



ST PAULS COLLEGE

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EQUITY

**IN CHANGING SOCIETY &
RESPONSIBILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS**



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Chapter – 5

New Media Usage and its Impact on Emotional Health of Women during Covid Pandemic in Kerala – A Case Study

self affected
Dr. K. S. Rajini
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Abstract

Confinement to home alone has increased the psychological distress among people especially women which led them to emotional stress. Women are facing extra burden due to harassments escalating behind closed doors. Incidences and reports of violence against women in households have also increased at an alarming rate says UN. The study tries to examine the impact of lockdown on the family lives of women. It tries to analyze the condition of women, their psychological situations in families during the lockdown. In the study, the new media communication platforms used by women during this lockdown are analyzed; their preferences of communication tools are examined and also try to find out how they make use of new media tools to engage themselves during lockdown days contributing to their emotional health. The study also tries to explore the new communication platforms opted and used by women to engage themselves during these days to make them stress free or to make them emotionally sound.

Keywords: *Lockdown, New media, Psychological wellbeing, Emotional health, Communication platforms, online communication.*

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INTRODUCTION

The lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a potentially far reaching, long term impact on people all around the world especially on women. The impact of lock down has adversely affected women and children who have become the worst sufferers during this period. Job insecurities and financial stress has further made the situation more painful that has resulted in the increase of stress among people. Social distancing, quarantine process and economic uncertainties have further fuelled anxiety among masses.

Mandatory stay at home rules has severely affected people, especially women and children. Both the employed women and domestic engineers are experiencing a similar situation during the lockdown days. Confinement to home alone has increased the psychological distress among people, especially women which has led them to emotional stress. Employed women are facing extra burden due to change in job nature that has changed to work from home Schedule plus the work they do for their family. Domestic engineers, the home makers faced emotional imbalances as a result of over workloads at home and due to lack of communication possibilities with outside world. Incidences and reports of violence against women in households have also increased at an alarming rate during this lock down says UN.

Emotional health is one of the important aspects of mental health. It is the ability of an individual to cope with both positive and negative emotions and maintain a balanced state of mind. Emotional wellness of a person acquires great importance as it aids in the mounding of an individual with sound mental and physical health. During lock down, people experienced mental stress, physical illness and suffered other mental agonies that made their life harder.

Domestic violence against women has become a common phenomenon in India and in some developing countries which has to be seriously dealt with. Most often media too turns Nelson's eye to these issues. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown has increased the violence against women in households and United Nations has named it as 'shadow pandemic'. In India, the National commission for Women has reported a large number of cases and victims of domestic violence since the pandemic broke out.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have been increasingly viewed and promoted as a tool for the empowerment of women, particularly in developing countries. Social media is a powerful emerging tool of socialization across the world. India is experiencing a rapid growth in the ICT sector since 1990's and the use of social networking site like Face book has become one of popular ways of socializing. During this pandemic and lockdown, the technology played a crucial role in socializing people through different communication platforms. It enabled individuals to connect them with friends, family and society with the help of a variety of communication tools and platforms.

Social media especially face book acts as an active communication platform to share, raise the voice of women when their voice is restricted. Empowerment of women is an inevitable factor for moulding a developed society. Access to the internet, awareness of its technologies, usage of technological applications can provide women greater participation in the developmental activities of the society. The Internet has become an active tool or space where women could showcase themselves to the world involving themselves in various facets of society including health, education and other social sectors. It has become an active platform for women to express themselves and thus contributing to empowerment of women. Information technology and its free and fair access to all without barriers is one of the preconditions to achieve gender equality.

Need and significance of the study

The study tries to examine the impact of lockdown on family

lives of women, both domestic engineers and working women. It tries to analyse the role played by new media communication tools among women during pandemic contributing to their well-being, social status, and emotional status. It's high time to find new ways and approaches in addressing women's issues and problems existing in society. It tries to analyse the condition of women, their psychological situations in families during the lockdown. The study analyses the communication platforms used by women during this lockdown, their preferences of communication tools and also tries to find out how they make use of use of new media tools to engage themselves during lockdown days contributing to their emotional health. The study tries to examine the challenges/problems they faced during lockdown in familial set up escalating their mental imbalance and tries to offer solutions to the crisis.

