

MOVING ON WITH GLOBAL SCALES: A STUDY OF 'LOCKED DOWN' FEMININE LIVES IN NORTH KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the study conducted among the village women in my everyday life, my friends, colleagues, relatives, the mothers of my students and also the women in my neighbourhood. It uncovers the impact of the pandemic on the locked-down lives of women from the villages of Kasaragod and Kannur districts of North Kerala, the Southern state of India. As Kerala has been applauded for its high rate of literacy among both the sexes and its globally praised health indicators, a glance into the pandemic-stricken lives of ordinary women and the academic interest to see if the women of my locality reflect the global or national trend in their lives during the pandemic is worth studying with its interdisciplinary implications.

Keywords: Climate Change, Pandemic, National and International Studies, Gender-Specific Differences, Social Isolation, Women in Every Day, Loss of Employment, Economic Insecurity, Domestic and Cyber Violence, Undesired Sexual Experience, Mental Health, Psychological Disorders, Exposure to Technology



1. INTRODUCTION

Women are recognized as the vulnerable category in terms of their exposure to climate changes and natural calamities and this vulnerability arises not of their physical peculiarities, but of their social and political constraints. The disproportionate effect of these calamities upon women accounts for the socio-political factors like gender, racial and labour relationships that are seen centred upon the dominant discourse of patriarchy (Goh 3). The women folk of the world experience more atrocities on account of the gender, race and social group they belong, to during the climate change and disasters, than their male counterparts. Similarly, there have up studies on women undergoing multiple issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, by national and international agencies.

The world population has been under the claws of COVID-19 for a period nearly of two years and the war-paced measures taken by the nations to fight the pandemic have affected the everyday life of people exceedingly. While adopting scientific steps to combat the infection worldwide, people have become more and more isolated from community life to a life in seclusion. The declaration of lockdown has increased public- awareness against the communal spread and it has kept individuals away from all kinds of social get-togethers. It was a time when all the public spaces, including communal gatherings, administrative offices and educational institutions, were locked down and the populace was quarantined in the domestic space called home. Thus the home has transformed into a space of distorted domesticity

resulting in intricate political dimensions. This reframed- home as a political arena has redefined the personal, domestic, physical, social, economic, psychological, and sexual relations within the social unit called family.

The impact of pandemic-related restrictions on the social life of the human community has been widely studied by national and international agencies and thereby, various stress areas have been identified, in general. The increased loss of employment and the resulting economic insecurity, a threatening fall in the mental health of people, including that of children, that resulted due to the prolonged isolation from social life and peer groups and potentially leading to depression and other psychic disorders, form the areas of significance as recognized by UNDP (7). Looking into the lives of women folk, along with the aforesaid areas of distress, the increased rate of domestic violence including sexual assaults, increased rate of domestic responsibilities and increased rate of undesired pregnancy and undesired abortion come up with political significance.

The International Agency for the Welfare of Women, namely, UN Women has released a report on the impact of the pandemic on women which tells that over 243 million women in the age group of 15-49, which is the half amount of the population, have undergone sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the first 12 months of the pandemic time. Though the rise in the statistics goes up to 30- 33% in countries like France, Argentina, Cyprus, Singapore and so on, the report states that only less than 40 percent of these women seek any kind of help from family and friends. And more shockingly only less than 10 percent seek help from legal authorities. During this period, India has witnessed a ten-year high rate of domestic violence within the states with the shocking account of less than 16% being reported or seeking legal solutions (hindu.com).

The paper presents the study conducted among the village women in my everyday life, my friends, colleagues, relatives, the mothers of my students and also the women in my neighbourhood. Thus it uncovers the impact of the pandemic on the locked-down lives of women from the villages of Kasaragod and Kannur districts of North Kerala, the Southern state of India. As Kerala has been applauded for its high rate of literacy among both sexes and its globally praised health indicators, a glance into the lives of ordinary women; the academic curiosity to see if the women of my locality reflect the global or the national trend in their lives during the pandemic, is worth studying with its academic and social implications.

The tool used for the study is the questionnaire circulated using Google Forms. The data collected for this study has been assured to be utilized for the sole purpose of this study, keeping the ethics of privacy and being protected from public domains.

1.1. AREAS OF THE STUDY

The study has been focused on the thrust areas of,

- 1) Economic insecurity.
- 2) Domestic responsibilities and domestic violence
- 3) Sexual assaults at home and cyberspace; and undesired pregnancy/ abortion
- 4) Mental stress
- 5) Exposure to new technology, if any.

