

The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Mental Health and Socio-Economic Well-Being: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and socio-economic well-being of women in, Pakistan. Women, as a significant portion of the population, faced increased domestic responsibilities, economic hardships, and a rise in psychological issues such as anxiety and phobias. The research conducted interviews with 24 women, case studies, and data from national and international organizations to provide comprehensive insights. The findings reveal that women not only pushed more domestic work and experienced reduced economic activity but also faced a significant rise in mental health issues. A significant proportion (29%) reported social life disruptions caused by lockdowns, isolation, and mobility restrictions. Another 29% highlighted unemployment as a major challenge, emphasizing the financial hardships faced by working women. However, 20% of respondents noted increased health awareness during the pandemic, which positively influenced family health management. Majority of respondents 66% reporting issues like anxiety, stress, and depression. While online education and employment opportunities were available, they were unevenly distributed. The study suggests the expansion of social protection systems, mental health services, and women-sensitive strategies in emergency planning. The research highlights the ongoing implications of the pandemic on women's social status and relations, emphasizing the need for policymakers to address systemic gender inequalities. This study advances understanding of the gendered impacts of pandemics in a developing country context.

Keywords: COVID-19, Socio-Economic Impact, Psychological Impact, Women in Pakistan.

Introduction

The virus spread all over the world, affecting more than 346 million people and resulting in over 5.5 million deaths by January 2022. In Pakistan, women made up nearly half of the population, and children at least 18 years old accounted for 50 percent of the total population. Since the first two cases were discovered in February 2020, the number of confirmed cases had risen to nearly 1.3 million by January 2022, with 29,000 deaths (Weekly Epidemiological Update on COVID-19 - 25 January 2022, 2024). As a developing country, Pakistan had limited resources to respond effectively to the pandemic (Shafiq, 2020). The pandemic was similar to the global flu that killed millions, and high-risk countries and regions like Iran were hit hard due to increased travel for professional, educational, and religious purposes (Almeida et al., 2020). Countries worldwide faced declining productivity, unemployment, and rising poverty, regardless of income level (Ahmad &

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Vismara, 2021). Pakistan's health system was further challenged by the lack of universal healthcare, negatively affecting the population's health. Both the physical and psychological health of women in Pakistan suffered, with social isolation, financial stress, and concerns about the health and safety of family members contributing to increased anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Almeida et al., 2020). These difficulties were made worse by the stigma associated with mental illness and the lack of access to mental health services (Ahmad & Vismara, 2021). The inability to protect loved ones from potential harm, along with the constant fear of contagion, created a pervasive sense of vulnerability and helplessness, heightening anxiety and psychological distress among women (Connor et al., 2021). To address the socio-economic and psychological impacts of COVID-19 on women in Pakistan, policymakers needed to implement targeted interventions and support mechanisms. This included ensuring access to healthcare services, economic relief packages, social protection programs, and psychosocial support services tailored to women's specific needs.

Research Problem and Rationale

The world has faced COVID situation recently and impacted the lives of people in many ways. Women are almost half of the populace of the world and are very much concerned with the situations of pandemic times, especially lockdowns. In this regard the study of the phenomenon of Socio-Economic and Psychological Impact of COVID on Women in Bahawalpur, Pakistan is very much related to the academic research.

Research Objectives

- The study focuses on evaluating the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 on women residing in the city of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.
- The research investigates the psychological consequences of COVID-19 on women in Bahawalpur, city of Punjab, Pakistan

Research Questions

The major research question of the study will be as below:

1. How has COVID-19 affected the socio-economic conditions of women in Bahawalpur, Pakistan?
2. What psychological effects has COVID-19 had on women in Bahawalpur, Pakistan?

Literature Review

COVID-19 has actually become a global health concern that has impacted millions of people, and dramatically changed social life. It was very shocking to find that the most affected category of people is women, who experiencing unique ordeal in this period (Almeida et al., 2020). It is evident that the pandemic has worsened existing mental dysfunctions, and the socio-economic loss is a tremendous problem throughout many women in area of Bahawalpur, Pakistan (Naveed et al., 2024). It is within this theoretical context that it is considered pertinent to analyze the pandemic experience in relation to and which affects women's mental health approaches with particular reference to psychological disorders and how such problems led to their social-economic decline. Using these theoretical concepts, this framework will enable understanding of the multiple intersections of mental health, gender, and poverty within the COVID-19 space (Connor et al., 2021).

