

The Influence of COVID-19 from the Perspective of Gender

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of coronavirus pneumonia epidemic in late 2019 has brought great changes and impacts to all over the world. After reading related research, the author finds that the impact of COVID-19 on the public is mainly concentrated in three aspects: economy, behavior, and psychology. Besides, from the view of gender, there are plenty of difference in these aspects. However, through further investigation, the author finds that there are few studies which concentrate on the impact of COVID-19 from the perspective of gender. Therefore, by analyzing and comparing different research results, the author explores the impact of COVID-19 on different genders from economic, psychological, and behavioral aspects. The results of this study are as follows: in the economic dimension, women are more impacted than men; in the psychological dimension, women have more irrational behaviors; in the psychological dimension, women have more negative emotions. As a result, the author suggests that the government and enterprises should actively shoulder social responsibilities, promote normalization of epidemic prevention and control, and at the same time give women supportive policies to help them cope with the negative impact of COVID-19.

Keywords: Gender Difference, COVID-19, Gender Equality, Public Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of coronavirus pneumonia epidemic in late 2019 has brought great changes and impacts to all over the world. Although the epidemic situation in China was basically controlled in the second half of last year, there were signs of rebound in some provinces and cities at the beginning of this year. Therefore, it is necessary to further explore the impact of COVID-19. Through researching relevant research, the author finds that COVID-19 has obvious influence on the public in three aspects, which were economy, behavior, and psychology, and the influence of these three aspects also reflect gender differences.

However, there is few studies exploring the impact of the epidemic purely from a gender perspective. In addition, women are a vulnerable group in society, so finding the unique plight of women in the epidemic is of great significance to alleviate the aggravation of gender status differences caused by the epidemic. Therefore, the author would like to explore several questions through this research: what dimensions of COVID-19 different effects on different gender have; what the differences

between different genders are; what the possible reasons for this difference are. Finally, some suggestions will be put forward by the author from the perspective of public policy.

2. GENDER DIFFERENCES UNDER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

2.1. Gender Differences in Career and Income

According to the novel *Pneumonia and Labor World: the latest assessment and analysis* (Fifth Edition) released by the International Labor Organization, the epidemic is a very big blow to the labor market [1]. At the same time, it can infer from the survey data that the impact of the epidemic on men's career and income is different from that of women.

Table 1. Year-over-year change in employment in April and May 2020 for selected countries by gender, aged 15 and over

	The employment rate change from April, 2019 to April, 2020	
	Male	Female
Australia	-2.9	-3.4
Canada	-13.8	-16.5
Columbia	-21.0	-29.3
Japan	-0.7	-1.8
Korea	-1.2	-2.5
U. S	-13.4	-16.6

First, women's careers are more vulnerable than that of men, which will widen the income gap between men and women. To avoid the further spread of the epidemic, many countries introduced the lock down policies which have led to many workplace closures. Compared with the Internet industry that can work online, the traditional manufacturing industry, catering industry, entertainment industry and other industries that need employees to go to workplace have suffered a greater impact. There are 40% of the world's working women are engaged in these industries, while the proportion of men engaged in these industries is 36.6%. Thus, it can be seen that women are more affected by the impact than men, which will exacerbate the gap between women and men in working hours and income [2].

Secondly, the decline of female labor participation rate is greater than that of male labor participation rate, which may affect women's subsequent career development. The lock down policies not only led to the closure of enterprises, but also made schools adopt the online teaching to avoid student gathering. As a result, some parents are unable to work because they had to stay at home to take care of their children. According to the statistics from the International Labor Organization, as of June 4, 37 million of the 55 million family workers at the risk of losing their jobs in the world were women [1]. Due to the unequal status of women in the labor market, men will be preferred to work outside, and women have to take care of their children at home. From April 2019 to April 2020, female employment in Canada, Colombia and the United States decreased by more than 16%, and the decline rate of female employment was greater than that of male employment [2]. The epidemic has further widened the gap between men's and women's labor participation rate. At the same time, women's inability to go out to work will lead to women losing their jobs due to too many absences. During the epidemic period, due to the impact on the economy, many companies closed, jobs in the job market will be further reduced and job competition will be further intensified. Due to the epidemic, women who are unemployed or forced to take care of their children at home will have an occupational gap. Compared with men who can go out to work during

the epidemic, women with an occupational gap obviously do not have a competitive advantage. It can be said that the epidemic has done harm to women's career.

