

Summary Report

Covid-19: A Survey on Women's Reproductive Health

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Introduction:

Women have always been a victim to the evils of our society. As we look back, history gives us enough pieces of evidence on the suppression, discrimination and unjust treatment towards women. The backbone of a household, a selfless caretaker, has been considered and has been treated like a second-class citizen. She has been a victim of patriar

chy, rituals and orthodoxy. The onset of the Pandemic of COVID 19 added on to their problems. A recent report by the United Nations Population Fund, (UNFPA) lists various aspects of women empowerment of which "reproductive health" plays a central role. Failure

to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproductive health constitutes gender-based discrimination and violation of women's health and life. It indirectly affects (negatively) the economic, educational and political empowerment of women.

Aims And objectives-:

Initially, Covid-19 gave rise to chaos in the society with mandatory lockdowns creating panic heightened by sheer lack of information and knowledge about the disease and its root cause. The near stativity of population being forced to stay indoors; bore heavily on women who were at the receiving end. In such a scenario women's health and the problems faced by them, particularly, were neglected and not given much attention. Therefore, this study aims to draw attention to the problems faced by women that were directly or indirectly caused by the pandemic.

This paper aims to present a retrospective study to assess the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on obstetric care and outcomes in women affected by the virus and highlight the challenges and adversities faced by them during this pandemic. The project has tried to:

- 1. To highlight the adversities of pandemic upon the reproductive health of women;**
- 2. To compare and analyze the efficacy of remedial measures taken by the government and their actual reach among women;**
- 3. To compare the data from various print media with the actual problems faced by section under study; and**
- 4. The fear and taboos associated with the pandemic**

Literature review

Looking for literature for the research on Pandemic had its own challenges. The experience of Pandemic is something that the world has never experienced before. It has been a tremendous task to look for sources which could provide the baseline of research. The sources that one could gather were basically health reports from international and national agencies like WHO and the United Nations, reports from the Population Fund of India, and reports in the form of articles in medical journals and magazine articles

Gaps in research - strength and limitations

The work was started at the outset of 2nd year semester 4 (January, 2021) at the time when the fear of COVID-19 was still new and fresh. Vaccine seemed to be a distant dream and there was chaos and fright all around. Undertaking a research in the given scenario had its own advantages and disadvantages.

Strengths:

1. The research focuses on the reproductive **health** of women and the disparities related to it. Moreover, this is a topic that has not been given the amount of attention it requires. Women play a major role in the development of a country. The better the condition of women in the country, the better is the development index

2. There is not much gender-disaggregated data available in India. This is both, a drawback as well as the strength of the research. Since the available data was less, it gave an opportunity to discover the on-ground conditions in personal thereby making this research more effective.
3. The Case Study method has helped to convey to the readers the in-depth and on-ground conditions that the women are going through because of the pandemic and lockdown.

Limitations:

1. One of the group members who is from Jammu had access to 3G data service only. This hampered her efficiency to collect data and also affected communication and coordination. Amid the corona virus and lockdown, there was restraint on coordination.
2. The idea behind choosing the topic was initially to investigate the issue of negligence of issues pertaining to women as per first hand observation and understanding. Most importantly, the reproductive health of women has been a much-neglected field due to various challenges that the Corona virus created in addition to already existing socio-economic factors.
3. The background of social sciences posed a big challenge to understand the medico legal terms. In order to resolve this the help of a medical student has been taken who is duly acknowledged in the study. This paper, thus, does not provide a medical point of view, rather it focuses on the broader sociological aspects related to women's reproductive health. The major focus has been made to highlight the social, economic and cultural aspects of the issues that were faced by women during the pandemic and lockdown.
4. This paper has been written from the perspective of humanities students and not doctors or medical students. Medico legal terms are not used extensively for the same reason. So due to knowledge constraints and difficulty in dealing with technical medical articles a case study approach has been followed in the research.
5. It was difficult to have access to women for the interview as it was a tough situation for everyone and people were facing a plethora of problems at that time. The research had to be conducted with constraints of contact while sitting at home.
6. Reproductive health being a more personal issue, some people weren't comfortable in sharing their experiences.
7. Language also became a barrier when one had to interview the migrant workers. Though questionnaires were bilingual, there were problems in identifying the local names used for the key terms of the study like menopause and periods.
8. At the time of the 2nd wave of COVID-19, 4 out of 5 research members and their families had tested positive for COVID. This was a huge setback in terms of coordination.
9. Being undergraduate students entering the third year there was a time restraint to cover the conditions of the second wave of the pandemic. However, the highlight of the second wave conditions is given at the end.

Methodology:

Interviews were conducted with 10 women from age group between 18-55 years from major economic groups like economically backward class, middle class, lower middle class and upper middle class. This is a research from the view of social science. The method used is that of Case Study.

Case Study: Definition and explanation

A Case Study is a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the Social Science. In the process of making the Case Studies, one focusses on main stages of research activity when planning and undertaking a Case Study. The crucial stages are: defining the case; selecting the case(s); collecting and analyzing data; interpreting data; and reporting the findings. The Case Study approach allows, over other things, critical events, interventions, policy developments and programme-based service reforms to be studied in detail in a real-life context

Data Analysis and Results:

Findings

10 case studies were taken up of different individuals in order to answer this research question. Selection criteria that revolved around the current research problem has been used and a simultaneous study and comparative investigation of the cases in order to generate a broader understanding of the issue has been used. In addition, an attempt has been made to undertake an in-depth analysis as well as recommendations for action and improvement of the current issue.

