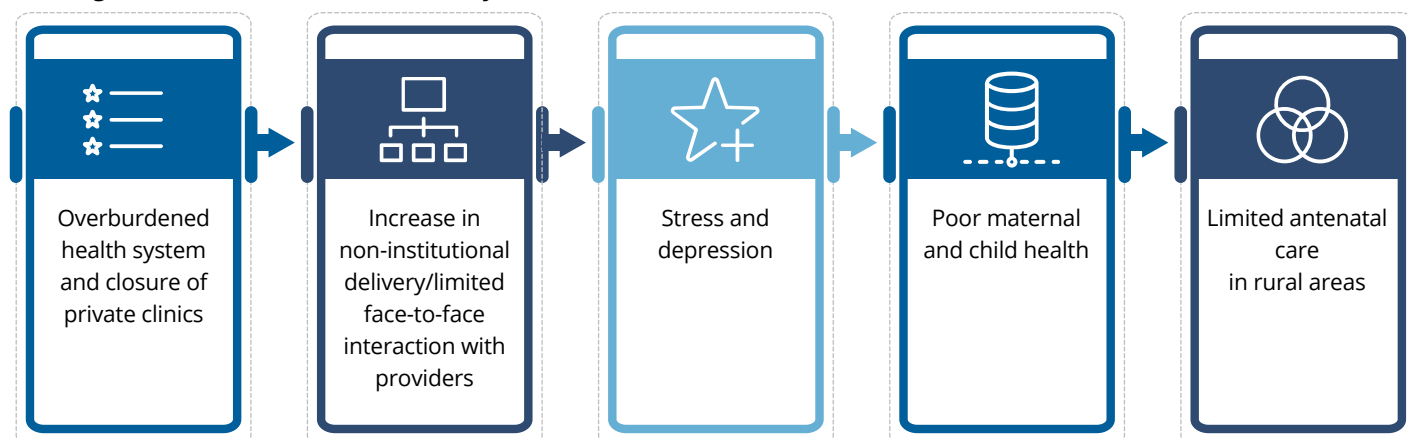


Source: Dasra. 2020. Lost in Lockdown: Chronicling the Impact of Covid-19 on India's Adolescents. Mumbai: DASRA. https://www.dasra.org/assets/uploads/resources/Lost%20in%20Lockdown_Dasra_vf.pdf; <https://empowerweb.org/news-events/news/empower-spotlights-impact-of-covid-on-adolescent-girls-in-india>

Apart from the economic and social effects, the health impact from a gendered perspective is equally significant. Access to health, emergence of a shadow pandemic

in terms of reproductive and sexual health, menstrual health, and maternal and child health are all negative outcomes of COVID-19.¹⁶

Challenged maternal and child health ecosystem

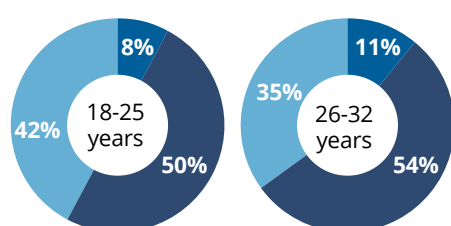


Source: Maternal Mental Health in India during COVID-19 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7275174/>

¹⁶ ISG Global. Dec 2020. What do we know about the Impact of Gender on the COVID-19 Pandemic?

The mental health statistics for women portrays a stark picture of a “boiling kettle” syndrome. Women reported poor mental health during the lockdown from being somewhat impacted to strongly impacted. The situation is bound to have a wider negative consequence on their day-day to lives.

COVID-19 Impact on Mental Health of Women



- Not Impacted
- Somewhat impacted
- Strongly Impacted

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1171224/india-impact-on-mental-health-of-women-during-covid-19-lockdown-by-age-group/>

A key challenge that women face is the gross underrepresentation at the highest levels of decision-making. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the UN, 10 of 152 elected heads of state worldwide are women. Moreover, per the Global Health 50/50 report, gender parity at the CEO level is 40 years away as only 25 percent of senior leadership positions comprise women.¹⁷ More concerning is that for every three men quoted in mainstream media on COVID-19, only one woman was quoted, further subduing the female perspective of the pandemic.¹⁸

Achieving gender equality is an important prerequisite to demonstrate progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where global leaders committed “to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men”, (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, target 8.5.) and “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (SDG 5).¹⁹

Research approach

This knowledge paper “COVID-19 and New Gender Equations – Respond, Recover, Thrive” is an attempt to bring forth the gendered impact of the pandemic, highlighting the impact, challenges, and positive narratives that have emerged as a result, and the type of gender-specific initiatives that should be delivered to reverse the negative outcomes. The paper tries to outline probable solutions through the ‘Respond, Recover & Thrive’ narrative: “Respond” to the current situation through immediate steps and limit the adverse impact, “Recover” by introducing medium-term measures, and “Thrive” with a long-term approach towards an equal future from a gender perspective.