Social Determinants of Health Theory

The Social Determinants of Health theory holds that health is a function of the social conditions worldwide (Paremoer et al., 2021). It came to light that those existing social inequalities and COVID-19 made women in Bahawalpur more vulnerable. Some of the hardships, including poverty, lack of healthcare access, and limited education, worsened their mental health (Connor et al., 2021).

Poverty and Economic Disparities

Health was linked to one's economic status, and women in Bahawalpur were among the most affected. The pandemic cost people their jobs, leaving them with less income to meet their families' needs, which made women more economically vulnerable. These financial pressures often led to stress, anxiety, or depression, making it harder for women to seek mental health care (Tsamakis et al., 2021).

Access to Healthcare

Another significant socio-demographic factor impacting women's mental health was the accessibility of health services. In Bahawalpur, some women who experienced depressive episodes were still unable to seek treatment due to issues such as stigma, lack of transportation, and inadequate healthcare facilities (Almeida et al., 2020).

Gendered Perspectives on Mental Health

Mental health from a gendered perspective focuses on the idea that men and women exhibit mental health disorders differently based on gender roles (Asim et al., 2021). This was particularly true because women were often trained to be caregivers, involving them in emotional labor that put additional pressure on them, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Connor et al., 2021).

Caregiving Responsibilities

Many women were compelled to care for children through homeschooling and elderly family members during the pandemic. This affected their mental health as they often felt overwhelmed, which could lead to burnout, anxiety, and depression (Xiong et al., 2020).

Stigma and Help-Seeking Behavior

Cultural prejudices about mental health served as barriers to women seeking help. In Bahawalpur's culture, women were less likely to discuss their issues openly or seek expert opinions (Tsamakis et al., 2021).

Resilience Theory

Resilience theory focuses on individuals' capacity to adapt and thrive in adversity (Mumtaz et al., 2021). Although the social rights situation in Pakistan was challenging, primarily due to COVID-19, many women in Bahawalpur successfully managed mental health problems and responded flexibly to the socio-economic crisis (Connor et al., 2021).

Coping Strategies

It helped us understand resilience to look at the successful ways that women dealt with stress during the pandemic. For mental health needs, a lot of women depended on social support, self-care, or help from other people (Tsamakis et al., 2021).

Community Support

Support from the community was very important in building resolve. Women were able to deal with the challenges of the pandemic thanks to programmes that helped them make friends, learn about mental health, and get to resources. Creating a sense of community helped women's mental health and well-being in general (Connor et al., 2021).

Psychological Disorders Faced During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many people, especially women, had a number of mental illnesses (Heitzman, 2020). To help the mental health of women in Bahawalpur, it was important to understand these conditions (Connor et al., 2021).

Anxiety Disorders

During the pandemic, there were a lot more people with anxiety illnesses like generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) and panic disorder. A lot of women had more worry because they were worried about their health, their jobs, and their caregiving responsibilities (Ahmad & Vismara, 2021). Uncertainty about the pandemic made these feelings worse and caused crippling anxiety, especially among women in Bahawalpur who didn't have access to education (Chakraborty, 2020).

Depression

Depression was another prevalent psychological disorder exacerbated by the pandemic (Shafiq, 2020). Women experienced sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed. Isolation and stress contributed to developing or worsening depressive symptoms (Talevi, et al., 2020).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD was common among women who lost a loved one, got sick, or were under a lot of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abbas, 2020). PTSD symptoms included nightmares, flashbacks, and stronger emotional reactions to things that reminded them of the stress (Xiong et al., 2020).

Substance Use Disorders

People turned to drugs and alcohol as ways to deal with worry and anxiety during the pandemic, which also led to a rise in substance use disorders (Chakraborty, 2020). Women faced unique challenges related to substance use, including stigma and limited treatment access (Chakraborty, 2020).

Eating Disorders

The pandemic changed eating behaviors, with some women experiencing disordered eating patterns due to stress and anxiety (Talevi, et al., 2020). This manifested as binge eating, restrictive eating, or other unhealthy behaviors impacting physical and mental health (Xiong et al., 2020).