Comparative analysis of case studies – Pregnancy and Maternal fatalities and Complications

Of 5 case study individuals – 2 being tested positive for COVID. 4 were Pregnant - 2 of them were Diagnosed with Serious Medical conditions - Fibroid, Gestational diabetes. the pregnancy for 2 subjects was planned and For the other 2 subjects it was unplanned. The Span of their pregnancy Varied Depending upon the given Due date. 3 of them underwent a C section wherein 2 of them had it already planned and 1 had it unplanned at the time of delivery.

1 case study had a history of Unsuccessful Pregnancies. First time it was a Chemical Pregnancy. Second time, cause - the baby did not have a heartbeat. And third time the cause was miscarriage. Ages were between 26 – 36. Time span during the First of COVID. Location Indian demography – Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and International demography – Canada.

According to the modified kuppuswamy scale, people are classified based on their social, educational, and economic backgrounds, and all five case study subjects were from the upper middle class strata of society, had a family business background, and were financially secure. One of the case study individuals was an engineer, while the other four were housewives. Their husbands were employed because they owned a business. And one subject had a military background, as her husband was in the Indian Army.

Major Findings from the case studies:

Some women had already planned their pregnancy due to underlying reproductive health issues. However, the COVID-related abrupt shifts in circumstances made things difficult for them. Due to the restrictions on transportation, getting everyday essentials like milk and groceries became difficult. Particularly for those who lived in outlying areas of states. It could have been even more challenging for them.

Some pregnancies were already difficult and sensitive due to major medical issues. Visiting the doctor for periodic pregnancy exams was a source of anxiety for such women. They were concerned about their own health as well as that of the baby. For their own safety, they had to take extra precautions. The COVID-19 pandemic overburdened the health-care system. As a result of the medical staff's preoccupation with COVID-19 patients, pregnant women had to wait for long periods of time at the hospital, causing them to suffer. Being exposed to a hospital setting, created worries for women who had issues or were in a vulnerable situation, as well as those who needed immediate assistance. These are the outcomes of our case studies. Who were well-off financially and could afford private health care facilities. To investigate how the problem affects people from various socioeconomic backgrounds and statuses. There is a need for additional data and investigation.

The findings also suggest that pregnant women who were able to engage in physical activity, such as yoga, during the COVID-19 pandemic had better mental health than those who were not. It should also be noted that certain physical activity constraints, such as the closure of outdoor parks/greenspace, may have been increased in order to slow the spread of COVID-19. Alternatives to enhance wellness through movement should be promoted as appropriate ways to increase physical activity and reduce stress levels induced by the pandemic. Moreover, as a stress-reduction strategy for pregnant women and women with reproductive health problems, psychological support services for women should be incorporated into primary health care.

The findings show that the pandemic has affected everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status. However, the impact differs by population. The impact might be caused by a variety of factors, both direct and indirect. Given the significance of this ongoing global public health emergency, we believe that, while the findings from our case studies are limited due to restrictions and time constraints, they are helpful in understanding the potential outcomes.. The COVID-19 pandemic has not been gender neutral, increasing inequalities, and many problems remain unaddressed due to a lack of data. To understand the unequal implications of the COVID-19 issue, data on cases, casualties, and economic and social impact must be disaggregated by sex, age, and other critical variables – such as status, condition, and wealth. There may have been many more undetected problems as a result of the lack of data; this requires immediate attention and inquiry. More data is needed to fully comprehend COVID-19's impact.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

There is no research that can be composed without facing any limitations. The study is no exception in this case. Although, an attempt has been made to complete this research covering

major problems related to the reproductive health of women, but, there are certain things that could be added in order to make this study more comprehensive.

1. Reproductive health of women and the impact of COVID-19 is a topic that has not been researched upon extensively and requires utmost attention. Since there is lack of data on cases, many questions have been left unanswered. Data segregation on the basis of gender, fatalities, economic, social impact age and other characteristics such as disability and wealth is vital to understand the impact of the pandemic. This is why this research should be carried further by future researchers to understand this problem in depth.
2. This study has been undertaken from the point of view of social science. However, there are certain things that could be added from the medical perspective to make this study even more comprehensive.
3. Research on “not having proper access to healthcare services which led to poor reproductive health” would be a good investment. This area needs to be discovered in order to bring more transparency and show the readers the situation of access to healthcare services.
4. The unavailability of subjects for the interview because of the outgoing situation limited the reach to more subjects. This resulted in lack of more data.
5. The cases of the second wave could not be undertaken because of restriction of time and the fact that the families of researchers too got infected to COVID-19. But, the second wave cases must also be researched. This will give more data and also will help in the comparative study of reproductive health issues faced by women during both the phases of COVID-19.
6. The topic is indeed very wide and each of its subtopics can be explored further more by the future researchers. Other factors like the psychological aspect (and its affect on reproductive health), rise in domestic violence, loss of jobs, etc can be included and correlated with its contribution in the affected reproductive health