This paper is based on secondary research that involved multi-stage analyses across three key spectrums:



Challenges across a woman's lifecycle:

Young girl – adolescence
– womanhood



Range of challenges:

Economic – social –
health – education



Basket of solutions and
gender-specific best
practices

¹⁷ IPU, Mar 2020. <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2020-03/in-2020-world-cannot-afford-so-few-women-in-power>

¹⁸ The Wire, Aug 2020. COVID-19: When a contagion comes, women bear a heavy burden

¹⁹ SDGs. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



New gender equations





Economic impact from a gender lens: Widening disparities



The pandemic has impacted the global economy in an unprecedented manner. The full or partial lockdown measures introduced to contain the spread of the virus led to closure or scaling down of several economic activities that directly translated to loss of jobs for many. The informal economy where women find the highest employment (South Asia: 95 percent, Sub-Saharan Africa: 89 percent, Latin America and the Caribbean: 59 percent²⁰) was one of the worst affected, with women overrepresenting the hardest hit industries such as hospitality, tourism,

retail, and entertainment.²¹ An example here is readymade garment production in Bangladesh (dominated by women who form 80 percent of the workforce), which recorded a 45.8 percent drop in orders in the first half of 2020.²²

The financial impact recorded is disproportionate as an estimated 80 percent of the 72 percent domestic workers who lost jobs were women.²³ The pandemic has derailed, and in many instances halted or diverted, worldwide efforts towards poverty alleviation. The

Around the world, during the first month of the pandemic, incomes of women dropped by 60 percent and they had a 19 percent higher risk of losing a job than men.

- UN Women

²⁰ UN Women. <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/changingworldofwork/en/index.html>

²¹ UN Women. Covid-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>

²² IISD. Aug 2020. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/women-more-affected-by-trade-disruptions-from-covid-19-wto-finds/>

²³ UN Women. From Insights to Action

intensification of poverty gaps is evident from every new statistic—the ratio of 118 women to every 100 men in poverty in 2021 might worsen to 121 women for every 100 men by 2030. It is estimated that 26 million more women will be living in poverty in 2030 because of the pandemic.²⁴ Per global trends, women earn less, subsequently saving less and have lower job security. Also, due to a greater likelihood of them being employed in the informal sector, their capacity to absorb the economic setback of this proportion is low to minimal.²⁵

In India, where half of the female population is outside the labour force (508 million), the pandemic has made the situation even more precarious.²⁶ A staggering 149 million women involved in household chores and classified as “not working” or involved in “unpaid work” had to undertake increased care and domestic workload resulting in enhanced time poverty.²⁷ The pandemic exacerbated already overstrained women in Bangladesh, where they were performing 3.43 times more unpaid domestic work than men in pre-pandemic times.²⁸ The women who moved to virtual workspaces also had a similar narrative. The situation is worrisome as there can be long-term ramifications with women leaving the workforce for good due to greater care demands, unpaid sick leave, limited or no social protection, and lack of health coverage. Women from Europe and regions of Central Asia (ECA) mentioned a

similar plight—reduced pay and difficulty in getting paid work. The younger group (18–34 years age), part of the active working age group, suffered more. Self-employed women across the world who mostly have small and medium-scale enterprises were the worst hit during the pandemic, with many units being shut down.²⁹

Urban and rural women were affected differently across the globe due to the pandemic. The general trend has been outmigration of rural men and youth to urban centres in search of jobs. The introduction of abrupt lockdown measures provided no response time to migrants residing in urban areas, resulting in India witnessing a migrant worker population crisis. Hordes of migrant men returned to their villages because they had lost their jobs, and consequently, their families had lost their main source of income. While in the absence of men, the women of the households had taken up agricultural jobs and were solely responsible for tending to their children, the arrival of men meant increased domestic workload. The migrant population involved in agricultural work also moved to their hometowns, increasing the burden of farm work for rural women. This resonates with the plight of women in developing economies where they form 43 percent of the agricultural labour force.³⁰ It has also been observed that during times of financial distress, women prioritise the nutrition needs of their children and husbands, compromising their own health and immunity.

²⁴ UN Women. COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>

²⁵ UN. Policy brief. Apr 2020. The Impact of Covid19 on Women

²⁶ ILO Brief. Jun 2020. Rapid Assessment of the Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis on Employment

²⁷ ILO Brief. Jun 2020. Rapid Assessment of the Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis on Employment

²⁸ UN Women. May 2020. Covid-19 Bangladesh Rapid Gender Analysis

²⁹ UN Women. 2020. The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia: Preliminary results from a Rapid Gender Assessment

³⁰ WRI. Sep 2020. <https://www.wri.org/blog/2020/09/rural-women-must-be-heart-covid-19-response-and-recovery>

Go local!

GRAMALAYA has been working on WASH issues for more than three decades, and MHM (Menstrual Hygiene Management) is a critical component of its initiatives. While implementing CSR programmes in the vulnerable communities of Tamil Nadu, the organisation realized the importance of reusable cloth pads and thus, the idea of an enterprise with women SHG members involved in the production process was born. During the COVID-19 crisis, these cloth pads were a part of the relief kits distributed by the WASHMAN Committee (CBOs formed in the communities) with funding support from donors.

(Websites: Gramalaya and Giocare Cloth Pads)

Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India rising to the occasion³¹

Women have been at the core of the development planning process in majority of developing economies. The best example of demonstrating this is the Self-Help Group (SHG) revolution in India. These women groups have become synonymous with any rural setting. Group members have come forward in times of crises for their own members, as well as for the community that they reside in. The women took the challenge of addressing several issues put forth by the pandemic. In no time there were SHGs preparing masks, sanitisers, personal protective equipment kits, running community kitchens for migrant workers who were returning

to their hometowns in large numbers, conducting awareness campaigns on measures to contain the virus and maintaining good hygiene practices. There are several such inspiring stories from all corners reinstating that women, when given adequate representation, can be the changemakers that the world needs.