Table 1: Psychological Disorders Faced during COVID-19

Depression	Impacted almost 17 million people and is worsened by social isolation, unemployment, and poverty.
Anxiety	With a prevalence of social and generalized anxiety disorders, it is characterized by excessive worry and physical symptoms, affecting approximately 12 million people.
PTSD	Widespread because of societal upheaval and natural calamities, affecting relationships and day-to-day living.
Substance Abuse	About 6% of people suffer, and they frequently turn to drugs—such as opiates and cannabis—to cope with their issues.
Eating Disorders	Rising, particularly among young women, as a result of unattainable appearance standards and social pressures.
Childhood Disorders	Childhood depression, ASD, and ADHD that go undiagnosed because of a lack of specialized care.
Perinatal Mental Health	Impacting both fathers and mothers, made worse by a lack of understanding and support networks.
Mental Health in Older Adults	Common among seniors as a result of poor care facilities, social isolation, and health problems.
Underserved Communities	Rural communities and underprivileged groups have limited access, which is made worse by poverty, cultural stigma, and geographic obstacles.
Suicide	A growing issue, especially among young people, driven by stigma, a lack of resources, and a generalized sense of hopelessness.

The literature highlighted the complex relationship between COVID-19, women's mental health care approaches, and socio-economic factors (Ahmad & Vismara, 2021). This literature provided a comprehensive understanding of women's challenges during the pandemic by employing various theoretical perspectives, including Social Determinants of Health, Gendered Perspectives, and Resilience Theory. The psychological disorders experienced by women, such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, substance use, and eating disorders, emphasized the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions and support. Addressing the unique needs of women in Bahawalpur requires a multifaceted approach that considers the social, economic, and cultural factors influencing their mental health care experiences.

Proposed Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory design to examine the impact of COVID-19 on women's mental health and socio-economic conditions in Bahawalpur. The research aims to explore how the pandemic has affected women's lives, focusing on their psychological well-being, socio-economic challenges, coping strategies, and the role of government interventions.

Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants. A total of 24 women, aged 18-65, participated in the study. Respondents were categorized based on their age groups, marital status, education, and occupation.

Data Collection

Data were collected using open-ended surveys, allowing participants to share detailed personal experiences and insights. The survey consisted of 10 questions designed to capture the socio-economic impacts, psychological effects, coping strategies, and the perceived effectiveness of government interventions.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through manual thematic analysis which involved identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within the responses. The survey data was organized using Microsoft Excel to compute frequencies and percentages for socio-demographic characteristics and themes. For visual representation of the results, Matplotlib and Python were used to generate graphs and charts, providing clear illustrations of key findings such as socio-economic impacts, psychological effects, and coping strategies.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this thesis focus on female residents of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, who have been affected by COVID-19 in various capacities. This encompasses women of all age groups, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's impact across different life stages. Specifically, working women, including healthcare workers, teachers, bankers, and others, are included to explore the economic ramifications of the pandemic on their employment. Housewives and unemployed women are considered, as their experiences during lockdowns and restrictions are crucial for understanding the broader socio-economic landscape. Female students are also included to assess the educational disruptions they faced, while female COVID-19 survivors and family members of COVID-19 patients provided insights into the psychological and emotional impacts of the virus on women's lives.

Exclusion Criteria

In contrast, the exclusion criteria are designed to refine the focus of the research further. The study will not include the male population, as the aim is to specifically investigate the experiences of women. Additionally, non-residents of Bahawalpur and women living outside Pakistan will be excluded to maintain the local context of the study. Children under 15 years of age are also excluded, as the research is centered on adult women's experiences. The time period for exclusion includes any studies conducted before December 2019 and data collected after January 2022. This ensures that the research remains relevant to the specific timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic. Non-COVID-19 related historical events are not considered, as they do not pertain to the central theme of the thesis.

