

Population First

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RESEARCH STUDY
ON

LOCATING GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN COVID-19 REPORTAGE IN INDIA

An Analysis of Print Media
(March - September 2020)

By
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Dr. Sweta Singh



Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First



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FOREWORD

It gives me immense pleasure to present this interesting and timely report on *'Locating Gender Perspectives in COVID-19 Reportage in India: An Analysis of Print Media (March 2020 to September 2020)*. I thank Sameera Khan and Dr. Sweta Singh for all the effort and hard work they have put in the project to bring out such an insightful report. I would also like to say a big thank you to the entire Network of Women in Media India team, especially the 12 researchers who had gone through so many newspapers so meticulously and evaluated the content from a gender perspective. I thank Chitra Ahanthem, Menaka Rao, Neeta Kolhatkar, Parul Sharma, Prachi Bari, Prachi Pinglay, Sruthi A S, Sudarshana Chakraborty, Sumita Jaiswal, Syeda Nazneen Hassan, Uttara Gangopadhyay, and Vidhya CK. I express my sincere appreciation for the ready support and funding from UNFPA which helped us continue with our media advocacy initiatives even during the pandemic. A special thanks to Ms. Anuja Gulati, Gender Consultant, UNFPA for her consistent engagement with us.

The pandemic was unanticipated, and had a devastating and life changing impact on all of us. Media played an important role in creating awareness about the pandemic and also about government and civil society response. The aftermath of the lockdown captured in the images and videos of the mass exodus of migrants from cities to their villages will remain with us forever. In this media hysteria, we realised the voices and issues related to women were not taken into cognizance. However, ground reports were bringing to us the innumerable problems confronting women - the increasing violence against women, loss of their livelihoods, the harsh realities of women migrant workers, the total paralysis of

health system and its impact on the reproductive and sexual health of women, the marginalization and invisibilization of women in sex work, and trans people to name a few.

Population First reworked on its media advocacy initiatives to respond to the crisis and the invisibilization of women. Apart from the Laadli Media Awards, we increased the number of fellowships from 4 to 17 to capture the stories from across the nation, conducted a five-day workshop on ‘Reporting on Covid-19 through a Gender Lens’, commissioned four films to promote more sensitivity and compassion for the marginalised, and many more online events to keep the conversation going.

Understanding how the media responded to the crisis, and where and how women figure in its reportage was considered important to engage the media persons and the leaders in a conversation, and put reporting protocols and systems in place not to forget the marginalized and disadvantaged in our concern to focus on the crisis. We could not have found a better collaborator than NWMI which has been consistently working on gender sensitivity in media.

I hope you will find the report engaging and thought provoking and use its findings in your in-house sensitization and training programmes.

Dr. A.L. Sharada

Director, Population First.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES, PURPOSE AND CONTEXT OF THE REPORT

This report was commissioned by Population First and UNFPA and prepared by a few members of the Network of Women in Media India based on data collected, monitored and analysed. It examines the representation of women and other marginalised genders in the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown print news coverage between March 2020 and September 2020 through a study of a sample of twelve India-based mainstream newspapers published in seven languages. The report provides a snapshot of the themes/topics where women and other marginalised genders were covered and/or ignored and elaborates on the specific nature and quality of media reportage in relation to gender issues and concerns.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns, that were clamped down to contain the spread of infection, disrupted life in a significant way all across India in 2020. While almost everyone was afflicted in some manner or the other, all Indians were not equally impacted. People who were already vulnerable in terms of jobs, income, education, housing and access to resources suffered more. The mass reverse migration of workers from the cities to the rural areas that we witnessed in the early months of the pandemic and lockdown was the most visible manifestation of this. Among all groups, women, girls, and transgender people were particularly affected, those from poor, lower-class, lower-caste, minority and marginalised backgrounds and locations even more so. As several non-profit organisations at the local and global level have pointed out, in addition to increased rates of family or domestic violence experienced by women and girls in many parts of the country, the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on women's health, jobs and education

has been more severe. Its bearing on trans people has not even begun to be calculated. This was the context that inspired this report and it asked one key question: where were women and other marginalised genders on the news pages when India faced the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis of unimaginable proportions?

The twelve daily newspapers that were monitored in this study are: in English, The Indian Express-Delhi edition (IE) and The Times of India-Mumbai edition (TOI); in Hindi, Hindustan-Delhi edition (H) and Dainik Jagran-Delhi/Patna editions (DJ); in Bengali, Anandabazar Patrika-Kolkata edition (ABP) and Ei Samay-Kolkata edition (ES); in Marathi, Loksatta-Mumbai edition (LS) and Sakal-Pune edition; in Malayalam, Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram edition (MB) and Malayala Manorama-Kottayam/Thrissur editions (MM); in Assamese, Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati edition (AP) and in Manipuri, Hueiyen Lanpao-Imphal edition (HLP).

Every newspaper was monitored on similar dates for seven days each month from March to September 2020. In each edition of the monitored newspaper, three to four of the main news pages were specifically studied in depth: the front page, the main city page and/or the main district page and the main nation page. On each of these pages, attention was paid to all news stories, feature stories, photo-features and photographs related only to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown in order to ascertain where and how women and other marginalised genders played a role in the coverage.

IMPORTANT FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

The study found that a gender perspective that highlighted the presence, role, concerns and voices of women, trans people and other marginalised genders was largely missing in the news coverage of the pandemic and lockdown in most Indian print publications, and this was true across all languages and regions. Only 4.8 percent of the 6,110 news stories monitored in the twelve print publications, had anything of significance with regard to women and/or gender issues.

Despite the popular assumption that English-language publications in India are more gender-friendly, the study found that publications in all languages including English, during the period monitored, only marginally represented gender concerns and issues during their COVID-19/lockdown coverage. Frequently women and trans people were absent as protagonists, sources and experts, sometimes even in stories that directly impacted them. When people were quoted in news stories, they usually tended to be men and Indian language print publications, in comparison to English-language print publications, quoted far less women citizen (unofficial) sources. The study found barely any news stories about Dalit and Adivasi women and the trans community.

Women were largely missing, across all language publications, in the biggest media story of the lockdown months about the mass fleeing of migrant workers from cities to their villages. They featured in many images from that time but were recognised by the media more as family members of male workers than as labourers or migrants in their own right. Overall, the study found an under-recognition of the livelihood issues of women, both in the formal and informal work sectors. It was observed that in cities, women's informal labour was more

acknowledged by the news media as domestic workers to middle-class families – though the lens applied to them often missed focusing on precarity and discrimination. Even when the media reported on the burden of unpaid work that fell on women during the pandemic/lockdown, this centered around urban middle-class women and often did not include working-class women in its ambit.

The study found that one area where the media consistently acknowledged women as professionals during the pandemic coverage was as healthcare and essential care workers. Many women featured in health-related stories as caregivers, patients, and in situations related to pregnancy and childbirth but often these stories remained limited to individual narratives or episodes with minimal gendered perspectives offered. A noticeable trend, particularly in the early coverage of the pandemic, was how often media reportage tended to identify and stigmatize women more specifically as carriers and spreaders of the COVID-19 infection. The study found few stories related to education and policy that offered a gender nuanced perspective. However, the study observed a fair amount of news coverage during this period focused on gender-based violence including domestic violence, child marriage, and sexual assault.

While recognising the enormous challenges faced by the Indian media in the coverage of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, this report recommends that even at the time of a crisis, in fact more so, the media should amplify the voices of women and other marginalised genders as protagonists, sources, and experts and provide an inclusive gender perspective in its news coverage. Further, gender education and training, incorporating intersectionality, is recommended for media personnel at all levels and for media students as well.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown disrupted life in a significant way all across India in 2020. On the one hand, there was COVID-19, its horrific consequences of complicated illness, morbidity, death, and the critical issue of availability and accessibility to healthcare services to be dealt with. On the other, with the central government announcing a nation-wide series of lockdowns, at very short notice, as a method to contain the spread of the disease, people were forced to stay mostly indoors. Several essential services such as public transport were severely curtailed, and in some cases fully shut down. Other essential services such as the supply of food, medicines, and cooking gas as well as sectors like banking were all gravely hit. Schools and universities shut down, students and teachers were forced to go online in an unplanned manner. Where jobs could go online, people were forced to work from home and connect digitally.

The lockdown had major implications on almost every area of life, particularly on people's jobs, both in the formal and informal sectors. The biggest impact was on those people who were already vulnerable and marginalised in terms of jobs, income, education, housing and access to resources. These included poor migrants from rural areas who worked in bigger cities, primarily in the informal sector and relied mostly on daily wages. Certain marginalised communities such as Dalits, Adivasis, elderly, disabled, minorities, homeless and children were hit harder.

As working-class, daily wage migrant workers and their families left cities in desperation and took to the roads, often walking hungry hundreds of kilometers to reach their homes in rural areas, it triggered a humanitarian crisis of epic

proportions. It eventually proved to be the biggest exodus of people in independent India since partition of the subcontinent more than 70 years ago.

Among all these groups, women, girls, transgender people and sexual minorities were particularly affected, those from poor, marginalised backgrounds and locations even more so. While everyone's movement and work due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns was severely curtailed, several non-profit organisations at the local and global level pointed out that the impact on women and girls was even more harsh. Increased rates of family or domestic violence were reported in almost all states. In addition, there was a noticeable neglect of women's healthcare, especially with regard to non-COVID related ailments, and an increase in child marriages - not just in the rural and tribal hinterlands but also in metro cities. In comparison to men, many more women workers lost their jobs in the lockdown and their job recovery rate has been much slower. It is now suspected that a lot of girls will drop out of formal educational systems due to family finances being hit. The impact of the pandemic and lockdown on trans people has not even begun to be calculated.

This media study has been commissioned by UNFPA and Population First and conducted by members of the Network of Women in Media India (NWMI). It focuses primarily on how the Indian print media addressed gender issues and concerns in its COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown reportage. It provides a snapshot of the themes/topics covered in this reporting, how they were reported, and the lacunae, if any, in the overall coverage with relation to women and other marginalised genders.

The principal investigators of this study were Sameera Khan and Dr. Sweta Singh. A team of twelve women journalists across the country helped in data collection (Details in appendix).

1. KEY OBJECTIVE OF THE MEDIA STUDY

To study a representative sample of twelve India-based print publications – in seven languages – in order to understand the manner in which the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdown have been covered by the media from a gender perspective. *

Gender is social and cultural in nature and a gender perspective is one that takes into account the impact of gender on people's access to opportunities, social roles and also power differentials among and between the genders.

While taking a 'gender perspective' means looking at men, women, and trans people's access to resources, **this media survey focuses primarily on women and trans people** as they are the relatively less privileged genders. Often their voices, opinions, issues, concerns and perspectives are ignored and not paid adequate attention to. This media study pays attention to them.

In this study, we monitored news reportage related to the pandemic and the lockdown to observe if gender played a role at all in any of the stories - were women and other marginalised genders present in stories as protagonists or sources; in which subjects/themes were they more visible and where were they more absent; and whether stories offered a gendered perspective, i.e. they took into account the impact of the pandemic/lockdown on women and other marginalised genders.

Further, we analysed stories that had aspects of gender in two ways:

- a) Stories where **gender played a primary role** i.e. news and feature stories/photo features where the issues, perspectives and voices of women and other marginalised genders were dominant and central;
- b) Stories where **gender played a secondary role** i.e. news and feature stories/photo features where women and other marginalised genders and/or their issues were present but not in any central or dominant way.

*The term ‘Gender’ is used to describe the socially constructed differences between men and women, unlike sex which refers to biological differences. According to the definition accepted by the United Nations, ‘Gender’ refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are learned through socialization processes.

(For more, see [OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming - Concepts and definitions](#))

3. SCOPE AND SAMPLE: MARCH - SEPTEMBER 2020

We monitored news reports on COVID and the Lockdown over seven months in twelve print daily publications in seven languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam, Assamese and Manipuri.

The 12 daily newspapers that were monitored in this study –

English: The Indian Express-Delhi edition (IE), The Times of India-Mumbai edition (TOI); Hindi: Hindustan-Delhi edition (H), Dainik Jagran-Delhi/Patna editions (DJ); Bengali: Anandabazar Patrika-Kolkata edition (ABP), Ei Samay-Kolkata edition (ES); Marathi: Loksatta-Mumbai edition (LS), Sakal-Pune edition; Malayalam: Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram edition (MB), Malayala Manorama-Kottayam/Thrissur editions (MM); Assamese: Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati edition (AP); Manipuri: Hueiyen Lanpao-Imphal edition (HLP).

The aim was to monitor each publication for one week (7 days) each month (starting Sunday and ending the following Saturday). Every publication was monitored for the same dates of the given week. However, a few adjustments were made in dates due to non-availability of certain publications. In addition, one publication each was not monitored in the months of July 2020 (Asomiya Pratidin)

and September 2020 (Sakal) and two publications were not monitored in August 2020 (Sakal and Asomiya Pratidin).

In each edition of the monitored newspaper, three to four pages were specifically studied: the front page, the main city page and/or the main district page and the main nation page. On these pages, attention was paid to news stories, feature stories, photo-features and photographs related only to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown in order to ascertain the emphasis of coverage of these issues in general and in terms of gender in particular. For more details, see the Methodology section in the Appendix.

Unfortunately, paucity of time and resources did not permit the monitoring of broadcast and stand-alone news websites for this study. However, we recommend that future research should explore these media as well for their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown with a gender perspective.

4. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MEDIA STUDY

The coverage of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult task for the media. It presented them with several new challenges - of keeping up with the latest information and developments, ensuring safety of journalists and editors from the infection and still managing to get the important news of the day out. The findings of this study in no way undermine the efforts of news media organisations and especially that of individual journalists, many of whom put themselves at risk, to get us the story of this very difficult crisis.

Overall, this study found that in the reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nation-wide lockdown, a gender perspective that highlighted the presence, role, concerns and voices of women, trans people and other marginalised genders was largely missing in most Indian print publications across all languages and regions.

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

The study monitored a total of 6,110 news stories relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown between March and September 2020 in twelve daily newspapers published across India in seven languages. It monitored a total of 514 news days.

Amongst those 6,110 news stories monitored, the study found barely 299 stories in which gender played a primary role, that is where the voices and perspectives of women and other marginalised genders were central to the story. In percentage terms, this means that only 4.8 percent of the 6,110 news stories monitored had anything of significance with regard to women and/or gender issues.

Even within the limited coverage where gender played a role, most news stories, even in the later months, did not deal in any meaningful depth with the serious economic and social fallouts of the pandemic and lockdown on women and other marginalised genders.

It should be noted that the main findings of the study are indicative only for the period monitored by the study.

DID THE LANGUAGE OF THE PUBLICATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The study monitored Indian print publications in seven different languages and observed:

1. Despite the popular assumption that English-language publications in India are more gender-friendly, the data collected in this study found that publications in all languages, including English, only marginally represented gender concerns and issues in their COVID-19/lockdown coverage.
2. The study monitored 1,652 stories related to the pandemic/lockdown in two English-language publications (The Times of India-Mumbai and The Indian Express-Delhi) between March and September 2020. Only 2.5 percent of

these stories offered a dominant gender perspective that focused on women. In the case of The Times of India too, only 0.004% of their COVID/lockdown related stories monitored during the period of this study showed any significant gender presence.

3. In fact, the study found more stories on women and gender issues in the COVID-19/lockdown coverage of certain Indian language publications during the period monitored. For example, a comparison between English-language and Bengali-language publications surprisingly revealed a stronger gender focus in the Bengali print media. Women and gender issues were dominant in 7.4 percent of the 1,149 stories monitored in the two Bengali publications (Anandabazar Patrika-Kolkata and Ei Samay-Kolkata) while it was central in only 2.5 percent of the 1,652 stories examined in the two English-language publications. The study found that Bengali newspapers reported on a diverse range of subjects related to women including violence and migration.
4. However, the study found that when English-language publications covered gender-specific issues, they were more proficient than Indian language newspapers in terms of interviewing relevant experts, bringing together more women's voices or exploring an issue more comprehensively.
5. While English-language publications were found relatively stronger in their coverage of the COVID pandemic/lockdown in the urban centres where they were published, Indian language publications often had a better grasp of pandemic/lockdown realities in the districts of the State where they were published. For example, the study found that Marathi newspaper Loksatta in its June coverage focused on the situation of anganwadi workers and online

education in rural Maharashtra better than the English-language dailies. However, these strengths in coverage did not automatically translate into bringing greater gender sensitivity or gender consciousness to the COVID/lockdown reportage.

6. Some publications such as *Ei Samay*, *Sakal*, *Hindustan*, *Mathrubhumi*, *Dainik Jagran* and *The Times of India (TOI)* had special pages reporting only COVID-19 news especially in March, April, May 2020, the early months of the pandemic. In TOI, this page was titled ‘Virus Watch’; in *Anandabazar Patrika*, it was ‘*Trasher Desh*’ (The Feared Country); in *Dainik Jagran*, special pages went by various militaristic titles such as ‘*Corona Se Jang*’ (War against Coronavirus) or ‘*Corona ke Yodha*’ (Warriors against Coronavirus).
7. The study noticed that in many publications the pandemic was likened to a ‘war’ and the coronavirus to an ‘enemy’ against whom even women health workers were co-opted as ‘warriors’ to fight. ‘*Ghar bahar dono jagah yodha ye mahilaye/Women are warriors both at home and outside*’ (May 10) featured in the Hindi daily, *Hindustan* (Delhi edition). In the Marathi daily *Sakal* (Pune edition), ‘We will win this war’ (April 9) was a story about hard-working nurses at Pune’s Sassoon hospital who referred to themselves as “biological soldiers”. Militaristic and masculinised language aside, Hindi newspapers also whipped up nationalistic passions against the virus, using headlines such as, ‘*Desh ke liye kuch karne ka moka mile to piche kyun/Why should I stay back from doing my bit for the nation?*’ (*Hindustan*, March 24) and ‘*Daughter of country in service of victims...*’ (*Dainik Jagran*, April 9).

8. While there were a lot of parallels in the national news stories carried by all the newspapers monitored, most Indian language dailies also focused on the plight of people from their region who were stuck in other parts of the country or world. An example is the Guwahati newspaper *Asomiya Pratidin*'s front page news story, 'Assam girl suffering from Corona at the quarantine centre in Mumbai' (May 11) on the condition of an Assamese women nurse in Mumbai. Similarly, the Malayalam newspapers made it a point to specifically focus with protective pride on stories relating to Malayali nurses working anywhere in the country. For example, *Malayala Manorama* carried the story, 'No medicine, no tests and no food too...' (April 8) on the terrible experiences of a Malayali nurse at a Delhi hospital. The two newspapers from the North-East (the Assamese-language, *Asomiya Pratidin*, and the Manipuri-language, *Hueiyen Lanpao*) focused more on local COVID-related news but also carried a fair amount of news stories from the mainland. Interestingly, it was observed that after early months of covering COVID, the Imphal-based *Hueiyen Lanpao* newspaper moved onto focusing more on political developments and elections in Manipur, reducing its pandemic coverage drastically.

MISSING VOICES

The study found that in the reportage of COVID and the lockdown, women and other marginalised genders were frequently absent as sources and experts. News reports often failed to include the voices of women and trans people even when a story or an issue directly impacted them. This is similar to the findings of September 2020 'The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News' report (Luba Kasso, commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) which

studied COVID-19 news media coverage in six countries, including India, during the early days of the pandemic (March 1 to 15 April, 2020). According to it, women's expert voices were marginalized in COVID-19 stories, even more so than in non-COVID related news stories, worldwide and that in India, men were quoted five times more frequently in the news about COVID-19 than women.

Similarly, our study found that during the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown, less women were quoted overall in most publications. While some were quoted as authoritative sources more regularly, we still did not hear enough from women despite the fact that there are many more women experts in the area of healthcare and epidemiology, unlike other fields where women's representation is more seriously skewed. In the COVID coverage, women were quoted often as official sources representing the government, such as the Indian Finance minister, the West Bengal state Chief Minister, the Kerala state Health minister, the Maharashtra state School Education minister, who coincidentally were all women during the 2020 pandemic. In any case, the Indian print media quotes a lot more official sources representing government, administration or corporates; usually these happen to be men. In comparison to English-language print media, the Indian language print media quotes fewer voices of ordinary citizens.

In this study, we found that the voices of women citizens (unofficial sources) were present in COVID reportage but in quite low numbers. As an illustrative example, we computed figures of unofficial sources of a few publications for three months (of the total seven months that we monitored) of the pandemic coverage. We found that in the COVID-19/lockdown stories monitored on three main news pages during March, April, May 2020 (one week in each month), of the 47 total citizen

voices (unofficial sources) quoted in The Times of India-Mumbai (English), only 17 were identifiably women; of the 354 total citizen voices (unofficial sources) used in The Indian Express-Delhi (English), only 64 were identifiably women; of the 27 total citizen voices (unofficial sources) in Hindustan-Delhi (Hindi), only 2 were identifiably women; of the 30 total citizen voices (unofficial sources) in Dainik Jagran-Delhi (Hindi), only 5 were identifiably women; of the 14 total citizen voices (unofficial sources) in Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram (Malayalam), only 5 were identifiably women; of the 37 total citizen voices (unofficial sources) in Anandabazar Patrika-Kolkata (Bengali), only 17 were identifiably women. (Table 3). These figures show that in comparison to English-language print publications, Indian language print publications quoted far less women citizen (unofficial) sources in their COVID/lockdown stories.

The other voices that were missing quite strikingly during the coverage of the COVID pandemic and lockdown were that of the trans community. Their issues barely found any mention in news publications across the country despite indications that their socio-economic vulnerability increased during COVID-19. Between March and September 2020, the study found only two short news stories that referred to trans people and their concerns. Both stories from Kerala were connected to state government policy initiatives towards trans people and were buried inside the local city pages of the Malayalam daily, Mathrubhumi. One was a city budget story that allocated financial resources for trans people to buy land/house (March 25) and the other reported on a scheme to provide free food kits to members of the transgender community (Aug 28). Apart from the announcement nature of these stories, there was no analysis and no trans voices were quoted.

Other marginalised groups of women fared no better. While elderly women featured in some COVID-19 health stories (due to the easy susceptibility of the elderly population to the Coronavirus), there was little mention of the challenges faced by differently-abled women during the lockdown. LGBTQ voices and issues were similarly excluded. Even as this period witnessed a surge in atrocities against Dalit and Adivasi women, these women barely made it to the COVID-19/lockdown news coverage monitored by this study. For example, one of the only times a Dalit woman found specific mention was as a COVID positive rape survivor assaulted by a male healthworker in an ambulance in the September 2020 news pages.

MISSING PERSPECTIVES

Hard data and information-heavy stories were the chief hallmarks of COVID-19 coverage in all media publications that were monitored. These were particularly related to the pandemic - rates of infection, testing, treatment, hospitalization, recovery and deaths from COVID-19 as well as information relating to healthcare facilities and essential services. Fewer stories overall featured people in general, and women and other marginalised genders in particular, as protagonists.

Even when it was an issue that concerned women in particular, often the tendency was to report it as a single individual narrative or episode and offer minimal perspective or analysis. For example, in May and June 2020, the study found many news stories about the challenges faced by pregnant women in accessing childbirth facilities in hospitals during the pandemic. Most of these were reported as individual patient stories and there was no attempt made to probe maternal/child healthcare as a larger policy issue that needed attention.

The study also found the consistent lack of a gender perspective in news reports that featured women or other marginalised genders. For example, a story on online education in the Hindi daily Dainik Jagran (Sept 7) reported how many women teachers and girl students were uncomfortable with the comments and ‘obscene’ acts of male students during online classes. However, the story did not offer the perspective that this was serious act of sexual harassment and violence against women that demanded strict action and accountability. Similar missed opportunities to bring in a gendered perspective were noticed in coverage of subjects such as migration, employment, education and policy.

WOMEN AND STIGMA

What was most noticeable right from the beginning was how media reportage in English-language and Indian language publications tended to identify and stigmatize women more specifically as carriers and spreaders of the COVID-19 infection. In absence of other reportage with women protagonists, this really stood out especially in the March 2020 coverage. It particularly played out in the story relating to Bollywood singer Kanika Kapoor, who arrived from abroad and disregarding quarantine rules interacted with a large number of people. She tested COVID positive and the story was blown up and sensationalized in terms of language, tone and story angle by news media across the country (discussed in detail in the March 2020 Summary and Analysis). It could be argued that it was Kapoor’s ‘celebrity Bollywood’ status and not her gender that drew media attention - though such coverage of women celebrities does little to promote a gender perspective. However, the study observed that she was hounded in a terribly negative manner by the media in a way that men - even celebrity men in later months - who were potential coronavirus carriers, patients or spreaders were

not. The only exception were minority Muslim men who were similarly stigmatised in news coverage in April 2020 in light of the Tablighi Jamaat incident (discussed in detail in the April 2020 Summary and Analysis). These two strong parallel media narratives to COVID and the lockdown in the initial months, which depicted women and minority groups as the problem, obfuscated the real socio-political, economic and health issues that needed urgent attention in the country.

MISSING MIGRANTS

The biggest media story in the lockdown months, across all languages, related to the mass exodus of migrant workers from the cities and their traumatic journeys home to their villages. In most of these stories, though we see some heartbreaking images of women walking, waiting, carrying children and belongings, there is an overwhelming absence of their voices. In story after story, the study found women scarcely recognised as labour or as migrants in their own right. Instead, most often they were simply recognised as spouses, mothers, or children of male migrant workers (discussed in detail in the May Summary and Analysis). The most horrific stories of women migrants related to the on-the-road births, deaths, miscarriages and stillbirths among migrant pregnant women who were forced to walk for several kilometers with no access to proper food, healthcare or transport. Very little media reporting on this held the State accountable for its callousness in not providing transport and safe maternal healthcare services during this period.

WOMEN AND WORK

Though work and livelihoods was one area where women were very impacted as a result of the lockdown, both in the formal and the informal sector, in the period monitored by this study we found little representation of this reality in the news media. Instead, the study observed that many media stories presented the harsh

reality of job losses and wage cuts as a subject that only affected men. The under-recognition of women workers meant that many livelihood concerns of women did not find a voice in the media, even when opportunities presented themselves. For example, when the Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi (Thiruvananthapuram edition) ran a series of stories on the impact of the lockdown on work (May 14, 15, 16), it quoted very few women's voices and barely mentioned the job losses suffered by them (discussed in detail in the May Summary and Analysis).

This was at a time when women's job losses were mounting. The nationally representative Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) showed that in April 2020, while 35 percent of Indian men, who were working in December 2019, lost their jobs, more than twice that proportion of Indian women (70 percent) lost their jobs. Though 73 percent of the men who lost employment in April 2020, returned to work in August 2020 and continued to stay employed in December 2020, only 23 percent of women managed to return and remain employed in the same period. Similarly, a COVID-19 livelihoods survey among informal workers, released by the Azim Premji University in January 2021, showed that at least 20 percent of those who lost work during the lockdown were still unemployed in December, with women hit much harder than men.