Moreover, the threat of the epidemic to women's health and work ability is also greater than that to men. The two representative groups are medical staff and housewives. There are 70-80% of the world's medical staff who are women, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, these female healthcare workers are often exposed to significant health risks while working, which is a huge challenge for the majority of female practitioners [3]. Similarly, because housewives do not participate in social work and lack social security support, they are also prone to bring greater economic burden to the family due to illness, which intensifies the vulnerability of women in the workplace and social level.

In conclusion, the epidemic has a great negative impact on the working hours, working income and potential working ability of professionals, and the impact on women is stronger than that on men.

2.2. Gender Differences in Behavior

According to "Psychosomatic Symptoms and Irrational Behavior among the Populace During the Epidemic of COVID-19", women's irrational feelings such as appetite, gastrointestinal function and sleep quality were significantly lower than that of men [4]. Even more, the division of labor between men and women has changed. That is, men work outside and are responsible for purchasing daily necessities, while women may bear more responsibilities in families and there will also be a corresponding increase in the number of households where women take sole care of children.

Due to the continuous changes and development of the COVID-19 and the increasing work intensity and workload, many health care workers who are mainly women are physically and mentally exhausted, which may lead to loss of appetite or overeating. And these female medical staff also work long hours and may have muscle pain in different parts of the body, so they may have difficulty in falling asleep, sometimes even for hours.

The COVID-19 enlarges the impact of social division of labor between men and women. In China, a representative phenomenon is that during the epidemic period, men began to become the main group of out shopping. For a long time, because the difference in social division of labor between men and women, men are mostly responsible for obtaining economic income to support family daily expenses, while women play the role of purchasing and housekeeping. However, due to the impact of the epidemic and the lock down policy, the opportunities for family members to go out have been greatly reduced, and the responsibility of women to go

out shopping has been transferred to men who can buy more goods at one time.

The division of labor between men and women may also become more pronounced. As many children take online classes at home during the pandemic, many mothers have to quit their jobs and devote themselves to caring for their children. As a result, there will be a shift from two parents taking care of the children to a mother taking care of the children alone. This pattern may also be solidified and forced more women return to families as the epidemic develops. This phenomenon will not be too obvious in a short time. However, as the time goes by, when more women choose to return to their families and the female turnover rate and absenteeism rate rise, the overall workplace competitiveness of female groups may be reduced, and the problems of female employment and gender equality may continue to intensify.

2.3. Gender Differences in Psychology

According to "Investigation Research on Cognition, Prevention and Control Behavior and Psychosomatic Healthy Status of Different Types of Adults during the Epidemic Period of COVID-19", the impact of COVID-19 on different gender groups is also different. Among them, under the influence of the epidemic, the symptoms of depression and anxiety of women were significantly higher than those of men. Therefore, women are more vulnerable than men [5].

The reasons why women are more psychologically affected can be attributed to the following several categories:

The first is the reason of social division of labor. In China, most women regard family as the focus of their life. Therefore, paying attention to the daily life and health status of family members has become women's responsibility and obligation. Against this background, novel coronavirus pneumonia outbreaks directly threaten women's performance in family duties. The epidemic situation causes family members to face health threats all the time, and one of the concerns of women is the health status of family members. Therefore, women are more likely to worry about the deterioration of the health status of family members, and this would make them more prone to anxiety.

The second is the work-life conflict. During the epidemic, many enterprises required to work from home. According to the survey, when working in the office, women tend to be more immersed in work, while when working at home, women tend to do housework or take care of children rather than continue to overcome problems when they encounter bottlenecks [6]. Therefore, the continuity of working at home is lower than that of working in the office. At the same time, due to working from home, the boundary between work and off-duty is relatively vague. This makes it difficult for women to

change places as the boundary of commuting, which leads to the fuzzy boundary of commuting. It is difficult to fully devote themselves to work during work and to fully devote themselves to family during off-duty, which intensifies the work life conflict and increases women's psychological pressure.

