COVID-19 AND WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

ICRW in collaboration with NASVI and Chetanalya, conducted a study to capture the experiences of street vendors and domestic workers in Delhi. The learnings presented here were collated as part of a three-country research study undertaken by ICRW Asia, REBUILD: COVID-19 & Women in the Informal Economy in Kenya, Uganda & India, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the International Development Research Centre.

TOP 3 PROBLEMS FOR WOMEN

- Economic difficulties: 86.4%
- Lack of access to health care facilities: 35%
- Fear of the COVID-19 infection: 32.2%

*Based on a survey with 178 civil society staff and leaders

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

For most women, the pandemic related lockdowns and slow reopening have triggered a long standing impact on their families’ financial situation, children’s education, nutrition, and ability to spend on healthcare.

TOP THREE MOST PROMINENT ECONOMIC CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE WOMEN

- 88.8% Used up their savings to cover their living expenses
- 86% Food shortage due to lack of buying capacity
- 84.4% A significant reduction in earnings

In addition, job loss (72.60%) and eviction due to non-payment of rent (84.4%) also cited as primary economic challenges.

HEALTH-CARE CHALLENGES

For most women, the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns negatively affected their ability to access clinics and hospitals, for both COVID and non-COVID health concerns.

TOP FOUR HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN

- 91.50% Lack of access to non-COVID health care facilities
- 74.60% Lack of access to testing facilities for COVID
- 74% Lack of access to COVID related health infrastructure
- 73.4% Mental stress/ depression

In the case of accessing sexual and reproductive health services during the pandemic reported by many women during discussions (65.50%), Data also revealed that women found it difficult to access health services for pregnancy related concerns. Abortion clinics difficult to access as well.

DISPROPORTIONATE BURDEN OF CARE-WORK

Women report disproportionate burden of care work during the pandemic, like managing children’s education due to school closure and caring for the sick and elderly.

DIFFICULTIES FACED IN ACCESSING RELIEF PROVIDED BY GOVERNMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

- 88.70% Lack of information
- 83.60% Unavailability of cards/documents
- 83.10% Lack of digital literacy
- 71.80% Restrictions on mobility

*Based on a survey with 178 civil society staff and leaders

Qualitative narratives highlight “standing in queues to access ration and direct cash transfer benefits as one of the most time consuming activities, in addition to care work”.

Lack of income and savings, income loss and lack of access to urban infrastructure such as transportation, clean drinking water, rations and healthcare have left women more vulnerable than before.

Mental health issues have emerged prominently as loneliness, anxiety, depressions arising due to economic challenges, and pandemic induced uncertainties and isolation.