In this study, one of the most important stories related to women's work focussed on the plight of women workers in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). The Indian Express front page news story, 'Migrants back, women's share in NREGS dips to a 8-year low' (Aug 25), analysed data available on the NREGS portal and reported on how the share of rural women workers had reduced as a result of male migrant workers returning home to the village due to

the pandemic and taking up their jobs. Though the story recognised rural women workers and reported on a very real impact of the lockdown on their employment, it only used data and had no voices of these women.

While several stories talked about the plight of poor informal workers, only a few mentioned women. The study found that in urban settings, the area of informal work where women's labour was more readily recognised by the news media during the pandemic was as domestic workers to middle-class families. However, the lens applied to them by the media often missed focusing on their precarity and on the discrimination against them. When reporting on the post-lockdown reopening of housing colonies to women domestic workers, many news stories regurgitated the perspective of those housing colonies of putting the onus of not carrying the infection more on the domestic workers than on the middle-class families that employed them.

The study found that English-language dailies reported on women and work-related stories during the pandemic centred around the urban middle-class woman. For example, the city feature, 'Balancing act: Moms juggle work from home, chores, e-schools' (TOI, April 6) quoted women sources and discussed the burden of unpaid work that particularly fell on women in such households during the lockdown. Unfortunately, this perspective was not extended towards working-class women whose unpaid domestic labour was not similarly counted.

The only women workers treated as professionals in the COVID-19 pandemic coverage were those working in healthcare and other essential care jobs. This was not unusual considering that more than 70 percent of the healthcare workforce globally are women. But while women doctors and nurses were more often recognised in media stories, frontline health workers at the community level such

as anganwadi workers, also a group dominated by women, were less readily recognised as women workers. The study noticed that during the pandemic coverage many media stories tended to valorise frontline women healthcare workers and at the same time also report on the stigma regularly faced by them as possible carriers of infection since they worked in close proximity of COVID patients. What stood out, however, was that overall the voices of women healthcare workers were less heard in the news - they were rarely quoted - even if the stories were about their critical roles.

GIRLS AND EDUCATION

Most news stories on the theme of education during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown focused on the challenges posed by online education - particularly access to digital devices and Internet services by teachers and students - and the postponement and re-scheduling of state and national exams. Hardly any stories, however, brought in the gender dimensions of the issue.

Already grassroots community organisations have pointed out glaring inequalities in access to online learning. Only 26% of girls in poor families, compared to 37% of boys, have access to mobile and Internet services to attend online classes, as per a report by The Right to Education Forum, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies and Champions for Girls' Education (November 2020). More worryingly, this report suggested that about 37% of girls from poor households hit by the lockdown are uncertain whether they would be able to return to school after the pandemic. Despite this depressing scenario, our study found that the media reported almost negligibly on concerns related to girls education in the period monitored.

WOMEN AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

Policy decisions are crucial in times of crisis when everyday lives of people are torn apart and their dependency on governmental intervention increases. Policy becomes a valuable tool of support and recovery, especially for those at the margins. While many government policies and interventions at the local, State and Central level were announced during the lockdown and pandemic, the reportage of these showed that most often news publications simply reproduced them verbatim without much analysis or asking tougher questions of them. Media coverage did not take a gender sensitive nuanced perspective on most of the announced policies and did not particularly probe their impact on women. For example, when during the lockdown in late March 2020, the government announced free gas cylinder refills till June under its Ujjwala scheme, this was simply reproduced by most dailies as a news item without bringing in the perspectives of women. Even news stories that reported on scores of poor women queuing up to withdraw Rs 500 under government schemes such as the Jan Dhan Yojana merely presented the women as standing in line for free cash hand-outs. Few news stories in the publications monitored queried in detail either the policy and its limits or the dilemmas and challenges faced by poor women in taking care of their families at such a time.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

The one area where the news media across the country and in every language regularly covered women during this time was in stories directly related to COVID-19. Many women featured in health stories as caregivers and hospital workers, as patients, in quarantine, as those making a recovery and also succumbing to the disease (discussed in detail in all the monthly summaries and

analyses). Though overall in the period monitored there were lesser non-COVID related health stories, there were many stories related to pregnancy and childbirth, both among women who were infected and those who were not (discussed in detail in the May Summary and Analysis). Unfortunately, few stories actually interviewed women accessing the healthcare infrastructure, so we know little about how they experienced it first-hand. But once in a while, a different story popped up, such as the one relating to menstrual hygiene needs of poor women (Indian Express, August 23), for example, that actually spoke to women and gave a better picture of things on the ground (discussed in detail in the July, August, September Summary and Analysis).

Most everyday health stories, however, simply gave a mound of statistical data on COVID-19 testing, hospitalisations, infection rates, recovery rates, and mortality rates - without connecting enough of those figures to actual human stories. Many of these statistics were also not gender disaggregated so it was difficult to understand whether there was a gender difference in the number of COVID-19 infections, hospitalisations or deaths. The study found few follow-up health news stories offering more detailed gendered analysis or gendered health policy perspectives.

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

The study found a fair amount of news reportage on gender based violence (GBV) during the lockdown and pandemic. These were, however, not evenly spread out through the seven months of the study, with more stories reported in some months and negligible in other months. Interestingly, the study found that many Indian language dailies covered GBV with some amount of detail. Many non-governmental community and developmental organisations had warned about an

upsurge in certain forms of GBV, such as domestic violence, and this was borne out in the reported stories.

UN Women called the spike in domestic violence during the forced lockdown “the shadow pandemic growing amidst the COVID-19 crisis”. As early as April 2020, stories in Indian newspapers mentioned the rising number of domestic violence complaints filed by women with India’s National Commission for Women (NCW). In July 2020, some newspapers quoted a University of California, Los Angeles, study that analysed the pattern of complaints registered with the NCW and found that domestic violence complaints were actually higher in red zones (COVID containment zones with strict rules of access). Some news stories gave quite graphic descriptions of domestic violence such as this story, ‘Wife tied to chair, face taped, beaten brutally, husband arrested’ in Bengali daily Ei Samay (Sept 21). Regrettably, few stories quoted enough experts, activists or lawyers to expand the scope of the narrative. The Indian language media also reported from rural districts on increasing financial distress causing a rise in child marriages, another kind of violence perpetrated on minor girls, during and after the lockdown.

Some of the most shocking news stories relating to sexual assault of women were reported from COVID quarantine centres; some stories reported on assault of women COVID patients; other stories reported on rapes by male health workers and health authority figures. Unfortunately, the security of women patients at hospitals and quarantine centres never really became a follow-up investigative story.

WOMEN AS HEROES

One category of reportage that was very popular during the pandemic and lockdown among all print publications monitored was presenting women as heroes. Often these were women frontline healthcare and essential care workers but sometimes they were also ordinary women who did something unsterotypical and stood out. One such example was of a government teacher and mother who rode her scooter for 1,400 kms over two days, braving strict lockdown, to bring her son home ('To Bring Back Son Mother travels 1400 km on a 2 wheeler', Loksatta, April 11).

5. MONTH-WISE SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

The study revealed that while news coverage of the pandemic and the lockdown was full throttle during the months of March, April and May 2020 - to the point that other non-COVID related news often failed to make it to the pages - it started gradually falling from June 2020 onwards. This was surprising as COVID rates across the country continued to rise. Either there was fatigue related to pandemic news coverage or the COVID story seemed less dramatic and hence got integrated into other everyday news coverage. In anycase, other news such as those related to the border skirmishes with China, the death by suicide of a popular Hindi film industry actor, local elections, floods in various parts of the country, etc. started to feature more often. Here are the summaries and analyses of the gender coverage in each month monitored from March 2020 to September 2020. As there was a clear dip in the COVID/lockdown news in July, August and September 2020, the summaries and analyses of those months have been collated together.

In each month, we have summarised the most noticeable patterns and themes related to gender in the media coverage of the pandemic and lockdown. These include looking at gender in relation to health, work, education, policy, migration, violence, among others. (For the full forms of the abbreviated newspaper names, refer to the list in Appendix D.)

MARCH 2020 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

In mid-March 2020, the Indian government imposed the first nation-wide lockdown in response to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the country. Mainstream media across the country began reporting extensively, and soon almost exclusively, on the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. Initial reporting focused on central, state and local government's announcements on the rising number of COVID-19 cases and the consequent guidelines relating to its management – prevention (masks, PPE, distancing), testing/diagnosis, hospitalization, rules relating to quarantine, contact tracing, and lockdown enforcement. Thereafter, the coverage expanded to include stories on frontline workers, essential services and the impact of the lockdown on people and their lives. Coverage was widespread and news pages were filled everyday with lots of information, spot reporting and statistics related to the pandemic and the lockdown.

In March 2020, a total of 1,193 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in twelve print publications in 7 languages. The study found that only 3.8 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.1 & Table 2)

WOMEN AND SOCIAL STIGMA

Many news stories in March focused on the social stigma and discrimination generated against COVID-19 patients or those suspected to be coronavirus carriers. This included doctors, nurses and airline crew who worked as frontline workers

during the pandemic. A closer look at these news stories revealed that there seemed to be an inordinate amount of focus by the media on social stigma related to the pandemic when the person stigmatised was a woman.

In the story, ‘People with cough and throat ache are being pressured to visit quarantine centres’ (ABP, March 25), the neighbours of a woman who worked in an airline forced her to go to a quarantine centre and her mother was not attended to at a grocery shop. In another story, ‘Instruction to 800 people coming to Mohalla clinic in Delhi to stay separately’ (AP, March 27, Nation page), a woman was specifically identified as the ‘infector’ or the ‘spreader’ of the disease. The story talked about four doctors at a Delhi Mohalla clinic infected by a woman returning from Saudi Arabia, forcing 800 patients treated by those doctors to be kept in isolation. Yet another story, ‘Gutka spit on NE girl, shouts Corona’ (DJ, March 24, Nation page) highlighted how women students from the North-East were being harassed by people who spat and shouted “Corona” at them. In most of these stories, the sources were men. There were no quotes of the women affected, which rendered the subjects of these stories voiceless.

The one story that whipped up a lot of frenzy and fear around March 22, coincidentally the same time when the central government was in the process of imposing a massive nation-wide lockdown, was the story relating to Bollywood singer Kanika Kapoor. She arrived from London in mid-March and proceeded to her hometown, Lucknow, where disregarding quarantine rules she interacted with a large number of people including several politicians. She tested COVID positive and the story was blown up and given a lot of coverage by newspapers across the country, initially on their front pages. In terms of language, tone and the angle

taken, the story was given sensationalist treatment and was reflective of patterns where women, in particular, are hounded and blamed for ‘aggravating’ issues.

‘A Thousand in Search of Kanika’s Footprints’ (TOI, March 22, Frontpage) was one of the stories reported from Lucknow. It was about contact tracing being conducted after Kanika Kapoor tested positive for COVID-19. ‘Tension spreads from Lucknow to Delhi regarding Kanika Kapoor’ (ABP, March 22, Front page) was another story carried in this Kolkata newspaper. It mentioned the fact that the hospital where she was being treated had tweeted that no special treatment would be given to her. ‘Case against singer Kanika’ (MM, March 22, Nation) focused on the legal case filed against the singer for violating existing COVID protocol. The stories aggressively pointed fingers at the singer. ‘184 in contact with Bollywood singer test positive’ (DJ, March 22, Front page) mentioned that those who came in contact with her did not quarantine themselves. ‘Kanika's contacts are negative so far; Raje and her son included’ (IE, March 22, Front page) talked about the COVID status of politicians who were in touch with Kapoor. In the stories splashed across the country, Kapoor was painted out to be not just as a COVID-19 patient but also a frivolous, careless person. It could be argued that it was her ‘celebrity Bollywood’ status and not her gender that drew media attention - though such coverage of women celebrities does little to promote a gender perspective. However, the study observed that she was harassed in a terribly negative manner by the media in a way that men - even celebrity men in later months - who were potential coronavirus carriers, patients or spreaders were not. The only exception were minority Muslim men, similarly stigmatised in later news coverage in light of the Tablighi Jamaat incident, who dominated the other major pandemic story in late March and April.

WOMEN AND WORK

In March, the dominant category in which women were looked upon as professional workers was as healthcare workers, primarily as nurses in urban hospitals. There was a tendency to valorise them and also report on the social stigma they battled as possible carriers of the infection since they worked in close proximity of COVID patients. All newspapers carried stories on nurses in some form or the other. ‘The test result for ward boy and ward girl will appear soon’ (AP, March 27, Frontpage lead 2 story) featured women as nurses noting that more than 2000 were to be trained in COVID management. The story, ‘Nurses protest about protective gear’ (ABP, March 26, Front Page lead 1) is accompanied by a photograph showing women nurses protesting about the lack of proper masks being available. That nurses were vulnerable in many ways came across in the story, ‘Person in Quarantine attacks Health worker’ (MB, March 24) that reported on a male patient attacking a woman nurse at her home after she reported him to health authorities for breaking quarantine.

More tellingly, however, the perspective missing from most stories was that the bulk of India’s healthcare workers especially at the community level were women. For example, a story from Jaipur, ‘In Rajasthan drive, 75000 health workers cover 23 lakh homes’ (IE, March 26, Nation page) used three male sources and was accompanied by a photograph of men but failed to note that most health workers at the grassroots levels, especially the ones doing door-to-door screening for COVID-19 symptoms, were women (ASHA and ANMs) and deserved to have their voices included or at the very least their presence noted.

