

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN MIGRANTS

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During the COVID-19 pandemic Indian migrant workers have faced multiple hardships. Factories shut down due to the lockdown imposed in the country, millions of migrant workers had to deal with the loss of income, food shortages and uncertainty about their future. Because of this, many of them start walking hundreds of kilometers to their native villages. In response, the central and state governments took various measures to help them and later arranged transport for them. The country faces a huge decline in government revenues and growth of the income for at least two quarters as the coronavirus hits economic activity of the country as a whole. A fall in investor sentiment impacts privatization plans, government and industry. India witnessed a massive crisis among migrant workers especially women migrant workers and their families. The visible impacts of the crisis on the women migrant workers are: loss of livelihood and resulting debt; compromises; captivity and the burden of responsibility; disrupted access; emotional geographies of COVID-19; and insufficient support.

Keywords: COVID-19, women migrant workers, informal sector of India.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the societies and enlarged many socio-economic crises. It has impacted all the people belongs to all regions and classes, but with a more adverse effect on the poor. To control the spread of the virus it is necessary for the governments to take steps to encourage social distancing, which was only possible by the closure of economic activities. As a result in India, a nation-wide lockdown was declared on 24 March 2020 for 21 days. It was further extended in a phased manner until 31st May. The enforcement of strict lockdown and other measures, including restrictions on inter- and intra-state movements to contain the spread of COVID-19, resulted in a severe blow to the livelihood of millions of people in the informal sector, especially migrant workers.

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In the country a huge amount of people engaged in informal sector from the total workforce. According to one estimate, about 90% of women work in informal sectors, of which 20% work in urban areas (Geetika, Singh and Gupta 2011). In the country informal sector is unregulated with no social security provisions. Due to this long term adverse effect is expected in informal sector workers (International Labor Organization 2020) as they are the most vulnerable communities and are more exposed to the current global pandemic (Sengupta and Jha 2020).

To control the spread of the virus it was necessary to have posed profound social, economic, and structural challenges to migrant workers across many countries . The loss of livelihood options created fear among them of falling back into poverty, but in particular migrant workers in countries like India are negatively impacted.

Migrant workers, and particularly women, are facing multiple problems such as losing their livelihood, suffering human rights violations, and contracting COVID-19. Women are affected more because of having a lower position and rank in the family and the society. Female-headed families are significantly affected by COVID-19 and are unable to meet household needs due to the lack of economic options. COVID-19 has added significant burdens on women migrant workers and impacted them in the domains of health, economy, social protection, and gender-based violence (UN 2020).

In a survey of migrant laborers in north it is found that around 92% have lost their work, and 42% are negatively impacted with no food or supplies (Jan Sahas 2020). During the nation-wide lockdown, lakhs (100,000s) of migrant workers had to flee to their home place on foot. It was frightening that many suffered from hunger and lost their lives on this journey. Migrant workers who remained in their urban enclaves encountered similar experiences (The Hindu 2020; Bailwal and Taniya 2020). Besides the loss of livelihood and income, the pandemic has a myriad of implications for the lives of migrant women workers. However, we currently lack empirical evidence documenting the experience of India's migrant workers during the pandemic. In this context, the present study aimed to explore the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers and their families from

the perspectives of migrant women workers who remained in their urban areas during the lockdown.

INDIAN MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The miserable situation of migrant women and their families are evident through the below points:

- The experiences of Indian migrant workers during the COVID-19 was miserable. It impacted their livelihood as they lost their jobs and surviving themselves on the dept which increases their insecurity for the future burden.
- The complete closure of economic activities has negatively impacted the informal sector laborers as they were completely dependent on daily wages. Even after the withdrawn of lockdown the migrant workers were not able to get job as before. This made their situation more poor as they still have to fulfil their daily needs which forced them to borrow money. It would take months to repay.
- The complete closure of all the activities in the country made the people feel isolated. In the absence of good internet facility and electronic devices, their kids were not able to access online teaching facilities.
- Even due to the closure of clinics operated by informal healthcare practitioners created more burden on them. Access to health services became a challenge for them.
- The quantity and quality of the food consumed was significantly reduced during the lockdown period.
- It was experienced that the government measures devised for them are insufficient and many of them did not receive any support from the government. Due to this, government was criticized for a lack of planning all over the country.

CONCLUSION

COVID 19 has impacted all the people on the globe but the weaker

section of the population faced its adverse effect more dreadfully like migrant workers. Especially, the situation of women migrant workers in the country is an issue of great concern. There is a need of studies and researches in the field of "the experience of migrant women during covid 19 in India". So that government can make plan for their upliftment which will help them to come out from the trap of debt and lack of income.

Due to the unplanned lockdown and pandemic women migrant faced a lot of social-economic crisis and were forced to compromise many essential requirements in their daily needs. The burden of responsibility and captivity made the life of women stressful.

The government measures devised for the vulnerable sections of society have not reached most of the participants. However, the contributions of migrant workers are crucial for the sustained urban economy and therefore policy measures and programs should consider them as central to interventions. Efforts should also be made to restore economic activities that are inclusive, where migrant workers feel confident, secure, and safe.

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