



Women After Pandemic

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This article is based on **Women work more, earn less, and face greater health risks** which was published in Hindustan Times on 15/07/2021. It talks about the issues women have faced during and after the pandemic and ways to recover from those impacts.

Women tend to be the backbone of society during crises, even as they are also more likely to face the disproportionate impacts of such events. The **Covid-19 pandemic** is no different.

It has severely exacerbated existing gendered barriers, widened India's gender gap in the workforce, and affected (overwhelmingly female) caregivers and frontline workers.

Moreover, Dalberg conducted one of the largest studies of the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 on women in low-income households, which pointed out that there is a multi-generational impact of poor nutrition, lack of access to contraceptives, and debt.

Impact on Women

- **More Women Unemployed:** Women were more affected than men by employment issues. Women made up just 24% of those working before the pandemic, yet accounted for 28% of all those who lost their jobs.
- **Issues of Food Insecurity:** Loss in incomes for women as well as their households led to reduction in food supply and women were affected more than other members of the family.
- **Issues of Reproductive Health:** Women's health indicators also deteriorated because they could no longer afford contraception and menstrual products.
About 16% of women (an estimated 17 million if extrapolated) had to stop using menstrual pads, and more than one in three married women were unable to access contraceptives.
- **Unpaid Labour:** Indian women already do almost three times more unpaid work than Indian men, and the survey showed a 47% increase in unpaid labour for women, and a 41% increase in unpaid care work for women.

- **Marginalised Groups:** Women from historically marginalised groups (Muslims, migrants, single/separated/divorced), were more affected than the average woman.
 - The variance is across the board, with more single, separated/divorced women having limited food or running out of food and many more Muslim women losing their income and livelihood.
 - Conditions on the ground are likely to worsen for those women (such as **dalit women** and **transgender individuals**) who bear the brunt of social discrimination.

Way Forward

- **Expanding public distribution system (PDS):** Expanding **PDS** beyond food as it's a far-reaching delivery channel. For instance, women's access to menstrual pads could be revolutionised in this fashion for the short term, improving reach considerably.
 - Bundling free menstrual hygiene products with PDS would relax women's dependence on income for these essentials.
 - Optimally, this would go hand-in-hand with national-, state- and district-level awareness drives around menstrual health and hygiene.
- **Benefits of Schemes Must Be Universalised:** Enlist Women on **MGNREGA** job cards to increase the total number of person-days to meet women's demand for job opportunities.
 - Strengthen the resilience of **SHGs** by focusing on their economic recovery and market linkages via the existing **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission**.
 - SHGs could also provide technical and managerial training to help women develop the skills needed to run small businesses digitally.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Focus on the inclusion of single, divorced/separated women in the **One Nation One Ration Card** rollout, and build social assistance programmes for **informal workers**, specifically domestic workers and casual labourers.
- **Increasing Awareness:** The government can build upon and accelerate its existing efforts through **Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA)** workers, **Mission Parivar Vikas**, and other schemes to strategically focus on contraceptive usage.

Conclusion

- According to the survey, one in three women said that government welfare schemes and SHGs had played an important role in helping them navigate the pandemic. Specifically, the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana**, and the **public distribution system (PDS)** supported 12 million, 100 million, and 180 million women respectively during the crisis.

- Thus, there is a need for universalising, deepening, and extending the government schemes and SHG setups in order to help every woman come out of the ill impact from the pandemic as soon as possible.
- Making the right investments in women's issues now could prove transformational in the long-term recovery and health of our economy and society.

Drishti Mains Question

'Women tend to be the backbone of society during crises, even as they are also more likely to face the disproportionate impacts of such events.' Analyse the statement in the light of Covid-19 pandemic.
