

Women's burden increases in COVID-19 era

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The triple burden endured by women in productive, reproductive, and community roles has been exposed and intensified due to COVID-19-enforced lockdown and quarantine restrictions. Researchers conducted interviews with women from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Australia that highlight intersections between COVID-19 and

gendered burdens, particularly in frontline work, unpaid care work and community activities.

Ros Wong, from Flinders University's Climate and Sustainability Policy Research (CASPR) group, was part of a team conducting research across four countries to understand the extent to which COVID-19 restrictions affect women and men differently.

"Women have had to endure additional burdens associated with both paid and [unpaid work](#), often without consideration or the alleviation of other life responsibilities," says Ms. Wong, who has completed her Ph.D. at Flinders University this year.

"Women were also tasked with the ongoing organization of their homes and families under pandemic conditions."

Ms. Wong conducted interviews with women from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Australia that highlight intersections between COVID-19 and gendered burdens, particularly in frontline work, unpaid care work and community activities.

"Our analysis during the early months of the pandemic indicates that women's burdens are escalating. We estimate that women will endure a worsening of their burdens until the pandemic is well under control, and for a long time after."

Ms. Wong is critical that public policy and health efforts have not sufficiently acknowledged issues concerned with the associations between gender and disease outbreaks.

She says the study's results will be fundamental to understanding the broader impact both during the crisis and during societal recovery.

"It is critical that public policy and health efforts are proactive in devising transformative approaches that address women's subordinate position in the context of this disease," she says. "In our analysis, we consistently identified that women's burdens across all spheres were not only heavier, but also more dangerous."

Under COVID 19 restrictions in Sri Lanka, women working in frontline health care roles say they faced discrimination in supermarkets when buying groceries, were threatened with eviction, and refused access on public transport.

In Malaysia, only the male head of the household was allowed to shop. Combined with only one person being allowed in a car, this meant that many women were confined to the house unless employed as a frontline worker. However, after a few weeks, this restriction was relaxed, mainly because men struggled to shop effectively and buy basic necessities required for a family.

News media in Vietnam portrayed COVID-19 restrictions as providing the perfect opportunity for women to relax, enjoy a chance for renewed intimacy and to spoil their men—this despite women having to wait in long queues to purchase food and their increased caring duties.

In Australia, childcare and schools did remain open to aid the many health and essential workers with childcare to continue working. However, this placed an extra burden on women as they negotiated school runs, extra housework and caring duties while still employed in essential work.

"COVID-19 restrictions for many women demonstrated once again that [women](#) continue to be disadvantaged during [natural disasters](#), war and global pandemics," says Ms. Wong.

The paper—"COVID-19 and Women's Triple Burden: Vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Australia," by Helen Jaqueline McLaren, Karen Rosalind Wong, Kieu Nga Nguyen and Komalee Nadeeka Damayanthi Mahamadachchi—has been published in *Social Sciences*.

More information: Helen Jaqueline McLaren et al. Covid-19 and Women's Triple Burden: Vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia, *Social Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/socsci9050087](https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9050087)

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