The objectives of the study are recognized as

- to find out how the pandemic has affected the rural life of women
- to find out if rural women reflect the national/ international trend.
- to find out if, and how far they got exposure to technology,

2. SAMPLE SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

The study was conducted on 102 married women of North Kerala villages, aged between 19 to 56 and the average age group is that of 32-50 years (Diagram I). The participants in the study belong, more or less, to two major classes of economic status, namely, employed and unemployed. Those working in the private sector are grouped with the

unemployed, on account of their low income in rural villages and by considering the high possibility of losing their job in the particular context of a pandemic.

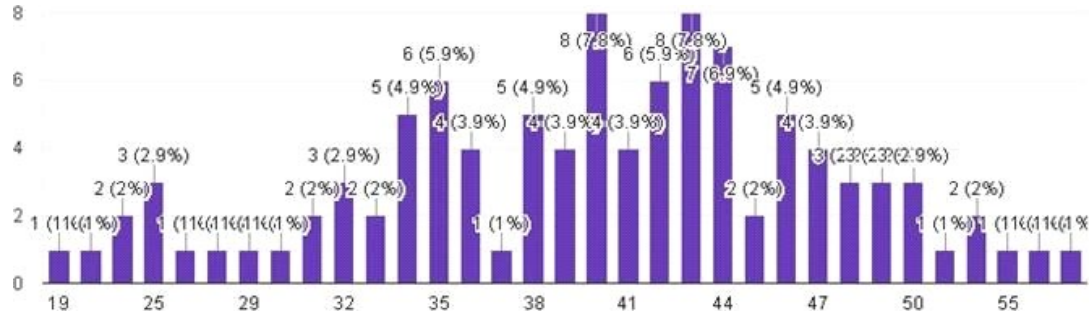


Diagram 1

Data Analysis

For the specific reading of the data collected, the colours of blue, red and yellow are used against the indicators namely 'very high', 'high' and 'not the least'. The analysis of the received data has been done by categorizing the information collected into groups as,

1) Economic insecurity

Out of the total women population selected for study, 45.1% enjoyed economic independence, whereas the 54.9 % (an aggregate of 12.7% working in private sectors and 42.2% forming the non-working group) are economically dependent (diagram II). During the pandemic, 47.8% of the participants face high rate of economic insecurity while 14.1% face very high economic crisis (diagram III).

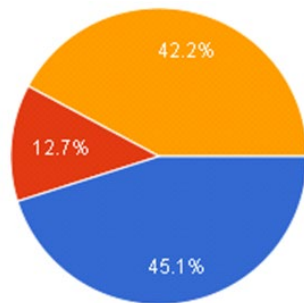


Diagram II

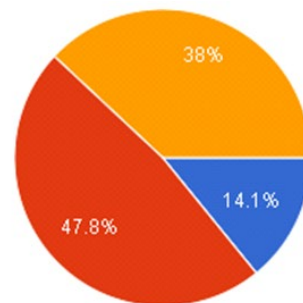


Diagram III

2) Domestic responsibilities and domestic violence

When 55.4% agree of having 'high' increase in domestic responsibilities, 18.5% reveal the case as 'very high' and the remaining 26.1% see no responsibilities added during the period (diagram IV). In terms of domestic violence like gender-based humiliation and subjugation, 2.2% reveal a 'very high' hike in the issue, while 9.8% agree for a 'high' increase in the matter and 88% of the participants rate as experiencing no domestic violence during the period (diagram V).

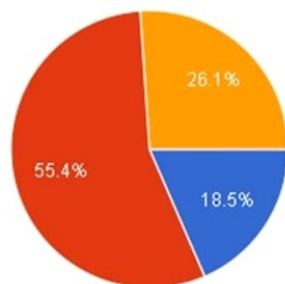


Diagram IV

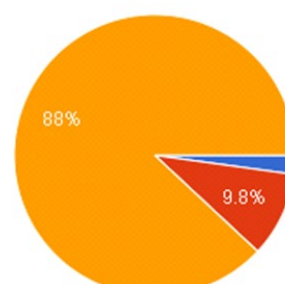


Diagram V

3) Sexual assaults at home and cyber space; and undesired pregnancy/ abortion

It is curious to see that all participants responded against an increase in sexual assault at home (diagramVI)., while 1.1% acknowledged an increase in sexual assaults at cyber space (diagramVII) and 1% agree as undergoing undesired sexual act/ pregnancy/abortion during the period (diagramVIII).

