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## A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL AND NON-PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN IN KERALA DURING LOCKDOWN

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**Abstract:** COVID- 19 Pandemic makes the whole world into trouble, from children to the elderly, regardless of age, it affects everyday life. It also causes chaos in women's life more than we can imagine. Whether it is natural or man-driven, women constantly face adverse difficulties whenever taking a history of calamities. COVID-19 is creating troubles in women's life. The lockdown becomes a reason for the increasing household chores. Everyone is stuck at home, and women have to take care of all the responsibilities than before. (Gupte & Dalvie, 2020). For working women, work from home, resulting in more stress and increases household works. The situation of women who lost jobs is leading to psychosocial as well as economic problems. This study is focusing on the psychosocial impact of professional and non-professional working women in Kerala. Women working from home are under more pressure from offices and have to change their daily routines. Without any help and support, they are doing things as they can, but this generates risky circumstances in their lives. This paper looks forward to the realities of women's lives during the lockdown. As a pilot study related to the project, the researchers had taken a google survey based on the topic. It shows that the 23 to 54 age group had responded. They shared their experiences in which some are going through high stress, anxiety and pressure because they have to manage everything between work and family. The one who has young children and the elderly in the house is facing challenges. They are struggling each day. Along with psychological problems, economic insecurities are going hand in hand. From the online survey and case studies, addressing the awkward situation.

**Keywords:** Work-life among women, Coping with lockdown, Women stress.

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## **Introduction**

The pandemic and lockdown followed by it resulted in strident situations all around the world. Everyone is coping with the incidents which happen in life. It removed the otherwise happy life and a series of mental health problems arising in which, as usual, women are dealing with vulnerabilities than any others. (Kataki, 2020). The women who go for daily wage jobs are now pausing and confused about the ongoing situation. Not only women but other vulnerable groups also facing similar harsh events (Banerjee, 2020). Women are victims of all the negative adversities. They are now in the stressful phase of life where they doubled their duties.

The lockdown was all about a sudden incident, and in women, several mental health problems emerged due to the work pressure. Women who work for daily wages lost jobs, and the financial crisis came amidst the pandemic. The reason behind the overload and increasing difficulties may be because of no support system in the family. After the closure of schools, offices, children, and husbands in the family began to depend on women. As a result, their workload doubled. Unemployment causes much pain among women. (Deshpande, 2020). It's essential to focus on the psychosocial impact of the toils in women's lives and what changes are happening in their daily lives.

While taking care of other's and bearing too much burden, it's necessary to look into the psychological and physical well-being of self. The everyday routine was completely disrupted, and there were many sleep problems, which may lead to even depression. According to the international labour organisation report, 195 million jobs are eliminated, and in most of the sectors, women are predominating. Other than that, 740 million women worldwide in both formal and informal sectors are being more vulnerable in the present condition. (COVID-19 and Women's Economic Empowerment, 2020). They are going through an extreme atrocity, and in most house, they are the breadwinners. Studies show that women working are mentally frustrated due to household work and professional commitment, where stress and anxiety levels are being high. Psychosocial support from family and society can bring positivity to women's life. Special attention has been given to the women in all aspects to get rid of the hardship.

### **1. Understanding Psycho-social Life of Women During Pandemic**

COVID -19 has dramatically altered the lives, and women are vulnerable to mental health issues because of a lack of support, care and protection. This makes women's life tragic and is affected by psychological problems like tension, depression, loneliness etc. The family to which

one belongs is an essential factor. In female-headed and single-parent families, they have to take responsibility for their own, requiring additional support and energy. But the whole situation makes things difficult. Women always stood as warriors against all the struggles, but we cannot give them the support they want most of the time. Government policies and programmes can empower them (Mathews, 2020).

Inequalities prevail in society regarding women is not a new thing. But with the arrival of COVID-19, it increased too maximum. Working and domestic chores can't do for a long time alone. Women are unable to balance all the works simultaneously with pain and suffering. They are struggling to handle everything in position. From morning to night, women are busy with the jobs inside the home, and with the closing of social life, the burden is at the peak (Swaminathan & Lahoti, 2020).

In reality, it's the women, regardless of whether they hold a job or not, domestic chores and their day jobs are now multiplied many times over because now it's known as work from home. It is creating vulnerable situations day by day. Impact of these resulting in ill health and psychological distress in women. The effects are somehow not imagined at all. This article is dealing with the real-life experiences shared by women working as professionals. All have their concerns and are at the worst stage. Raising voice is considered adverse, hostile by society and others (Deshpande, 2020).

Women at the core of the fight against the COVID-19 crisis describe many aspects of women's present status as employers both inside and outside the home, financial crisis, women's responsibilities, and women's challenges in developing countries the pandemic, and it focused on women current atmosphere. Vulnerabilities are going up, as reports say. Single parent family without a job is struggling at this time. Working mothers are also going through the same situation (Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis, 2020).

