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Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women empowerment

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Abstract

The economic empowerment of women viz.-a-viz. their social power to determine their independent futuristic life has been recessed by COVID-19 pandemic to a large extent. The economic repercussions due to COVID-19 pandemic have a retrogressive effect on gender equality, which was uneven even before the pandemic. It has put a symbolic effect on women's social life. Therefore, COVID-19 pandemic has a double impact on women's life, socially and economically. The first one, women's being housewives have first to look after their families and at the same time they act as a role of mother to nourish their children as they seem necessary. The paper reveals how women had been impacted by COVID-19 pandemic and what measures need to be taken to safeguard their interest, livelihood, self-dependency and how to make them self-reliant and self-sufficient.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, empowerment, social, economy

Introduction

Pre-COVID-19 scenario, the women were not enjoying equal status as of men in all dimensions. During the early Vedic period the status of women upgraded. They were given equal opportunities of education, they were marrying at mature age and the families were less patriarchal. The present COVID pandemic immensely impact the persons belonging to all spheres of life. The quantity of men died of the virus is more than their counter-parts (B. Guarino, 2020) [1]. COVID-19 leads to the deprivation of the feminine section, mainly because immense burden of look-after and care, breaks in education, disruptions in income, poor availability of basic health care facility and deprivation of land and property rights. The women, already belonging to the poor section, facing such impacts of the COVID crisis can impede their social and economic progress which would further lead to their deprivation. The COVID crisis has impacted the woman's pecuniary empowerment intensely and has provided a thorough setback to women's empowerment in some regions profoundly. The women play their part in the economic development forthwith and discursively. The nature has put the additional burden of giving birth to a child on women and the socio-economic status of the women is not showing great figures. The solution for dilemma of all problems lies in providing Empowerment of women in all respect. The ability and capability of the women should be recognized and put to use in every field for optimum use and women must be made economically active and stable for creating a civilized society. The root Cause of her lower status is the poverty and lack of awareness and unavailability of the education. The obstacles women are facing are often created in society. These barriers are created by their family or cultural rites and customs of communities they live in. These hurdles are often forced by the rigid social structure and inequalities and ambiguity in laws and policies that shapes the woman's lives. The empowerment of the women and alleviation of the poor sections of the society run shoulder to shoulder. Women education can be utilized for their long-lasting empowerment and their alleviation can be used for sustainable economic development.

Empowerment is the level of freedom, liberty and sovereignty in people, which facilitate them to exemplify their concerns and interests in a pledged and self-sufficient way. Empowerment can also be defined as the process through which people become self-controlled and shape their lives and future with available resources for a better sustenance. Though the concept of empowerment is not women-specific, yet it is specific in the sense

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that it cuts across all types of class and caste and also within families and households [Malhotra *et al.*, 2002] ^[3]. Empowerment is critical to poverty eradication and to all round development. The empowerment of any section can be accomplished through poverty elimination, job creation, easy access to water, sanitation, hygiene and energy, access to basic health care services and overall social integration. The gender inequality and discrimination and violence against women has been a historical issue all over the subcontinents. In order to surface out the figures and facts relating to deprivation of women two indices, the first one being Gender development index [GDI] and the second one Gender Empowerment index [GEI] were introduced. The GDI measures the dimensions and variables same as HDI but the distinguished parameter is that it includes the inequalities in achievements between men and women [Anand and Sen, 1995] ^[2]. While the GEI shows whether women are able to actively take part in political and economic life. Women have shown over time the thirst and quest to provide them equal status and opportunities to showcase their talent and skill for their better future, livelihood and sustenance. Women who are neglected and deprived of their rights, often lack self-confidence and self-support. This leads to many socio-psychological and other mental health problems.