Results and Discussions

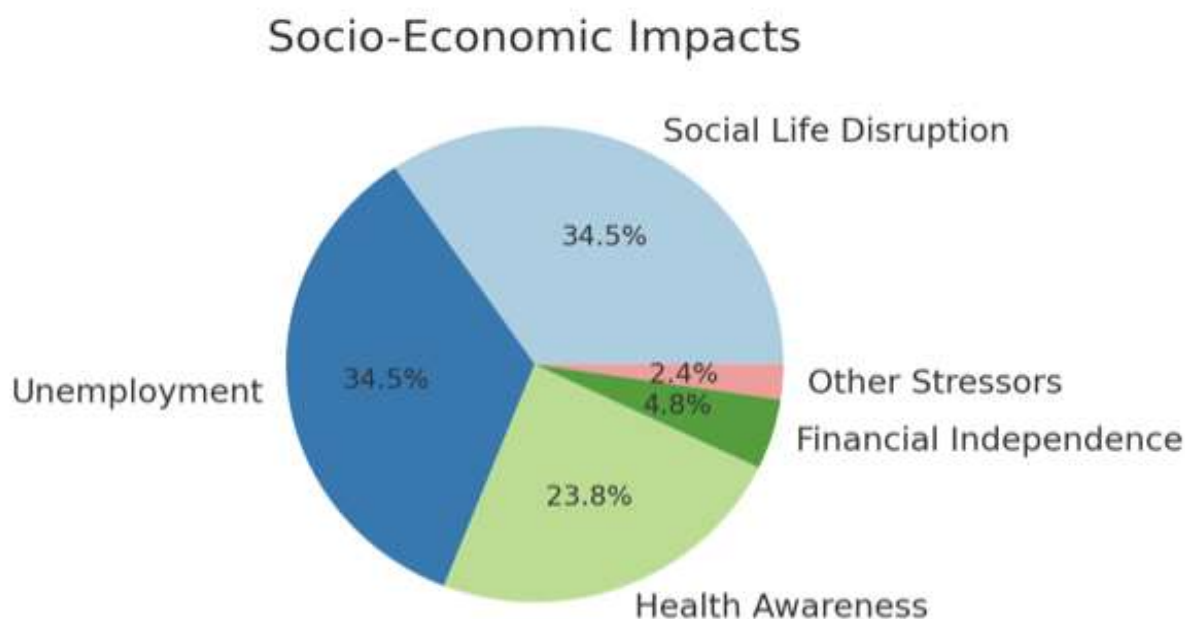
Key demographic insights are shown in table 2 below:

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

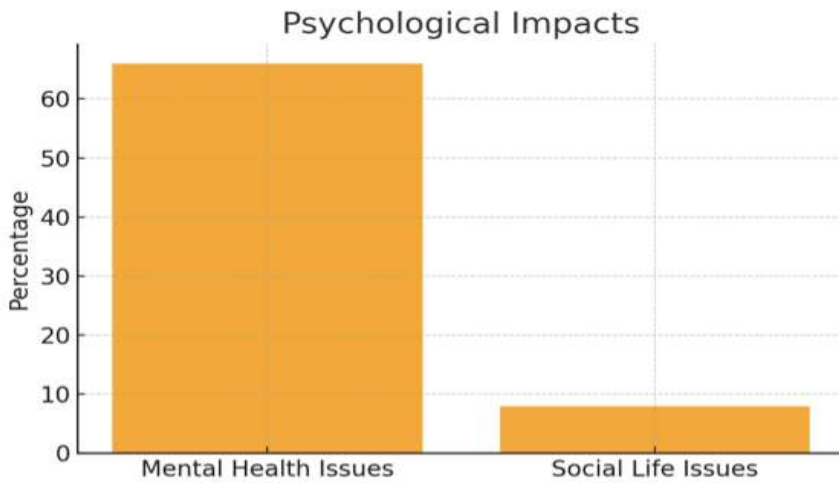
Characteristic	N	Percentage (%)
Age (18-40)	20	83.3
Age (41-65)	4	16.6
Single	11	45.83
Married/Partnered	13	54.16

Undergraduate	5	20.83
Postgraduate	9	37.5
Higher Studies	10	41.6
Working Women	23	95.83
Housewives	1	4.16

