

Gender Trends for Women: Impact of a Global Pandemic

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Abstract

For years, men have dominated occupations in society due to presumed gender roles. Recently, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, women have had to step into different lanes and transition from traditional duties into roles that center on the aftermath of the pandemic. An increase in stay-at-home duties allocated for a lot of women to shift from their normal routines towards household needs. There was also an influx in domestic violence against women and the need for reinforcing preventive measures as it came to safety concerns for women. This qualitative study analyzes research that illustrates gender trends that occurred as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research is needed to illustrate how to overcome the ongoing economic risks and hardships that women still face.

Keywords: COVID-19, gender, inequality, pandemic, trends, family

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a worldwide ripple in the economy where millions of individuals were forced to leave their work environment. The pandemic resulted in a change of women employment due to the shift in the U.S economy and the unwavering rates of unemployment. The pandemic placed hardships on women that reduced economic opportunities that would assist towards gender equality and support in the labor market. Before the pandemic, women made up about 70% of the health care arena, social and food services. It is estimated that women provide essential health services for around 5 billion people worldwide. The financial value of women's input into health systems is estimated to be over US\$3 trillion annually (World Health Organization, 2022). From February 2020 to February 2021, a net 2.4 million women and 1.8 million men left the labor force – neither working nor actively looking for work – representing drops of 3.1% and 2.1%, respectively. Women accounted for a majority of the decrease in the labor force in the first year of the downturn even though they make up less than half of the U.S. workforce (Kochhar & Bennett, 2021). The pandemic caused a direct impact on unemployment negatively, which resulted in woman's inability to participate in the labor market.

Many women who lost their jobs had given up hope in searching for another. As a result, many became dependent on the government for financial resources. Such resources offered in the United States ranged from The American Rescue Plan which provided roughly \$350 billion of monies for emergency funding to The CARES Act. On March 18, 2020, President Trump signed into law the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which provided additional flexibility for state unemployment insurance agencies and additional administrative funding to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law on March 27. It expands states' ability to provide unemployment insurance for many workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including for workers who are not ordinarily eligible for unemployment benefits (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Unemployment rates were not gender neutral, and the dependency on government funding for women was notably, especially for those who have children. Youth and women were especially hard hit, with employment losses of 8.7 per cent and 5.0 per cent,

respectively, in 2020, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults and 3.9 per cent for men (United Nations, 2022).

Unemployment rate, 2019 and 2020 (percentage)



Figure 1.

Note: (United Nations, 2022).

On a global scale, data published from the United States illustrates the effects of the pandemic across the globe. The unemployment rates also warranted demographic inequality for women as well and shifted gender roles where trends illustrated economic effects and a change in occupational roles.

2. Gender Trends

Women play key roles in the realm of the healthcare force. The impact of the crisis changed the trajectory in which millions of jobs were lost which seldom caused women to target gender gaps and equality to boost their economic growth. Besides that, of unemployment rates, research illustrated that the nature of work for women has shifted to leaving the workforce altogether. The pandemic caused elements of exhaustion for women who felt more pressure than men to maintain work. The expectations to maintain traditional roles to maintain a job illustrated barriers towards sustainability in the aspect of maintaining a household. Women were forced to leave the labor market due to the lack of childcare availability and the need to care for their children. The pandemic crushed a child-care sector that was already fragile. The most recent available data shows almost 16,000 child-care programs closed permanently between December 2019 and March 2021, and the number almost certainly has grown (Haspel, 2022). The pandemic created a child-care crisis which forced many mothers to quit their jobs to take care of their children at home. Factors coupled with this include school shutdowns which increase women responsibilities in their home life. This increased the need for women to become temporary teachers along with parenting due to the increase in remote learning around the nation. Short-term modifications without sufficient experience were necessary and forced all providers and users of the educational system to adjust to a sudden and completely new situation of home schooling (Haller & Novita, 2021.) Challenges during this time caused women to worry about their child falling behind in education due to not being equipped with proper technology and or means of resources. Women also became worried about their child(ren) being exposed to the virus upon returning to school. This in turn lead women to seek out becoming an entrepreneur and running their own business.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there had been more than 1.5 million new business applications as of mid-December 2020. A research survey from Gusto found that approximately 40% of female entrepreneurs launched their businesses as a direct result of the pandemic (Zalis, 2021). The gender gap for starting a business increased for women as many tapped into their creative and innovation side. Women became empowered to provide for their families on a social and economic level. Socio-economic factors stimulated establishing new endeavors and taking charge of one's financial means. The socio-economic factors that women faced related to a