By late March, already there were talks of a sliding economy and rising losses of jobs and incomes. But by and large, the country’s workforce was presented as male

and women labour were largely invisibilized or presented only marginally through a very middle-class lens. In ‘High rises restrict entry, domestic helps fear pay cut’ (IE, March 24, City page), the story discussed domestic workers/maids not being allowed into gated middle-class communities for work during the lockdown but it missed a sharp focus on discrimination and livelihood issues related to women domestic workers. The tilt was more on the domestic workers as potential carriers of infection than on the middle-class families that employed them. In the story, ‘Work from home like “being in Bigg Boss”’ (TOI, March 26, Front page feature), about couples working from home, there was a casual reference to increased familial stress with sources talking about being “super fried”. No particular gender perspective was offered in relation to women shouldering the larger burden of office work and unpaid work of childcare and household care.

WOMEN AS HEROES

But while the bulk of the coverage in March did not consider the impact of the pandemic and lockdown separately on women, there were a fair amount of stories that celebrated women working in frontline positions as heroes. The news story, ‘Dr Priya fights against the bad virus’ (MM, March 22, Nation), profiled the dedication of the Pune-based National Institute of Virology director, Dr Priya Abraham, who had earlier researched and led a fight against the Nipha virus and was now working on COVID. The feature story, ‘Why should I stay back from doing my bit for the nation’ (Hindustan, March 24, City page) quoted an Indian Airlines woman crew member who helped bring back 275 people stuck abroad. Another feature story, ‘My family members ask me to avail leave, but how can I sit at home’ (Hindustan, March 28, City page) was about a woman healthcare worker who believed it was her duty to go to work and not sit back at home.

TRANS PEOPLE

It is important to note that of the 1,193 COVID-Lockdown related stories monitored in March, only one story mentioned marginalised genders at all. This was a city budget story in Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi, ‘Corporation announces 25 crore package to counter COVID’ (MB, March 25, City Page) which referred to the Thiruvananthapuram City Corporation budget allotting Rs 2 crores for trans people to buy land/house. This point from the budget was covered in a tiny font bullet point, along with a mention of other projects, on the City page. It did not quote any trans people responding to the initiative.

‘LAKSHMAN REKHA’

Finally, what also stood out in the March coverage was the use of particularly gendered language by the Prime Minister. “‘Don’t step beyond your home’s Lakshman Rekha, only way out’”: PM’ (IE, March 25, Front Page Lead): this was the front-page lead story in every media publication around the country after Prime Minister Narendra Modi used the term ‘Lakshman Rekha’ in a televised address to the nation to explain the imposition of the initial 21-day India-wide lockdown and the idea of physical distancing. Apparently, this also led to a lot of googling of the term in parts of the country not familiar with the phrase ‘Lakshman Rekha’ which was a reference to an incident in Valmiki’s famed epic, The Ramayana. In that incident, Ram’s brother Lakshman draws a magical protective boundary and asks his sister-in-law Sita not to step outside of it. However, Ravana manages to trick Sita into stepping out of that boundary and thus abducts her. It is disconcerting that the Prime Minister used such a gendered term implying a certain morality when announcing the lockdown and that the mainstream media helped amplify it. ‘Lakshman Rekha’ is a term often used to sequester Indian women to their homes,

it implies denying women accessibility to the outside world. Its usage by the Prime Minister needed to be interrogated more vigorously by the media.

APRIL 2020 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The focus of most reportage in April was on COVID-related health issues, including the steep rise in COVID positive figures, as well as on various aspects of the health-infrastructure that was dealing with it. The other subject that received significant coverage was the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim religious movement, and its alleged role in being a super spreader of COVID. Unquestioningly, media across the country ran news stories with provocative headlines blaming the Tablighi Jamaat for the country's explosion of COVID-19 cases. All identities of individuals were diffused into simply the accusatory 'Tablighis'. The Jamaat bashing led to blame being cast on the Muslim community in general and this impacted women as well. This seemed to cloud the more significant issues then plaguing the country such as the huge internal migration crisis that caused major displacements and horrific deaths due to hunger and accidents.

In April 2020, a total of 1,459 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in twelve print publications in 7 languages. The study found that only 5.6 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.2 & Table 2)

WOMEN AND HEALTH

There were slightly more stories with a gender presence and more quotes from women sources in April. Many women featured in the COVID-19 health stories as caregivers, hospital workers, patients, as those making a recovery and also succumbing to the disease. Women also featured in a few non-COVID related health stories on menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. ‘COVID-19 claims pregnant woman, senior citizen in Vasai’ (TOI, April 7) reported on the death of the first pregnant woman, also the youngest then, with COVID-19 in Mumbai balancing it with a more hopeful story, ‘82-year-old woman beats virus, is among oldest in the state to go home’ (TOI, April 9) about the oldest woman in Maharashtra who recovered from COVID-19. In ‘17 days of battling corona’ (Sakal, April 9), the daughter of parents who had travelled abroad and battled COVID-19 spoke of her experience with the illness. Another story was about ‘an emotional scene’ (AP, April 9, Nation,) where after 15 days, a three-year-old was reunited with her mother, a nurse who had not seen her daughter for several days as she was quarantined after hospital duty. Most of these news stories are simple spot reports and offer no deeper analysis or gender perspective.

WOMEN HEALTHCARE WORKERS

There were a lot of stories and photographs about women healthcare workers, many valorising them. ‘2020: International year of nurses. Light a lamp for them’ (MB, April 5) was a front page lead feature focusing on the services provided by the nursing community. It mentioned the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale and also included the Prime Minister’s call to switch off lights for 9-minutes at 9 pm to salute healthcare workers. The Malayalam newspapers also made it a point to focus on stories relating to Malayali nurses working around the

country. ‘Three doctors, 46 Malayali nurses test positive’ (MB, April 7) was a news report about 53 nurses, of whom 46 were Malayali, and three doctors testing COVID positive in a private hospital in central Mumbai leading to the hospital being shut down. ‘No medicine, no tests and no food too...’ (MM, April 8, Nation) focused on the terrible experience of a Malayali nurse at a Delhi hospital. Several stories pointed out the risks faced by healthcare workers. ‘Double trouble for Anganwadi workers: Govt has not given them any equipment for their safety and no communication with their families as they have to isolate themselves’ (LS, April 7), reported from Nashik on problems faced by women anganwadi workers.

GENDER DIMENSIONS OF THE TABLIGHI JAMAAT STORY

Interestingly, once the story about the Tablighi Jamaat and the role of its members in allegedly spreading the virus became widely reported, it also acquired gender dimensions. ‘One more woman in Ranchi tested positive’ (DJ, April 7) was a headline about women infected after they allegedly came in contact with a Tablighi member. Other people were mentioned in the story but that there were women among those infected people was especially highlighted in the headline even though there weren’t many details about them in the story. ‘Tablighi members misbehave with health workers; time to shift out female workers’ (LS, April 5) was a PTI-reported story from Kanpur. It mentioned that at a hospital at Kanpur, there were reports of ‘Tablighi’ members who refused to take medicines and instead mishandled health workers. The report mentioned that ‘the Tablighis’ (notice how they were mentioned as a group with no individual identity) allegedly spat on their hands and then touched the railings in the hospital, thus contaminating it. A senior woman doctor is quoted as saying that they behaved so badly with the staff that the hospital was forced to move female health workers out of the hospital.

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

Several studies by non-profit activist organisations showed that domestic violence increased in the times of pandemic, as reflected in the story, ‘Lockdown brings trouble for victims of domestic violence’ (Hindustan, April 9), which reported about the rising number of complaints filed by women with the National Commission for Women. Similarly, a story in the Assamese newspaper, Asomiya Pratidin, ‘Child abuse has increased in the world in the midst of corona’ (AP, April 10, Nation), reported on the drastic increase nationwide in child sexual abuse during the lockdown, with more than three lakh calls made to the child helpline number in eleven days. Another kind of violence perpetrated on minor girls, which also increased during the lockdown, were child marriages. ‘In home quarantine father tries to marry off underage girl’ (ES, April 11, District) reported on a migrant worker father who returned home and arranged his minor daughter’s marriage while in quarantine. The local administration heard the news and managed to stop the marriage in time. Even healthcare workers, especially women, were found susceptible to facing violence while on their job. One such story was about ‘Two women doctors beaten up in Safdarjung hospitals’ (Hindustan, April 10). A story from Ajmer reported on a woman doctor working in the Civil Hospital being attacked by her neighbours, ‘Female doctor attacked’ (DJ, April 7).

WOMEN AND WORK

Again, like in March, we only saw women covered as professionals in the healthcare field. There was very little mention of women’s other livelihoods. Stories that mentioned women as workers did not necessarily offer a gender perspective on the nature of their work. Such as the story, ‘Request the govt. to arrange fodder and feed cattle’ (HLI, April 11) which mentioned a woman in a

piggery in Manipur who demanded that fodder be made available for pigs. ‘When a visit from tehsildar moved her to tears’ (Sakal, April 9, District page) was a story about a woman who after losing her husband and her job was finding it difficult to survive. While the story mentioned that when she received food and monetary help from the tehsildar, she was moved to tears, it did little to inform us about her work; neither did it mention the possibility of another job for her. The tone suggested that she was someone who needed to be taken care of. A stronger story was ‘Tales from Delhi colony that accounts for bulk of hunger calls’ (IE, April 9) that talked about people losing their livelihoods during the lockdown. It made an attempt to talk to women factory workers and get their perspective on their jobs.

English-language dailies reported women and work-related stories centred around the urban middle-class woman. The feature, ‘Balancing act: Moms juggle work from home, chores, e-schools’ (TOI, April 6, City), quoted many women sources and discussed in detail how household chores and children's studies - basically the unpaid work that women did at home - had expanded and become the additional duties of women along with their professional work, especially in the absence of other caregivers. Unfortunately, the feature did not expand to tell the story of unpaid work in relation to working class women.

WOMEN AND POVERTY

When poor and working class women were reported on, they were portrayed more as victims standing in queues for government cash hand-outs. This was especially noticeable in stories and photographs related to government schemes such as the Jan Dhan yojana. ‘Cash reaches Jan Dhan account of 40% of 20 cr women beneficiaries’ (TOI, April 5, Front page) and ‘Cash over, women queue to draw Rs 500 from Jan Dhan accounts’ (IE, April 9, Front page) were both front-page

reports on women queuing up to collect Jan Dhan deposits. Though these stories were about women beneficiaries, they didn't discuss women's dilemmas in detail and lacked a perspective on women's employment and drop in wages.

A similar treatment was often meted out to stories focused on hunger and food security. Some included the voices or photographs of poor women. 'What do I feed my children?' (Sakal, April 7) was a story from Pune city where poor women interviewed raised troubling questions about finding food for their children during the lockdown as rations ran out. A study about slum dwellers access to soap and water, 'Water and soap a luxury to 300 crores' (ABP, April 5), had several official quotes but only one by a woman. A story about 'Hundreds of women waiting for food with children in the zoo-road tiniali' (AP, April 10) spoke of how women came out in the hope of getting food when they were falsely informed that food items would be distributed.

WOMEN AS HEROES

At the same time, newspapers also reported extensively on women who stood up like 'heroes' to protect their communities either as frontline workers or by spreading awareness and showing generosity. 'First completed her duty and then performed the last rites of her mother' (DJ, April 5) was a story about a health worker on duty who received news of her mother's death but went home only after her responsibility ended. 'We will win this war' (Sakal, April 9) was a story about the nurses at Sassoon hospital in Pune who called themselves "biological soldiers" and stayed away from their families to keep them safe while working non-stop to take care of patients. In 'Moirant MYDO Leishangthem' (HLI, April 6), women were reported taking the lead in community food distribution. 'Commendable move by Madhya Pradesh women police' (AP, April 10), was a news story about a

woman police officer who stitched masks at home for people who cannot afford them.

The most remarkable hero story, however, was, ‘Woman rides 1,400 km on scooter to get son back home’ (TOI, April 10, Front page) and ‘To Bring Back Son Mother travels 1400 km on a 2 wheeler’ (LS, April 11), about Razia Begum, a government teacher and a mother who travelled 1,400 km over two days on her scooter from Bodha town in Nizamabad, Telangana, to Rahmatabad in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, to bring her son back home and shatter gender stereotypes. Later she spoke to reporters almost matter-of-factly about the arduous journey, of braving lockdown and crossing several places with restrictions. Many newspapers across the country carried her story.

MAY 2020 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

By May 2020, the reporting on the pandemic and the crisis it had brought about across the country deepened and expanded in many directions.

In May 2020, a total of 1,146 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in twelve print publications in 7 languages. The study found that only 7.3 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.3 & Table 2)

WOMEN AS MIGRANTS

The subject that really stood out in terms of media coverage in May 2020, across all languages, was the exodus of migrant workers. Many publications carried detailed stories on the movement of migrant labour from the cities to their villages and the difficulties of travel, including finding transport, scarcity of food, accidents, and deaths along the way. What was startlingly obvious in many of these stories was the overwhelming absence of women and their voices - they were scarcely recognised as labour or as migrants. Though there were quite a few photographs in the newspapers that searingly captured women's presence along with men and children on the road, their voices were missing. When women and girls were mentioned or quoted in news stories related to the migrant exodus, they were not portrayed as workers but as spouses, mothers, siblings or children of male migrant labour.