Women across the world have come forward to address the challenges posed by the pandemic, one such initiative is the Women Rise for All campaign launched on social media in the month of April 2020. Women leaders across the world have vowed to *save lives and protect livelihoods*³² under this initiative.

Corporates leading the way!

HSBC India has been supporting initiatives focussed on building financial capability of women from disadvantaged backgrounds through various implementation partners across the country. These initiatives have largely focussed on increasing access to finance, promoting women entrepreneurship, digitisation of processes for loan repayments at microfinance institutions, and financial/digital literacy training. During the pandemic, more women were linked to financial products, which in many cases was a microfinance loan to support income generation activities. A call centre setup to track the awareness level of women attending financial and digital literacy sessions included the dos and don'ts in its outbound call script during COVID-19. This also led to a spike in the number of inbound calls. Like HSBC India, several other corporates also supported their implementing partners by giving them the space to innovate.

³¹ World Bank. Apr 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/11/women-self-help-groups-combat-covid19-coronavirus-pandemic-india>

³² UN. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/women-rise-for-all>

Way ahead

During a similar outbreak in Liberia a few years ago that required strict lockdown and quarantine measures as a response, the economic impact recorded on women and girls was more severe as compared to men. It was also observed that the economic activity of men returned to pre-outbreak levels soon after the distancing rules were withdrawn, while for women the journey took much longer.³³ The way

ahead is going to be difficult and will require a balanced mix of immediate and long-term measures to ensure a gender-inclusive and a gender-responsive plan. Based on the pathways suggested by several governments and national and international development agencies, it is evident that the vulnerable and the marginalised should be part of the solution for the planning to be robust.



Respond

- Childcare support to ensure continuance/re-entry in the job market
- Added financial impetus to women-led SMEs to enable them to restart and recover losses
- Improved access to paid family and sick leave
- Increased funding to initiatives and institutions working to address the existing gaps exacerbated by the pandemic



Recover

- Social protection programmes with health coverage focussed on women
- Improved access to skilling and upskilling programmes
- Flexible work hours for women working from home
- Programmes to help women create a safety net
- Social messaging on sharing the domestic workload