The lockdown threatens the life of many, especially women. Women are seriously affected by the pandemic. Working women have to concentrate on multiple tasks. Now the absence of helping hands like maids are seriously concerned the daily life. Due to lockdown, they can't go for work and married women and have children suffering due to the lockdown. They have to check everything is alright about the health of children, aged ones at home. Software professionals, entrepreneurs, and women working in various fields explained their suffocation in writing. Women are doing double works at home with paid work. Reports are comparing the considerable difference

in works carried out by men and women. Equal distribution of works can change many problems and thus arise gender equality (Vasudevan, 2020).

Women are more vulnerable to mental health problems during coronavirus pandemic than men. The study revealed that the number of women suffering from stress and loneliness during the COVID-19 outbreak has risen from 11 per cent to 27 per cent. The reason behind this may be the added pressure of childcare, domestic duties, and professional work on women during the lockdown. Notably, loneliness is described as a state of solitude and feeling alone. It can leave you to feel unwanted and empty (Women on the verge of getting depressed in the lockdown, 2020). Women are mainly disturbed by the pandemic. They are running the entire house and working at home has to take care of other family members, including children, the elderly. Online classes of children also result in stress for women. They have to spend additional time with their children. It might develop into anger, affecting their mental health (Pande & Nagpal, 2020).

This isolation period is a suffocation time for females. They are coping with each day. There are gender differences in mood, empathy, tension etc. Earlier schedules have a significant difference from today's routine. The entire system was collapsed, and thus females are becoming victims of the existing inequalities in all areas. The isolation during the lockdown is becoming a reason for mood disorders and less quality sleep (Guadagni, 2020).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

A higher proportion of women are suffering from the social and psychosocial impacts of lockdown. Before the pandemic itself, all the burdens in a house are on the head of women. Women, whether they are working or not, have the responsibility of holding a family. But when they have chances of being socialised with others, they get relief. Now the state is entirely different. Suppose they are in depression or troublesome situations, unable to open up. The house became a busier place than their worksite. Children and other family members are now in the house. The unpaid works, including cleaning, cooking, washing clothes, wiping, caring for children, the elderly, and a family, have to do with the women themselves and for the working women to submit the works at the scheduled time. These all are analysed and heard from informal virtual conversations and case studies, in the case of women working in textiles, shops, companies, small scale industries, unable to handle emotions and frustrated because of economic insecurities. If Women can share their pressure and household chores with others in the house, they become much relieved. But from the time itself, this gender inequality is prevailing everywhere, and all have a

misconception that women could bear all the stark. Work-life balance with family members' support is an essential thing that can remove the concerns. Many women face psychological problems like stress, anxiety, sleeping disorders, mood swings, depression. Everyone needs a peaceful life, especially during the lockdown, all our emotions are at extreme, and when the circumstances are unfavourable, it becomes worse.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The present study carried out by using both primary and secondary data. Secondary sources of data collected from online resources like e-newspapers and articles. Samples were collected from 50 professional and non-professional working women across Kerala and, the tool used for data collection was an online questioner. The study conducted among women of age group between 23 to 54. While conducting a study among professional workers include teachers, engineers, managers, IT professionals. Women working in the non-professional working field have sales girls, company workers, daily wage workers.

### **Findings & Discussion**

As per the study conducted among women, most of them experienced severe emotional disturbances and workload pressure and household responsibilities. Research shows that 10.9% belongs to the single-parent family, 69.6% belong to the single nuclear family, and 19.6% belong to extended or nuclear families. Nuclear families find it more challenging to manage responsibilities. The first 25 days of lockdown reports 54.3% mood swings, 17.4% is going through the depression stage, and 23.9% is facing fear about the current situation; 39.1% reported work from home is distracting. Stress and anxiety level is very high among young women and having young children. 17.4% of responders who face severe issues were from the Kollam district, and high responses got from the Ernakulum district.

An online survey by schizophrenia research foundation (SCARF), in which women participants expressed that their domestic responsibilities had been increased by nearly 16% than usual (60% before lockdown), in contrast for men, it increased by 13% than normal that of 36%. According to the survey findings, the family's elders were helping as usual with the domestic responsibilities. The children were found to be helping more by an increase of 10% during the lockdown days. A total of 36% of the participants worked from home, 33% are at home, but they are not doing any professional work from home, 16% were going for work as usual, and 15% were

homemakers. 39% of the participants stated that they were passed through stress conditions during the lockdown days. There were around a total of 66% of women getting stressed, and men's stress rate stands at 34%. Persons, who were single and staying alone, brings more stress and depression (With the increased workload, women a stressed lot, 2020).