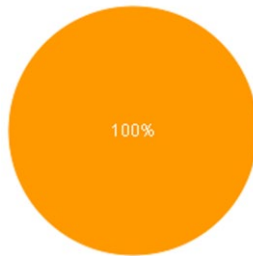


Diagram VI

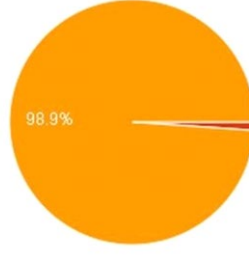


Diagram VII

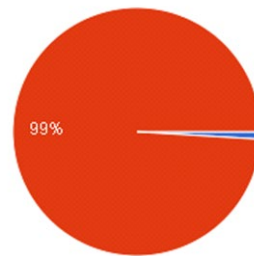


Diagram VIII

4) Mental stress

As far as the mental stress caused by isolation, economic crisis, domestic violence and sexual assault etc. 7.6% of the participants express as experiencing very high mental stress, while 52.2% experience high risk of mental stress and 40.2% see no added stress during the period (diagram IX).

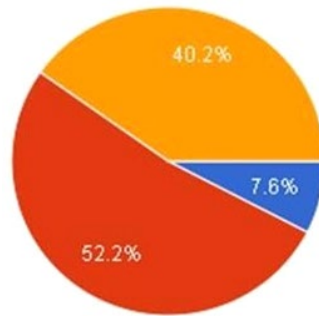


Diagram IX

5) Exposure to new technology, if any.

The single factor of empowerment that has been revealed through this study is in terms of technological exposure in terms of the use of technological devices and social platforms like whats app, facebook, Google meet, zoom etc. Since the kids have their schooling online the pandemic opened up the possibility for technological exposure to the mothers who facilitated the classes at home. When 58.5% feel empowered through being exposed to new technology on a high rate, 27.2% realize themselves as technologically empowered on a very high rate (diagram X) and the 35.9% of the participants newly entered to the world of technology (diagram XI).

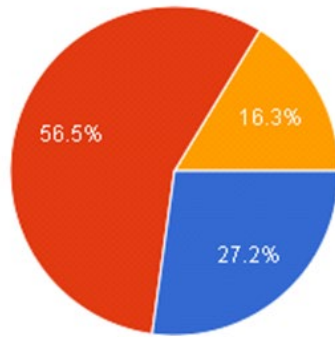


Diagram X

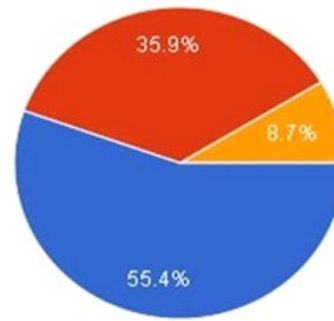


Diagram XI

Inferences on the Study

- During the pandemic, economic insecurity among the village women increased and many have begun to face very high economic crisis due to loss of job etc. in tune with the national and international trends.
- The study has revealed an increase in domestic responsibilities and domestic violence as experienced by the women under study and it shows as keeping in pace with the national and international trends, though not on the same scale.
- Sexual assaults at home and cyberspace, though reported, do not go with the national and international trends.
- More than half the number of respondents experienced a high risk of mental stress during the period in tune with the national and international trends.
- Increase in the use of technology reflects the national/ international trend, though not in the same measure.

3. CONCLUSION

As per the inferences evolved out of this study conducted among the rural women of North Kerala villages, it is revealed that the pandemic has not been seen in coalition with misogyny at a clear scale. The family locked down in the home has added the responsibilities of women in villages. They are forced to take care of the whole family members during the whole day and also to take responsibility of the online education of the kids along with the duty of attending the pandemic-stricken or isolated family members. The low response in terms of sexual assault at home and in cyberspace as well as of undesired sexual acts/ pregnancy to be studied further as the social stigma may have worked behind. Thus, the underreporting/ the uninformed cases of assaults in villages can be seen going in hand with the international scale. Positively enough, the study uncovers the fact that increased exposure to technology has added to the lives of the village women. Thus, though the pandemic has been affecting women socially, economically and psychologically at a high rate of negatives, the women under study have been seen as empowered through exposure to technology.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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