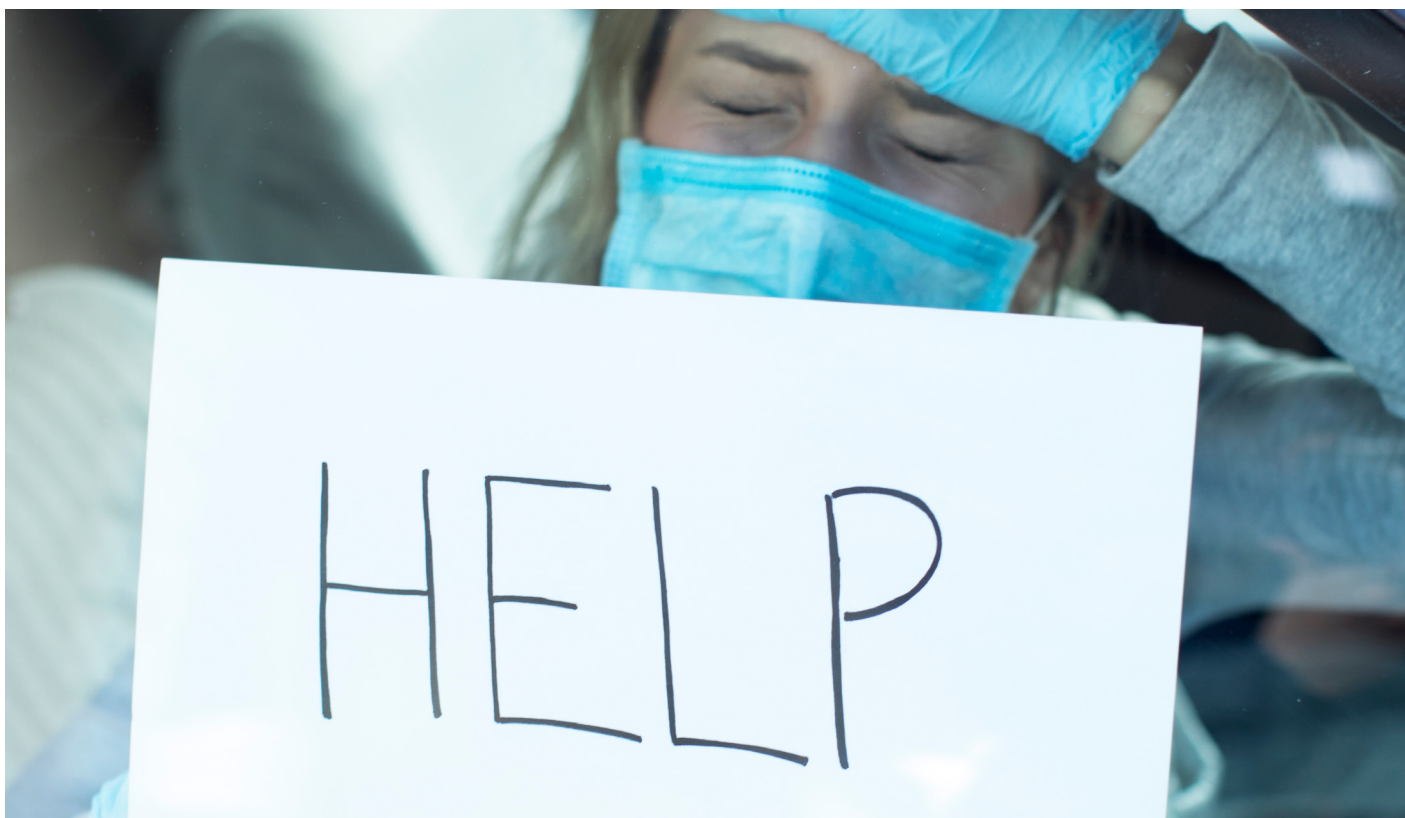


Thrive

- Gender-inclusive and gender-responsive policies
- Safe working conditions for women in non-formal employment
- Local employment solutions to minimise the impact of global supply-chain disruptions

³³ UN. Policy brief. Apr 2020. The Impact of COVID19 on Women

Social impact from a gender lens: The shadow pandemic



The effect that the pandemic has had on the general populace is multi-fold. High mortality rates concern regarding access to health care and loss of livelihood opportunities are some simplified examples of the adverse effects of the crisis. The consequences of a crisis are never gender-neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception.³⁴ It is imperative that the impact of the crisis be viewed from a gendered lens to enable informed gender-sensitive decision making. We must acknowledge that in addition to the monetary ramifications of the pandemic and the

subsequent lockdown measures, women are also personally bearing the brunt of the socio-economic fallout of COVID-19.

Domestic violence

Ever since national lockdowns were declared across parts of the world, the reactions across sections of the society have been contrasting. While some classes (such as the upper middle class) have welcomed the opportunity to spend more time with the family, we must also acknowledge the privilege that allows for work (and subsequent earnings) to

Post imposition of lockdown measures, an increase in domestic violence reports have been recorded globally.

- UN Women

³⁴ UN Women. Sep 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>

continue in most cases. Most countries have adopted measures that encourage social isolation, provide work-from-home opportunities, and limit business operations to essential services only. While these measures are effective in controlling the spread of the disease, they have a profound impact on the society with financial, socio-economic, and psychological repercussions.³⁵ In the absence of a well-structured and established support system, isolation can expose and exacerbate vulnerabilities. Quarantine conditions are often associated with alcohol abuse, depression, domestic violence, and PTSD-like symptoms. For individuals who are victims of domestic violence and abuse (physical and mental), it is usually the interaction with the external world that they find relief in, through reduced exposure to the perpetrator, allowing them to cope with the help of distractions.

Domestic abuse/violence (DV) is often used interchangeably with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)—sexual, physical, mental, verbal, elder abuse, and child abuse. In this section of the report, DV will be used synonymously with IPV. According to statistics shared by UN Women, DV reports have seen a significant increase across countries since the lockdown in March 2020. While in France, DV reporting went up by 30 percent, an increase of 25 percent was reported in Argentina. Helpline calls in Singapore were also reported to have increased by 33 percent.

Historically, DV rates have been seen to rise in the wake of economic slowdowns, natural or human-caused disasters, or during political and social instability. In majority of the cases, women are the victims. The idea behind this finding is

that frustrations caused by the outside world, the sense of failure experienced by the man of the household, is eventually channelised into violence towards those viewed as vulnerable, weak, or subordinate—namely, women, adolescent and young girls, children, or the elderly in the household. Before the pandemic, access to social support systems was available (to a large extent) in the form of medico-legal remedies, support homes, counselling services, etc. With a breakdown of this support system during the pandemic, the increase in the number of cases has not been proportionate to the support mechanisms instituted by the state and other players.

In India, post the declaration of the lockdown, the National Commission for Women (NCW) reported a substantial increase in domestic violence cases across the country. Globally, as the number of reports continued to increase, the number of formal complaints registered in India was counter-intuitively dwindling. Suspecting that reporting DV cases (an already underreported crime) had now become even more challenging due to movement restrictions, privacy challenges to make reports via formal channels, etc., the NCW launched a series of measures including a helpline, taskforce, and motivational videos to address this concern.³⁶

NCW in India launched WhatsApp based helpline, Mahilla Thanna (Special Cell for Women), released a video on psychological wellbeing and established a special taskforce to make it easier for women to report cases.

³⁵ National Centre for Biotechnology Information. Dec 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7195322/>

³⁶ National Commission for Women. Apr 2020. http://ncw.nic.in/sites/default/files/2.%20RS%20April%202020_0.pdf

Inequalities in the labour market

A few months into understanding the extent of the crisis, the International Labour Organization (ILO) warned that the pandemic is expected to further widen labour market inequalities. It was predicted that those countries where progress had been made in bridging these gaps would lose some gains. According to Prof. K.R. Shyam Sunder, a labour economist, the pandemic has exacerbated the gender disparity with regard to labour due to the following three reasons:³⁷ the patriarchal structuring of society has increased work pressure on women with domestic chores being considered only a woman's responsibility. Secondly, as businesses try to adapt to changing circumstances, men are preferred over women on account of the perception that they can deliver without any significant domestic limitations. Lastly, the rights that women have struggled to earn while being in the workforce (such as transportation support and maternity leave) might, during the economic slowdown and because of the pandemic, be viewed as additional costs to businesses.

