



EMOTIONAL WELLNESS OF WOMEN DURING LOCKDOWN

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Abstract

Background: The Covid-19 virus which broke out in 2019 has influenced the lives of people all around the world. The spread of the virus has not only been detrimental for individuals' physical health but has also had a negative impact on their mental health. It has put the emotional wellbeing of individuals at risk, especially women who have to manage multiple roles and abide by societal expectations. This study explores the impact of the pandemic on the emotional wellness of women from different sections of society.

Methodology: To understand the emotional wellness of women during the lockdown. A semi-structured interview was constructed consisting of 17 items. Telephonic interviews were taken. Positive and convenience sampling were used to collect data.

Results: After the thematic analysis four themes emerged from the data: Productivity (management of work, increased workload), Relationships (strong bonds, lost relationships), Emotions (unpleasant, management), and Self-improvement (self-care, self-awareness), each having two sub themes.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that homemakers experienced more negative emotions as compared to working women and students. Although management of emotions was done better in the case of working women as compared to homemakers and students. Working women focused more on self-improvement than students and homemakers.

Key words: Productivity, Emotions, Relationships, Self-improvement, Negative emotions

Introduction

Emotional wellness refers to the ability of an individual to cope with stress, to create and maintain effective relationships, to remain resilient, and to be emotionally stable. Emotional wellness plays a major role in securing the mental health of an individual. The pandemic has placed the mental health of individuals at a great risk due to its impact on the wellbeing of individuals. Coronavirus outbreak has impacted millions of people around the world; however, its impact hasn't been identical for every individual. Some sections of society have been more vulnerable to its impact than others and have suffered more. One such section is women. Women are expected to be the caregivers in their families; they are viewed as responsible for the health and wellbeing of themselves and even of their family members. These expectations can exacerbate the experience of stress and other issues among women. This impact has been even more profound among working women, who now have to take up two roles in their household: one of a mother or a wife and another of a working professional. They are required to simultaneously juggle two responsibilities. According to the United Nations Global Compact India Study (2020) many women in India had even left the workforce as they prioritized their role as a caregiver over their role of a working professional. Women are expected to manage the house chores, take care of their children and other family members, along with which they are expected to manage their jobs. Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic women are unable to rely on external aid or help in the form of maids or nannies and since caregiving is believed to be a part of being a woman, they are rarely offered any help by other family members. This role strain has made women more susceptible to stress and has negatively impacted their emotional and physical wellness. Social isolation and confinement has also led to an increase in the incidence of domestic violence against women. Many men have displaced their frustrations due to job loss, income reduction, and isolation from their partners. The pandemic aggravated the factors which lead to domestic violence and left women feeling helpless, being stuck inside their houses leaving them devoid of any help. The pandemic has been especially difficult for migrant workers, daily wage laborers, domestic workers, and other marginalized groups. Among these marginalized groups, the impact has been even severe for women due to a double

disadvantage caused by them belonging to two or multiple marginalized or vulnerable groups. Undergoing pregnancy during the pandemic have also faced various concerns because of being socially isolated, being at a greater risk for infections, and facing problems in getting in touch with doctors or required help. The pandemic also impacted the mental health of many students. With the modality of classes changing to the online mode, disruption of their daily routines leading to changes in their eating and sleeping habits and getting isolated from their social circles have resulted in them undergoing problems of stress, anxiety, depression, and frustration. Hence, women's role as a caregiver, role strain, domestic violence and health risks make women more vulnerable to the negative consequences of the pandemic and makes it more likely to have an impact on their mental health, even students have become susceptible to this influence. The purpose of our study was to examine the wellness of women during the pandemic and to explore what factors have had an impact on their emotional wellness.

Review of literature

A study by Gill, Minton, and Myers (2011) included measures of spirituality, religiosity, and wellness to identify coping strategies for the multiple challenges to wellness faced by low-income, rural women in America, a total of 167 women volunteered to participate in the study. Spirituality and religiosity resulted in 39% of the difference in wellness, with purpose and meaning in life, unifying interconnectedness, and private religious practices composing the main contributions

A research conducted by Sharma and Vaish on the mental health of working women during the lockdown in this survey a sample was collected of 537 from 28th April to 12th May 2020 and their responses were recorded from women working from home as well as working for home using snowball sampling technique. Mental health was moderately and severely affected in 27.5% and 27% of participants respectively. 34.3% experienced a great increase in physical load due to household chores during lockdown. 45.81% reported pain in the neck and back region with 36.31% participants reported strain in their eyes sometimes. 15.08% and 8.37% tended to overreact in the present situation often and always respectively. The women performing work from home and work for home during the lockdown are going through moderately increased physical and mental load.

Thibaut and Cremers conducted a study to analyse the differences observed in mental health and violence between men and women in the COVID outbreak. They reviewed articles on men and women's mental health during COVID and analysed the situation of pregnancy during the pandemic; the specific psychological and psychiatric risks faced by women both as patients and as workers in the health sector, the increased risk of violence against women at home and at workplace and, finally the risk run by children within their families. It was concluded that women have been affected more due to the pandemic than men.

