

Awareness of gender equality during the First lockdown period of COVID-19 epidemic- A study of a student community

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Abstract

There has been an increasing concern that the global shutdown period during the spread of the COVID -19 epidemic will widen the gender gap, and that the gains of women before the epidemic will decline. Since COVID-19 crisis affects men and women in different ways, measures to solve it must take into account the gender. This study clarifies the student community's interest and awareness of gender equality issues during the initial lockdown period by selecting a representative sample of the student community at Ajman University.

The most important findings of the study are that there is a risk that women and girls face the loss of some of the gains made in recent decades, the worsening of gender inequality during the initial lockdown and the spread of the epidemic, in relation to the growing gender gaps in labor force participation rates, and the authority to make decisions, and the equality in unpaid home care. The time that women devote to unpaid care work may increase with the presence of children in the family, especially with the closure of early childhood education centers, care services and schools, which led to the worsening of care requests during the crisis. Also, this decrease in the gains appears through an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Keyword: COVID19,pandemic, gender inequality, women, Gender, unpaidhome care, lockdown,SGBV.

Background:

The gender gap in issues of social life and active participation is one of the sources of concern in societal circles, and although this gap has witnessed a shrinkage in many issues, the period of lockdown during the COVID 19 epidemic has increased fears of this gap expanding again. Numerous research and scientific studies have demonstrated that gender inequality has increased

in frequency during the lockdown period in the first wave of the epidemic and the threat to women has become a source of concern. [1,2].

There are many gains that women have achieved that have become threatened by the danger after the spread of the COVID 19 epidemic, and this represents a new societal challenge. During the first shock of the COVID 19 epidemic, societies were preoccupied with the health side and how to prevent the disease, especially in light of the precautionary measures taken by central governments that emphasize social and physical distancing; these measures have negatively affected the status of women in society in the areas of work, home care and violence. In a report of the International Labor Organization on 6/30/2020, it indicated to reduction of gender gaps in labor force participation rates, and against the background of gender inequality in the labor market, the crisis disproportionately affects women workers in four main ways. Firstly, the harm that has occurred on a large percentage of women working in the service sector that has been severely affected [3]. Secondly, women homemade workers are highly vulnerable to lockdown measures taken by governments and according to ILO estimates, as of June, it was 55 million, or 72.3 percent, of home workers worldwide were at high risk of loss their jobs and incomes as a result of the lockdown and the lack of effective Social Security coverage. The majority - about 37 million - of those home workers at risk are women, moreover, home workers are often immigrants, which leads to exacerbate their vulnerability due to lack of social protection in destination countries, and also by the fact that they are unable to return to their countries due to lockdown measures and travel bans. [4,5], thirdly, the vast majority of workers in the health sector and social work are women. Globally, women represent more than 70 percent of those working in the field health and social work sectors, especially those who deal with COVID-19 patients, are exposed to harsh (and sometimes dangerous working conditions), which exposes them to a higher risk of infection and transmission, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Fourthly, the disproportionate impact of the unequal distribution of increased care demands on women. The closure of early childhood education centers, care services, and schools, along with the unavailability of older relatives to provide support, exacerbated demands for care during the crisis. Early and with the beginning of the outbreak, researches such as Carlson, Petts, and Pepin [6] indicated that COVID-19 exacerbates and reduces gender inequality in the division of labor between heterosexual couples with children at home. As was the case before the pandemic, mothers bear primary responsibility for housework and childcare in most families

during this time. For mothers who do most of the housework, many report that their time on this job has increased due to the addition of homeschooling responsibilities[7,8]. It is certain that the closure of schools and nurseries resulted in an increased women in home educational care. Women have been doing the greater share, but overall, the gender childcare gap[9,10].

In a European online survey, 10.6 percent of women reported that during the crisis, family responsibilities prevented them from devoting the required time to their jobs [11]

These disproportionate impacts on women could slow some gains in gender equality in the labor market and exacerbate inequalities, such as Christian S. Czymara[12], indicated that there is a critical indicator of increasing gender inequality in the cognitive and physical dimension of work during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany.