Additional responsibilities and reduced social mobility

As women have always been viewed as primary caregivers for children (especially so in countries such as India), the fact that schools were shut as preventive measures against the COVID-19 outbreak further

increased pressures on the women of the household. In addition to increased domestic responsibilities due to the unavailability of house helps (majority of whom were also women), adapting to changing methods of working and work pressures (or being laid off in some cases), women were also expected to care for the children, who, under normal circumstances would be engaged at school for eight hours a day. With overwhelmed health services, the demand for home-based elderly care expectedly increased. In the absence of help, this burden was also inevitably transferred onto the women of the household.

The experiences of women across social classes and overlapping vulnerabilities are notably different. As for migrant women working jobs in construction, the adversities were only compounded. It is known that women are bigger contributors to the informal sector than men (although wages drawn by men are significantly higher). In the absence of any institutionalised social security schemes for informal sector workers, economic stressors triggered reverse migration, returning them to a way of life they had aspired to outgrow. With a substantial prevalence of alcoholism amongst male daily wage earners, the loss of earnings and subsequent frustrations are often exhibited via gender-based violence.

³⁷ Live Mint. Oct 2020. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/women-s-workforce-participation-drops-11603757842533.html>

Way ahead



Respond

- Institutionalisation of processes to respond to gender-based violence
- Using a gender-disaggregated lens to dissect information reported on the social challenges faced



Recover

- Equal representation of women across decision-making bodies
- Acknowledgement of increased domestic work pressures on women



Thrive

- Provision of fiscal support in addition to direct bank transfers with a focus to improve positions that women occupy in supporting families
- Advocacy efforts to ensure that pay cuts/ layoffs are gender neutral with affirmative action to safeguard women's interests
- Integration of DV preventive efforts into COVID-19 response policies

Class of COVID-19: Gendered perspective on education inequities



The year 2020 brought to the surface, uncertainties, gaps in technology and innovation, and most importantly, disruptions to the existing lacunae in our systems. Dr. Michael J. Ryan of the Informal World Health Organization (WHO) Advisory Group was quoted saying “all countries need to review their strategies now”.³⁸ Although implied towards health, his words could not have more aptly described the current global education scenario.

The sheer suddenness and continued unpredictability of the pandemic, accompanied by strict lockdowns, offered countries little or no time to analyse the newly emerging risks and prepare for their mitigation. All efforts and resources

were channelled towards health and relief measures for those severely affected.

This need-based prioritisation led to a consequential low in the education sector.³⁹ With children and adolescents being vulnerable, schools and colleges were shut down indefinitely in more than 190 countries around the world, affecting 1,198.5 million learners worldwide.⁴⁰ In India, about 320 million students were affected by the school closures leading to a higher number of dropouts and the inability to enrol in schools.⁴¹

School closure was accompanied by minimal or no market alternatives for continued learning. Besides, schools were not equipped with adequate safety and

³⁸ Stefanie Valentic. 2020. 8 Quotes from the World Health Organization's Covid-19 Media Briefing

³⁹ IMF. 2021. Policy Responses to Covid-19

⁴⁰ UNESCO. 2020. SDG-Education 2030 Webinar Series for Latin America and the Caribbean: Leaving no one behind in times of the Covid-19 pandemic

⁴¹ UNESCO. 2020. Global monitoring of school closures caused by Covid-19

hygiene measures that the pandemic demanded. Examinations and assessments were postponed, affecting students' academic year. As "anganwadis" or rural childcare centres in India were also closed, children below the age of five did not have access to midday meals. Adolescents faced similar challenges around receiving midday meals in their educational institutions, alongside a social disconnect due to the pandemic.⁴²

NAZ Foundation

The multitude of challenges faced by adolescent and young girls have magnified with the added stress of the pandemic. Naz Foundation realised this at a very early stage and introduced life-skills online training modules using indoor exercise as a medium to spread the message. These sessions covered topics ranging from menstruation, hygiene, physical distancing, violence, safe spaces, and mental health, and were delivered by female coaches.

(Naz Foundation Trust social media handle)

Pre-pandemic research confirms that in any crisis, the poorest are the most impacted, with 90 percent in low income, 50 percent in middle income, and 30 percent in high income countries failing to master foundational secondary-level skills.⁴³ The newer estimates in the UNESCO GEM Report divulge that about 40 percent of low-income and low-middle income countries could not provide support to disadvantaged learners during lockdown.⁴⁴

With large-scale migration and loss of livelihood, attention has been diverted further from education. This phenomenon was especially common in rural and urban poor disadvantaged areas across nations, where education is never the priority,

pandemic or otherwise. It contributed to the financial stress of families for school fees amongst other household expenses. Families could no longer afford to educate all their children, and the priority is always given to the boy over a girl child. UNESCO estimates that around 132 million girls are out-of-school globally and reveals poverty to be a major determining factor of a girl's access to education completion.⁴⁵

Schools being shut led to the closure of a safe space for girls where they could talk to teachers face-to-face and have peers. Based on the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) statistics, with every three-month extension of the lockdown, there was a 15 million increase in cases of domestic violence. Additional challenges of being at home included domestic responsibilities being handed over to the girl child, adding hindrance to the time she could spend in learning. About 67 percent parents in the Asia Pacific region have reported an increase in their daughter's domestic work in contrast to 57 percent that reported additional work for their sons.⁴⁶

Girls being married off to not be an additional financial burden to the family has been an existing practice amongst rural communities. With the pandemic exacerbating the financial challenges, some girls lost complete access to education, leading to higher dropout rates of almost 20 percent in countries such as India.⁴⁷

On the positive front, countries were quick to innovate and commence digital initiatives that were aimed at revolutionising the existing education system. Ideologies were forced to be fast-tracked to prevent further dropouts and avoid discontinuity in education. Findings of the Brookings survey discovered the presence of 3,000 new education innovations across 160 countries.⁴⁸ All

Even in the developed economies like the United States, 1 in 10 children had little or no access to technology.

