

# PSYCHOSOCIAL CONDITION OF WOMEN DURING COVID-19 IN RURAL KARNATAKA

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## ***Abstract***

*Women in rural areas play a key role in handling the well-being of their families and the community. Because of this key role, most of the time rural women face many vulnerable situations like anxiety, depression and stress. The COVID -19 pandemic was harmful to health as well as social and economic well-being worldwide, with women right at the centre. This leads them to high-risk positions due to their status in families which depends on their economic condition, family responsibilities, and many other factors. In such a situation their mental health was ignored and sidelined. However, what many didn't realise was that mental health is just as important to overall well-being as physical health. When we feel mentally fit, we can work productively, enjoy our free time and actively contribute to our communities.*

***Keywords: Psychological Distress, COVID-19, Mental Health***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mental health involves our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It can be affected by the way we think, feel, and perform. Good mental health helps people cope with the various situations in people's day to day life. It also helps us to learn how to handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Thus mental health determines the overall development of the individual. Different circumstances can affect the mental health of people and mental health affects the psychological state of men and women. Psychological distress is a general term used to describe unpleasant feelings or emotions that impact a person's level of functioning. Psychological distress includes states such as anxiety, depression, stress, etc. This Psychological distress often leads to negative attitudes about the environment, others and oneself. These psychological distress situations result in economic, cultural, or other issues. Emotional distress is more of emotional anguish, people can experience these symptoms anywhere and anytime. Good mental health is important at every stage of life from childhood and adolescence through adulthood and ageing. Maintaining positive mental health and treating any mental health conditions is crucial to stabilizing constructive behaviours, emotions, and thoughts.

Mental health is important because it can help you to:

- Cope with the stresses of life
- Be physically healthy
- Have good relationships
- Make meaningful contributions to your community
- Work productively
- Realize your full potential

More than one in five women in the United States experienced mental health distress conditions, such as depression or anxiety. Many conditions of mental health such as Bipolar Disorder and Depression, affect women more than men in various ways. Most severe mental health conditions can be treated but cannot be cured and this can still help them access a better standard of life. COVID-19, a contagious infection caused by the coronavirus was a pandemic and created a profound shock worldwide, with different implications for men and women. Women serve on the frontlines against COVID-19, and the impact of the crisis on women was harsh. Women face compounding burdens: they are over-represented in health systems and continue to do the majority of unpaid care work in households, face high risks of economic insecurity (both today and tomorrow), and face increased risks of violence, exploitation, abuse, or harassment during times of crisis and quarantine. The pandemic has had and will continue to have a major impact on the health and well-being of many vulnerable groups. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without any special treatment. Elderly people, those without medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses. Women are among the most heavily affected groups in the COVID pandemic and after. During the COVID-19 pandemic when the entire world went on lockdown, women were the most vulnerable group affected badly. Most people remained at home. There were no social and family gatherings, no cultural activities and there were severe economic downfalls that led to a financial crisis. Eventually, this financial crisis had an impact on the women who exhibited various mental health issues. Mental health issues not only affected their mental well-being but would also affect their physical functions too. A lot of factors could contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Genetic makeup such as a family history of mental health problems

Around the world, women carry out far more care work than men – up to ten times as much according to the OECD Development Centre’s Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). The travel restrictions, at-home quarantine, school and centre closures, and the increased risks faced by elderly relatives can be expected to impose additional burdens on women, even when both women and their partners are confined and may continue working from home. Crucially, lockdown

situations exacerbate risks of violence, exploitation, abuse, or harassment against women, as has been seen in previous crises and from the early case of China during the COVID crisis. Despite all this, women's voices are still not well represented in the media. This risks leaving their experiences unheard and their perspectives ignored in the policy response to the crisis.

This study aims to investigate the psychological distress of women during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. The study includes various problems faced by women due to COVID-19 and the impact of the problem. Women experience distress in different ways than men such as anxiety, fear, depression, stress, etc. Due to COVID-19, women in villages face more issues like fear, anxiety, depression, stress, etc. along with economic issues. Rural women are adversely affected in this situation, as they are not aware of the recent developments in the market and the advancements in technology making them a vulnerable section of the populace.

## **STATISTICS**

1 in 3 adults experiences psychological distress as a result of COVID-19, according to a report by Hemani Sheth published in the Hindu Business Line on January 31, 2021. Adults' psychological distress has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic based on the findings of the researchers at Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore, who published their findings in the journal PLOS ONE.

According to an official press release published in the journal *Eurekalert*, one in every three people, especially women, younger adults, and those of lower socioeconomic status are experiencing psychological distress as a result of the pandemic. Researchers performed a meta-analysis of 68 studies from 19 countries that included 288,830 participants during the pandemic, analysing the risk factors for anxiety and depression in the general public. Women, younger adults, people of lower socioeconomic status, people who live in rural areas, and people who are at high risk of infection were found to be more likely to suffer from psychological distress such as anxiety or depression.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To learn about the

- Demographic details
- The psychological distress of women during the COVID-19 pandemic
- To identify intervention strategies for the problem

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design chosen for this research was a descriptive study. Descriptive research will help to describe the characteristics of the target group.

## SAMPLE AND SAMPLE SIZE OF THE STUDY

The population of the study includes all women living in a village, in Karnataka state. The sample size is  $n= 30$  women who were selected through the census method.

## TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

The tools for data collection used by the researcher are based on the research design and objectives. The researcher used a self-made questionnaire tool for data collection and it was conducted through a survey method. The questionnaire was organized in English and it consists of demographic details. A total of 20 questions were framed which were related to the psychological distress among women during COVID-19. The questionnaire included demographic details such as age, gender, education, occupation of the women in the rural area, and other questions related to the study were also collected.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Analysis of data was based on the particular objectives of the study. SPSS Software was used for analyzing the continuous data and the frequency percentage was calculated.

**TABLE NO: 01. Socio-Demographic details**

Variable	Category	No.	(%)
Age	20-30	9	30.0
	31-40	8	26.7
	41-50	4	13.3

	51-60	4	13.3
	61-70	5	16.7
Education	Degree	4	13.3
	Primary Education	12	40.0
	PUC	9	30.0
	Secondary Education	5	16.7
Occupation	Home Maker	18	60.0
	Others	9	30.0
	Self –Employed	3	10.0
Marital Status	Married	29	96.7
	Unmarried	1	3.3
Religion	Hindu	30	100.0

The above table depicts that, 30% of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-30 years. During this period, expectations and responsibilities are more on them, and because of this responsibility, they often feel stressed in many situations. Considering their educational status, 40% of the respondents have completed only primary education.

The results show that 30% of the respondents completed their education level up to PUC. Very few respondents have a degree-level educational status. From the analysis, it is evident that many may not be able to understand their psychological condition in their life.

**TABLE NO: 02. Psychosocial Factors**

Variable	Rating	No.	(%)
Quality of Life	Alright	11	36.7
	Bad	4	13.3
	Good	4	13.3
	Very Bad	10	33.3
	Very Good	1	3.3
Mental and Physical Well Being	Agree	7	23.3
	Disagree	7	23.3
	Neutral	1	3.3
	Strongly Agree	12	40.0
	Strongly Disagree	3	10.0
Fear and Anxiety due to the exposure to virus	Agree	7	23.3
	Disagree	8	26.7

	Neutral	2	6.7
	Strongly Agree	8	26.7
	Strongly Disagree	5	16.7
Depression	Agree	5	16.7
	Disagree	15	50.0
	Neutral	5	16.7
	Strongly Agree	1	3.3
	Strongly Disagree	4	13.3
Emotional Wellbeing	Agree	3	10.0
	Disagree	11	36.7
	Neutral	11	36.7
	Strongly Agree	2	6.7
	Strongly Disagree	3	10.0
Confidence in Handling Personal Problems	Agree	13	43.3
	Disagree	1	3.3
	Strongly Agree	16	53.3
Feeling of Worthless	Agree	3	10.0
	Disagree	13	43.3
	Neutral	1	3.3
	Strongly Agree	2	6.7
	Strongly Disagree	11	36.7

The result depicts that 36.7% of the respondents responded that their quality of life is reasonable, and COVID-19 hasn't had a significant impact on rural women. However, there were about 40% who strongly agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their mental and physical health and that this was due to a change in their lifestyle. This result shows similarities with the previous study conducted by Gupta et al; 2021. Based on their study COVID-19 has changed the lifestyle of almost all the people in the world negatively. The study also indicates that 26.67 per cent agree and disagree equally, suggesting that certain people may be scared or nervous as a result of the virus exposure. 43.33 per cent said they would live with depression as a result of isolation. 23.33 per cent reported that they were unable to deal with the situation. Half of the respondents (50%) denied feeling depression during COVID-19, while 16.6% admitted to having encountered depression in this situation. Since they were safe and had fewer interactions with urban people, 43 per cent of respondents during COVID-19 did not feel extreme panic. Furthermore, 23% of people agreed that they often felt sick during the outbreak, and 20% strongly agreed with the statement. Furthermore, 36.67 per cent of respondents suggested that COVID-19 did not prevent them from experiencing emotional well-being, while 6.67 per cent of the minority indicated that they were prevented from experiencing emotional well-being. The related research literature also substantiates the study results, most of the studies reveal that the COVID situation made women undergo psychological distress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher found that out of 30 respondents, some of the respondents were not completely affected because COVID-19 didn't have much impact in rural areas when compared to cities. But few respondents responded that they did have fear and anxiety due to the exposure to the virus and some people did face issues in their social and economic life due to lack of social support and because they were financially dependent – they did feel they were isolated and completely locked from the outer world.

1. Usage of Coping Mechanisms – All women are to be trained in handling their psychosocial burden. The panchayats should take necessary action to facilitate this.
2. Women's counselling centres are recommended to implement this as it will assist them in sharing their concerns and resolving them.
3. Empower community members to participate in mental health awareness programmes and free counselling campaigns could be conducted every month
4. Women are to be trained in handling the psychological first aid in the community to enhance general wellbeing and also that of women in particular.

Coronavirus disease is an infectious disease caused by coronavirus. It has affected many people in different ways and changed everyone's life and lifestyle. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the ability of health systems to maintain the delivery of essential health services. Children, elderly people living with chronic conditions, minorities, and people with disabilities are mostly affected by the deadly virus. Most people have not adjusted to the situation and they are still facing some kind of lingering psychological issues, mental issues, health issues, etc. In this research, researchers focused on the psychological issues of rural women. The researcher found that in rural areas inhabitants know about the COVID-19 disease and its situation, health issues, etc. But the majority of rural women do not have any kind of tension, stress, and anxiety. It means that there was no major psychological distress among rural women because of COVID-19. Therefore, in rural areas, women are very strong and capable and able to handle their life successfully.

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