

Opinion – The Gendered Consequences of Coronavirus

Written by Katelyn Jones and Tria Raimundo

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KATELYN JONES AND TRIA RAIMUNDO, MAR 26 2020

As the Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread, it is permeating every aspect of people's lives. Stock markets globally have been plummeting since the outbreak, and some experts have labeled the global economy as being in a recession. Italy, Spain, and France are in lockdown, meaning that people are only allowed to leave their homes to buy food and medicine, commute to work, go to hospitals and banks, or take caregiving related trips. Millions of Californians are also in lockdown, and New York City may soon follow suit by implementing shelter in place. Countries around the world are taking drastic measures, with many closing their borders.

All people are affected by Coronavirus. But women are especially affected. How are men and women experiencing the effects of the coronavirus differently? Why is it important to understand these differences? And what can be done to alleviate the unique burdens women bear? As with many crises, women are disproportionately and negatively impacted by COVID-19 and policy responses to the pandemic. Using gender as an analytical tool to examine three ways women are experiencing COVID-19 differently from men, it becomes clear that women are suffering disproportionately and negatively. Moreover, it reveals clear policy actions that can be taken to relieve women's burdens, ultimately benefitting *everyone*.

Women constitute 70% of the workforce in the health and social care sectors globally, primarily working as nurses. And in the US, women make up 78% of care workers. This means that women have a higher risk of contracting Coronavirus than men. However, the virus is killing more men than women. Evidence suggests this is potentially due to sex-based immunological or gendered behavioral differences, such as patterns and prevalence of smoking.

An unprecedented number of 850 million children and youth from 105 countries are not in school due to social distancing measures, half of the world's student population. And women are disproportionately affected by this, as the lion's share of caregiving often falls to them. Globally, and in "normal" times, women perform 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care work—four times as much as men. Many women are often juggling more than one job— from household tasks to helping children with homework.

While social distancing and isolation work to limit the spread of Coronavirus reduce morbidity and mortality rates, they also provide opportunities for abusers to unleash more violence. In China, activists have seen a dramatic increase of domestic violence during quarantine, with one precinct nearly tripling the number of cases in February, compared to the same period the previous year. Men and women can both be victims of intimate partner violence, but women are more often abused. In the US, for example, it is estimated that 1 in 4 women experience intimate partner violence, compared to 1 in 9 men. This means that women are especially at risk of experiencing violence and abuse in lockdown situations. And women are unable to seek resources they might normally look for—including going to families' homes—due to restrictions on movement. Moreover, with the looming recession, women will be increasingly unable to gain the financial independence needed to leave abusive relationships post-pandemic.

To effectively respond to the pandemic, policymakers need to ensure that their plans address the different ways men and women experience COVID-19. Policymakers must act to ensure women are fairly compensated for their work as caretakers on the frontlines, as well as their massive amount of unpaid labor. To do this, they must implement policies to empower women economically and address the gender pay gap, which will not only benefit women, but also help the global economy be more prosperous for *everyone*. Smart policies will specifically aim to empower

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women for the benefit of all.

Policymakers also must act to ensure women put at increased risk of domestic violence have access to as many resources as possible. Supporting the development of new technologies to help victims find support and help when isolated is critical to helping women. Moreover, these resources will be helpful to men who are victims of intimate partner violence, as well, and be of great use even when isolation comes to an end. Ensuring policies are responsive to the different ways women experience Coronavirus is critical to ensuring the wellbeing of everyone.

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