



THE LINK BETWEEN CARE WORK AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN INDIA

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GENDER & CARE WORK

- According to a 2018 ILO report women in India spend 312 minutes/day in urban areas and 291 minutes/day in rural areas doing unpaid care work (washing, cooking, and cleaning, care of children and elderly).
- Men correspondingly spend only 29 minutes/day in urban areas and 32 minutes/day in rural areas on such kind of unpaid care work. What is even more **unjustified** about this gendered system of unpaid care work that this is unrecognized work, and only seen as 'the women's duty'.
- In most of the households, girls are trained to accept work as their 'feminine duty' and boys in conditionalities of decision making, work and resources of the household members.
- Both women and men are affected by corona virus in terms of loss of jobs, increased poverty poor health care but women in disproportionate numbers are at the central point of this impact and men act both as victims and perpetrators of violence.

INCREASE IN CARE WORK

- The government of India has been widely appreciated for stringent measures of the lockdown of vast areas of the countries. Of course, these measures have saved numerous lives, but at the same time have deprived people under poverty line, mainly migrants, casual workers, daily wagers and the like of livelihood, institutional care and food with dignity. Many of them, however, have managed to return to their homes, exhausted physically and financially.
- The closure of schools has increased childcare responsibilities and inaccessibility to hospitals and healthcare centers and absence of hired help has added to women's care work commitments.
- The normalization of unpaid care and unfreedoms of women is indicative of low socio-economic status of women, ineffective laws, patriarchal structures, masculine policies and practices of our society.
- Generally trapped in the market-centric logic of work, existing under the state-led economic dependency on men, as well as under the influence of gendered social norms, women feel limited in bargaining with the household heads and others 'who consume the products of their labour (Folbre, 2020).
- However this has also resulted in a disproportionate burden of unpaid care on women of the households. Two worst outcomes of this pandemic are: **arise in income inequality an increase in domestic violence against women.**

HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH CARE WORKERS

- Reportedly 70% women are the health care workers within home and outside. There are reports that show that across states workload of Asha workers has more than doubled while their incomes reduced. They are now sole earning members of the family – as men have lost jobs.
- Majority of them come from marginalized social groups (Dalits and Adivasi) and are in a cycle of **delayed payments – rising expenses – debt cycle**. They suffer from malnutrition as gender-specific food distribution and discrimination since the early age.
- On a very poor remuneration, they are subsidizing India's health care system with their unpaid and tedious labor.
- Apart from being underpaid Asha workers have not been included in the Ayushman Bharat scheme.
- A new study(May 2020) by the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi and Harvard T C Chan School of Public Health in the US studied sex-specific distribution of 3,433 deaths among 112,027 Caronavirus infected patients in India, and came to the conclusion that women and girls in a certain age groups have a higher relative risks of Covid-19 mortality in India.

INCREASED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- The reported data since the outbreak of the COVID- 19 in March 2020 shows that violence against women and girls have intensified globally: 30 percent increase in case of France, 25 percent rise in Argentina, 33 percent increase Cyprus in Singapore and 100 percent increase in reported cases in India.
- The demand for emergency shelters for women affected by violence have been reported in Canada, Germany, Spain, The United Kingdom and The United States. (UN Women, 2020).
- We are at a loss to understand :
 - 1) Why for the women homes have become ‘spheres of fear and anxiety’. Women, who have emerged as the crisis managers with their work to provide food and care to every member of the household are subjected to an intensified domestic violence; and
 - 2) Why our representatives and democratic governments in the South have failed to put domestic violence in their crisis management agenda of COVID-19 pandemic. **Are we living in a time when masculinity proudly parades itself as sovereign authority?**

THE PREEEXISTING UNFREEDOMS OF WOMEN

- Our analysis of gender system in India indicates that women and girls have multiple forms of unfreedoms on the basis of sex and gender that promotes and perpetuates:
 - ❖ Women's economic dependency on men, embedded in their resourcesless/assetless position;
 - ❖ lack of rights to decision making and building economic and social agency;
 - ❖ limits to mobility boundaries of home for women, not permitted to be outside with a purpose;
 - ❖ inaccess to finances and markets; and
 - ❖ violence or threat of punishment disallowing any transgression or deviation of social norms.
- These social norms operate and reproduce themselves in customary laws and regulations, the State and its mechanisms, the family and community rules, religious sanctions and the media narratives.
- The 'naturalization of men' with hegemonic power over women's body, life and work, is justified by a 'altruistic character' of 'the male breadwinner' and 'The head of household' in legal and socio-cultural norms.
- This dominant role of men is manufactured out of discourses on poverty, growth, class, caste and ethnicity, as evident in more recently impact analysis of COVID-19.

MY ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND

- There is an intensified domestic violence that is not captured in the conventional analysis of socio-economic impact of the pandemic or lockdown. The questions I raise :
 - ❖ Why do the consumers of women labour engage in an exercise of abuse and physical force that deny women any agency and an existence with dignity?
 - ❖ What has been role of state and the market that thrive on women's unpaid and underpaid work?
- From this perspectives, my framework of analysis has two interrelated components :
 - ❖ Increase in women's agency achieved as a result of their significant work in food production (agriculture) and other subsistence income earning work and unpaid care at home, in particular by numerous women's rural organizations (Self-Help-Groups) and their participation in right-based movements, as evident in the Pink Brigade, Aaroh, Shaheen Bagh and others, and
 - ❖ Men's assertion of the male power when they found themselves at home for 24 hours, watching and realizing what has changed in women's thinking and doing (agency) and as a consequence a shrinking of their masculine power over women's body and work. Hence, in a desperate attempt to regain their "lost" power over women and their work they use force and violence to keep them under the masculine control.

GENDER SYSTEM AND MALE POWER

- Power works through arrangement of relations, relations between individuals that go directly down into the society. We have seen through history that women and their punishments have reaffirmed the supremacy and sovereignty of the male.
- As Foucault shows that legal frameworks did not work for women, as they were/are not represented there. They are routinely assessed for their work and servitude and punished for failing in their 'duties'.
- A constant instilling of fear through discrimination and cruelty by punishments serve as strong forces of political power relations, in this case gender relations.
- Women and their deviations from social norms, which are for their fight for rights and justice is likely to be attacked, as it's understanding, and investigation depends on a male dominated systems within the household and outside in social structures and institutions of power.
- These social norms and systems are changing, as challenged by women as providers of food and care, and more important being aware of this role, and therefore this increase in violence against women. This agency of women is somewhat recognized largely by women and some men, however we have a long way to go.