

# **Covid-19 & Gender Performativity: A Study of the Global South**

Dr. Kanupriya  
(Submission 29)  
IWBBIO, 2022

# Organization of the Presentation

- Introduction
- The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis
- Evolving a Gender -Sensitive Response to the Covid-19 Crisis
- Conclusion
- Future Implications of the Study

# Introduction

- Covid-19 not affecting men and women equally.
- This is even more valid for the Global South.
- This phenomenon shall be studied in a '**gender performativity**' framework.
- Globally, men seem to be at a greater disadvantage compared to women when it comes to the impact of Covid-19 in terms of both morbidity and mortality.
- Males shoulder a disproportionate overall disease burden at 66 per cent, compared to 34 per cent for females (Biswas, 2020; Jin et al., 2020; The Times of India, 2020).

# Introduction (Contd.)

- The entire issue requires a detailed analysis; not just based on a few morbidity and mortality statistics.
- The **gender performativity** framework seeks to study this issue from a socio-economic perspective.
- The gender as against sex, is a manifestation of the roles and responsibilities assigned to each gender, male or female and is reinforced through repetitive performance of tasks and roles assigned by the society.
- This very '**reiterative**' nature of '**performance**' of **socially mandated tasks** is what constitutes the core of the **gender performativity** theory (Butler, 1990).

# Introduction (Contd.)

- Despite considerable economic growth and progress, India, a classic case of the Global South, lags behind on major social indicators like Human Development and Gender Gap indices (HDI and GGI), pointing towards a deep-seated social rot within its traditional society.
- The rank of the country in 2019 on the HDI and GGI stand at 129 out of 189 countries and 112 out of 153 countries respectively (Business Today, 2019; The Business Line, 2019).
- The deplorable health, education, employment and working conditions only seek to add to a typical woman's woes (Falcone and Detty, 2015).

# Introduction (Contd.)

- Also, the improperly defined gender relations within third world homes, where it is safely assumed by all, including even by the women themselves, that men are meant for the ‘outside world’.
- These attitudes magnify the distress to womenfolk, both mental and physical, in a typical gender performativity context.
- This study tries to argue about the challenges posed by Covid-19 through a wider, gendered lens, keeping in focus the archetypal third world woman; constrained by the socio- psychological norms imposed by the underdeveloped societies of the third world.
- For the purpose of readability and lucidity, this article is divided into the following sections. The first segment introduces the readers to the topic.
- The second pertains to the differential impact of the crisis on men and women.
- The next is on the gender-sensitive response measures to this pandemic.
- The last but one segment concludes the paper.
- The final section elicits the future implications of this study.

# **The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis**

- Fraught with numerous socio-religious and traditional bondages, the third world woman is a study of fortitude—both mental and physical.
- Disasters, like the Covid pandemic, be they natural or man-made, seem to affect women more than men, especially in the developing or third world countries.
- The percentage of women and girls experiencing gender- based violence including rape, human trafficking and domestic abuse is known to rise exponentially during and after the disaster, thereby increasing the vulnerability of women folk (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe, 2003; Morrow and Phillips, 1999; UNDP, 2013).
- Any disaster places an undue burden on females in terms of responsibility for unpaid domestic care work like cooking food and fetching water for the household from long distances.

# **The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis (Contd.)**

- Case Fatality Rate (CFR) stands at 3.3 per cent for Indian females and 2.9 per cent for Indian males, thereby, challenging the traditional notions of women being in a stronger immunity position than men in the Covid-19 crisis (Biswas, 2020; The Times of India, 2020).
- This data is in stark contrast to that for the developed parts of the world, where more men than women are likely to die from the pandemic (ibid).
- There could be several probable reasons for the same and the basic answer lies in the gender unequal social framework of third world societies like India (ibid).



# **The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis (Contd.)**

- Globally, an estimated 743 million girls are out of school, a majority of whom are from the third world (Giannini, 2020).
- Quite frighteningly, after the crisis comes to an end, some of these girls may never go to school again (ibid).
- Many of the parents and guardians could stop sending their girls to schools in order to make them adept at domestic responsibilities for their future role as wives and mothers, in line with the traditional notions of a girl being responsible for domestic chores or the ‘household world’ as against the ‘outside manly world’ (ibid).

# **The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis (Contd.)**

- Women are more likely than men to be caregivers and to work in health-care occupations, given their supposedly docile and caring (read: motherly instincts) nature (Gibbs, 1990).
- An estimated 70 per cent of the global caregivers are women, with the number going up to 90 per cent in some countries (The Conversation, 2015).
- This naturally increases their exposure rate to influenza strains (WHO, 2010).

# **The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis (Contd.)**

- The loss of jobs is another major factor (Connley, 2020; Perrett, 2020).
- Globally, during the pandemic, some 60% women lost their jobs (ibid).
- Given the lack of job and social security and improper socio- economic infrastructure in the third world, women are at a relative disadvantage than men, for remember, it is the third world woman who single-handedly has to take care of her household with no support from her father, husband, brother or son (ibid).
- This lack of third world male interest in the domestic chores is the result of the social norms and upbringing (Singh, 2020).

# **The Differential Impact of Covid-19 on Men and Women of the Third World: A Gender Performative Analysis (Contd.)**

- The burden of unpaid care work is another area of concern.
- The entire burden of household care work often falls disproportionately on women, in the wake of social distancing and stay-at-home guidelines.
- Domestic violence is on an uptick during this pandemic.
- Increased instances of intimate partner violence or IPV around the world have been noticed and unsurprisingly, more so in the third world.
- This could in part be due to the growing frustration among unemployed males and it being vented on females within their close settings, who often serve as a punching bag for the ‘aggressor/violent/strong/manly man’.
- The woman is expected to bear it all, in the true spirit of gender performativity theory.
- The ‘social construct’ is to be docile and good natured, come what may.
- Psychologically too, women are at a greater disadvantage than men (Fothergill, 1996; Oxfam UK, 2004).

# Evolving a Gender -Sensitive Response to the Covid-19 Crisis

- Sharing of household responsibilities.
- Furthermore, women as far as possible, must not abandon their jobs on their own accord, however low paid and demanding, and continue to work side by side their menfolk in these times (Fordham, 1998; Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007).
- Employers have a special responsibility during such times to not fire their women employees, despite their underperformance, as a gesture of altruism.
- Girls should be allowed to focus on their studies as far as possible, just as boys are.
- Fathers too must assume some of the child care responsibilities and assist their wives in the rearing of children.
- Engage in physical activities like Yoga or if not possible, a simplistic task of climbing the stairs and walking in the locality (Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, 2020).
- Also, the governments must promote the idea of the need for maintaining the peace of mind during emergency situations like the Covid-19; a fact too important to be ignored by any woman grappling with the challenge (Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, 2020).

# Conclusion

- A gender sensitive response to the Covid-19 would not only ensure the well-being of one and all but also reap greater dividends for the entire human race in the third world both during and after the pandemic.
- The sooner the third world comes to terms with the ‘woman’ not as a rigidly defined social category, the better.

# Future Implications of the Study

- The outbreak could serve as a harbinger of welcome social change of the importance of breaking the rigidity of existent social norms in terms of gendered social relations in the third world.
- It is time to revisit the gender performativity theory and usher in the much desired socio- economic changes in the landscape of gendered social relations.
- Policies must be aimed at evolving a gender- friendly atmosphere and sensitivities in the third world societies. E.g. gender budgeting, raising the employment, financing and public infrastructural profile for women during this pandemic.
- Covid-19 could be a MAKE OR BREAK MOMENT FOR THE WOMEN OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH.

**THANK YOU**