

Is Corona Virus Gender Biased? A Crisis within Crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Is the world falling apart? Is humanity on end? Will things be normal again? Is it all a bad dream? Every human has been occupied with these thoughts lately. Covid-19, an uncalled-for pandemic, has wreaked havoc on the lives of people. Corona or SARS-CoV-2 virus (RNA virus) spreads through droplets of saliva when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Patients with comorbidities like diabetes, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, STD/HIV related immunosuppression, have a higher fatality rate [1]. People with a poor immune system and renal and hepatic dysfunctions are also at risk [2].

It is more than just a respiratory illness. Isolation and social distancing are the two most effective measures as medication and vaccine are currently unavailable. Prof. Philip Goulder, Department of Immunology, the University of Oxford, said that immune response in women is more effective and amplified as compared to men [3]. Globally, the death rate is higher in men than in women, however, a combined study by the Institute of Economic Growth in Delhi, Institute of Health Management Research in Jaipur and Harvard University in the US, indicates that in India, 3.3% of women contracting the disease are dying, while this rate is 2.9% for males [4].

In India, any outbreak causes more pressure on the female sex as they are the prime caretakers of their families. There are shreds of evidence from previous epidemics (Ebola and Zika crisis) that indicate the reduction in access to sexual and reproductive health services to many women, especially living in rural areas [5]. Economic stress for working women in addition to the load of domestic work can pose a serious threat to their mental health. Many women are facing difficulties scheduling their gynaecological appointments for IUD installations, hormonal implants and prescriptions for administering oral contraceptives [5].

One of the most debated questions is the chance of transmission of the virus from the mother to the foetus, through amniotic fluid, breast milk and other body fluids. However, recent reports say that there is no placental transmission of the virus as of now

[5]. The most stressful and risky scenario is for pregnant ladies giving birth in this global crisis, especially with higher-risk pregnancies. Many hospitals have even barred partners and visitors from hospitals, during child-birth [6]. This pandemic has forced many women to stay in abusive relationships and thus domestic violence, across the world is on the rise. The lack of emotional and domestic support, unavailability of social and judicial services and sexual exploitation are attributing in psychological and mental breakdown of women [6].

Many countries, majorly impacted by Covid-19, have undermined women's rights by refusing to provide legal abortion services. The reduction in the production and transportation of birth control commodities has caused an increase in unintended and unwanted pregnancies. Therefore, there is a strong need for developing a link between Covid-19 and women health (including vulnerable populations) and highlighting in particular the clinical, epidemiological and psychological parameters. Strong reforms, policies and groups and organizations supporting women health should be taken seriously.

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