Among the things that causes concern during the period of the first lockdown measures imposed by governments around the world, the request of many women to stay at home and isolate in a place that is supposed to be safe, but many families are not ready to provide this safety for women and girls, with the increase of economic and social pressure caused by isolation measures, financial difficulties in the family, and an increase in gender-based violence, as many women are in custody with those who abuse them, another form of the impact of the crisis on gender equality appears in the digital gender gap as a result of school closures due to inequality in access to the Internet and technologies[13], Despite the widening digital divide in the use of technology and computer resources before COVID-19, it is expected to widen further.[14]

Another dimension of the gender gap demonstrated by the crisis is reflected in the disproportionate contribution of women in COVID-19 researches. The lockdowns imposed around the world due to the pandemic have made many researchers work from home and face competing demands from parenting, home education, and other caring duties. These roles are mostly undertaken by women, especially in countries with high rates of gender inequality. The representation of women in research in general, and specifically in the Covid-19 study, may be disproportionately affected by lockdown measures.

Underrepresentation of female researchers tends to create underrepresentation of women-related issues in research, which may create important gaps in our understanding of COVID-19 [15]. Anecdotal evidences indicate that conflicts between work family, which impede the career progression of members of the staff, has been exacerbated during the Corona epidemic because the responsibilities of women for caring both their families and students increase under the

emotional stress of the epidemic [16,17,18], and long-standing evidence shows that women perform much more housework and care work than men including academic families [19,20,21,22].

Gender disparities in academic work require universities to take into account how their assessment systems can consider gender inequalities in the distribution of work that negatively affect academic women, especially those who care for young children, the elderly and other dependents with special needs [23].

Research problem

There is an increasing concern about the situation of women during the lockdown period of the first wave of COVID-19. These closings forced a large number of women to stay at home in fragile family situations, especially in the third world countries, bearing in mind that the first epidemic wave represents a global societal shock phase. This concern raises a set of questions, the most important of which is: Will the gender gap increase? Will the gains made by women before COVID-19 be reversed?

Here, we are working to understand how the student community views gender equality issues during the first stage of the Corona epidemic. This is done by measuring students' awareness of gender issues in general and gender issues during the outbreak. To determine this, the researchers prepared a set of inductive indicators related to gender equality issues.

Methodology:

The study relied on selecting a sample of the student community at Ajman University, 362 students out of a 6,042 students, the total number of students, according to Yamani mathematical equation $n = N / (1 + Ne ^ 2)$. The information was collected through an online questionnaire from March to April 2020. The questionnaire was formulated according to systematic procedures on the Likert trio model, and procedures were reviewed and approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee (REC).

General Awareness of University Students about Gender Issues:

It is noticed through the study that was conducted on the student community at Ajman University that there is an overall awareness of acquired gender equality issues. This is confirmed by the data in Table 1

Table No. 1: Student Community Awareness of Acquired Gender Equality Indicators

No.	Topic	SMA	Standard Deviation	Seq.
1	Gender equality at work	1.887	0.556	4
2	Gender equality in the scientific field	1.374	0.665	1
3	Gender in Health and Life	2.026	0.574	5
4	Gender equality in political participation	1.856	0.594	3
5	Gender equality in economic empowerment	1.768	0.508	5
Total		1.781	0.579	Very high

Table No. 1 data, which includes (5) indicators of acquired rights for women before COVID-19, shows that the student community is aware of the importance of gender equality, as the arithmetic averages of the responses ranged between (2.026 -1.374)

In general, the general arithmetic average of the respondents' responses on all topics was (1.781). This indicates their approval, which means that there is a high degree of youth awareness of gender equality indicators. The level of awareness of gender equality indicators in the field of education came in the first place, the second place was the level of awareness of indicators of achieving gender equality in the field of economic empowerment, and the third place was the level of awareness of indicators of achieving gender equality in the political field, the fourth

place was the level of awareness at work, and in the fifth and last place was the level of awareness of indicators of achieving gender equality in health and life.

This is consistent with what Suttan's[24] in which she argued that the gender equality perspective should be taken into account when developing strategies. It also agrees with what the Brumfield [25] study emphasized on the need to develop laws and legislations to empower women socially, and it also agrees with Worthington's,[26] mechanism, which indicated that women in Islamic societies, such as: Indonesia, Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates, have raised their level in gender issues and more in the economic, educational, health and political participation fields. In sum, mainstream of gender issues and development in the 1990s was linked to the cultural change issues of globalization, as the gender and development perspective in all stages of its development remained equally deeply intertwined with the cultural and political contexts shape women's possibilities for social advancement[27].

Gender equality during the COVID-19 epidemic:

Some previous experiences related to the outbreak of epidemics and diseases indicated that there are adverse consequences associated with problems of gender equality and that women, and the evidence, and girls are exposed to a real risk as a result of outbreaks of these diseases from past epidemics shows that inequalities between women and girls, and discrimination against other marginalized groups, are getting worse at these times. [28, 29, 30].