How alone and 'othered' they found themselves in the cities where they worked and served at the time of the lockdown came across in several stories and photo features. In 'Line of migrants outside New Delhi railway station grows: 'No help, nowhere to go'' (IE, May 15, City), the story, with a photograph, focused on families and the vast number of women, some with children and some single, waiting outside New Delhi railway station wanting to leave, with "no place to call their own in the city", they told the reporter. The desperation of women to manage the hunger of family members was visible in 'Desperate bid' (ES, May 11, Photo Feature) where Malati, 30, and her husband were photographed and interviewed. Unable to pay rent for their house in Kolkata as they had lost their daily-wage jobs during the lockdown, the couple had decided to cycle back to their village in Jharkhand. As they rested along the way at Dankuni, Malathi said, "We do not

have ration cards here. How long can I borrow or ask for food from others? What will I feed my infant son? So it is best to return to the village. At least we will have something to eat there. It may take time, but we will reach.” In another story with a photograph, a woman was shown on the Agra highway. She was walking from Punjab to her home in Madhya Pradesh while pulling a strolley suitcase with a child lying on top of it (ABP, May 15). Many women migrants were visible like this in photographs - walking or waiting for some means of transport on the sides of roads with children and families.

But the journeys home proved treacherous for many. The news story, ‘Thane family heads to UP in their auto, 6-year-old & her mom die in accident’ (TOI, May 13, City) reported the death of a mother and daughter in an accident as they made their way home from Thane to Uttar Pradesh in an auto rickshaw. The media coverage visibilised the fact that abandoned by the State, which clamped down on all means of accessible transport, and with limited resources at hand, so many migrant families were forced to walk and/or use bicycles and auto rickshaws to travel home in precarious conditions. Several news stories also reported on late attempts by state governments to arrange buses and shramik trains.

WOMEN AND WORK

The other news subject, partially related to the return of migrants to their home states, that found mention in publications in May was that of labour shortages in cities and the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on work and livelihoods. While many news stories reported the grim scenario of job losses in several sectors, it was treated like a subject that mainly affected men and the economy. That women’s labour was under-recognised, if recognised at all, both in the formal

as well as informal work sector was apparent in the news stories monitored which focused more on men and their employment.

Few stories brought in the issue of women's livelihoods and their perspectives and concerns related to it, even when the opportunity was presented to them. The Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi (Thiruvananthapuram edition), for example, ran a series of stories on 'Lockdown miseries' that particularly looked at jobs and featured voices of many ordinary people. 'Barbers, beauticians: Locked' (MB, May 14, District) featured barbers and beauticians. It had only one quote from a woman beautician and focused more on the plight of barbers in Thiruvananthapuram district. Another story in that series, 'Life of calamity' (MB, May 15, District) reported on how the lockdown had impacted those working in the informal sector. It highlighted the lives of vendors, particularly lottery sellers in Thiruvananthapuram district, during the lockdown. Only one women's quote was used in the story and there was little mention of women vendors as a whole. A third story in that series, 'No relief for construction labourers' (MB, May 16, District) was on construction labourers. While it mentioned the condition of out-of-State labourers working on the construction of high-rise buildings and local contractors and labourers working on smaller construction projects, the story only focused on male contractors and labour and did not feature women as construction labourers at all. The entire series missed the fact that women worked outside the home and that their livelihoods and incomes were equally impacted by the lockdown. Some other news stories tried to include women's work. For example, this front page story, 'In an orange zone, factories stir to life with staggered shifts' (IE, May 15, Front Page) from Roha in Raigad, Maharashtra, focused on factories and jobs opening up and reported on women fisherfolk as well. It also carried a photograph of women workers.

The study found that in urban settings, the area where women's labour was more readily recognised by the news media was as domestic workers. 'Some RWAs open society doors reluctantly, to domestic helps' (IE, May 10, City) was a story on Resident Welfare Associations taking decisions related to getting domestic help back. However, the story is told from the perspective of middle-class employers and does not have any information on livelihood issues from the perspective of the domestic workers, on whether they were paid salaries during the lockdown, their general condition and includes no quotes from them. 'In Def Col, Covid positive help made to wait hrs for ambulance' (IE, May 15, City) was about a woman domestic worker thrown out of house after she tested COVID-19 positive. Though the news story was on a specific incident, it highlighted not just the precariousness of domestic work but also the indifferent attitude towards working class COVID-19 patients.

WOMEN AND MATERNAL HEALTH

In May, the study observed many news stories relaying health statistics (rise in cases of COVID-19, recovery and mortality), and information on testing/diagnosis, situation of hospitals and health workers. But what stood out were the stories on maternal health across most newspapers. The stories talked about pregnant women and their families who were denied access to health and treatment facilities. Some of them were made to wait long hours causing delay in treatment as reported in 'Pregnant Thane woman taken to hospital after 12 hrs' (TOI, May 16, City). It is about a pregnant woman waiting for over 12 hours to get an ambulance. Another story read, 'Pvt unit refuses scan, woman delivers stillborn' (TOI, May 11, Nation) was a short story from Agra about a pregnant woman who was denied a scan at a private laboratory as she lived in a COVID red zone (referring to areas with high

incidence of COVID cases) and who later lost her baby. ‘7 hospitals rejected; COVID patient gave birth to 3 babies in first delivery’ (MM, May 10, Front page lead) was a story about COVID positive pregnant woman who gave birth to triplets after seven hospitals refused to take her in.

There were several stories about women giving birth in unusual conditions, some of them in extremely difficult situations due to lockdown. ‘Paulo is born on home soil’ (MB, May 11, Frontpage) was an example where the child was born on a ship. ‘A Pregnant Woman dies after being carried on a home-made stretcher’ (ES, May 11, Nation) was a story from Anantnag where a pregnant woman met with a tragic fate. Pregnant women migrating to their hometowns were reported to have given birth to children on the streets. A migrant worker woman who was pregnant delivered her baby on the road without any medical help, rested for two hours and then started walking again to reach home. She walked for 150 kms just after giving birth to finally board a bus (ES, May 14). Many similar stories were reported frequently from across the country relating to deaths, miscarriages, stillbirths as many migrant pregnant women were forced to walk for several kilometers with no access to healthcare, transport or after failing to procure tickets on the Shramik Special trains. Most of the reporting focused on horrific episodes involving pregnant women and child birth but hardly any reporting held the State accountable for its callousness and inefficiency in not providing transport and basic safe maternal health services during this period.

JUNE 2020 SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Though news about the pandemic and the country recovering from Lockdown 4.0 continued to feature in June, many other news events such as the India-China

border skirmishes in Ladakh, the death by suicide of popular Hindi film actor Sushant Singh Rajput, and the arrival of the monsoons in many parts of the country, started to take precedence on the front pages of news publications.

In June 2020, a total of 807 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in twelve print publications in 7 languages. The study found that only 3.09 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.4)

Some subjects that dominated media coverage in earlier months such as migrants were almost forgotten in the June coverage. Across all news subjects, there was less gender specific coverage. Even a subject like health where women received some visibility in earlier months, had fewer stories on them. What one witnessed instead was a desperation among all sections of people - especially the poor, elderly and jobless - trying to get back to everyday life after the severe lockdown. The story, 'Lockdown has adversely hit senior citizens; 65% lost livelihood' (LS, June 17, City) quoted a study by HelpAge India, which found that the lockdown had impacted the livelihood and income of 65 percent of the elderly population. However, the news report did not specifically mention the impact on elderly women, especially those who were single and not supported by family. Acute rural distress during the lockdown could be seen in stories like '60-year-old forced to drag mother to bank' (TOI, June 16, Nation/ ES, June 16, Nation) about a poor 60-year-old woman who dragged her 80-year-old mother in Balangir, Odisha, to the bank to withdraw Rs 1,500 from her Jan Dhan account.

WOMEN AND WORK

There were plenty of dismal stories on loss of jobs and wages across the board. But even when there were news stories related to jobs dominated by women, the media reportage did not bring a gender perspective to those stories. They barely even mentioned that women's livelihoods were at stake in those areas. These included stories on frontline health workers at the community level such as anganwadi workers, on nurses, on teachers and on domestic employees - all jobs dominated by a women workforce.

In 'Anganwadi workers still not paid their wages, darkness in their homes' (LS, June 15, City), the story reported about the mental and financial condition of anganwadi workers who battled the fear of COVID-19, as they interacted regularly with potentially infected community members, and tried to ensure that their work did not harm their families. The news story mentioned that since workers had not received their wages for the last two months, they had threatened to strike. But it does not point out that most anganwadi workers are women nor does it quote them. 'Containment zone tag of our slum has left us jobless, say Mulund house help' (TOI, June 18, City) reported on the COVID 'containment' tag attached to many slum colonies that affected work prospects of domestic workers. Quoting two women domestic workers, the story mentioned how middle-class employers were avoiding employing back domestic workers who lived in containment zones; many slums fell in containment zones. Another story, 'Parlour prices likely to double' (LS, June 18, City) reported on the challenges of re-opening small businesses like beauty parlours. The feature primarily focused on how expensive all services would get for customers due to closure and sanitizing protocols and as a secondary issue it considered the job security of women who worked there.

GIRLS AND EDUCATION

Since June was the month when schools reopened for a new term, it was not surprising that several news stories focused on new challenges in education due to the pandemic. These included the pressure on working-class parents to provide fees and digital devices for their children's education at a time when family finances had been hit, the complications of online learning, and the lack of accessibility to digital devices or broadband for so many. Hardly any stories, however, brought in the gender dimensions of the issue.

The story, 'Online education near to impossible in rural Maharashtra' (LS, June 19, City) reported that as per a survey by Maharashtra state education department, 65 percent of rural students had no smartphones or Internet access and were thus deprived of online education. Moreover, it reported that about 18 percent of students had dropped out of the school system as they had absolutely no digital device, including radio and TV. The news report offered no gender perspective of the problem though there is a high likelihood that many of these dropouts were girls. In fact, a later study, reported by the media in November 2020, by The Right to Education Forum, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies and Champions for Girls' Education suggested that about 37% of girls from poor households were uncertain whether they would be able to return to school after the pandemic. The study also said that compared to 37% of boys, only 26% girls in poor families had access to mobile and internet to attend online classes.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

In some COVID infection related stories, gender was noticeable. 'Sonia Deori of Narayanpur dies at AIIMS in Delhi' (AP, June 18, Front Page) was a story reported by Asomiya Pratidin of an Assamese woman from Narayanpur (Assam)

who worked in Delhi and had died of COVID-19 at the AIIMS hospital. ‘May 15-30 COVID-19 peak has pushed up June deaths: Doc’ (TOI, June 14, City) was a Mumbai news report explaining the increased COVID-related deaths in June. This report noted that more men than women had died due to COVID. This was counter to another news report, ‘COVID 19 more likely to lead to more deaths in women than men in India: Report’ (HLI, June 14, Frontpage) which quoted a study by Institute of Economic Growth, cited in the Journal of Global Health Science, that mentioned that more Indian women than Indian men were likely to die of COVID due to their poor nutritional status.

Other stories related to COVID were on pregnant women, access to care, infections and stigma/prejudice among health workers. ‘300 pregnant women with Corona admitted at Nair; 306 babies born’ (LS, June 16, City) and ‘COVID moms give birth to 300 babies’ (MB, June 15, Nation) reported on the large number of successful childbirths amongst COVID positive mothers at Mumbai’s Nair hospital.

Finally, stigma and discriminatory behaviours associated with COVID continued to affect not just professional relationships but also the personal ones, especially those of health workers. One such instance was that of a government hospital nurse who was not allowed by her own family members to move back home even after she had recovered from COVID at the hospital. ‘Corona helped to know who is your own and who is not’ (ABP, June 19, City) reported on this nurse who was eventually forced to go stay at a colleague’s house when a plan to let her stay in the nurses’ hostel also failed when a group of nurses protested.

JULY, AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2020 SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

News stories directly related to the pandemic and lockdown noticeably reduced on the front pages of newspapers across the country over July, August and September 2020. While city and district pages continued to carry news related to local Corona cases and impact of the lockdown on local populations, overall the intensity of this coverage lessened. Subjects such as the India-China standoff, floods in various parts of the country, the Rajasthan political crisis, Ram mandir inauguration, the gold smuggling racket in Kerala and by September the Bihar state elections were some of the larger non-COVID related news stories that gained traction. What began to receive more attention in COVID coverage were news stories related to COVID vaccine development and clinical trials. In these same months, news and feature stories related to women and other marginalised genders lessened quite substantially.

In July 2020, a total of 664 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in 11 print publications in 6 languages. The study found that only 3.16 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.5)

In August 2020, a total of 443 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in 10 print publications in 6 languages. The study found that only 4.2 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.6)

In September 2020, a total of 398 news stories related only to the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were monitored in 11 print publications in 7 languages. The study found that only 5.5 percent of these news stories (primary) significantly represented or reflected gender and gender-related concerns, i.e. issues related to women and other marginalised genders. (Table 1.7)

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

The most shocking lockdown-related news stories in these months focused on the rising cases of horrific violence against women. ‘Girl raped in COVID care centre in New Delhi’ (ABP, July 25, Nation) reported on the arrest of a 19-year-old youth and his companion for raping a 14-year-old girl in a COVID quarantine centre where they were also quarantined. The same story in another daily offered more details, ‘Minor sexually assaulted, filmed at COVID centre in Delhi: Police’ (IE, July 24, Front Page) but unfortunately, the security of women patients at secluded COVID quarantine centres didn’t become a follow-up investigative story.

In September, two rape cases in Kerala - linked to COVID and quarantine rules - were reported on extensively, even by newspapers outside the state. In both cases, the rapists were identified as male frontline health workers. The first was the rape by a 29-year-old ambulance driver of a 19-year-old COVID-positive Dalit woman who was being transported to a quarantine centre. This was one of the stories in the Malayalam newspaper, Mathrubhumi (Thiruvananthapuram edition), ‘Can’t forgive them; COVID patient raped in ambulance, driver held’ (MB, Sept 7, Front page lead). In Malayalam Manorama (Kottayam edition) the front page first lead read, ‘Rape inside COVID ambulance’ (MM, Sept 7, Front Page Lead 1) and focused on the shock of the perpetrator being a frontline healthworker. The story was also the front page lead in the Bengali newspaper Ei Samay in Kolkata, ‘COVID positive patient in ambulance, rapist didn't spare her’(EI, Sept 7, Front Page Lead 3). In the Guwahati edition of the Assamese newspaper, Asomiya Pratidin, the story was headlined, ‘In Kerala, a COVID patient was raped by an ambulance driver’ (AP, Sept 7, Nation). This was one of the few times when a Dalit woman found specific mention in COVID and lockdown reportage in the seven months of this study. The second rape case reported around the same time in Kerala was related to woman health worker accusing a government official of sexually assaulting her when she went to his house to collect a COVID-negative certificate. ‘Woman accuses health inspector of rape; official suspended’ (MB, Sept 8, Front Page Lead 2) reported that the woman health worker was tied up by the junior health inspector in his house and assaulted for two days before she escaped and informed the police. In ‘Health inspector arrested’ (MM, Sept 8, Front Page Lead 1), the story mentioned that the health inspector threatened to complain to the police about the woman health worker violating COVID protocol when he raped her. This also brought to attention the misuse of power by people in authority

who were in-charge of implementing the strict COVID quarantine protocol rules and its impact on vulnerable women.

Several news stories focused on rising incidences of domestic violence being reported. ‘Cops, DCW rescue chained at home, husband held’ (IE, Aug 26, City) reported on a woman who was facing violence at home being rescued. ‘Wife tied to chair, face taped, beaten brutally, husband arrested’ (ES, Sept 21, Nation) was a news story about a woman found in a brutalised state in her home, tied to a chair, gagged and with visible marks of beatings. Neighbours had complained of regularly hearing shrieks from the house. The story mentioned that her husband was arrested. Domestic violence was hidden in a feature story on the difficulties faced by police stations as many staff members were infected by the Coronavirus. In ‘Police stations see rise in Corona infected, question over law-and-order maintenance’ (ABP, July 23), there was mention of how reduced staff strength of the police station had impacted people who came to file complaints. The reporter met a woman waiting for a long time at a police station to register a case. She told the reporter that she would not have come but for the dire situation she faced. Her parents-in-law beat her up for the slightest mistake. “I have tolerated it for a long time. But things are going out of hand and so I have come to complain,” she said.

‘More domestic violence complaints in red zones during lockdown: study’ (IE, July 24, Front Page) and ‘Family violence in Red Zone’ (ABP, July 25, Nation) reported on how domestic violence complaints in India were higher in red zones (COVID containment zones with strict rules of access). The stories quoted a new study by researchers at University of California, Los Angeles, who studied the pattern of complaints registered with India’s National Commission for Women and noted that domestic violence and cyber crime had seen an increase in the red zones

in various states. The same study showed that, on the other hand, complaints of harassment, sexual assault, and rape had dipped in red zone areas. However, no case studies or women survivors or experts were quoted in these news stories. This can be seen in conjunction with the story, ‘Serious crimes against women fall 50% in city’ (TOI, Aug 28, Front page) which reported on crimes against women falling by 50 percent during the lockdown period, in comparison to the same time period the previous year. The story quoted a report and no experts were interviewed. It is not clear if the report was only referring to crimes in public and if it had counted in domestic violence or factored in the difficulty of reporting crimes to a police station in a state of lockdown.

That the online education space did not necessarily offer safety at such a time was apparent in a Dainik Jagran news story from Lucknow, ‘Students also misbehaving in online classes’ (DJ, Sept 7) reported on how teachers were finding it difficult to handle male students during online classes. It mentioned that women teachers and girl students were uncomfortable with rude comments and ‘obscene’ acts of some male students. This made the women feel unsafe even while attending online classes from their homes. However, this story didn’t offer a gendered perspective of treating this as an act of sexual harassment and violence against women that demanded action and accountability.

IMPACT ON THE MARGINALISED

Reportage across the months of July, August and September 2020 made apparent the impact of heightened financial vulnerability during the pandemic and lockdown on the everyday lives of the most marginalised - young girls, sex workers, poor women, the differently abled and trans people. The story, ‘Marriage of underage girls on the rise in the pandemic situation’ (ABP, Aug 24, District), for example,

reported on the increase in the number of marriages of minor girls, especially in rural districts of Bengal. Quoting local district administration and NGOs, the story mentioned that five such child marriage had been stopped over two days in August in Diamond Harbour. Earlier, during the lockdown, local administration in Arambagh (Hooghly) stopped four of the eight marriages of minor girls that took place. Many more marriages had been stalled in several districts but NGOs suspected that many more might have escaped notice as district administrations were busy with the pandemic and cyclone relief work. The news report mentions that one of the areas where child marriages were on the rise was the Cyclone Amphan affected area of South 24 Parganas where many families had lost homes. Poverty and fear of sex trafficking was pushing parents towards arranging child marriages.

Another story, ‘Children of 'body sellers' (sex workers) face problems of education’ (LS, July 19), reported on how children of sex workers - who lived with their relatives in the villages and studied at district schools - had dropped out of school due to the costs and challenges of online learning. Their mothers in the city were unable to pay rents and make ends meet due to restrictions related to the COVID pandemic lockdown. The story used the Marathi word, “Deha vikray” meaning ‘body sellers’ to refer to sex workers. Despite objections raised by sex workers and their organisations about the usage of the word, Marathi news media continues to use the word. A story from Midnapur, West Bengal, “‘We want to study’ Shabnam, Indu request 'Police Uncles’” (ES, Sept 8, District), reported on how the pandemic had affected the lives of children in slum areas who were forced to beg due to extreme poverty of their families. When the police doing their rounds came across these young girls practising their alphabets on the road, the girls requested them to help them to study as they did not want to beg.

The situation of elderly women made it rarely to the news pages. ‘Sons leave mother’ (ES, Sept 8, Nation) was one such story of an 82-year-old partly disabled COVID positive woman who was abandoned by her four sons at a temporary shelter. On hearing the news, her daughter arrived to take care of her. The differently-abled made even less news though this news story, ‘Deaf need special masks. Will someone lend them an ear?’ (TOI, July 20, City), stood out as it unusually featured only women’s voices while highlighting the problems of deaf people. According to the news report, due to the prevalence of mask-wearing during the pandemic, deaf people who lip-read found it difficult to communicate.

The transgender community, their voices and issues, found almost no mention in news publications across the country. Even this news story, ‘Free food kit for transgender community’(MB, Aug 28, City), which reported on Kerala State Health Minister KK Shailaja’s announcement that free food kits would be supplied to about 1000 transgender community members with ID cards from the social justice department, was a small news item buried on the local news page that featured no voices of trans community members.

WOMEN AND WORK

The most important story in this period relating to women’s work focussed on the plight of women workers in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). The Indian Express front page news story, ‘Migrants back, women’s share in NREGS dips to a 8-year low’ (IE, Aug 25, Front Page) analysed data available on the NREGS portal and reported how the share of rural women workers had reduced as a result of male migrant workers returning home to the village due to the pandemic and taking up their jobs. The story also had data on the consequent dip in women’s wages. This story not only recognised rural women workers, it also

reported on the very real impact of the lockdown on their employment and income. It only used data and had no voices representing these women's stories. While several stories talked about the plight of informal workers, only a few mentioned women. 'Money is needed for survival, but how to raise it? Naka labourers, domestic workers in search of work after lockdown has been eased' (LS, Aug 27, Front page) reported that two months after the lockdown had been eased in Mumbai city and the suburbs, there were still a lot of workers, especially daily wage 'naka' (those who wait at the crossroads to be picked up for daily jobs) labourers and domestic workers left jobless. While domestic workers, who are most often women, tried to get employed, the continued strict rules of many housing societies restricting outsiders proved a hindrance.

How the pressure of falling family incomes during the pandemic adversely affected women was further made apparent in a story from Hyderabad published in Ei Samay. 'Middle-class women taking up surrogacy as a profession' (ES, July 21, Nation) reported that middle-class women were taking up surrogacy as a profession to support themselves and their families as the pandemic had drastically decreased family finances. The report gives few details nor explains how this was possible given that commercial surrogacy is now illegal in India.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

The health-related reportage in July, August, September focused a fair bit on the difficulties of women getting a hospital bed for non-COVID ailments, particularly childbirth, at this time. The news stories were more on the condition of individual pregnant women and did not centre on the larger problems related to maternal healthcare and health policy.

‘Minister Nemcha Kipgen is COVID positive, two dead’ (HLI, Aug 26, Front Page) was a report on the only woman minister in the then Manipur state cabinet (she later resigned) disclosing her COVID positive status and asking people who had been in touch with her to isolate themselves. A brief news item in The Times of India (Aug 28, Front Page) informed about the first female bus conductor to get COVID in Mumbai. This front page story, with a photograph, in Marathi daily Sakal, ‘A woman ran from the hospital fearing corona, whereupon the traffic police explained to her that it was for her health that she should return to the hospital’ (Sakal, July 19) was about a Pune woman who ran out of a hospital fearing coronavirus but was later apprehended at a traffic signal by the traffic police who convinced her of the benefits of staying in the hospital. Apparently, this story proved very popular on the online site of Sakal. Newspapers like Asomiya Pratidin had regular reports and statistics on its front page listing COVID-related deaths, including those of women, in Assam.

‘*Peeda: 45 ghante tak ICU bed ke liye bhakti rahi mareez*/Problem: For 45 hours, a woman patient kept searching for an ICU bed’ (Hindustan, Sept 7, City) was a report on how women suffering from kidney ailments, diabetes, and several other health problems did not get ICU beds easily during this time. A feature story in Manipuri newspaper Hueiyen Lanpao, ‘Pregnant women facing difficulties at the delivery stage’ (HLI, Aug 24, Front Page) mentioned that pregnant women were facing difficulties in seeking appointments at hospitals. No health worker nor any pregnant women were quoted in the story. Only the husband of a pregnant woman was quoted anonymously by the reporter. In ‘OPD slots to be linked to app in future: CM’ (IE, Aug 25, City), the news report mentioned how in the future hospital OPD services would be fixed online by pregnant women to ensure that they got beds in hospitals.

In ‘Pregnant Soni and Dhanjay will return by flight, while their scooty will be sent by Bus’ (DJ, Sept 12), a pregnant tribal woman travelled with her husband on a Scooty 1,174 kms from Godda in Jharkhand to Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh to appear for her second year Diploma in Elementary Education examinations. When the news was published in newspapers Nai Duniya and Dainik Jagran, a few social organisations came forward to help the couple and send them home by plane. This is one of the rare stories where mention was made of an Adivasi woman, though we read very few details about her. Meanwhile, an important news story, ‘3 new +ve moms at Nair Hospital treated for postpartum psychosis’ (TOI, Sept 9, City), was about how a few COVID positive women who had delivered babies were now being treated for postpartum psychosis.

The study found that little reporting attention was paid to issues relating to menstrual hygiene and health needs of communities that were not well-off. As this Delhi-based story, ‘Sanitary napkins for Re 1- but many don’t know about it’ (IE, Aug 23, City), showed what women needed was simple accurate information on available services and products that were critical to their everyday lives. As the news story explained, usually young girls picked up sanitary pads for themselves and even their mothers from government schools in Delhi which gave them out free. But with schools shut due to the lockdown, many women and girls had been forced to use ordinary cloth not realising that their neighbourhood Jan Aushadhi Kendras sold sanitary pads for Re 1 as part of an existing government scheme. The importance of hearing women’s voices is brought out well in this news story which interviews a mother and daughter pair about buying sanitary pads. While the 19-year-old daughter now buys pads from the market, the reporter quotes the mother as saying, “Obviously, we cannot afford pads for two women, so I use old pieces of cloth.” That one quote put the importance of the story right up front.

WOMEN AND STIGMA

Stories on the stigma and prejudice faced by COVID-infected women, their families and even recovered patients continued to be reported - with the stigma often leading to aggressive consequences. In ‘Corona recovered patient stopped from entering the home’ (ABP, July 21, District), a married female bank employee who had recovered from Covid was stopped by neighbours from returning to her parental home to the extent that they threatened to pour kerosene on the woman and her father. When crowds gathered outside her home, she went to stay with her in-laws even as her COVID-negative father was forcibly admitted to hospital by neighbours. Another story, ‘Neighbours threaten corona winner nurse’ (ABP, Aug 25, City) reported on the harassment of a COVID-negative nurse by her neighbours who either wanted her to leave her job or the neighbourhood with her family. Neighbours made everyday life very difficult such as making sure that garbage from her house was not collected, etc. The local authorities in both stories are portrayed as being powerless in this regard.

WOMEN AS HEROES

But a few stories continued to point out women heroes. ‘Without fear of COVID, these women bury the bodies of COVID patients’ (MB, Aug 24, Front page) was an interesting feature article about a group of eight gutsy women junior health inspectors who collectively pursued an unusual task. While maintaining full COVID protocol and wearing PPE attire, they collected the dead bodies of people who died due to COVID from the Thiruvananthapuram medical college and performed the final death rites. According to the news report, they took this initiative so that dead bodies were not kept in the medical college mortuary for long.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary for the media to recognise that almost every area of daily life impacts women and other marginalised genders disproportionately. At times of major crisis, such as the pandemic and the lockdown in this case, existing inequalities often deepen. This fact has been acknowledged and recognised by international bodies such as the United Nations system. It is important that all journalists and the media recognise this so that when they report, they use this understanding to do better, more in-depth gender sensitive stories.

In fact, a broader understanding of various subjects and gender will also help them recognise that there is a gender perspective in all stories and topics - be they about work, education, migration, health, disease, policy, economy or politics.

1. We recommend that the media actively cover more stories with an inclusive gender perspective and with women and other marginalised genders as protagonists, while also being conscious of minorities and other vulnerable groups among them. More efforts should be made towards not stereotyping or misrepresenting them. The media should amplify the voices of women and other marginalised genders as news sources and as experts. In fact, all newsrooms should maintain a database of women experts on different issues and use this proactively in all types of stories, not just those related to women.
2. Media reportage needs to move away from episodic coverage of issues that limit news stories to individual narratives or stand-alone events. It needs to provide a broader picture and more in-depth stories. More detailed follow-up stories to spot news reporting are necessary in order to bring in deeper

perspectives, including but not limited to gender perspectives. The aim should be balanced and representative coverage, not just repeating the language of those in authority but using that to question them.

3. Data and statistics add valuable layers to a story and there is an important need for gender disaggregated data to tell the story behind the numbers: for example, if more women are ill, but less get hospitalised – what are the reasons? Additionally, in reporting hard data, journalists should not forget the human-interest element. The pandemic coverage at one level became all hard facts and information and somewhere people's stories, especially women's stories, got forgotten.
4. We suggest more gender education and training of male and female media personnel at all levels - reporters, sub-editors, senior editorial staff. Additionally, such training must incorporate intersectionality, that is, an understanding of gender in relation to other axes including caste, class, religion, disability, sexuality, etc. We recommend similar training components to be included at mass communication institutes.

RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR THE MEDIA:

UN Women: Paying attention to women's needs and leadership will strengthen COVID-19 response

<http://bit.ly/3s1WQxk>

UNFPA: COVID-19: A Gender Lens

<http://bit.ly/3pmin1X>

UN Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women

<https://bit.ly/3arbh81>

UN WOMEN: The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19

<http://bit.ly/3jUotFr>

IMS: Paving the way for good journalism

<http://bit.ly/3asgw7z>

IWMF: The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News

<https://bit.ly/3auJnYZ>

GIWL: Women's Representation & Voice in Media Coverage of the Coronavirus Crisis

<https://bit.ly/3pNtYHw>

The Lancet: Covid-19: The Gendered Impacts of the Outbreak

<https://bit.ly/2NATBh2>

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Three organisations are responsible for this report: **Population First, UNFPA and the Network of Women in Media India (NWMI)**. We thank them all most profusely for supporting this important India-based study which brings together the critical themes of media, gender and the pandemic.

We wish to acknowledge and thank Population First for giving us the opportunity to conduct this study. We particularly thank its Director Dr AL Sharada for the trust she reposed in us and for championing us as we undertook, what we did not fully realise at the very start, this very massive endeavour. Thank you to UNFPA for sponsoring this significant research study.

We warmly thank our team of researchers from across India - who are all accomplished women journalists in their own right - who painstakingly monitored and collated data from twelve publications in seven languages and did not take offence everytime we pushed them to do it quicker. This was tedious work and we thank them profusely. In alphabetical order, they are: Chitra Ahanthem, Menaka Rao, Neeta Kolhatkar, Parul Sharma, Prachi Bari, Prachi Pinglay, Sruthi A S, Sudarshana Chakraborty, Sumita Jaiswal, Syeda Nazneen Hassan, Uttara Gangopadhyay, and Vidhya CK. Without the participation of these NWMI members, this research project could not have gone forward.

Access to news archives proved to be a very major stumbling block for the study. Even when we bought digital subscriptions, many publications did not offer access to their archives or did not provide it for the editions we were interested in. At such

a time, we are extremely grateful to all those who helped in offering easy and free access to media archives. So, our deepest thanks to Nandagopal Rajan, Editor (New Media) and Shekhar Suman at Indian Express Digital for giving us free access to the Indian Express archives; to Jayant Mammen Mathew of the Malayala Manorama group and to the librarian at the Manorama group in Kottayam for giving us free access to the required Malayala Manorama editions; and to Samrat Phadnis, Editor (Traditional & Digital Media), Sakal Group for access to the required Sakal (Pune) editions.

Our grateful thanks to so many NWMI members. Thanks to Rajashri Dasgupta, Durba Ghosh, K.K Shahina, Neha Dixit and Kalpana Sharma for suggesting and locating researchers. Many more thanks to Ammu Joseph and Laxmi Murthy for suggesting researchers and supporting us in pursuing this study with their guidance, encouragement and valuable critical comments.

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Finally, we both deeply thank each other for the others' patience and for this successful collaboration based on trust, many long hard hours of studying data sheets, writing, editing and coordinating all the research work. It has not been an easy journey to bring out this report and our dear families have borne the worst brunt. Thank you to them for living through this with us.

- Sameera Khan and Dr. Sweta Singh

TABLE:1

These tables show the month-wise distribution of all the news stories monitored in the study along with the number of stories related specifically to gender.

Total number of Stories relating to COVID/Lockdown monitored between March and Sept 2020: **6,110**

Total number of Days monitored: **514**

Total number of Gender (primary)* stories: **299**

Percentage of gender related stories: **4.8%**

* This study considered gender representation in two ways:

1. Stories where **gender played a primary role** i.e. news and feature stories/photo features where the issues, perspectives and voices of women and other marginalised genders were dominant and central;
2. Stories where **gender played a secondary role** i.e. news and feature stories/photo features where women and other marginalised genders and their issues were present but not in any central or dominant way.

TABLE 1.1 MARCH 2020**Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories**

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in March	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	7	180	2	21
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	116	2	4
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	85	3	0
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	74	3	4
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi +	5*	170	7	3
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	4 *	36	2	3
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	106	7	4
8	Malayala Manorama - Kottayam	Malayalam	2*	22	4	0
9	Anandabazar Patrika - Kolkata	Bengali	7	139	5	14
10	Ei Samay - Kolkata	Bengali	6*	54	7	0
11	Hueiyen Lanpao - Imphal	Manipuri	7	62	--	1
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	7	149	4	7
	Total of 12 Pubs	-----	73	1193	46	61
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=107						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=8.9%						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=3.8%						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

TABLE 1.2 (APRIL 2020)

Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in April	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	7	290	5	23
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	181	3	7
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	72	8	1
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	63	10	7
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi	7	162	10	2
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	7	69	6	2
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	115	3	6
8	Malayala Manorama – Thrissur	Malayalam	5*	89	6	5
9	Anandabazar Patrika – Kolkata	Bengali	7	171	9	6
10	Ei Samay – Kolkata	Bengali	7	66	10	13
11	Hueiyen Lanpao – Imphal	Manipuri	7	85	1	2
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	7	96	11	15
	Total of 12 Pubs	-----	82	1459	82	89
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=171						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=11.7%						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=5.6%						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

TABLE 1.3 (MAY 2020)**Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories**

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in May	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	7	177	6	21
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	195	6	6
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	137	12	1
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	58	8	7
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi	7	127	3	5
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	7	64	4	4
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	89	5	12
8	Malayalam Manorama – Kottayam	Malayalam	5*	44	9	2
9	Anandabazar Patrika – Kolkata	Bengali	7	152	14	24
10	Ei Samay – Kolkata	Bengali	7	79	14	6
11	Hueiyen Lanpao – Imphal	Manipuri	3*	16	0	1
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	2*	8	3	2
	Total of 12 Publs	-----	73	1146	84	91
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=175						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=15.2%						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=7.3%						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

TABLE 1.4 (JUNE 2020)

Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in June	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	7	128	5	11
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	58	1	4
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	56	0	0
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	43	0	1
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi	7	96	4	13
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	4**	21	0	0
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	74	3	8
8	Malayala Manorama – Thrissur	Malayalam	7	78	2	2
9	Anandabazar Patrika – Kolkata	Bengali	7	94	4	0
10	Ei Samay – Kolkata	Bengali	7	95	4	10
11	Hueiyen Lanpao – Imphal	Manipuri	7	26	1	1
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	5**	38	1	0
	Total of 12 Pubs	-----	79	807	25	50
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=79						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=9.2						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=3.09						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

TABLE 1.5 (JULY 2020)**Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories**

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in July	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	7	65	2	11
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	50	2	6
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	80	5	5
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	42	0	1
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi	7	110	4	7
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	5*	41	2	0
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	47	0	1
8	Malayala Manorama – Kottayam	Malayalam	5*	89	0	1
9	Anandabazar Patrika – Kolkata	Bengali	7	84	5	5
10	Ei Samay – Kolkata	Bengali	7	30	1	0
11	Hueiyen Lanpao – Imphal	Manipuri	7	26	0	1
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	--	--	--	--
	Total of 11 Pubs	-----	73	664	21	38
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)= 59						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=8.8%						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=3.16%						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

TABLE 1.6 (AUGUST 2020)

Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in August	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	6**	53	1	10
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	56	5	1
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	44	1	0
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	62	0	0
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi	6*	43	3	1
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	---	---	---	---
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	32	2	0
8	Malayala Manorama - Kottayam	Malayalam	5*	13	0	0
9	Anandabazar Patrika - Kolkata	Bengali	7	87	4	1
10	Ei Samay - Kolkata	Bengali	4**	20	2	0
11	Hueiyen Lanpao - Imphal	Manipuri	7	33	1	4
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	--	--	--	--
	Total of 10 Pubs	-----	63	443	19	17
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=36						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=8.1%						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=4.2%						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

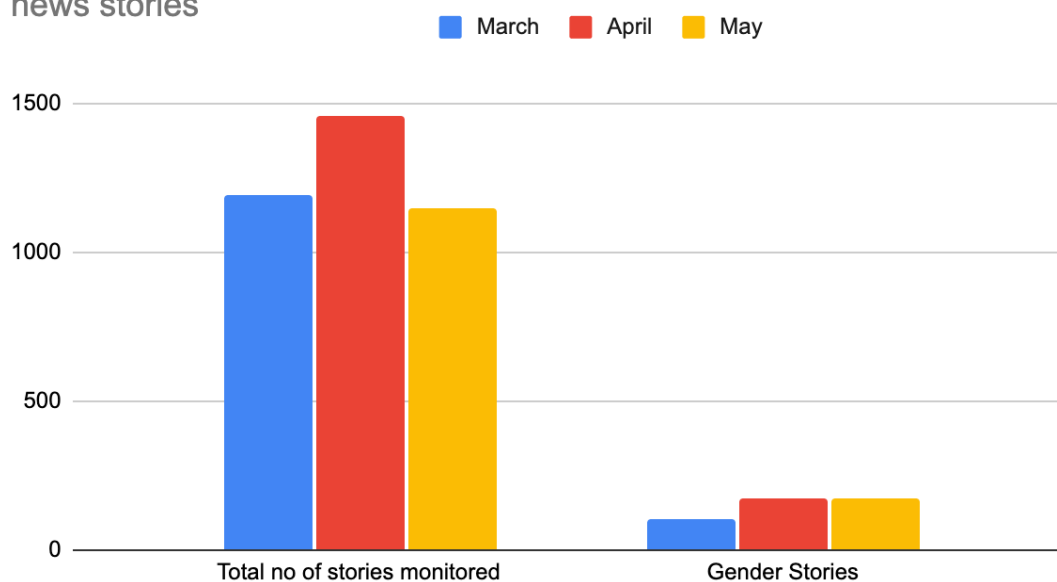
TABLE 1.7 (SEPTEMBER 2020)**Table of No. of Stories Sampled in 12 Publications + Gender Stories**

Sr. No.	Name of Publication-Edition	Language	No. of days coded in September	No. of stories/publ.	No. Gender (Primary) Stories*	No. Gender (Secondary) Stories*
1	TOI-Mumbai	English	7	62	1	5
2	IE-Delhi	English	7	41	1	1
3	Hindustan-Delhi	Hindi	7	39	3	0
4	Dainik Jagran-Delhi	Hindi	7	57	1	1
5	Loksatta-Mumbai	Marathi	7	49	1	1
6	Sakal-Pune	Marathi	--	--	--	--
7	Mathrubhumi-Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam	7	28	3	1
8	Malayala Manorama – Kottayam	Malayalam	5*	18	3	0
9	Anandabazar Patrika – Kolkata	Bengali	7	54	2	3
10	Ei Samay – Kolkata	Bengali	7	24	5	1
11	Hueiyen Lanpao – Imphal	Manipuri	7	18	0	1
12	Asomiya Pratidin-Guwahati	Assamese	3**	8	2	1
	Total of 11 Pubs	-----	71	398	22	15
Total Gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=37						
Percentage of gender stories (Primary+Secondary)=9.2%						
Percentage of stories with predominant gender presence (Primary)=5.5%						

* Other days not accessible for analysis

TABLE: 2

Monthly distribution of general and gender-specific Covid-19/lockdown news stories



Twelve Indian publications in seven languages were monitored for COVID-19/lockdown news coverage in March, April, May 2020. Of the total 1,193 news stories monitored in March, only 3.8 % of stories had a significant gender presence. Of the total 1,459 news stories monitored in April, only 5.6 % of stories had a significant gender presence. Of the total 1,146 news stories monitored in May, only 7.3 % of stories had a significant gender presence.