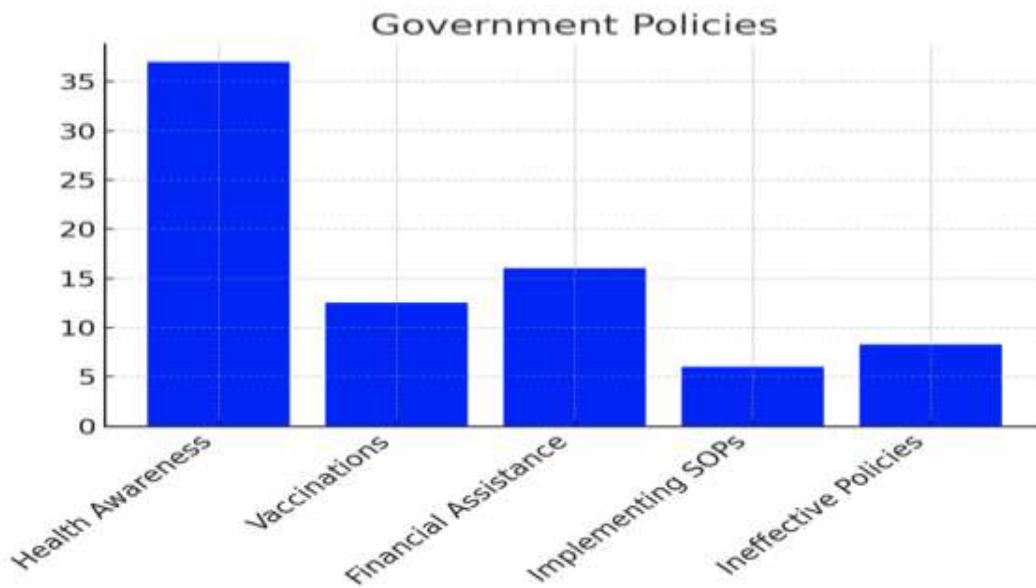
Figure 1: Pigraph of Social Economic Impact of COVID-19



This pie chart illustrates the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on women in Bahawalpur. A significant proportion (29%) reported social life disruptions caused by lockdowns, isolation, and mobility restrictions. Another 29% highlighted unemployment as a major challenge, emphasizing the financial hardships faced by working women. However, 20% of respondents noted increased health awareness during the pandemic, which positively influenced family health management. Only 4% managed to achieve financial independence by starting small businesses, showcasing resilience. A minor group (2%) identified other life stressors like loneliness and frustration.

Figure 2: Bar Chart of Psychological Impacts of COVID-19

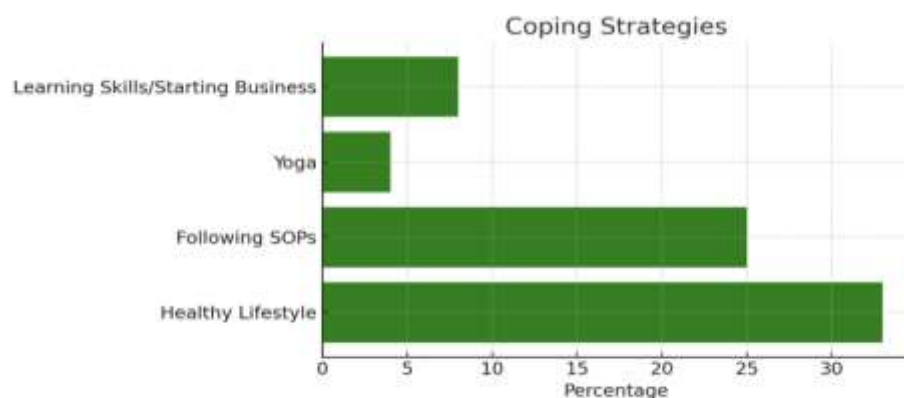
The bar chart showcases the psychological toll of the pandemic on women. Mental health emerged as the most affected area, with 66% of participants reporting issues like anxiety, stress, and depression. Restricted social interactions further contributed to mental health challenges for 8% of respondents. The data highlights how the pandemic amplified psychological distress, especially in contexts of isolation and fear.

Figure 3: Bar Graph of Government Policies about COVID-19

The clustered bar chart details participants' perceptions of government policies during the pandemic. A large proportion (37%) acknowledged the effectiveness of health awareness campaigns, which informed the public about safety protocols and health measures. 12.5% of respondents appreciated vaccination drives, while 16% highlighted financial assistance programs

for their role in easing economic burdens. The enforcement of SOPs was noted by 6%, whereas 8.3% criticized the government's overall response as inadequate. These mixed responses underscore the importance of tailored government interventions during crises.

Figure 4: Bar Graph of Coping strategies about COVID-19



This horizontal bar chart visualizes the coping strategies women employed during the pandemic. The most common approach (33%) was adopting a healthy lifestyle, including regular exercise, skill development, and improved diets. Following government-issued SOPs was another major strategy (25%), providing participants with a sense of control over their safety. Meanwhile, 8% turned to yoga and physical activities like walking or household tasks to manage stress, and another 8% invested in learning new skills or starting small businesses. These findings highlight women's adaptability in mitigating pandemic-related stressors.

The results reveal several key challenges faced by women during the pandemic. Research shows that these women face disproportionate effects in many areas of their lives. These range from economic hardship due to job loss and reduced income generating opportunities (Abbas, 2020), to the increased mental stress resulting from managing household responsibilities while in captivity and the risk of health anxiety. The findings highlight how existing gender differences are exacerbated during crises. Women face additional responsibilities such as access to health services, educational difficulties and responsibilities in the home. As a female worker, especially those working in our healthcare and essential services (Heitzman, 2020). They encounter unique challenges in balancing their professional duties with personal safety and caring for their families. The psychological effects are very severe (Talevi, et al., 2020). Many women have reported increased stress, anxiety, and depression during the pandemic. The study also revealed remarkable resilience among Bahawalpur women. It has developed several survival strategies and adapted to unprecedented situations. The research highlights the urgent need for gender-inclusive policies and support systems during public health crises. This includes targeted economic assistance. Mental health services and access to health care for women. These findings contribute valuable information for policy decision makers and stakeholders in developing more effective and comprehensive crisis response strategies for future public health emergencies.

Conclusion

The study concludes with a statistical breakdown of the primary challenges: Economic impacts

were considered the most severe by 42%, followed by psychological 36% and social impacts by 22% for the women in Bahawalpur due to COVID-19 stressing the need to address mental health and economic issues. Over & above point has been highlighted as per the COVID-19 season in Pakistan & is mostly common in third-world country. Covid-19 not only left the deep consequences on the world but in spite of the pandemic, it has some blessing in disguise. The entire world was (Re-Set) for normal life. The man has learned how to survive in a hilarious pandemic. The man & society can be saved only case to stay at home & keep distance to others.

One of the main challenges lay in collecting precise and accurate data during the pandemic. Social distancing measures and restrictions made traditional data collection methods difficult; furthermore, many cases of COVID-19 were not reported, especially in rural areas. This made it difficult to assess the true extent of the impact on women. The reliability of available data was questionable due to limited testing and reporting capabilities during the early stages of the outbreak.

In Pakistan's conservative culture, especially in Bahawalpur, it was very hard to get in touch with the women who were interviewed and get private information about their lives. Many of the women didn't want to talk about personal issues, especially those that had to do with their mental health or their home lives while they were in confinement. Cultural norms made it hard to talk to the women directly, which may have reduced the amount of information that could be gathered.

It was especially hard to figure out how COVID-19 affected women's mental health. Due to social stigma, many women had trouble recognizing or talking about their mental health problems. During COVID-19, there was also a lack of a standard method for assessing mental health in Pakistan. Adding this made things even more complicated.

Future Work

Pioneer Research: This study gives a chance to do groundbreaking research on how COVID-19 affects men and women differently in Pakistan. The results could be used as a guide for future pandemic reaction plans and policymaking that focuses on women's needs.

Policy Development: The study gives a chance to change policy by bringing attention to the unique problems women faced during the pandemic. The results could help make disaster reaction plans and social support systems more gender-sensitive.

The study gives people a way to learn more about what women went through during the pandemic. This could help people in Pakistan understand and support women's problems better. It might help break down mental health taboos and get people talking more openly about the problems women face. This study gives a chance to record an important historical event from the point of view of women's experiences during a global disaster that has never been seen before. The study brings together different fields, like sociology, psychology, economics, and public health, to get a full picture of how the pandemic affected women. This method that draws on different fields of study could lead to more complete answers for future crises.

Because of the pandemic's problems, new research methods are needed. These methods could help create new ways to research social science in times of trouble. This might include better ways to collect digital data and do interviews from afar.

These problems and chances show how complicated and important this study is. While the problems need careful handling and creative solutions, the chances offer the chance to make a real difference in the fields of academia and policymaking. The study's success depends on how well these problems are solved while making the most of the chances to learn useful things about women's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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