

# What Impacts Has the Pandemic Had on Women’s Rights in the Developing World?

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## ABSTRACT

Conventional studies have focused on the damage to human life and health from COVID-19, often ignoring the negative impact COVID-19 also has on human rights, especially women's rights in developing countries. This paper first reviews the emergence of feminist movements in developing countries and finds that the pandemic has harmed to the feminist movement in developing countries. Finally, this paper tries to propose some solutions to solve this problems and protect women’s right in developing countries.

**Keywords:** Women’s right, Developing world, Covid-19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

due to rocketing medical expenses, shrinking trade volumes, and withering business activities. As most of the world’s developing economies are currently residing at Asia, I would like to explore how the pandemic aggravated the inequality women are confronted within those regions.

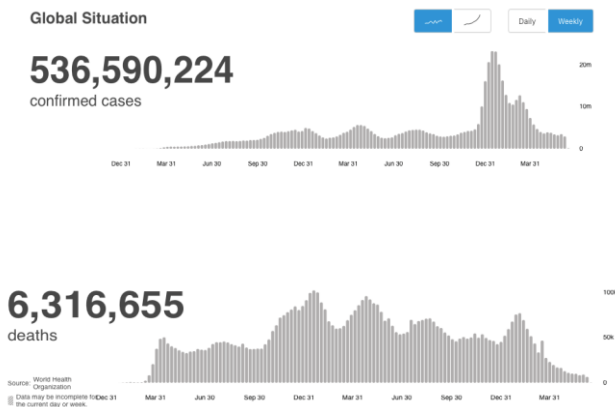


Figure1. Global Situation of Covid-19

### COVID-19 Overview

Since the eruption of the pandemic originating from a packed seafood market in China’s Wuhan at the end of 2019, COVID-19 has quickly spread over the world, substantially altered the way people live, and profoundly influenced the global economic and social order. Indeed, as revealed by WHO COVID-19 Dashboard (2021) [1] till the end of July, the confirmed cases of COVID-19 totaled nearly 200 million worldwide and the death toll surpassed 4 million(Figure1). Though it is a global pandemic, developing countries with relatively unsteady economic basis witnessed the breakdown of their national economies

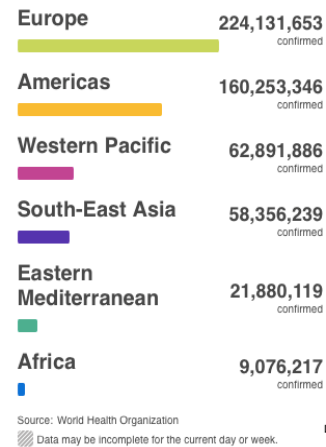


Figure2. Region Situation of Covid-19

### Feminism Movement Overview

The exemplary of feminism undoubtedly stems from the western world where women in developed countries, after decades of struggling and fighting, have wielded more powers in familial matters, political elections, and economic affairs.

However, even before the outbreak of COVID-19,

women’s rights in the developing world have been a great concern for feminists and human rights advocates. Indeed, gender privilege in favor of men is regarded as normality in developing countries, where men are entitled to more educational opportunities, vocational prospects, and negotiating powers in marriage.

## 2. COVID-19 COMPROMISES WOMEN’S RIGHTS AT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

As mentioned in the background session, women in developing countries are systematically inferior to men in terms of rights they can claim in both vocational and domestic spheres.

To start with, physiological differences and stereotyped preconceptions regarding family roles have imparted women more responsibilities in taking care of family members. Tran Phuoc Bao Thu and others (2020) [2] have pointed out since COVID-19 is highly contagious, many developing countries have implemented a series of strict social distancing measures such as restricting children (those less than 7 years old yet entering primary school) and elders (especially those who suffer from high blood pressure and diabetes) at home, who are supposed to be looked after by women. Subsequently, many women opt for family. They suspend or terminate their professional careers, leading to the deterioration of their vocational prospects.

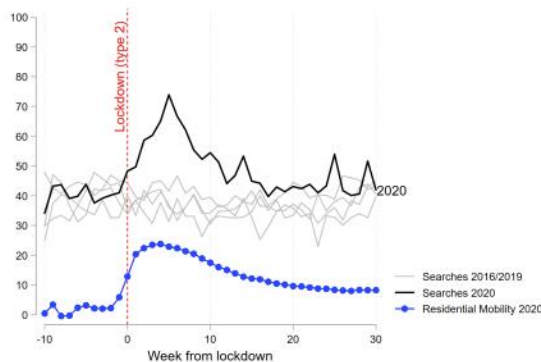


Figure3. Trends in online searches and residential mobility Pool of 11 countries.

