



A STUDY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN IN SOLAPUR CITY

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great socio-economic and psychological impact on women in Solapur City, which has intensified pre-existing gender inequalities. Lockdowns and mobility restrictions significantly affected the livelihoods of women in Solapur, especially those working in informal sectors such as weaving, domestic work, and small-scale businesses. Job loss and financial insecurity resulted from such disruptions, rendering women dependent on male family members and further exacerbating their vulnerability. The pandemic further escalated the burden of unpaid care work as schools were shut down and studies became online-based, making children's learning more of a mothers' burden because many did not have access to technology or its use. Add this to sick family members in the household whom they must also care for as well as perform all household chores, leaving them exhausted both physically and emotionally. Psychological distress was general, with more anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion, most of which manifested among the less privileged. Also, domestic violence increased during this period, in which women had been confined at home with the abusive partners because they could not seek help; social isolation, as well as disrupted support systems, had them in a tough spot. Also, access to mental health services was limited. Socially, the pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized groups such as widows, single mothers, and women from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing education, healthcare, and social welfare services. The digital divide further exacerbated women's lack of participation in online education and employment, further entrenching existing gender gaps. Traditional gender roles were further amplified, reducing women's autonomy and decision-making power within their households. The pandemic further highlighted the importance of gender-sensitive policies, the need for well-targeted support systems, the need to fill the digital gap, mental health problems, and, above all, the economic and social empowerment of women.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, Psychological Consequences, Covid-19, Women

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted societies worldwide. However, in this case, women are most vulnerable to health crises because of the pre-existing gender inequalities that existed before the crisis. This study takes a microcosmic approach by looking at the specific case of the city of Solapur in the state of Maharashtra, India [1]. Socio-economic disparities have increased, and this pandemic has forced the vulnerable section, including women, further into financial precarity. Lockdowns and mobility restrictions in Solapur, which has a majority of women employed in informal sectors such as weaving, domestic work, and small-scale businesses, affected their livelihoods and increased the burden of unpaid care work on women. It has created a cycle of stress and exhaustion in their lives and made it challenging for them to sustain financial independence and stability.

Mental problems in women across the pandemic were prevalent, which led to increased occurrences of intimate partner violence, emotional abuse, and strained relationships among families [2]. More and more women confessed that they are becoming more anxious and depressed, feel hopeless, with a lack of psychological counselling support. The confinement and social isolation had limited them from accessing most psychological counselling support services.

Social implications of the pandemic have been profound as well, as obstacles to education, healthcare, and social welfare programs tend to fall hardest on already disadvantaged groups like widows, single mothers, and women from less economically developed countries [3]. Stereotypes that feed into notions that women have to sacrifice their needs for their family's well-being further erode their social autonomy. The absence of digital skills and access to information technology has barred many women from online education, professional development, and entrepreneurial opportunities, which widen the gender gap.

Table 1: Overview of Studies on the Socio-Economic & Psychological Impacts of COVID-19

Author Name	Topic Covered	Research Study Title
Bukuluki et al. (2020) [4]	Socio-economic and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on urban refugees in Uganda	The socio-economic and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on urban refugees in Uganda
Das, Behera, and Paital (2022) [5]	Socio-economic impact of COVID-19, including economic disruptions and mental health issues	Socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the Environment
Florin et al. (2020) [6]	Socio-economic and psychological impacts of COVID-19 on radiologists in private and public hospitals	Socio-economic and psychological impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on private practice and public hospital radiologists

2. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

The socio-economic status of women in Solapur City was deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the already vulnerable position of women in the labor market and homes, effects such as lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and economic downturn compounded problems for women. The key issues are elaborated upon as follows:

2.1. Employment Disruption and Financial Instability

The pandemic caused a sudden lockdown, leading to job losses, particularly for women in Solapur who work in small-scale industries like garment manufacturing, domestic service, and street vending [7]. They lost income, faced financial insecurity, and struggled to afford basic necessities. They were also restricted in their financial independence from their male relatives, who imposed restrictions on their autonomy. The stigma of financial independence by women worsened their situation, as most homes focused more on male employment during the economic downturn. The lack of job security, paid leave, and severance benefits further exacerbated their financial situation.