- United States Census Bureau

⁴² National Herald. 2020. The govt must assist girl students from poor backgrounds to get education during the pandemic

⁴³ Emiliana Vega & Rebecca Winthrop. 2020. Brookings-Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before COVID-19

⁴⁴ UNESCO. 2020. UNESCO report on inclusion in education shows 40% of poorest countries did not provide specific support to disadvantaged learners during COVID-19 crisis

⁴⁵ World Bank. Sep 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation#:~:text=According%20to%20UNESCO%20estimates%2C%20around,of%20upper%2Dsecondary%20school%20age.>

⁴⁶ Jenelle & Natalie. 2020. The Diplomat-COVID leaves millions of Millions of Girls at Risk of School Dropout in Asia-Pacific

⁴⁷ Sanjay Singh. 2020. Better India-Experts Predict 20% Increase in Girl School Dropouts. What Can We Do About It?

⁴⁸ Emiliana Vega & Rebecca Winthrop. 2020. Brookings- Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before Covid-19

learning content had to be converted to a format compatible with digital platforms, with technology being the opportunistic sector and saviour in these challenging times.

The next emerging challenge was providing access to students remotely and in areas where technology penetration was found to be low. The wealthiest communities did not bear the direct brunt of the pandemic, while unaffordability and poor internet connectivity amongst low income families left them no alternative but to drop out. Furthermore, for adolescents and disabled students pursuing education and skill courses online, especially in rural areas, connectivity and operability posed a major challenge. It was computed that only 25 percent low-income countries were providing remote-learning facilities to learners in contrast to 90 percent high-income countries who were able to provide remote learning assistance.⁴⁹ According to the UNESCO report, 258 million children and youth were completely neglected from education due to inaccessibility resulting from poverty.⁵⁰

Developing countries such as Jamaica, Argentina, and South Africa overcame some of their challenges by introducing a zero-rating practice, which provided students access to learning websites free of cost. Other countries such as Kenya and Rwanda either provided students with additional data or ensured network coverage using the Google innovation “Loon Balloon” that consisted of 4G base stations. Croatia, Egypt, and Dominican Republic took a step further and arranged for free internet or WiFi hotspots for students.⁵¹ The ASER report indicates that only one-third of the children enrolled in schools in India were provided learning material through digital or non-digital modes.⁵²

Besides access to technology, a unique challenge emerged for female students from studying at home. Families in rural disadvantaged areas were found to have access to one or two electronic devices at home such as mobile phones. This was usually owned by a parent who would often go to work, preventing children from having access during this hour. In households with more than one child, boys are usually prioritized over girls, who are expected to carry out household chores.⁵³

A striking development during the pandemic was the realisation of the importance of schooling by parents and their increased involvement. While parents felt that having children around in the house required them to re-plan their daily activities, they began to acknowledge and appreciate schools as well as its teachers. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, families applauded not only their health care workers, but also their teachers. Parents’ participation in their child’s education increased due to online learning modes. This has aided in creating a global community that is concerned about the future of education.⁵⁴ In India, three-fourth of those learning from home received support from family members, including parents and older siblings. Parents who had studied up to fifth grade or lower were equally supportive of their children being given an opportunity to complete their education.⁵⁵

In addition to strengthened relationships between teachers and parents, some of the most notable partnerships was that with the community and social welfare organisations who work at grassroot levels. Partnerships were established between the media, education leaders, technology companies, not-for-profits, and the government to form a strong network that would design a fast-evolving education

PRATHAM

Pratham launched its home and community-based learning initiative customized for children and mothers of 11 Indian states using its strong volunteering network, state partnerships and local technology infrastructure such as Radio, TV, text messages, messenger and government applications.

(Pratham website)

⁴⁹ Emiliana Vega & Rebecca Winthrop. 2020. Brookings-Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before COVID-19

⁵⁰ UNESCO. 2020. UNESCO report on inclusion in education shows 40% of poorest countries did not provide specific support to disadvantaged learners during COVID-19 crisis

⁵¹ Sampreet Kaur & Ayushi Jain. 2020. The Hindu: Business Line. How to bridge the digital divide in education

⁵² ASER Report. 2020. Wave 1 (Rural) findings-India

⁵³ Mahima Bansal & Swati Shukla. 2020. Feminism in India-Understanding How The COVID-19 Crisis Impacted Girls’ Education in India

⁵⁴ Emiliana Vega & Rebecca Winthrop. 2020. Brookings-Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before Covid-19