global recession including social mobility, poverty, and informal economy jobs to name a few. On top of socio-economic factors, the pandemic illustrated an increase in domestic violence towards women during this period. The disconnection from one's usual community caused individuals to become indifferent towards each other. From the early days of the COVID lockdowns, women's organizations noted a significant increase in reported cases of violence against women. But comprehensive data collection on the issue was difficult, because of the sensitivity, stigma and shame around the subject as well as constraints imposed by the pandemic (Un Women, 2021). Society witnessed an increase of violence towards women as a direct result of the pandemic.

Lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have increased the exposure of women to abusive partners and known risk factors, while limiting their access to services (World Health Organization, 2021). For individuals working outside their homes coupled with multiple layoffs due to the pandemic, a heightened increase in financial stressors became prominent in many households. The chances of women and their children being exposed to violence is dramatically increased, as family members spend more time in close contact and household stress intensifies, and the risk grows even greater when families also have to cope with potential economic or job losses (World Health Organization, 2022). The ability for women to call for assistance became limited due to the temporary and permanent closing of businesses and the closeness of space the woman is experiencing with her partner; where she may not feel comfortable or safe to call for help. Health services that address issues such as clinical management of rape, first-line support and basic mental health services for survivors are overwhelmed by the urgent need to counteract the effect of the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2022). The importance of early education and intervention in these types of situations can help prevent intimate partner violence. The need for women to understand the rights that are embedded to them allows for a decrease in violence and more accountability on the perpetrator. Prevention is the key method for stopping violence before it occurs.

Despite this violence, many women found the opportunity to become entrepreneurs and start their own business as a direct result of the pandemic. The pandemic allowed women the space and time to develop ideas and projects towards building their new brand. The Women Business Owners Supporting Women Business Owners group on Facebook had about 1,000 members in November 2019; by August 2020, there were 15,000 and today, there are about 21,000, said Amber Powers, the group's founder and president of Powers Digital Marketing (Masunaga, 2021). Women during this time proved to be resilient as the pandemic became a motivating factor towards business ownership. Faced with obstacles and barriers that the pandemic exhibited, women were driven by their passion and skills towards pursuing their own success. Women observed the number of personal finances, flexibility and job security that came with being an owner of a business. Having one's own business created a space of job opportunities and economic development as more and more women joined this trend. Women are able to contribute to their household finances and depending on the family size, allowed women to take advantage of the development for new ideas towards business growth.

Some women in the United States were able to prevail in their business despite the wave of the pandemic. Data compiled for The Washington Post by the professional networking site LinkedIn found that the share of female entrepreneurs on its platform grew 5 percent year-over-year, from March through November, more than double the pre-pandemic average. LinkedIn's analysts looked at female members who had changed their title to "founder" during the pandemic (Zimmerman, 2021). However, on a global scale, women entrepreneurs were hit hard due to the area in which their business focused on such as hospitality services, retail and wholesale and manufacturing to name a few. The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women released its 2020 annual audit of research on women entrepreneurs in low and middle income countries for International Women's Day on 8 March 2021. The report's most concerning findings relate to the impacts of COVID-19: most (83.8%) women surveyed reported that the pandemic had had a negative impact on their businesses, and nearly four in ten (38.5%) reported their business will or may have to close as a result. Nearly one in ten (9.2%) reported that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was the single greatest challenge they had ever faced (Cherie Blair Foundation For Women, 2022).

3. Conclusion

This qualitative analysis illustrated the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on women and some trends that were illustrated globally. The pandemic disproportionately affected women in the realm of finances, child services, and their overall health and social well-being. Despite challenges and barriers women faced including an increase in domestic violence as it relates to intimate partner violence, job loss, and a lack of educational services for their child(ren), women overall proved to be resilient in which some were successful in their entrepreneurship endeavors and ability to continue moving through this crisis. The need for policies to be implemented to protect women rights who are victims of violence along with economic and social policy measures could assist in alleviating ongoing effects that the crisis that has left lingering in many households amongst women in society. Integrating gender neutral policies that provide the tools and resources towards

technical skills can also better equip women towards structural adjustments. Rebuilding from the pandemic calls for action towards inclusivity and resiliency that protects and empowers all women towards a more equal and fair society.

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