Another is the role of nursing. Most of nurses are women and they should bear the responsibility of care in more cases, which also leads to more exposure to the source of infection. This not only means a threat to women's health, but also causes women to have more anxiety and depression due to fear of infection. And the continuous high intensity of treatment work also makes the psychological pressure of female medical staff greater, and they are more prone to fear, tension, anxiety, depression and other negatives emotions.

COVID-19 has also greatly increased the psychological burden of women in the physiological and pregnancy periods. Novel coronavirus pneumonia is the most representative of the women's group during pregnancy. Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, many hospitals have been forced to stop their obstetrics and gynecology. The worse thing is that hospitals have become a vulnerable place for infection. Many pregnant women are unable to carry out normal prenatal examination due to hospital suspension. Even if they are accepted by the hospital, pregnant women are at risk of infection when they go out, which brings a lot of psychological burden to women who are emotionally unstable during pregnancy. Pregnant women who have been infected with the COVID-19 face a more difficult choice: giving up their children. Getting treatment must cause the fetus to be affected by drugs, so terminating pregnancy is a painful but inevitable choice. This is painful for every family member, but it means a greater impact for pregnant women. Therefore, women are also more prone to depression and anxiety.

Finally, long-term home life may also lead to more family contradictions. The COVID-19 causes family members to face more pressure and unforeseen risks. Family members' psychological pressure rises correspondingly. In a stressful situation, the time they get along with each other becomes longer, which is likely to lead to increased conflicts and plans, and even increase the probability of domestic violence [7].

3. RESULTS OF GENDER DIFFERENCE

From a national point of view, if women are more affected than men for a long time, it will aggravate gender inequality and may even affect women's reproductive willingness. The reduction of women's fertility will lead to the decline of the birth rate, which will lead to the disappearance of the demographic dividend and hinder the long-term development of the country.

From the perspective of enterprises, the loss of female employees will lead to the shortage of employees in some posts, increase the training cost and affect the benefits of enterprises.

From a personal point of view, women receiving more negative effects will lead to the decline of women's happiness and even depression, which is not conducive to women's personal development and the maintenance of family relations.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING GENDER DIFFERENCES

Under the influence of COVID-19, women are more affected than men. Under the influence of COVID-19, women are more affected than men in economic, behavioral, and psychological aspects. Based on the above analysis, the author puts forward the following suggestions from the perspective of public policy:

The government should establish an information platform for epidemic prevention and control, and gradually lift the business ban in catering, entertainment, and other industries on the premise of ensuring safety. The State can gradually return the economy to normal on the one hand and enable female employees to return to work on the other hand, preventing women from being trapped in family life and exacerbating gender inequality in the workplace and exacerbating gender inequality in the workplace. Moreover, government and social party should promote equal pay for equal work, so that women will not lose job opportunities due to unequal pay and treatment under the condition of a significant reduction in employment.

The government must also establish a transparent and reliable official information release platform to let people know the latest epidemic development, so that people at risk of infection can take timely measures. And the rhythm of daily life of people without risk of infection will not be disturbed and the anxiety of highly sensitive women can be further reduced. Especially, the Sanitary Department should take responsibility to improve the regulations on disinfecting, isolation, and zoning in the hospital, so that pregnant women can normally complete prenatal examination and childbirth. Reduce the risk of maternal infection and psychological burden. What's more, government can provide mental health support for people, such as opening a psychological counseling hotline and publicizing mental health knowledge in the public media. All these measures can provide mental health help for highly sensitive women.

The enterprise shall assume corresponding social responsibilities, define the boundaries between work and life by formulating internal articles of association in the situation of home office, provide employees with the possibility of work life balance, and avoid female employees from facing work family conflict.

For individual, especially for women, it is important to keep calm and do what they can to reduce the risk of the epidemic. Everyone should give more support and understanding to family members.

5. CONCLUSION

This study is based on the research and survey results of other scholars. Based on the existing research, it can diversify the data and perspectives, but it may also lead to a slight deviation in the accuracy of the results due to the difference of different data statistical caliber. The author acknowledges the limitations of this study, and in the current situation, the findings of this study need to be tested by society. The COVID-19 itself is a great challenge to public health safety in various countries and regions. At the same time, as this is a global public security event, the government, and enterprises, as two important subjects of social operation, need to actively undertake corresponding social responsibilities to promote the stable operation of the state machine under the influence of the epidemic and seek the well-being for the people.

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