⁵⁵ ASER Report. 2020. Wave 1 (Rural) findings-India

system. As schools remained open for community engagement, community areas were reimagined as large playgrounds for diversified learning.⁵⁶ The not-for-profits continue to strive hard to close the learning gap and continue to keep young learners engaged. Several community campaigns were launched to ensure that the girls return to school. Examples of

these include the “Keeping the girls in the picture” campaign of Nepal through radio broadcast, the national educational partnership in Pakistan that carried out WASH campaigns in remote isolated districts, and UNESCO’s Gender Flagship programme of the COVID-19 Global Education Coalition, titled “Building back equal: girls back to school guide”.⁵⁷

Way ahead⁵⁸



Respond

- Sanitisation of education premises as a mandatory protocol for reopening
- Creating the gender dimension towards enrollment of out-of-school children
- Equitable access to technology and online resources so that female students do not have to compete with the male sibling
- Initial parent engagement by teachers and social welfare organisations to ensure the above
- Training of adolescent girls in digital literacy and introduction to emerging sector opportunities
- Inclusion of health and safety education in the curriculum for adolescent girls, e.g., menstrual hygiene management and self-defense



Recover

- Set up of an institutional core as the heart of learning and teaching to form a web of partnerships
- Introduction of blended learning models on indigenously manufactured equipment to reduce costs
- Use of public schools as the centre of education systems to provide equal opportunity
- Continued community awareness and gender sensitisation campaigns to encourage girl child education
- Continued parent-teacher engagement to change age-old perceptions through newly built trust
- Ensuring health and safety protocols at schools and training centers for youth



Thrive

- Equal opportunities provided to those offered to male students; the girl feels safe and the knowledge and skills imparted make her independent and a major contributor to change in her community
- Taking an iterative approach where there is scope for continuous learning from failures, robust evaluation and documentation of gender-based data, and scaling opportunities that lead to a “powered up school”
- An informed community that actively participates towards ensuring equal access to education and resources
- Technology access for all

⁵⁶ Emiliana Vega & Rebecca Winthrop. 2020. Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before Covid-19

⁵⁷ Jenelle & Natalie. 2020. The Diplomat-COVID leaves millions of Millions of Girls at Risk of School Dropout in Asia-Pacific

⁵⁸ UNESCO-IIEP. 2020. Covid-19 school closures: Why girls are more at risk

Compounding vulnerabilities: Gendered perspective on access to health care



Epidemics and other humanitarian crises have been noted to disproportionately affect vulnerable groups; minorities, the elderly population, homeless people, and women. Moreover, they exacerbate existing gender inequalities.⁵⁹ During the pandemic-imposed lockdowns, women were already spending higher durations of time on domestic duties and care giving and have had to take on more unpaid work, thus reducing time for self-care and reported increase in stress levels.

Loss of financial and mobility independence, as well as social isolation has increased women's vulnerability to experience varied forms of abuse.

Additionally, as key care givers of families, the unpredictable and ambiguous nature of the pandemic has resulted in women reporting higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. There have been COVID-19-related suicides reported across the globe. Furthermore, the Indian government has initiated helpline numbers across the country. According to the NCW, they received 2,320 complaints on mental harassment and emotional abuse in the month of April; 2,914 complaints in July; and 2,043 in June, in contrast to the previous years, which received 1,550 complaints between the months of December 2019 and March 2020.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ ISG Global. Dec 2020. What do we know about the Impact of Gender on the COVID-19 Pandemic?

⁶⁰ Live mint, Aug 2016. NCW planning to launch 24x7 helpline for women facing mental harassment. (<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/ncw-planning-to-launch-24x7-helpline-for-women-facing-mental-harassment-11597585503991.html>)

Gendered beliefs and practices around health seeking behaviours also mean that women typically delay seeking care; with household incomes contracting for many disadvantaged households, this extends to delays in getting medical assistance for routine illnesses. Further, experiences with earlier health outbreaks suggest that with the focus shifting to managing the public health situation imposed by the pandemic, delivery of routine services including those related to sexual and reproductive health is usually adversely impacted. This could have implications on maternal mortality and other reproductive health outcomes amongst women and girls. There has been a reported increase of sexual and reproductive violence, which has been called the “shadow pandemic” by the UN. Globally, there has been a 20 percent increase in the number of domestic abuse cases reported. In India, 1,477 complaints were registered by women—higher than those received during previous lockdowns in the last decade.⁶¹

Going the technology way!

A Mumbai-based nonprofit organization launched a free virtual OPD system, which provides mothers and children from vulnerable communities’ health care services through volunteer obstetricians and gynecologists.

(Armman NGO website)

Per estimates made by health experts, millions have lost access to family planning services. Additionally, the findings of a UN survey stated that the lockdown led to approximately seven million unwanted pregnancies, globally.⁶² In India, the public health care system was burdened with COVID-19 patients, which led to pregnant women facing difficulties in accessing maternal health care services. Additionally,

social distancing norms and the lockdown restricted pregnant women in rural India to contact their local health care workers resulting in multiple unsafe pregnancies. It has been estimated that the loss of these services can lead to an additional 2.3 million unintended pregnancies, 1.45 million abortions (including 834,043 unsafe abortions), and 1,743 maternal deaths in India.⁶³ Furthermore, India is a country that has a high neonatal mortality rate and it has been noted that the number of institutional deliveries fell by 40 percent during the lockdown.⁶⁴

