

Pandemic Predictions- The World Post-Covid-19 for Indian Females

DEVASHREE JUVEKAR

As the entire world is grappling with the novel coronavirus pandemic, many experts and researchers have predicted a number of social and economic changes that the world would undergo post-pandemic, ranging from an increase in nationalism and decrease in globalization to changes in food choices and a global hunger crisis. I am going to explore what changes might occur in the world post Covid-19 for Indian females, by studying the issue from their lens.

The majority of Indian households are patriarchal in nature, with a male member being the primary breadwinner and with females being confined to their homes and having a subordinate position in the family. Due to the countrywide lockdown, many businesses, construction sites, factories and manufacturing units are suffering heavy losses which would leave a number of Indian men unemployed and profitless. This fear of job insecurity and the frustration of joblessness might get projected onto their wives or female partners in the form of violence increasing the cases of domestic violence in the country. Often times, people project their fears and frustration onto someone else as a coping mechanism, but in this case, it would simply lead to acceleration of domestic crime.

According to the latest Global Nutrition Report in 2016, the prevalence rate of Anaemia among WRA (women of reproductive age) is 51.4% in India. Given the current situation in the country, the United Nations has predicted a global hunger pandemic that may attack all nations as they remain in lockdown leaving people with no jobs and money. Post Covid-19, as the poor will struggle even more for basic necessities like food, an increase in malnutrition among the Indian female population could be predicted. As women are instilled with the notion of giving themselves lesser importance and putting their family's needs before theirs, the rate of starvation might increase, leaving many women in the country in bad health conditions.

The worst-case scenario for urban working women post-pandemic could be reinforcement of traditional gender roles. For decades, women have struggled to prove their position as on a par with men, and have fought for their rights to work and get an education. However, in the disguise of 'social distancing', women might be compelled to stay at home. There is a socially constructed phenomenon that 'women are natural caregivers' and hence often the responsibility of family care is forced on the females of the household. The combination of fear of catching the virus and the caregiving duty of women might endanger them from going out for work, leading to an increasing disproportionality between the working males and females in the country.

Currently, a number of Indian households have given a leave of absence, whether paid or unpaid, to their domestic help. An important question that arises is: what will be the fate of these female domestic helpers after the pandemic in urban India? It can be predicted that due to the lockdown leave, the demand and need for house-help might increase. As people are struggling with doing household chores, the importance of domestic workers might rise. However, on the other hand, due to the fear and stigma attached to slums, and as most of the house

helps live in cluttered and unsanitary areas of the cities, these poor women might lose their jobs, putting their lives at risk even more than during the virus.

These are a few predictions derived after a critical analysis of the current social and economic situation in the country, and how the pandemic could turn out be a social disaster for females in India.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devashree is an anthropologist from St Xaviers college, Mumbai.