

## **Pandemic Paradox: Unveiling the Complex Interplay of Gender in Work and Family Realities**

**Naomi Magh**

Faculty of St. Xavier College, Department of Sociology, Nagaland

Email ID: [naomimaghsxc@gmail.com](mailto:naomimaghsxc@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This research paper explores the gender-specific consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on work and family dynamics. It highlights the deep-rooted societal circumstances and mechanisms that have resulted in gender disparities in both the workplace and domestic sphere. The study emphasizes the importance of considering variations based on factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and marital/parental status in work and family studies. The paper discusses the uneven impact of the pandemic on women, including job losses and increased caregiving responsibilities. It also examines the potential disruptions to pre-existing gender disparities and the need for further research on the lasting consequences of the pandemic on gender inequality or equality. Additionally, the effects of employment fluctuations on women's professional trajectories and economic standings, as well as the potential transformations in care systems and work institutions after the pandemic.

*Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, gender disparities, work and family realities, caregiving responsibilities, socioeconomic*

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound influence on society, with the highest number of confirmed cases and fatalities globally (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Governments have implemented lockdowns and social distance regulations to limit the spread of the virus, leading to mass layoffs, increased unemployment rates, and increased telecommuting. Additionally, the pandemic has increased the demand for in-home care work, especially among parents with small or school-aged children, causing significant adjustments to the paid and unpaid employment schedules of parents. The study focuses on the gender-specific consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic on work and family dynamics (Weill et al., 2020), incorporating knowledge from research on catastrophes and social inequalities.

Eric Klinenberg's (1999) seminal sociological research analyzed the social mechanisms that resulted in uneven susceptibilities. The pandemic has exposed the deep-rooted societal circumstances and mechanisms that resulted in gender disparities in both the workplace and domestic sphere (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). The unequal treatment of genders in the job market affects the unequal distribution of paid & unpaid work inside households, and vice versa. COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing gender disparities in both professional and domestic spheres, with some trends suggesting the prevalence of gender equality in some instances. The study emphasizes the importance of considering variations based on factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and marital/parental status in work and family studies. It provides detailed insights into the specific ways in which men and women have been impacted differently by the epidemic, taking into account the connections of their gender and other significant identities.

### **Objectives**

- 1- To examine the shift in caregiving roles within families during the pandemic, considering how gender dynamics may have evolved.
- 2- to assess the impact of work arrangements during the pandemic on gender roles and expectations in the professional sphere.

### **Literature review**

#### **The effects of pandemic employment on gender**

On-site workers are exposed to health risks, increased unemployment, and organizational downsizing as outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women have been disproportionately affected due to occupational gender segregation and employment disparities (Carli, 2020). Women are more likely to be in occupations with lower wages, job insecurity, and part-time employment (Weeden et al., 2016). The pandemic has disproportionately affected non-essential service sectors,

such as restaurants, retail, hospitality, and travel, which were characterized by instability before the pandemic. Despite the economic recovery, women have experienced slower progress, with women accounting for 43% of new employment. This gendered job recovery pattern may have implications for social inequalities, food and housing insecurities, and wage penalties upon re-entering the employment. (Pedulla, 2020).

Women are disproportionately represented in “essential and high-contact jobs, such as healthcare, retail, and residential care, compared to men” (Avdiu & Nayyar, 2020). These jobs are undervalued, low-paying, and unstable, with limited access to benefits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women faced increased vulnerability due to lockdown measures, uncertainty, and anxiety. Healthcare professionals, who faced increased demands and increased susceptibility to the virus. The pandemic also led to a shift towards remote work, with 42% of the workforce transitioning to full-time remote work in May 2020. Women were disproportionately represented in lower-status roles, leading to a greater number of women working remotely.

### **The gendered impact of school and childcare closures**

Women's employment is influenced by labor disparity, parental work division, and childcare institutions like schools and daycare systems (Collins et al., 2021). Mothers are more probable to work part-time or take on stay-at-home roles, particularly when not the main breadwinner (Collins, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased childcare obligations for both parents, with some heterosexual couples showing more equal distribution of household responsibilities. However, mothers continue to engage in more household chores and dedicate more hours to home-schooling and childcare. Single women are more prone to reporting exclusive responsibility for both household chores and childcare. Telecommuting during the pandemic has presented exclusive trials for parents, particularly women, as it blurs the lines between work and home life. Studies show that mothers spend more time on work while their children are present, and gender disparities persist. Unemployment has led to increased domestic employment for men, but jobless men do not show as significant increases. Women, particularly mothers with young children, are more likely to decrease their working hours or leave the workforce, with mothers experiencing a 3-4 percentage point decrease in participation. Temporary work leave usage has also been disproportionately favored by mothers.

This research examines the many aspects of gender norms at the local level within commuting zones. By using hierarchical cluster analysis and four well-established markers of gender norms, we have determined that the most effective way to understand these local cultural settings is via a multilevel framework. Commutation zones may be classified based on whether they exhibit egalitarian or traditional characteristics. However, within these broad categories, there are additional intricate aspects. Gender-traditional regions may be categorized as “traditional-breadwinning and traditional-essentialist, while egalitarian places can be divided into liberal-egalitarian and egalitarian-essentialist”. We investigate the variables that maintain this variance in space by examining the influence of compositional and contextual impacts. The evidence for compositional impacts is limited, since the demographic mix of commuting zones has a little impact on gender norm pointers. However, we discover evidence that local gender norms are maintained by contextual influences, in which the act of living in a certain location molds the attitudes and actions of the locals. Contextual effects are particularly influential in regions characterized by traditional gender norms. In such areas, individuals who would typically hold gender-egalitarian views, such as those with higher levels of education, tend to adopt more traditional perspectives compared to individuals with similar characteristics who live in regions with more egalitarian gender norms.