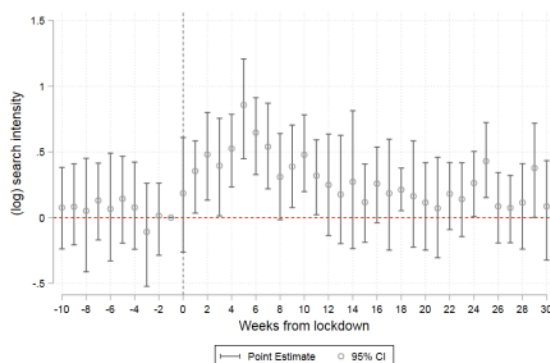


Figure4. Event study - All countries

Furthermore, even women succeed in retaining their

jobs, their income substantially shrink. As Mariah J (2016) [11] pointed out, many women are in service or catering industry where their salaries mainly rely on patron’s consumption at restaurants, shopping malls, and tourist attractions. On the one hand, due to COVID-19’s highly contagious nature, governments have issued stipulations that restrict people at home. On the other hand, patrons of restaurants have concerns to eat together outdoors. As a result, people’s consuming behaviors have been rendered online and the revenues of traditional service sectors have been negatively impacted. Lu Zhang and others (2021) [3] have noticed that the density of consumers at restaurants has subsided due to people’s increasing alertness against unnecessary social contacts. As the majority of practitioners in service sectors are females, they are experiencing hardship and their economic independence will be further compromised.

Apart from being confronted with economic stress caused by the pandemic and familial burden exacerbated by social distancing, women are more easily subjected to domestic violence. According to Inés Berniell (2021) and Alex R. Piquero (2021) [4][5], incidents of domestic violence (usually husbands against wives) are on the rise mainly because of COVID-19 lockdown(Figure2,3&4). Such phenomena are understandable since many men suffer from loss of income and are expected to be fired due to economic recession. Indeed, as Ana V. Nikčević (2020) [12] discovers, psychological distress are more prone to bring about distress and anxiety, leading to greater chance for men to commit domestic violence.

Furthermore, according to Wade M (2020) [10], the influence of Asian cultural perspectives such as Confucianism have rendered Asian women into subordinate roles at both work and home. Even though local feminism activists have made significant strides in gaining power for females in both public and private sectors, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic have substantially mitigated their previous efforts.

## 3. THINGS TO BE DONE TO CURB THE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

### The Role of Government

For women to improve their status in society, their priority is to gain economic independence. Just as Simon Mair (2020) discovers, the prerequisite women need to claim more rights is to realize their value under the reality shaped by COVID-19. Therefore, governments from central to municipal levels should develop policies to maintain women’s economic powers.

Unemployment insurance might be the first option governments can adopt as David Sjoquist (2021) [6] observes that unemployment claims retrieved from relevant

insurance products are beneficial for those losing their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, developing countries should encourage women to cover themselves with sufficient unemployment insurance to caution against interruption of job scenarios.

The second approach governments can adopt is to subsidize companies who leave their door open to female job seekers since these companies assume some risks in hiring women for their female employees might choose to resign when COVID-19 lockdown prevails. According to Kohei Kawaguchi (2021) [7], direct subsidy to small and medium-sized enterprises still in the trauma of COVID-19 pandemic is necessary since they offer substantial amount of job vacancies for Asian females.

The third method governments should take is legislative efforts. As MinSook Heo (2010) [8] pointed out, South Korea stipulates relevant laws punishing those who conduct domestic violence, which turns out to be very effective since the government dexterously frames the legislation under its unique cultural backdrop. Similarly, when mapping out their peculiar laws aimed at promoting women rights which have been on the downward track since the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian countries should take into consideration their deeply-rooted traditional cultures and adapt laws that can guarantee women's access to shrinking work opportunities under the COVID-19 pandemic, that can ensure women's equal compensation for the same amount of working hours, and that can sustain women through the hardship brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### The Role of International NGOs

As feminism movement is a global cause, many international NGOs have played important roles. Anna Jenderedjian (2021) [9] have proposed Gender Mainstreaming, a strategy that is widely adopted by NGOs and that is effective in empowering women at Armenia. Indeed, it is impossible to rely solely on governmental agencies since they are unlikely to address each aspect of women rights. Instead, different types of NGOs can fulfill their designated duties to promote gender equality. For example, World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) can work out specialized financial tools to provide women losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic with loans of low interest rates; UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) can wield their influence to offer young girls exiting their schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic equitable opportunities to receive education; and UN (United Nations) should deploy more personnel and fund to help regions plagued by the COVID-19 pandemic to continue their efforts to eliminate gender inequality.

#### The Role of Communities

Either governmental intervention or NGO's participation cannot provide women immediate or adequate access to aid in need. As a result, the very communities in which

potential female victims of domestic violence live have to shoulder some responsibilities.

Since most Asian community is very populous, the government rely heavily on organizations and individuals at community levels to execute orders of social distancing to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic at areas of large population density. Thanks to such a mechanism of community intervention, many community officials have established close connection with community residents during the pandemic era. As a result, it is feasible that community organizations to detect potential female victims of domestic violence by paying periodic visits to families within communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, communities can hire volunteers and social workers under the name of health care provision who can also step in when domestic violence occurs.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

To recap, after decades of efforts, feminism movement at developing world finally gains momentum and the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 which has halted such a trend. The pandemic causes women to suffer from reduction of revenues, loss of jobs, deterioration of familial status. However, as long as local communities, governmental agencies, and international NGO step in and play their respective roles dutifully, women under the pandemic shock will surely restore their pre-COVID-19 situations and constantly improve their status.

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