And if we are still in a need for accurate and reliable data disaggregated by sex for the decrease, in gender equality during the initial lockdown COVID- 19.

However, all expectations indicate that there will be a decline in the achievements of gender equality before the spread of COVID- 19, and therefore there are many issues that must be addressed regarding the status of women during the initial lockdown period.

In this part of the research we will refer to a number of indicators through which we measure the awareness of university community students about gender equality during the initial lockdown period, as shown by the data of Table 2

Table No 2 university community students' awareness of diminishing gains in gender equality during lockdown

No.	Ferries	Response										SMA	Standard Deviation	Seq.
		Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree				
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N			
1	Decision-making bower for women diminishes during outbreak	39.22	142	53.59	194	5.80	21	0.55	2	0.82	3	2.629	0.782	1
2	Familyresponsibilities prevented women from dedicating needed time to their jobs	0	0	61.60	223	22.92	83	3.86	14	10.49	38	2.356	0.785	2
3	The representation of women in scientific research has been affected	17.5	63	43.92	159	26.24	95	9.94	36	1.93	7	1.867	0.642	7
4	Increasing the burden of free home care services for women	37.01	134	44.75	162	13.81	50	3.31	12	1.10	4	1.928	0.502	5
5	The sexual and reproductive health needs of female health workers have decreased	24.86	90	56.35	204	13.25	48	4.69	17	0.82	3	2.002	0.501	4
6	Women's participation in the workforce has decreased	17.5	98	43.92	159	26.24	95	9.94	36	1.93	7	1.679	0.619	8
7	Women working in the field of health and social care are more susceptible to infection with the disease	33.14	120	49.44	179	11.04	40	4.97	18	1.38	5	1.919	0.609	6
8	Staying home and defenseless puts the safety of women	21.54	78	51.10	185	18.78	68	7.45	27	1.10	4	2.154	0.655	3

	and girls at risk													
General arithmetic mean		2.026												
General standard deviation		0.574												

Data table number (2) Note where arithmetic means of responses the student community on the indicators of diminishing gender equality gains during the closure period of the first wave of COVID-19 epidemic vary (2.629, 1.679), which are averages It indicates a high degree of awareness of the university student community that there is a diminution in the gains women gained before the outbreak in general average arithmetic for awareness with indicators backing down in an equal between the sexes during the disease outbreak (2.026) standard deviation (0.574), This indicates the students ’ awareness of the threats and risks of the COVID-19 epidemic for women and girls, Which, in order, are: Leak in decision-making power for women during an , outbreak , family responsibilities prevented women from devoting the required time to their jobs staying home and defenseless puts the safety of women and girls at risk, the sexual and reproductive health needs of female health workers have decreased. Increasing the burden of free home care services for women, women working in the field of health and social care are more susceptible to infection with the disease. Female participation in the workforce has decreased.

Conclusion:

We must be more in the figures careful related to university students ’ awareness of indicators of diminishing gender equality gains due to the fact that the data collected from students were in the initial lockdown phase, which can be called the trauma phase. This period we cannot trust many of the effects data other than the health of the COVID-19 epidemic, because the focus was focused on protection from infection and health care, another aspect that makes us be careful in the results of the study, which is the emotional, and societal disturbances and mental perceptions of the disease in the study community, because of the fear broadcast by the media, especially those that were coming from Wuhan and Italy.

In spite of this, the high indicators presented by the student community about diminishing gains in gender equality were more evident in the traumatic period, -post, so it is certain that research studies and international reports that focused on the impact of unhealthy aspects of COVID-19, in additions to other form women, - of gender such as the severe risks of domestic COVID-19 based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse [30,31], there is also a serious possibility that they will be exposed women unequal access to health During care a pandemic [31], in additionto the loss of many jobs for women, especially those related to service jobs.

The witness is that the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on women, especially the poorest and most developmentally fragile societies, women and girls are particularly vulnerable and need stronger protection and there need for strategic policy responses to understand the broader impact of this disease during crisis and during individual and community recovery[28].

Although some researchers, such as Lyn Craig [32]who indicate that the Covid-19 crisis might also engender change in some of the structures underpinning unequal gender relations, such as more recognition of women's economic contribution and there might be more gender-equal participation in domestic work and unpaid care at home. But in general, the outbreak of the epidemic increases concern about the impact on women, which creates policies are more appropriate to reduce the risks of larger gender gaps during the spread of COVID-19 [33].

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