It was obvious that COVID pandemic will hit the women in a unique way as they had been affected in previous occasions by the 2008 financial crisis and 2014 Ebola virus. The question was not how and why but how deeply it will impact the women in general, how inequalities would prevail and what policies and programmes offer support of all kind to them. The women can by collective effort show resilience to fight the COVID pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak has brought into surface the importance of digital technology to women. The digital apps make it easier to keep records than hard copies, since keeping social distancing has become the need of the hour, therefore the mobile and digital platforms have allowed them to meet in virtually band get to know about the government relief measures and policies.

Review of the related literature

Many investigators have studied the women empowerment globally and nationally through various methods and empirical analysis in this section let's put a brief light on various studies related to the research problem. Moser (1993) ^[4] has elucidated thoroughly the inter-link and interconnection between gender planning and development. Moser provides that women empowerment through gender planning and effective implementation of the same can emancipate their status holistically by keeping in view the needs of the women by providing them necessary training. Anand and Sen (1995) ^[2] have tried to provide recommendations to develop a comprehensive framework for 'gender-equity' of achievements and freedom and to evaluate the extent of gender equality and inequality. R. Pillarisetti and Mss. Gillsivray (1998) ^[5] focuses on the UNDP's important indicator of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The basic purpose is to scrutinize and analyze the theoretical and measurement concepts of Gender empowerment Measurement (GEM). Bardhan and Klassen (1999) ^[6] captiously analyze Gender Development index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) as gender associated indicators of UNDP and pointed out some

consequential theoretical and factual problems with both the measurement indicators and proposed some alteration and modification to both the measurement indicators including a emendation of the income earned component of the Gender Development Index (GDI). Dijkstan and hammer (2000) ^[7] analyzed the concept of Gender Development Index (GDI) and identify a number of limitations to the indicator. According to them there is no information about the comparison of gender inequality between various countries. Klassen (2006) ^[8] asserted some measures to rectify the problems associated with GDI and GEM. Dijkstra (2002) ^[9] criticized both measurements and provides a new indicator of measurement Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE). This indicator attempts to include maximum dimensions of gender equality. M. Donnell, M. Buvinic, C. Kenny, Shelby Bourgault and G. Yang (2021) ^[10] highlights the gendered impacts of COVID-19 pandemic putting special focus on women's economic empowerment. It has illustrated how the pandemic restrictive measures have differentially affected the well-being of women and girls. P. Bergallo, M. mangini, M. Magnelli and S. Bercovich (2021) ^[11] highlights the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the autonomy of the women in terms of economy in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Statement of the research problem: The research problem under investigation is itemized as:

“Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women empowerment”

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is the analyze the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on women empowerment with special reference on social and economic freedom. The study also investigates the scope of the women empowerment through which they can enhance their skills in all available avenues.

Methodology and procedure: The researcher found it suitable to adopt descriptive survey method for carrying this research problem

- Collection of the data: The investigator has collected secondary data for generalizations of the data.

Objectives of the study: The objectives of the study under Q investigation are pointed as follows:

1. To study the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on women's social empowerment.
2. To study the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic empowerment.

Rationale of the study: women empowerment has been discussed at the global and national level. At the national level, despite of many women empowerment alleviation programmes, women's are not enjoying the equal status as of men because of the gender gap and unequal gender norms in the society (Purshottam Nayak and Bidisha Mahanta, 2017) ^[12]. Women's inordinately exposes to unemployment risks in COVID-19 pandemic. According to international labour organization [ILO], report 'COVID causes devastating losses in working hours and Employment' (April 7, 2020) about 195 million jobs could be eliminated internationally due to pandemic with majority of sectors including women cites a report, international labor organization 'women and men in the informal economy: A