While the COVID-19 virus seems to infect equal number of men and women globally, the incidence of confirmed cases has been higher in men (65 percent per gender disaggregated data).⁶⁵ Further, while data across countries indicate a higher fatality rate amongst men, potentially due to biological constitution and gendered behaviour patterns (e.g., smoking), evidence is available to prove that women from specific demographics and occupational groups have higher exposures and hence, a greater risk of contracting the infection.⁶⁶ Further, there have been studies which highlight that women’s health data is usually unreported due to unequal access to health care, and the incidence of men getting tested is higher as women are more homebound.⁶⁷ It is imperative to highlight the lack of access to health care for transgenders due to socio-cultural barriers. Furthermore, transgender women have reported high levels of psychological vulnerability and distress.⁶⁸

The COVID-19 sex disaggregated tracker reports data collected across 186 countries accounting for 99 percent of global cases. It had sex-disaggregated data for 58 percent of all case data and 72 percent of all deaths, which were reported to WHO. Specifically, 11 countries in the SEARO

⁶¹ The Hindu. Jun 2020. Data a Domestic Violence complaints a 10 year high during Covid-19

⁶² Times of India. May 2020. Covid-19 baby boom? India expected to have the highest number of births this year.

⁶³ FRHS India. May 2020. Impact of COVID 19 on India’s Family Planning Program Policy Brief

⁶⁴ IDROnline. Jun 2020. The Impact of Covid-19 on reproductive health services.

⁶⁵ UNWomen. Jun 2020. data.unwomen.org

⁶⁶ The Lancet. COVID-19 the gendered impacts of the outbreak. Vol 395

⁶⁷ The Wire. Sep 2020. <https://science.thewire.in/the-sciences/covid-19-gendered-data-females-women-susceptibility-severity/>.

⁶⁸ NCBI. Jul 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7386532/>

(South East Asia Region) and the Eastern Mediterranean region did not report sex-disaggregated data for seven million cases. Moreover, countries did not report additional indicators such as testing, ICU admissions, or cases amongst health care workers by sex.⁶⁹

Culturally determined gender roles translate into women being the primary care givers for the sick at home and at the frontline in the form of nurses and health workers at community levels. Despite the significant role that women play in the health care industry, there are various challenges, which they face. Most have complained about unsafe working conditions and unfair work practices. About 70 percent of the poorly paid health care workers are women, for example, 90 percent health workers in the Hubei province of China are women and often work without proper safety equipment and training. Through a survey by Oxfam India of 306 ASHA workers (Accredited Social Health Activist), who visit a minimum of 25 homes per day to screen suspected patients in rural and urban spaces, it was found that 75 percent were provided with masks; 62 percent received gloves to perform their tasks; 23 percent received hazmat suits; and 76 percent received training. The other important workers

that need personal protective equipment (PPE), training, and support are social care workers, both paid and unpaid. Care homes for older persons have been a major source of infections in many countries in Europe and North America, and are mostly staffed with poorly paid women.⁷⁰ Additionally, women health care workers across the globe have reported that they lack the resources to manage their menstruation cycles; from the lack of availability of sanitary products to PPE kits not being conducive to their periods.

Clinical trials have historically been limited to cisgender men. It is imperative to include women and transgenders to understand the effect and consequences to their health. It is necessary to understand and address the different ways in which COVID-19 would manifest and effect women who suffer with women specific diseases such as lupus, fibroids, and pregnancies, and so on.⁷¹ A large proportion of COVID-19 treatment studies identified from high-volume clinical trial registries specifically excluded pregnant women. The WHO has called for the inclusion of pregnant women in research to evaluate the prevention and therapeutics of infection.

Women make up more than 70 percent health workers globally, making them highly vulnerable to being infected by the virus. A staggering 77 percent health workers in Spain, 70 percent in Italy, 73 percent in Germany, 74 percent in Ireland, 66 percent in Ireland, and 38 percent in India infected with COVID-19 were women.

- TOI article, 4 Oct 2020

⁶⁹ ICRW. Dec 2020. Regional Update Report

⁷⁰ Reliefweb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/women-s-unpaid-and-underpaid-work-times-covid-19>

⁷¹ American progress. Jul 2020. (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/07/15/487429/toward-equitable-treatments-womens-health-coronavirus-beyond/>)

Way ahead⁷²**Respond**

- Setting up of protocols, helplines, and support groups to enable detection, fast reporting, and protection of women from gender-based violence in these contexts
- Ensuring the availability of sanitary products and protective gear suitable for women's physiology
- Conducting research to review the gendered impact of COVID-19 on women's health
- Setting up protocols for data collection of gender-disaggregated data

**Recover**

- Active and intentional inclusion of pregnant women and women in clinical trials require addressing the institutional, socio-economic, and cultural barriers to women's participation in clinical trials
- Steps to address the pay gap based on gender in the health care sector
- Adequate training for women health workers
- Gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection, which takes into consideration the increase in unpaid care work
- Adequate response kit and capacities for frontline workers

**Thrive**

- Prioritise women's voices and perspectives. Ensure adequate representation of women at the policymaking and technical advisory roles
- Introduce innovative models that compensate for the gaps in public services to address areas of remote work models to improve work-life balance and reduce the effect of the pandemic on women's mental health through co-responsibility
- Provision of telemedicine and technology-based solutions to expand health care reach

⁷² Deloitte. Oct 2020. Social response to Covid-19

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