

## Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Pakistan

Islamic Research Institute of Social Sciences (IRISS) organized a focused-group discussion (FGD) on “Impact of Covid-19 on Women” in Karachi. The discussion was aimed at analyzing the impacts of pandemic covid-19 on women and their responses on pandemic during the lockdown. The women from all walks of life including academia, medicine, police, law, media, as well as housewives and single mothers shed light their experiences and offered solutions to mitigate the negative impacts and turned challenges into opportunities. The session was moderated by Dur-re-Sadaf Emaan, Research Coordinator IRISS.

Starting off, **Dur-re-Sadaf Emaan** said IRISS has been on the forefront in creating awareness among people through radio shows, seminars, webinars and FGDs. She said that research estimates around 59% women have been subjected to domestic violence globally due to COVID-19. Taking COVID-19 as a challenging situation for women and the gravity of the situation, IRISS has arranged this FGD.

The discussion started with **Ms. Rabia** saying that while COVID-19 has strengthened family relations, lockdown have resulted in problems for females especially with regards to transport to their offices.

**Dr. Warisha**, medical officer, said that the initial motivation received by healthcare providers as people hoisted white flags and paid salute to them, later turned into arrogance. People started doubting the sincerity of healthcare providers due to conspiracy theories taking round on social media. This turned into various violent events and attacks on healthcare providers, who were now considered as enemy of patients instead of their healers. This was due to lack of awareness and non-acceptance of severity of disease by people.

**Police Inspector Ms. Haleema** said that aside from some positive impacts, the cases of domestic violence, husband-wife fights, has increased due to pressure on women and presence of males at home. Many such cases are reported in police stations. The fear of disease has also created uncertainty in the society. She said children’s education is extremely affected as online education is nothing but an eye wash.

Talking about the fear in the society, **Advocate Reema Khan** opined that relatives of people in custody are worried about the health of jail inmates. This has increased pressure on people engaged in legal profession. But on a positive side, people are given bails very easily now. She said generally women are under immense psychological pressure as their workload has increased.

**Dr. Ayesha** said the initial rest at home, family unity sent positive vibes, but when extended relations and social and cultural norms like funeral, weddings and attending to sick people came as a challenge when due to social distancing and fear of contracting virus barred people from attending to these events, the problem escalated and fear increased. The women lost their resting time, as they had to juggle with their home as well as office responsibilities. She also criticized online teaching as even at university level students are not learning through this method, due to their non-compatibility with the

method. The problem is more crucial in rural areas where internet and electricity facilities are not at par with urban areas. This has further increased worries of women about their children's education.

**Aalima Mughisa**, who is running a Hifz institute in North Karachi, said the Covid-19 has strengthened family and now women spend less time on shopping, have less mobility, which is good for them. **Ms Kulsoom** said that at Karachi University, Post Graduate Admission Committee's meetings are not being done which has jeopardized the fate of post graduate students. Similarly, students from remote areas of Pakistan cannot avail the opportunity of online classes due to lack of facilities like computers, smart phones, or internet. This has affected higher education badly. While many families are facing economic issues due to unemployment, women have come under additional pressure due to poverty.

**Sheher Bano, a journalist from The News international**, while endorsing the strengthened family relations due to COVID-19, said that working women probably for the first time in their lives have found ample time to attend to their children and family in a focused manner. Since males are at home and maids are not, women are finding it very hard to handle pressures of home and office work. This has extended their office working hours as contrary to earlier nine to five job routine, now they have to work extra hours to meet deadlines, due to their home responsibilities. On a positive side, having the convenience of office and home at one place, they have now saved their long travelling hours. Though this has reduced their physical exhaustion but now this time is consumed at home. Since Covid-19 took all of us by surprise, and no one was initially prepared to deal with the situation, the lack of infrastructure like computers, internet, telephones, mobiles, generators, UPS, (to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply) etc has disturbed the home budget severally due to inflated electricity, mobile, phone, gas bills. This is coupled with COVID-19-driven joblessness in the media field which was already facing lay-offs, delayed or non-payment of salaries, retrenchments since a couple of year.