statistical picture (2018). Adding to this around 740 million women around the world working in the informal sector and as daily wage workers employment is vulnerable to loss their livelihood due to COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic women's employment has been exposed unequally in health sector. According to world health organisation's report titled 'Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries', working paper1 (Boniol M, Mclsaac M, Xu L, Wulliji T, Diallo K, Campbell, 2019) ^[18] Women healthcare workers comprise about 70% of the global health workforce and are vulnerable to COVID-19 And stigma for working with COVID-19 patients. Adding to this, the inequality in pay and remuneration being paid to women healthcare services is low, therefore decreasing their ability to purchase the necessary items to live. Therefore, non-recognition and low valuing of women's work disheartens women. Disproportionate care burdens taken by the women's having negative impact on their economic empowerment. According to the international labour organisation (ILO) report, 'care work and care jobs for the future of decent work (2018)' the unpaid care work, due to social norms, women perform about 76% of the total hours, more than three times as men. During COVID-19 pandemic the burden of care increases exponentially including the care of COVID-19 positive persons and of the children at home. This increased burden reduces the time to generate an income, operation of the business or other income producing units. Food security and the livelihood of the women farmers has been impacted unequally due to COVID-19. In developing countries, Women constitute about 43% of the agricultural workforce and comprise about 2/3 of the global 600 million poor livestock keepers. Even before the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, hitherto land rights of the women are not secured and the barriers to accessing markets and take finances from the financial institutions were high. The pre-existing challenges of the women are further aggravated by COVID-19 pandemic as agricultural producers and working in the fields. The highlighted example is of Mali, where due to COVID-19 restrictions the hours of women working in the fields were lessen, therefore were not contributing to food production adequately. Moreover, the control of some common land resources impacting the women's who used these resources for livelihood. Many women were running their livelihood by selling their agricultural products in local markets, as when markets were closed due to pandemic, they suffered losses in income. This also increases the risk of exploitation by their male shareholders, especially the nations where women are encouraged to harvest their land. The economic empowerment of many women entrepreneurs and executives also face regression during COVID-19 pandemic. Women are not accessible to financial credit and other formal banking services due to legal and social discrimination. COVID-19 has also transfer the focus of appointing executives with proven track record to maximise their profit with less labour in a short time-a policy that favours men. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the gender-based violence has increased significantly which impedes women to make significant progress in economic activities. The cases of domestic violence have increased at large due to the stress and disruption in social norms, especially the restriction of staying at home. Hence, women's economic empowerment and productivity gets affected by gender-based violence.

The education of the girl Childs and the skills training needed to kick start their business units are affected more than male counterparts during the COVID crises. The main reasons for this are the frequent closing down of educational institutions and the additional burden of care taking, household chores besides giving helping hand in economic activities. The hard social norms where there are already restrictions on girl's education, their mobility in schools hampered and, in some regions, due to school closures the enrolment of girl Childs drop down heavily.

Conclusion: A pandemic magnify and elevate already existing inequalities. The Womens have an aggravated impacts of COVID-19 for women beforehand living on the economic margins. The global gender pay gap is stuck at 16% with women paid less than men. Women are also not exposed to financial inclusion, revealing with the figure that women globally holds only 72% of bank accounts against 72% of men in 2017. COVID-19 brings social stress along with the restricted movement and social isolation measures, which increased the gender-based violence substantially. The main causes being crowded homes, substance abuse and less peer group support, are deteriorating the conditions.

Suggestions: The suggestions of the study are as under:

1. Implementation of the specific programmes and appropriate funding of women centred programmes, to address the economic fallout of women globally.
2. Special focus should be laid on women working in informal sectors and women belonging to lower income families, migrant women workers and other marginalised women. In order to expand the cash transfer policy and trickle down the subsidy programmes to lower income problems without any middleman.
3. Women entrepreneurs should be supported through simple financial process to get credit from financial institutions. Women's finance cases should be taken up at priority level for their e-commerce and other economic units, without going through rigorous systematic process.
4. Ensure the protection of women workers exploitation at workplaces under COVID-19 crises and make their jobs secure by providing fair wages, favourable work conditions and other protections to make them safe.
5. Provide them training in reputed institutions for industrial jobs and polish their skills by investing in skill enhancement programmes in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Ensure the return of girl students to school which gets affected because of COVID-19 pandemic. Establish special response plans and teams to deal with gender-based violence and domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic.

Computing interest: During the entire research process, the investigator has not declared any conflict of interest.

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