Data collected from 50 samples suggests that women are anxious because of the impending change, like their jobs. So that they feel frustrated, anxious, hopeless at some point in time. Work from home mode is somewhat disturbing and badly affecting. And those who have comfortable and relaxed surroundings of home are less affected by this condition. Data shows that women in sync and agreement with other family members, spouse on the methods of handling their children and household in the present situation, adjust to the conditions prevailing now. This particular study reveals that family members share the responsibility of household work is an essential factor. The stress level is increased day by day due to the lack of sharing responsibilities among family members. Women share the load on their own. Also, there is a helplessness situation that arises when none of the family members listens to them. Besides work from home, women attend office 3-4 days a week, self-employing ones as their work cannot be done online.

The survey shows that 17.9 % face depression because of losing their job and unable to go to the workplace. This includes sales associates, company workers, daily wage employees. Family, children and their future fear them. The majority of the responders have no supporting method system to deal with their anxiety and stress during these lockdown days.

The respondents shared that they experience some emotional exhaustion and anxiety is to be expected in these lockdown days. The great majority of employee reports come across a conflict between the demands of work and the family's demands (Feder, 2020). Some employees have young children to take care of, and these families vary in their circumstances and composition. Many are increasing eldercare responsibilities. Others may be feeling extreme isolation, and some are facing mental health challenges compounded by this crisis. Many are worried about family or community members on the front lines. Moreover, economic anxiety is being experienced across the spectrum.

The report classifies unpaid work to include cooking, dishwashing, cleaning a dwelling, laundry, ironing, gardening, caring for pets, buying groceries, and caring for dependents. The lockdown situation has amplified such unpaid work for working women. For many professional women, 'Work from home' means many zoom conferences and emails to attend. However, they

also need to ensure that the children are gainfully occupied, complete cleaning chores in the absence of the domestic help who cannot enter the building, supply three meals and endless rounds of tea and snacks. The background is the spectre of the coronavirus that requires checking if everyone is washing hands a thousand times. For those who live in cramped apartments or with elders suffering from chronic ailments or both, six weeks of this routine can seem like an eternity; stress and anxiety levels have been high. This is also leading to arguments and fights between relationships. Some of the common issues that all women face during the lockdown are health issues, change in sleep patterns, frustration, pressure, guilt, fear, and anxiety (Vasudevan, 2020).

### **Suggestions Based on the Study**

It is essential to focus on the family-level approach rather than the individual. Methods of tele-counselling for the family can be considered in this situation. The counselling can take case studies, and adequately follow up is necessary. Casework has always been concerned with the impact of living with what can be done to help families achieve stability or make changes that will help them achieve maximum effectiveness in handling both works every day. Stress Management Training (SMT) is a method to get working women to either work through regular stress or control their stress levels. The idea is to maintain stress levels below instances of burnout. Several research types have been conducted that link specific interventions, such as narrative writing or topic-specific training, to reductions in physiological and psychological stress. On an individual basis, women can cope with the problems related to burnout and stress by focusing on the causes of their stress. Various therapies, such as Neurofeedback therapy, claim to Assist in cases of burnout. This coping type has successfully been linked to reductions in individual stress (Tripathi & Bhattacharjee, 2012).

The government can do many things to empower women these days and expand childcare support for working parents where schools, childcare, and care services are closed, with a particular focus on safe and accessible services for essential workers—continuing school feeding programs and adapting them to the crisis context by preparing rations for delivery or pick-up and ensuring access to sufficient and affordable water, sanitation, and hygiene services for vulnerable groups of women, including in informal settlements and rural areas and refugee camps—procuring goods and services for infrastructure and public services from women-owned enterprises (Eidinger, 2020). Use women networks and civil society organisations, including microfinance and savings groups, to communicate benefits (The impact of COVID-19 on women, 2020).

## Conclusion

The lockdown creates an emptiness in women's lives, which in the high female workforce sectors lost their jobs in this time, and unemployment is the result of all these sudden changes. As discussed in this paper, working mothers, schools, offices, and institutions' closure increased their works. (Alon et al., 2020). For working women, the struggle does not end with issues and stress of the situation, as they now may have to fight the very battles with patriarchy for empowerment all over again, which they had won in the last few decades. We spoke to working women from across various fields to get a bigger and better picture of their struggle during these uncertain and stressful times (Gupta, 2020).

Even though this lockdown triggered women's life, various programmes on the online platform can empower them. Government and non-government sectors can impart policies, guidance and support to working and lost jobs. In response to Covid-19, women need more strength and capability to cope with the situation along with their family. Effective psychosocial support and tele counselling can reduce stress. Family members' involvement is another important factor because if they tried to empower the women or give some help, they could balance all the works. The government's support measures should be extended to the informal and micro, and small businesses that support more women entrepreneurs. Direct monthly cash transfers by governments to all deprived households in the informal economy are recommended for at least three months. This study aims to find a reason to find a solution to reduce psychosocial and economic problems by applying social work methods and interventions by the government. (Shekhar, 2020)

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