Methodology

Online interviews were conducted among 100 women respondents including both home makers and working women. In-depth interviews and mobile conversations were also conducted among women respondents from Maranchery Panchayat in Malappuram District. Purposive sampling method was used to collect data. Open ended questions were used to collect information from respondents.

Theoretical Framework – Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and gratifications theory put forward by Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, in 1973 says that popularity of a mass media can be understood by analysing or identifying the factors underlying its usage. The uses and gratification approach was developed to study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to different media and their diverse contents that satisfy their social and psychological needs. Media substitution theory states that whenever a new medium emerges, it can alter the audience's use patterns of the older media. Social network is playing another key role in consumption of news as large numbers of users were sharing news on their social network page (Pew Research, 2014). The study analyses the new communication platforms

used by women during this lockdown, their preferences of communication tools and also tries to find out how they make use of both online and offline communication tools to engage themselves during lockdown days.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory proposed by Miller and Dollard with relation to Social learning theory put forward by Albert Bandura states that a person will learn a particular behaviour if he/she is motivated to learn or understand that particular behaviour through clear observations. The theory clearly states that people learn a particular behaviour by observing others, by observing the environment they live in and this clearly has a direct impact or influence on their personality development. People form their behaviours and opinions through observation from their social environment. This theory is relevant during this pandemic where technology plays the vital role in communication especially in social involvement among masses with the help of new media communication tools and technologies.

Technological Determinism

Technological determinism states that a society's technology drives its social and cultural development. Technology plays a vital role in social change. Technology has the capacity to change the way people think and react and can also influence how they interact with others. Social progress is connected to the technological advancement of that society and technology influences the political, cultural, economic and social aspects of a society and application of this theory that can lead to societal development along with the technological up gradation.

Findings and Discussion

The study tries to explore the new communication platforms opted and used by women to engage themselves during these days to make them stress free or to make them emotionally sound. The study looked in to the gratifications that attracted

and hold women to use different online and offline platforms of communication that satisfied their social and psychological needs during lockdown days. The study identified the communication platforms used by women during this lockdown, their preferences of communication tools and also tries to find out how they make use of both online and offline communication tools to engage themselves and maintain emotional stability during lockdown days.

Women and New Media Usage

High proportions of women surveyed recognize and value online platforms for communication such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Messenger as a space for commenting their views and issues and say that among them Facebook has become their favourite medium during these lock down days to express their views.

Majority of them used online platforms during these lockdown days to communicate with their family and friends. At the same time, the telephone, especially mobile assumes an important function in their lives, a way of maintaining long-distance communications with family and friends as majority of their relatives were in Gulf countries during this pandemic. Most of them used mobile thus as a way of easing domestic isolation. Though among minority, Telegram app has also gained significance during lock down days among women. However, there exists a minority who doesn't have access to these platforms who should be seriously taken in to account.

Confinement to home alone has increased the psychological distress among people, especially women which has led them to emotional stress. In depth interviews and mobile conversations revealed that the employed women are facing extra burden due to change in job nature that has changed to work from home Schedule Plus the work they do for their family. Domestic engineers, the home makers too faced emotional distress due to over workloads at home. However, they tried to engage themselves through different live communication platforms to balance their emotional health or

emotional status during the stressful days of pandemic. Women chose online communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook more as it was easy for them to use it. Women who didn't have accounts in Facebook have started their account to keep in touch with friends and to socialize themselves online when social distancing was a must. Zoom app and Google meet also gained popularity among some women as these two apps were chosen as platforms for online education for their children by educational institutions. Amazon prime has also been used by some women, though limited in number in order to make them ease by watching films during these stressful days.

The study revealed that most of them faced emotional stress during lockdown days as they were restricted themselves or forced to be at home. Family issues were on rise, physical tortures; mental tortures were also reported by women in some households leading to domestic violence. Some of them expressed their anxiety as they do not know how to handle their children who were psychologically upset as they were denied entry to playgrounds or social places where they once gathered to share themselves.

Online interviews and telephonic conversations pointed out that this lockdown has compelled many of them to install online applications in order to overcome the isolation they faced during this period. Most of them used these online platforms mainly for communication with their family and friends. They also revealed that they had more exposure to technology and online platforms during this period as it became a necessity. A few even had Arogya Sethu app installed in their phone as recommended by the central government to combat corona virus which points out that women were also in pace with the technological advancement. New media communication technologies played an important role in communication process among women. They have acquired more power to communicate boldly with the society in this platform especially during Covid pandemic days when social distancing was a must. The acquired skills involve:

Informational power

- ◆ Informational access
- ◆ Production of information
- ◆ Content generation.

Communicative power

- ◆ New communication channels and platforms for communication.
- ◆ Strengthened the power to engage themselves.
- ◆ Power to voice themselves.

Associational power

- ◆ Encouraged participation in community issues.
- ◆ Active involvement in online political groups.
- ◆ Active involvement in community groups.
- ◆ Encouraged collective action, activities of NGOs and other social organizations.
- ◆ Vibrancy of membership groups and collectives
- ◆ Political participation.
- ◆ Information access and acquiring rights.

Social connectedness and Representation

New media platforms have offered a space for women to communicate with the outside world, giving them a representation and voice in societal decisions and activities. The study identified the following motives for usage of online communication platforms among women during lockdown days that improved their emotional health.

- ◆ Social Interaction.
- ◆ Passing Time.
- ◆ Entertainment.
- ◆ Companionship.

- ◆ Communication.
- ◆ To ease stress.
(both physical and emotional stress)

Cyber security challenges, cybercrimes and violence against women

The women users also faced security challenges in online platforms including abusive comments, cybercrimes and other online abuses and violence when trying to express themselves which stood as a hindrance among them in using online communication platforms confidently. Patriarchal set up, rules, guidelines and stereotypes further prohibited them from accessing these technologies.

CONCLUSION

The use of online communication tools, technologies and platforms have encouraged socialization process among women during lockdown days, enhancing their participation in several facets of their lives promoting women's rights, emotional well-being and empowerment. The online technologies including social networking sites have offered a space for women to voice their views, likes and dissent with confidence thereby cementing their mental health and emotional wellbeing. However there still exist challenges that are gender-specific which deter women from accessing and using ICTs. Women's participation and awareness in technological progress is crucial for the development of a society. Bridging the gender digital divide is the foremost thing to be done in order to ensure women's equal participation in technological development and progress. Addressing imbalances in information technology access is the need of the hour to ensure gender equality. There should be stringent measures to combat online gender based violence that would discourage women from expressing creativity or expressing political voice online. Gender sensitivity is the pre-condition to be achieved in any developmental activities of society in order to promote inclusive development. Research studies must explore the needs, necessities of women users and

offer solutions to the problems and challenges faced by them in accessing and using technologies to ensure their participation in the national development process par with men.

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EQUITY in Changing Society & Responsibility in Relationships is a peer-reviewed collection of articles from the national seminar on Identification of Abusive Relationships and Prevention of Domestic Violence -2022 (NSIV-2022). The Two-Day National Seminar Identification of Abusive Relationships and Prevention of Domestic Violence -2022 (NSIV-2022) was hosted by ST PAULS COLLEGE in association with the National Commission for Women (NCW), Government of India with the goal of bringing together a cross-section of academicians, students, scholars, policymakers, activists, gender specialists, NGOs, and LGBTQI community leaders to a common platform to explore obstacles to a gender-just society and to identify the nature and occurrence of abuse, domestic violence, gender inequality, and human rights, as well as to present and discuss data on resolution principles and novel solutions to deal with the challenge of equity in Indian society.

The book also sheds light on Gender and Inclusivity in Media. The collection not only covers films (gender portrayal!), but also captures Women Empowerment, Child Marriage, and Human Rights Violation. This publication adds to the existing knowledge of analysis and representations of gender and inclusivity in the field of mainstream media and developmental studies. If you want to keep abreast of the changes in the media landscape, **EQUITY in Changing Society & Responsibility in Relationships** is a great reference point and is sure to captivate the minds of faculty, students and casual readers, of media, alike.

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