A study was conducted by Sabrina, Yosra, Sami and Ouanes to check the mental status of women during the pandemic. This study aims to assess the effect of the lockdown on Tunisian women's mental health and gender-based violence. A survey was conducted, and the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales and the Facebook Bergen Addiction Scale were used. 751 women were a part of the female-only social groups on Facebook and used the snowball

sampling method. A total of participants originating from all the Tunisian regions completed the questionnaire. Majority of the participants underwent extremely severe distress Symptoms. Women who had a history of mental illness and abuse were found to have more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Around 40% of women reported problematic social media use. Violence against women increased significantly. Psychological abuse was the most frequent type of violence (96%). Participants who were subjected to abuse prior to the lockdown were at a higher risk of violence during lockdown

Objectives

1. To understand if there is any difference in emotional wellness of homemakers, working women and students.
2. To understand the difficulties and hardship faced by homemakers, working women and students.

Research Methodology

Aim

To explore emotional wellness among working women, homemakers, and students during lockdown by using semi structured interviews.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, 12 participants were interviewed consisting of 4 homemakers, 4 working women and 4 students.

Tools

A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed consisting of 17 items including demographic details. The questions were developed to understand emotional wellness of women during lockdown. Telephonic interviews were taken with subjects' consent. Purposive and convenience sampling were used to collect the data.

Research design

Our research employed a cross sectional qualitative research design. A cross sectional qualitative research design was used as data was collected using semi structured interviews from the populations of working women, home makers, and students at a particular point in time.

Procedure:

The aim of the research was to study the emotional well-being of working women, home makers and students during the lockdown. The research was conducted via online interviews. Before conducting the interview, each participant was asked for consent to record the conversation. Interview questions prepared by the team were asked and after the conduction of the interview each member of the team made a transcript of the interview. In total 12

interviews were taken on call. After the transcript was created, the recordings were deleted. Thereafter, the interviews were coded, and thematic analysis was conducted

Result

Table1

Themes emerged from the interviews

Themes	Sub themes	Verbatim Evidence
<i>Productivity</i>	Management of work	<p>Homemaker: P3 “Yes, I was able to take care of me and my family though it also involved extra household work as everyone was at home, but I was spending more quality time with family”.</p> <p>Working women: P7 “Hmm Yes. I felt relaxed and at ease with myself. Prepared well for my classes and learnt a few things for my professional growth and expertise”.</p> <p>Students: P11 “Yes I think so that the lockdown has helped me to do the things and take of the things in a better way”</p>
	Increased workload	<p>Homemaker: P4 “Ammm not so much lockdown was very stressful”</p> <p>Working women: P6 “Yes the responsibility has increased the workload has increased”.</p> <p>Students: Partially yes and partially no, as far as household chores and things are concerned i have become much more responsible.</p>

Relationship

Strong bonds

Homemaker: P2 “Yeah my husband did and my other family members. And if I ever felt really depressed, I would go back to my mum's house and feel better emotionally. But most times my husband was always there to help”.

P1 “Yeah, without family I wouldn't be able to even survive this lockdown. And being a housewife, you overthink everything if left alone in stressful situations, so I really appreciate that my family was by my side every day during such horrible times”

Working women: P7 “Yes. Always as they also understand my professional and personal commitments. I always turn to them for suggestions, advice and get enough cooperation in every respect. They are always there for me”.

Lost Relationships

Students: P11 mentioned the following “I think in starting I get in the arguments because from last 1 year I was living far from home and was not in a habit to live together with the family so leading to some disagreements and arguments as I am short temper and same goes with my family so I get into some heated arguments but I can't say it as a verbal or physical abuse as I thought that this happens in every family”.

Homemaker: P3 “Partially yes, like I am still working and trying to accept and cut off as in these difficult times we all have gone through times when a realization hits of having an unfriendly environment”.

Working women: P8 - “Yes I did, I have stopped talking to a few of my friends. But I don’t have any regrets about doing that. I feel okay about cutting out certain relationships with friends.”

Students: P9 “I didn’t actually, on purpose, but yes this was also the time that our college ended so people automatically started to drift off on their own, and contact got lost in between”.

Unpleasant

Homemaker: P2-You start feeling extremely depressed because of so many things and the fact that you cannot go out.

Working women: P7: My profession is an indirect blessing as I keep myself busy in making study materials or learning something new. Apart from that I sing, nature walk and talk to my near and dear ones. Even watching a good movie is a desirable choice.

Students: P9: It depends completely on the situation. Sometimes it's best to ignore certain things, but on some days, you also need to face them. So, I had a mix of both, where some days I just let it pass by, but some days I actually confronted certain things in order to get rid of my emotions.

Students: P9-I think of journaling and painting. Oh yes, I also started making earrings from clay and my own Instagram handle for them, so they also helped me in managing my emotions at times.