**Umme Aiman, a house wife** again talked about the increased workload of women due to all family members at home. **Khadija, a single mother**, said single mothers undertake the responsibilities of two parents at a time. COVID-19 has increased financial crises, due to which mothers have to work extra hard. But that translates into less communication with their children and reduced monitoring of their activities, which in turn can have negative impact in the longer run.

## **Recommendations**

The second part of the FGD was to find out the solutions to the problems outlined above. Some of the recommendation which were given by the participants of the FGD included:

1. The women should care of the SoPs such as sanitization of the hands, carrying masks when go outside and quarantine yourself if you are sick. This is too important in this situation for the safety of our loved ones.
2. Husbands and wives should share and care for each other. Husbands need to share responsibilities of their wives, by following the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), who used to do all his work himself and would also share his wives' burden. In case of joblessness of

husbands, wives should satisfy husbands while following Hadhrat Khadija's example as to how she consoled Rasullullah (SAW) when first Wahee (revelation) was revealed on him. Tolerance on both the partners is very necessary. Women need extra tolerance level.

3. Allah is the provider of every human being, so contentment and trust in Allah should be strengthened. We need to strengthen our relation with Him by increasing *Ibadaah* like Namaz, recitation of Holy Quran etc. Sharing is caring, frequent *Sadaqah*, *Infaaq* etc. can reduce overall miseries of people.
4. We should be cognizant of the needs of less fortunate people of the society and should share with them whatever extra is with us.
5. It is a wrong notion to put all the responsibility of education on Institutions. Parents, especially mothers, should pay attention to their children's education to fill their knowledge gap. Educated people should take the responsibility of disseminating education by shared learning process.
6. Boredom of living inside home can also be mitigated by engaging in positive activities, like book reading, indoor games. Out-of-box thinking to create new ways of entertainment and positive activities is required.
7. Despite lockdown, marriages are taking place with simplicity. This can be adopted as a future practice to avoid extravagance.
8. There is a general need to change people's attitude. Keeping good company and talking to positive people will generate good results.
9. Avoid insensitivity towards relations, like not attending to sick people for fear of contracting COVID-19 as death is inevitable and it has a fixed time, individually and collectively we should be ready for it. But we need to be more caring towards our relations and do counselling of people towards this factor.
10. Those countries where women are heads of states like News Zealand, there were very few deaths due to COVID-19, which means women, can create good governance. This factor needs to be endorsed and propagated.
11. Islam cannot be preached in poverty, first we need to address the basic needs of people and then preach Islam. We should work for the collective interest of the society.
12. In order to fight unemployment, there is need to develop skills for new job requirements by benefitting from online free training opportunities available. Jobless people should start diversifying themselves and also seek online work.
13. In government welfare schemes like BISP of PM's emergency fund, those who were in real need were not benefitting from these schemes, as they didn't have smartphones to send messages etc. While wrong people befitting from these schemes. We should identify real deserving people and help them to access these schemes.
14. Gratitude is the best attitude should be our motto. We should promote positivity and do counselling and advocacy.

15. Organizations should be approached to provide infrastructure to women who are working from home, as in case of many people working at one house, infrastructure falls short and women are the ones who sacrifice in such cases.

## Women Participants

1. Dr. Ayesha Rizvi, Lecturer University of Karachi
2. Dr. Kulsoom Fatima, Lecturer University of Karachi
3. Aalima Sadia Habib, Director Jamia Anwar e Habib
4. Aalima Mehreen, Teacher oot Anwar e Habib
5. Aalima Wania, Teacher at Anwar e Habib
6. Ms. Haleema Chandio, Inspector Police Station Clifton
7. Ms. Rabia, PC of Sindh police
8. Aalima Rabia Fatima, Aalima , Writer , Teacher
9. Dr. Warisha Ismail, Medical officer, Civil Hospital Karachi
10. Ms .Shahir Bano, Editor The News
11. Aalima Mughisa Khalid, Principal of Dar ul Islam
12. Dur-re-Sadaf Emaan, Research Coordinator IRISS
13. Ms. Khadija Yaqoob, Reporting and Communication Officer, IRISS
14. Ms. Falak Naza, Reporting and Communication Officer, IRISS
15. Ms. Reema Azeez, Program Manager, IRISS
16. Ms. Ume Aiman, Admin officer, IRISS

## GALLERY:



