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# Editorial: The gendered impact of COVID-19: communicating risks, hope, opportunities, and challenges

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

[The gendered impact of COVID-19: communicating risks, hope, opportunities, and challenges](#)

Disease outbreaks have traditionally exacerbated gender inequality and increased vulnerabilities borne by women, besides derailing hard-won progress in female empowerment. The World Economic Forum's 2021 "Global gender Gap Report" noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic "closing the [global] gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years." The articles in the current Research Topic delineate the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in complex and intersectional ways.

Kim et al.'s article explore the association between vaccine hesitancy and factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, income, educational attainment and neighborhood location in order to understand the intersectional impact of demographic variables on healthcare seeking behavior within the context of the pandemic. The findings from the article demonstrate how gender and its intersectional relation to poverty, race and primary care access, affect vaccination—hesitancy, adoption and adherence—and precipitate health disparities. The study provides a practical framework for planning health communication interventions specifically targeting the concerns of marginalized communities who face compound barriers while navigating vaccination adoption and adherence. Kim et al.'s research—like other work in the special issue—emphasizes the multiplicity of oppression experienced by high-risk and marginalized groups and demonstrates why we cannot always depend on universalized identifiers like 'women' while analyzing pandemic response. Hence, strategies and innovative approaches that endeavor to reverse the debilitating impact of the pandemic should not only focus on mitigating long-standing inequalities and disparities, but also aim to build an understanding of the intersectionality of the identities of the women at the center of recovery.

Mukherjee et al.'s research on digital activism during COVID-19 in India exemplifies how pandemic responses overlooked gender-specific vulnerabilities while creating opportunities for innovative advocacy communication. Their analysis of the #LockDownMeinLockUp Instagram campaign and Feminism in India's reporting reveals critical dimensions of COVID-19's gendered impact. India's lockdown policies

tragically trapped women with abusers while disrupting support systems, creating what the authors call a “pandemic within a pandemic.” This case study highlights three key communication challenges: structural patriarchal norms that normalized domestic violence, economic vulnerabilities exacerbated by women’s job losses, and the severe health consequences of abuse during confinement. Digital activism emerged as a powerful response when traditional media failed to address these concerns. Visual storytelling through Instagram transformed everyday household objects into symbols of violence, while feminist media platforms contextualized these experiences through intersectional analysis. Celebrity amplification expanded reach beyond traditional advocacy circles. The research demonstrates both the necessity of gender-sensitive crisis response and the potential of digital platforms to fill communication gaps when institutional responses fail. It underscores that effective pandemic communication must acknowledge differential impacts across genders and utilize diverse channels to reach vulnerable populations. Most importantly, the authors emphasize that advocacy attention must persist beyond the pandemic’s acute phase.

Saxena et al.’s research provides insight into the gendered impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on family life. Specifically, their study explored the impact on family routines and stress. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their study affirms that during lockdowns, women shouldered the majority of family-related tasks, including household duties and care-giving, which may have contributed to increased mental stress. In short, the lockdowns exacerbated the already gendered toll of household labor. While the female participants in their study adapted positively to these disruptions (i.e., they perceived changes in routines positively), the authors caution that long periods of high stress and intense caregiving without time for personal self-care and rest can lead to compassion fatigue and other adverse outcomes. Further, they found that women and men had different negative emotional responses to the lockdowns, with men being angrier than women. Although their study is exploratory in nature and their sample size is modest, their findings point to the heightened need for exploring if disruptions of family routines and resultant anger can lead to an increase in domestic violence, a phenomenon that was reported by multiple sources during the lockdown. Ultimately, this research underscores the need for systemic support and complex interventions that take into account gendered differences in stress responses, particularly in times of major disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kapoor’s work involves studying the meaning of citizenship in contemporary India through a partial, yet multi-perspectival view of the protest movement of Shaheen Bagh, culled from select readings on the movement. Through an examination of “expert musings” by four prominent academics, public scholars and thinkers, along with a re-telling of the stories of the embodied voices from the protest ground, this paper reflects on the contemporary discourse on citizenship in a critical moment in the global South COVID-19 landscape, along with documenting an important disruption in the constitutional history of contemporary India. The project highlights the confluence of vigilante citizenship and citizen-led protest against the backdrop of the Indian

state’s imposition of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the COVID-19 pandemic. In essence, the work is a testament to the history of dissenting Muslim women of Shaheen Bagh and their powerful dissent against the constitutionality of the citizenship laws passed by the current right-wing Indian government. By using the theoretical work of subaltern public intellectuals as framework to understand this particular local protest movement, Kapoor reinstates women’s historical struggles into the canon of world history, politics, communication, and legal studies. As acknowledged by the author, this study is neither ethnographic, nor derived from primary data. Despite that, this essay is able to capture a crucial moment from the COVID-19 pandemic time in India through the re-telling of the ground realities as well as the summary analysis of the writing of prominent scholars and thinkers like Romila Thapar, N. Ram, Gautam Bhatia and Gautam Patel.

To what extent are gendered disparities of COVID-19 felt across varied contexts—including vaccine uptake and hesitancy, domestic violence and digital activism, family routines and stress, and negotiating the meanings of citizenship of a subaltern population? The current Research Topic tries to answer these questions as well as identify solutions for a diverse group of women—often with intersectional and multiple marginalized identities—within the context of the pandemic.

## Author contributions

SD: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. SR: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MD: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. RS: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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