Emotions

Management

Homemaker: P3 Playing music, dancing and relaxing by remembering old good times like looking at old photographs and also recently I started making things with waste materials like best out of waste.

Working women: P5-I would say although I used to cook daily, but yes trying out new recipes have given me immense happiness and it has been a very therapeutic process for me.

Self-Improvement

Self-care

Homemaker: P2: There are days where I go without combing my hair. I miss taking care of myself. Haven't been paying much attention to self-care.

P4: yes, like little bit not that much

Working women: P7- Certainly yes as I have understood self-care is self-protection from all harm and injury and the root cause of happiness.

Students: Yes, I give more time to myself now as compared to before.

Self-awareness

Homemaker: P3- "I understand I am good at managing multiple tasks even in critical situations. I can see I have more patience than I thought."

Working women: P7- "I have realized that age is just a number for trying anything new. I have become better at handling situations than my 30-year-old self. I understand the beauty of leading a 'minimalistic life'

Students: P10: I underestimated myself a

lot. The lockdown taught me I am much more resilient than I thought I was.

Discussion

Productivity: Productivity in this research means the state of being efficient during the lockdown period. As the pandemic started there has been a work over lockdown. With that working professionals, students etc are asked to stay at home and work accordingly. School and university classes are being held online and all the office work has been shifted to work from home. When asked about whether the workload has increased and the management of work there were different opinions recorded. The two sub-themes emerged were: **Management of work and Increased Workload.**

When comparing the results of Homemakers, working women and students it was found that, homemakers and working women received help from their family members in managing extra tasks and they agreed that they were mostly at their best. Though students agreed that the extra time was beneficial, they also regret that they could have spent it in a better way. In terms of increased workload, All the 3 categories of participants agreed that there was more work than usual. So, it can be said that lockdown increased the workload, but the management of the work was handled well due to the presence of the loved ones which also made participants work upon their hobbies.

Relationship: Relationships are usually divided into family, friendships, acquaintances, and romantic relationships. Relationships act as a social backbone in an individual's life. Currently due to COVID people have either gotten closer to their close ones or lost connection from their close ones. In the current study when the participants were asked questions about relationships two sub-themes emerged which were- **Strong bonds and lost relationships.** When comparing the results of each group of participants it can be said that none of the participants experienced any kind of verbal or physical abuse during the lockdown. Although in terms of forming bonds between their families or friends' homemakers and working women were the most comfortable and experienced help during the pandemic. But for students the pandemic started with a rough start as it was hard for them to adjust with their

families being around all the time but slowly and gradually, they started adjusting. They experienced arguments in the family and in most cases avoided sharing their feelings with anyone.

In terms of cutting down relationships, homemakers and working women are seen to have cut down on their relationships with friends while students have just reduced interactions with their friends rather than cutting out these relationships.

Emotions: People have now accepted this new change in their life but during this change people have faced or experienced different kinds of emotions or unpleasant feelings. When people were asked about their emotions, two sub-themes came into consideration which were **unpleasant feelings and management**. After comparing the results homemakers did face some negative emotions and working women did go through some unpleasant feelings whereas students did not feel any negative emotions nor unpleasant feelings instead had mood swings according to the situations. For homemakers, listening to music and dancing seems most effective in managing these feelings and emotions and working women cooking is on the top of the bucket list for managing their emotions. It gives them immense pleasure and happiness after trying new dishes. Whereas for students journaling and painting was the most effective in managing their mood swings.

Self-Improvement: In this research, self-improvement refers to developing and upgrading one's knowledge, status, and personality by their own efforts. During COVID we all lived in a challenging environment and dealt with difficult times. People choose to either run away from challenges or accept them as a part of our journey to our growth and utilizing times for self-improvement. In this study when participants were asked questions about self-improvement two sub themes emerged which were - **Self-care and self-awareness**. When comparing the result of each group of participants it can be said that homemakers were partially able to take care of themselves and indulge in self-care activities as they were busy with household work and taking care of their family. Whereas, working women and students were more self-care oriented during lockdown. In terms of self-awareness, homemakers were partially able to learn something new about themselves. Although working women and students had better understanding of their feelings and personality, they were also able to learn new skills and utilize their time in self-improvement during lockdown.

Conclusion

The current study explored the emotional wellness of students, working women, and homemakers. Using thematic analysis four themes emerged from the data: productivity, relationships, emotions, and self-improvement. By examining these themes, we discovered that negative emotions were experienced by homemakers, working women and students. Although, homemakers experienced more negative emotions as compared to working women and students.

In terms of management working women were able to manage their emotions better as compared to homemakers and students. Also, working women focused more on self-improvement than students and homemakers.

Our study had certain limitations. The sample size of our research was very small which makes the results less generalizable to wider populations. The interviews were conducted online via phone calls which made it difficult to determine the authenticity of the participants' responses and build a rapport. Since the research was a qualitative one, the analysis may have been influenced by the bias of the researchers.

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