The number of mothers who are unable to work as a result of childcare obligations has increased significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Carlson et al., 2020). Specifically, women amid the ages of 25 & 44 are nearly three times more likely to attribute their unemployment to childcare issues than men. Institutional childcare assistance has also played a role in fostering gender equality in job and career opportunities during the pandemic. Studies on women saw a more significant decline in productivity compared to males during the pandemic. Single moms may have been particularly affected, as they lack a partner to assist with childcare and household chores (Tan et al., 2021). However, institutional childcare assistance is crucial in fostering gender equality in job and career opportunities during the pandemic.

### **Research gap**

The analysis of intersectionality, inadequate examination of challenges associated with remote work, disregard for single-parent perspectives, insufficient emphasis on mental health consequences, lack of representation of non-normative family

structures, limited analysis of organizational responses, restricted comparative analysis across industries, limited investigation of cultural variations, neglected influence on professional ambitions, and the lack of longitudinal studies. By rectifying these deficiencies, the research can enhance comprehension regarding the intricate interplay among gender, employment, and familial dynamics amidst the pandemic.

### **Gender differences in work realities during the pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on employment, particularly for women. Women have been disproportionately affected due to occupational gender segregation and employment disparities. They are more likely to be in “lower-paying, insecure, and part-time jobs”. The pandemic has further exacerbated these disparities, as non-essential service sectors, where women are overrepresented, have been heavily impacted. Despite economic recovery, women have experienced slower progress in terms of employment, with implications for social inequalities, food and housing insecurities, and wage penalties.

Women are also disproportionately represented in “essential and high-contact jobs, such as healthcare and retail, which are undervalued, low-paying, and unstable”. The pandemic has increased vulnerability for women in these roles due to lockdown measures, uncertainty, and anxiety. Healthcare professionals, in particular, have faced increased employment demands and a higher risk of contracting the virus. The shift towards remote work has also disproportionately affected women, as they are more likely to be in lower-status roles that can be done remotely. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing gender disparities in the employment, with significant implications for women's employment, well-being, and social inequalities.

### **Impact of Career Interruptions on Professional Paths in Gender Difference**

The career interruptions have an impact on the professional paths of both men and women, our knowledge on the significance of job loss in this process is limited. Based on interviews conducted with jobless individuals who have college degrees and work in professional fields, my research demonstrates that both men and women see their job loss as a result of impersonal "business" choices. However, women also attribute their job loss to employers' "personal" judgments. The loss of employment among men influences their later chosen career paths, without ever diminishing the significance of their involvement in the workforce. For many women in this research, the experience of losing their job serves as an opportunity to contemplate their career trajectories, often leading them to withdraw from paid employment. This research highlights job loss as a factor that, in addition to gendered workplace experiences and caregiving responsibilities, may limit the involvement of some women in paid employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a important impact on the employment and gender disparities, particularly affecting women. Women are more likely to experience job losses due to their overrepresentation in insecure employment and greater caregiving responsibilities at home. As the economy reopens, women face slower employment recovery compared to men. Telecommuting presents challenges for women, especially mothers, due to the lack of institutional childcare assistance. However, the pandemic may have disrupted some pre-existing gender disparities, as couples adopt more equitable divisions of work. There is still much to learn about the specific effects of the pandemic on different demographic groups and the lasting consequences for gender inequality. Further research is needed to understand how couples divide household responsibilities during the pandemic, considering existing theories in gender, family, and work. It is also important to investigate the impact of fluctuations on women's future professional trajectories and economic standings, particularly for mothers. The decrease in productivity and impact on professional experience suggest that women may face greater obstacles in career advancement. Additionally, it is crucial to examine the potential transformations in care systems and work institutions after the pandemic and their lasting effects on gender equality. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of childcare and sparked discussions about the need for progressive policies to address affordable and accessible childcare.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the employment and domestic sphere, worsening pre-existing gender disparities. Women are disproportionately affected by job losses due to insecure employment and greater caregiving

responsibilities. As the economy reopens, women experience slower employment recovery compared to males. Telecommuting poses challenges to work and productivity that are specific to one gender, with mothers facing these obstacles primarily due to the absence of institutional childcare assistance. Nonetheless, certain pre-existing gender disparities might have been disrupted by the pandemic, as couples have reportedly adopted more equitable work divisions since the inception of COVID-19. There is a significant amount of knowledge still to be acquired on the specific effects of the pandemic on various demographic groups and the lasting consequences these effects may have on gender inequality or equality. Further research is needed to understand the factors influencing how couples divide household responsibilities during the pandemic, particularly in relation to existing theories in gender, family, and work. Further investigation is needed to understand the effects of employment fluctuations on the future professional trajectories and economic standings of women, especially those who are mothers. The significance of childcare in society, the labor market, and women's employment has been underscored by the pandemic. As a result, there has been public discussion regarding the necessity for more progressive policies at the state and federal levels to ensure accessible and affordable childcare.

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