TABLE: 3

FINDING WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE COVID PANDEMIC & LOCKDOWN

This table brings together data on the **number of total sources (unofficial citizen voices)** and the **number of women sources (unofficial women citizen voices)** quoted in news stories related to the COVID pandemic and lockdown in these specific publications in March, April, May 2020. Three news pages were monitored in each publication for one week in each of these months.

Unofficial sources refers to ordinary citizens who are quoted by journalists. These are different from official sources who are usually people in government or official spokespersons in business.

*These were sources that were known to be identifiably male and female. We asked that trans sources be identified separately but no such sources were found in the study.

Names of Publications	March	April	May	Total
TOI Mumbai/English				
Sources (Unofficial)*	16	20	11	47
Women sources (Unofficial)	5	9	3	17
IE Delhi/English				
Sources (Unofficial)*	145	127	82	354
Women sources (Unofficial)	30	26	8	64
Hindustan Delhi/Hindi				
Sources (Unofficial)*	24	2	1	27
Women sources (Unofficial)	1	0	1	2
DJ Delhi/Hindi				
Sources (Unofficial)*	8	10	12	30
Women sources (Unofficial)	1	4	0	5
MB Thiruvananthapuram/ Malayalam				
Sources (Unofficial)*	1	5	8	14
Women sources (Unofficial)	0	3	2	5
ABP Kolkata/Bengali				
Sources (Unofficial)*	16	11	10	37
Women sources (Unofficial)	11	3	3	17

APPENDIXES

A. METHODOLOGY

The data collected for this media study was extremely current and ongoing (the COVID-19 pandemic and some sort of semi-lockdown state continued in many parts of India even as we studied the data of March-September 2020 in late 2020 and early 2021). Since we had witnessed the unfolding of this reportage first-hand as journalists, our assumption was that a gender perspective or a perspective that looked at less-privileged genders (women and trans people) was absent in much of the reporting, though some gender issues relating to them had received attention.

Thus, we looked at all the COVID-19 and Lockdown related coverage in one week (on three specific news pages) of every month from March to September 2020 in twelve publications in seven languages in order to assess:

1. Whether gender-related (women and trans people) issues and concerns were included in this coverage?
2. How were these included? What thematic categories did they cover? For e.g. Health, Employment, Education, Policy etc.
3. Were there themes that were noticeably more present and/or noticeably less present in this gender coverage?

In order to get a clear view of gender-related coverage, the study had to first look at the general overall news coverage about the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. This included identifying the specific issues (thematic categories) that the media focused on in its coverage of the pandemic and lockdown.

A code-sheet was devised for each researcher for each month from March to September. The code-sheet using MS-Excel was broadly divided into 6 sections:

1. **Six Basic details of the story:** (Date, Dateline, Whether the story is related to COVID/Lockdown, Story Page/Position, Name of the publication, Story type, Headline of the story).
2. **Sources and Byline:** (Byline Gender, Source Gender-Official and Source Gender-Unofficial).
3. **Coding Categories:** (The seven coding categories are: Politics/Policy/Public Services, Health, Education, Jobs/Livelihood, Migration, Violence, Marginalised Groups).
4. **Role of Gender** (The research's assessment of gender emphasis in the story).
5. **Photographs:** (Gender visibility in photographs, Photo Theme).
6. **Summary and Comment**

(For Coding sub-categories, see Appendix B: Explanatory Guide)

The sample includes news stories, features, photographs and photo features. It does not include articles from Opinion pages.

This research used qualitative techniques while also relying on quantitative information to interpret, describe and analyse data thematically.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research intended to study all twelve publications across seven months in seven languages (one week per month). However, some days were missed out in some months and some publications were not monitored in July, August and

September due to a variety of reasons including lack of access to some news archives (online and in-print form); unavailability of publications on certain days as no edition was printed on account of the lockdown; and inability of some researchers to meet data collection deadlines.

This research was also based on the monitoring and coding done by researchers from different regions of the country studying newspapers in different languages. Since the data was collated online in a shared database, there was no way to revisit the stories for verification of information. Hence, the study was dependent on the coding decisions of the individual researchers, who underwent an orientation exercise in order to fill in the required code-sheets.

The findings of the study are indicative only of the period monitored.

B. EXPLANATORY GUIDE

Sample:

1. One week (seven days) in each month from March 2020 to September 2020.

These are the dates chosen for the study:

March: 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28

April: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

May: 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

June: 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

July: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

August: 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29

Sept: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

2. Select **all** stories (except briefs) on the following pages: **Front page; City Page** (choose the main city page)/**District Page** and **Nation Page** (choose only one nation page).

City Page: The first/main city news page (and if it has no story related to the pandemic or lockdown, then go to the next city page)

District Page: If you unable to do the District page, it is okay but City page, Front page and Nation page are required

Nation page: The first/main Nation page (and if it has no story related to the pandemic or lockdown, then go to the next Nation page). This page should have stories from different parts of the state/nation.

MS-Excel Spreadsheets Code Sheet Guide:

A. **Date** - Give DD/MM/YY

B. **Dateline** - Give name of the District/City/the place mentioned in story dateline - where is this story being reported from, eg. New Delhi or Guwahati

C. **IS THIS RELATED TO COVID PANDEMIC/LOCKDOWN YES/NO**

Note: We are **only coding** stories related to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown and anything connected to it in terms of politics, government, services, healthcare, jobs, education, migration, violence, marginalised groups and women/girls/trans etc groups.

D. **Page:** Front Page - Lead 1, 2, 3; City page; District page; Nation page

Note: If you are unable to do the District page, it is okay but City page, Front page and Nation page are required.

E. **Story Type** -

- Is this a News story?
- Is this a Feature?
- Is this a Photo Feature

Note: Only tag Photo Feature when it is a stand alone photograph with caption but no news or feature story attached to it. There is a separate column for photographs attached to news stories.

F. **Headline** (if not in English, then provide English translation)

G. **Gender of Byline** - only if noticeable or known tag M/F/NK/NA (Male/Female/Not Known/Not Applicable) - In case of multiple bylines, take the next row/s.

H. **Gender of Official Sources** M/F/Other/NK/NA - No. of Male/No. of Female/No. of Other/ No. of Not known/NA - In case of multiple official sources, take the next row/s.

I: **Gender of Unofficial Sources** M/F/Other/NK/NA - No. of Male/No. of Female/No. of Other/ No. of Not known/NA - In case of multiple unofficial sources, take the next row/s.

J. **Story Categories (Politics/Policy/Public Services):**

1. NA
2. Central government
3. State government
4. Local government - Municipality
5. Civil Society
6. NGOs

7. Essential services - Tag this if it includes a bunch of services such as Transport + garbage collection + PDS etc
8. Transport
9. Sanitation - Includes Solid Waste management, garbage collection, community/public toilets
10. Food Security - Public Distribution System, Hunger
11. Housing
12. Other

K. Story Categories (Health-related):

1. NA
2. Health Data
3. Hospitals
4. Healthcare workers - (drs/nurses/ward staff, ASHA, others)
5. Testing/Diagnosis
6. Treatment/Medication - ventilator, clinical trials etc
7. Vaccine
8. Maternal healthcare - (pregnancy, antenatal/prenatal care services, delivery)
9. Abortion/contraception
10. Other - Includes anything Other in the Health category. It also includes i.e other diseases (TB, cancer, etc.) Mention details in Columns T and U.

L. Story Categories (Education):

1. NA
2. Schools

3. Higher education - colleges, universities etc
4. Examinations - (NEET etc)
5. Teachers
6. Dropouts - school/college dropouts
7. Digital Divide - Low speed internet, wi-fi access and educ
8. Online learning - challenges etc
9. Other - Includes anything Other in the Education category. Mention details in Columns T and U.

M. Story Categories (Jobs/Livelihood):

- 1.NA
2. Formal Sector - Manufacture/service industry, Public/Private sector, Corporate, Industrial workers, bank employees, government workers, etc
3. Informal sector - eg. domestic workers, contract, piece-meal work, home-based work etc
4. Small Businesses
5. Agricultural work - all categories of work in agriculture/NREGS
6. Household work - not by domestic workers/maids but by members of family
7. Labour Laws
8. Other - Includes anything Other in the Jobs category. Mention details in Columns T and U.

N. Story Categories (Migration):

1. NA
2. Migrants leaving cities

3. Migrants arriving home
4. Migrants -Transport
5. Migrants -Death
6. Other - Includes anything Other in the Migration category. Mention details in Columns T and U.

O. Story Categories (Violence/Safety):

1. NA
2. Domestic violence (includes all familial violence)
3. Child marriages
4. Public Violence
5. Riots
6. Police/State violence
7. Death
8. Other - Includes anything Other in the Violence category. Mention details in Columns T and U.

P. Story Categories (Marginalised Groups):

Is this story about any vulnerable/marginalised groups

1. NA
2. Dalit
3. Adivasi
4. Minority
5. Poor
6. Homeless
7. Single

8. Older
9. Disabled
10. Trans
11. Queer
12. Children
13. Other - Includes any Other marginalised group not in this list. Mention details in Columns T and U.

Q. Role of gender

1. NA
2. Primary
3. Secondary

Notes:

NA: Gender plays no role in this story at all?

Primary: Would you say gender plays a primary role (that the story is centered around women, girls, trans, lgbtq+) in this story?

Secondary: Would you say gender plays a secondary role (women, girls, trans, lgbtq+ are included in the story but the story does not centre on them) in this story?

R. If **Photograph** with story, what is the primary gender highlighted?

NA/M/F/Other/NK

NA: No photograph/**Other:** Trans, other genders/**NK:** Not Known or not clear in the photograph or both/all genders present.

S..Theme of the photograph - Broad categories:

- 1.NA
2. Politics/Policy/Public Services
3. Healthcare
4. Education
5. Livelihood
6. Migration
7. Violence
8. Other - Mention details in Columns T and U

T. Summarise story briefly

U. Comments

C. NAMES OF PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCHERS

ENGLISH -

- The Times of India, Mumbai - Prachi Pinglay
- The Indian Express, New Delhi - Menaka Rao

HINDI -

- Hindustan, New Delhi - Parul Sharma
- Dainik Jagran, New Delhi/Patna - Sumita Jaiswal

MARATHI -

- Loksatta, Mumbai - Neeta Kolhatkar
- Sakal, Pune - Prachi Bari

BENGALI -

- Anandabazar Patrika, Kolkata - Uttara Gangopadhyay
- Ei Samay, Kolkata - Sudarshana Chakraborty

MALAYALAM -

- Malayala Manorama, Kottayam/Thrissur - Sruthi A S
- Mathrubhumi, Thiruvananthapuram - Vidhya CK

ASSAMESE -

- Asomiya Pratidin, Guwahati - Syeda Nazneen Hassan

MANIPURI -

- Hueiyen Lanpao, Imphal - Chitra Ahanthem

D. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABP: Anandabazar Patrika

AP: Asomiya Pratidin

DJ: Dainik Jagran

ES: Ei Samay

H: Hindustan

HLI: Hueiyen Lanpao Imphal

IE: The Indian Express

MB: Mathrubhumi

MM: Malayala Manorama

NWMI: Network of Women in Media India

S: Sakal

TOI: The Times of India

LS: Loksatta

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

ABOUT US

Population First:

Population First is a ‘not for profit’ organization registered in March 2002 under the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950. Our key objective is to work towards gender sensitive and social development oriented health and population programmes.

We promote gender sensitivity and gender equality through:

- Awareness programmes on gender, health, population and social development issues
- Mobilising community participation in population, health and social development programmes
- Building Public-Private Partnerships for programme and policy development and implementation
- Working with influencers in media and advertising to change mindsets related to girls and women's rights and gender equality.

UNFPA:

UNFPA’s mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled ensuring rights and choices for all.

UNFPA works towards achieving the following three transformative results that promise to change the world for every man, woman and young person by 2030:

- Zero unmet need for family planning
- Zero preventable maternal deaths
- Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices

Network of Women in the Media India:

The NWMI is an informal collective that emerged through a long, slow, participatory, bottom-up process of network building that took forward earlier initiatives by media women in different parts of India. It was collectively conceptualised, unanimously endorsed and formally launched on 30 January 2002 in New Delhi. It is a voluntary, informal, non-hierarchical, participatory collective that has no institutional affiliation, infrastructure or paid staff. Decision-making has been transparent and largely consensus-based, following extensive deliberation.

Our authors:

Sameera Khan is a Mumbai-based independent journalist, researcher and co-author of the critically acclaimed book, *Why Loiter: Women & Risk on Mumbai Streets* which examines women's access to public space. A journalist for three decades and a former Assistant Editor with The Times of India, she has taught reporting at the School for Media & Cultural Studies at Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Till recently, she wrote a column on women and the city in The Hindu (Metro Plus) newspaper. She was co-author of the first Global Media Monitoring Project India Report (2010). For the last decade, she has also been a media trainer, guiding journalists on how to cover violence against women, particularly rape.



Dr Sweta Singh is an Assistant Professor and Course-Coordinator at the University School of Mass Communication, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. She has been a television journalist with Doordarshan News, New Delhi, and also worked with digital news ventures. Her Ph.D. thesis explored coverage of the Arab Spring by news television in India. She has presented papers in international conferences organized by IAMCR, ICA and AMIC in India and abroad and published research papers and book chapters in many areas of journalism. She recently contributed to the Network of Women in Media India (NWMI) report titled 'Panels or Manels? Desperately seeking women in Indian TV news debates.' She is currently contributing to the GMMP Project 2020, a global study that monitors the representation of women in the media.

Population First

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