2.2. Informal Sector Challenges in Solapur

The lockdown in Solapur severely impacted the informal economy, particularly women in traditional sectors like handloom weavers, small-scale tailors, and vegetable sellers. Disrupted supply chains, fewer consumers, and restrictions on movements left women vulnerable to long-term economic hardship. They lacked formal financial systems and social security benefits, and were excluded from government relief packages. Bureaucratic red tapes further hindered their access to financial aids, further exacerbating their economic hardship.

2.3. Increased Burden of Unpaid Care Work

During the pandemic, women have experienced a significant increase in unpaid care work due to the shift to online learning and the lack of digital literacy among mothers [8]. This has led to increased workloads in caring for family members, household chores, and hygiene. This has resulted in physical and emotional strain, reducing women's participation in paid work and enhancing gender disparities in labor market engagement. In Solapur, intergenerational responsibilities, particularly managing elderly care, have increased, particularly for younger members.

2.4. Loss of Access to Economic Resources and Support Systems

The lockdowns have hindered access to essential economic and social support systems for women's livelihoods, particularly in the Solapur area. Women have relied on self-help groups, microfinance institutions, and community networks for loan and financial facilitation. However, these groups have been disrupted, leaving women without alternatives for credit and collective support. Market closures and restrictions on women's mobility further entrench inequalities. Tailored recovery programs are needed for women to recover from economic setbacks.

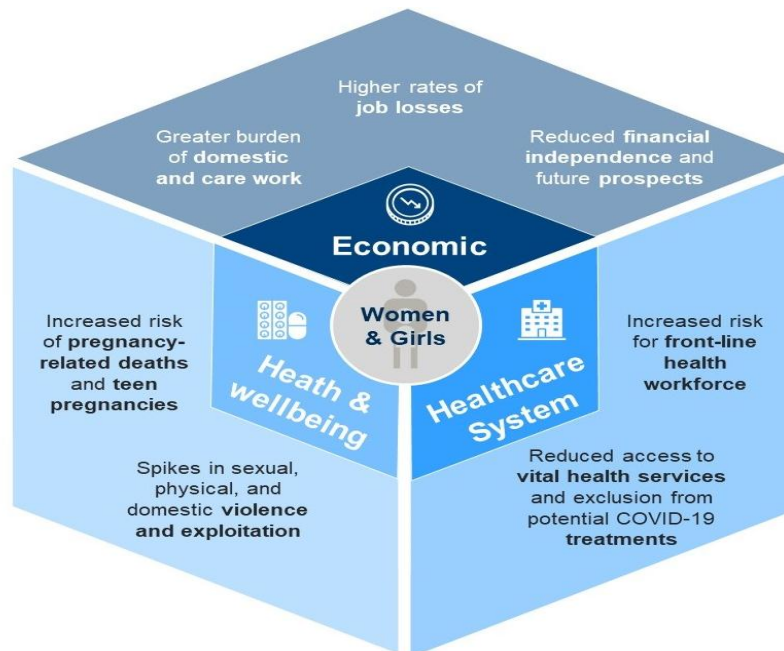


Figure 1: Seven Issues Affecting Women and Girls During Covid-19 Pandemic [9].

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted the psychological well-being of women, more so in a vulnerable region like Solapur City [10]. The problems were compounded by specific gender issues added to health, economic, and social disruptions; hence, leading to extreme mental distress. The key aspects of these challenges are explained below:

3.1. Anxiety, Depression, and Emotional Distress

The pandemic environment created an environment of uncertainty and fear, causing anxiety and depression in women. Women were usually the primary caregivers at home, and constant worrying about family members being affected by the virus, coupled with economic hardships, affected their emotional well-being immensely. Most of the women were stressed for long periods of time because of the loss of income, insecurity about food, and the burden of fulfilling demands in the house. Lockdowns are found to cause higher levels of feelings of loneliness and emotional exhaustion if there is an absence of recreation or socializing. Women of lower-income groups experienced greater psychological distress, which was partly attributed to the added dual burdens: economic instability coupled with fewer providers of healthcare services.

3.2. Domestic Challenges and Intimate Partner Violence

Lockdowns and movement restrictions confined many women to their homes, thus making them more vulnerable to domestic challenges [11]. For some, it increased family tensions, while for others, it resulted in intimate partner violence. During the pandemic, reports of domestic abuse increased, as women in Solapur and elsewhere were cut off from support systems and could not seek help. The economic burden and emotional burden on the family only fueled the debate over such issues, and women had very few ways out. Most of them were not willing to report the violence due to the social stigma, fear of revenge, or because they were financially and emotionally dependent on their perpetrators.

3.3. Social Isolation and Loss of Community Support

The pandemic severely disrupted the existing community structures and social networks for women in Solapur, which have been a source of emotional and practical support. Social distancing measures ban gatherings and collective activities that constitute the social lifeline of the city. It was a loss of community support most acutely painful for women because many relied on these networks for guidance, companionship, and venting of tension. This led to alienation and powerlessness, mainly for the aged and in joint families, where inter-generational conflicts at times increased their suffering. Even more severely, women who were single mothers or widows found themselves completely cut off, with little opportunity to seek relief from others at such a moment of crisis.

3.4. Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

The pandemic threw light on the grossly inadequate mental health infrastructure, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas like Solapur. Psychological distress among women during the pandemic period further compounded the difficulties of accessing mental health services [12]. The already overburdened healthcare facilities had little time for mental health problems due to COVID-19. Cultural stigma against mental health problems also made it difficult for women to come forward for treatment. Lack of telehealth services or digital literacy further restricted access to counselling and therapy. The most affected women were those from the marginalized communities as they often lacked finances, transport, or information on the available mental health services.

4. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PANDEMIC FOR WOMEN

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about intense social challenges to women, where it deepened existing inequalities and hindered the access of women to basic rights and resources. Women in Solapur City were subjected to some specific social struggles, especially on education, healthcare, and autonomy, while marginalized groups suffered more from these impacts. The discussions below are in detail on the key social implications:

4.1. Challenges in Accessing Education and Healthcare

The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the access of women to education and health. Schools and colleges were closed; therefore, online learning was implemented, affecting most in Solapur. Users did not have easy access to smartphones and access to internet facilities. This enhanced family's financial pressure to make girls stay out of schools. In healthcare, the over-occupied medical facilities increased the scarcity to access reproductive health care services, maternal care, and routine check-ups. Pregnant women suffered delays in care, increasing the risks to both mother and child. The poorer women had difficulties affording health care because of their economic disadvantages and limited mobility.

4.2. Marginalization of Vulnerable Groups (Widows, Single Mothers, etc.)

The pandemic has worsened the marginalization of the vulnerable groups, like widows, single mothers, and women with disabilities. In Solapur, these groups have been pushed into further marginalization due to market closure and weak social connection [14]. They could not receive significant basic requirements, such as food and shelter, because no one was earning from their households, as they are females. Traditional gender roles excluded them from policy-making decisions, and single mothers had both breadwinner and home-maker roles imposed on them. The groups herein often ended up being overlooked in government relief measures due to exclusion criteria or ineffective implementation mechanisms.

4.3. Impact of Gendered Stereotypes on Autonomy

The pandemic reinforced some of the deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that made a woman subservient and subservient. It is no secret that much more was expected of women during this time to nurse, often without proper education and career prospects that might have propelled them to have better aspirations than they had hitherto, for themselves as well as in relation to their lives with their partners. In addition, patriarchal attitudes strengthened rapidly. Male members of the household often controlled decisions related to money management, movement, and employment, which further limited women's control and prevented them from participating in decision-making processes.

4.4. Digital Divide and Limited Opportunities

The digital divide in Solapur has significantly limited women's access to technology and, therefore, their opportunities in education, work, and social engagement. For instance, many women do not have access to smartphones, computers, or reliable internet connectivity, hence creating a gap between the two genders and further limiting digital literacy [15]. This exclusion further widened the gap between the two genders and left them unprepared to adapt to the post-pandemic digital landscape. Despite the availability of digital resources, women and girls remain low on priority.

5. CONCLUSION

This study is clear that deep-rooted inequalities among women exist in Solapur City, the COVID-19 pandemic having worsened their socio-economic and psychological situation. Economic shocks alongside increased burdens of unpaid care work put many women in deeper financial instability, which confines their autonomy and access to resources. Psychological distress was increased by heightened anxiety, depression, and the rise in cases of domestic violence, and denials of mental health services have only worsened the crisis. Widows and single mothers have become increasingly more marginalized in educational, health, and social living. The digital divide excluded most of the women's access to education and economic activities. Thus, these factors have also sustained the existing gender gap. With the establishment of a pandemic, it becomes clear that the gap between feminine vices and male virtues demands complete policy reforms and an adequate support system to rectify the



specific problems women face. There is a need to address crisis situations that endanger long-term impacts on women's lives.

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