

Gendered Responses and Marked Inequalities: The Pandemic as a Revealer of Gender Injustice

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequalities are structural in our society: unequal pay, unequal distribution of household chores and family life, and violence against women remain major social facts. The field of gender studies has become increasingly important in the academic sphere. Numerous analyses have attempted to evaluate the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic through a gender lens, showing for example a more important role for women in family work during lockdown, a greater exposure of «typically» female occupations to the pandemic or an increase in domestic violence.
Memorandum 6 : overview of the studies and projects registered on WPRN database

Gender inequalities are structural in our society: unequal pay, unequal distribution of household chores and family life, and violence against women remain major social facts. The field of gender studies has become increasingly important in the academic sphere. Many analyses have attempted to evaluate the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic through a gender lens, showing for example a more important role for women in family work during confinement, a greater exposure of «typically» female occupations to the pandemic or an increase in domestic violence.

The studies reviewed by WPRN shed new light on the topic, with several studies having the particular interest of focusing on individuals' perceptions of the situation according to their gender.

Comparative statistics show that mortality is higher among men than among women, although women appear to be more likely to be exposed to contamination. Lockdown and in particular the closure of schools has led to an additional mental, family and household burden for women, which is unequally distributed. Inequalities are also visible in gender differences in emotional state and perceptions of the pandemic, with women expressing more anxiety about the pandemic.

The majority of deaths affect men but women are more likely to be exposed to infections

As illustrated by the data collected by the [INED platform](#), «the demography of Covid death», registered on WPRN, men represent the majority of Covid 19 deaths, the male-female ratio was 1.5 in France on the 45th day of the epidemic, the figures varying from country to country but always higher for men, up to 2.4 times more male than female deaths in Italy. As recalled by a [study](#) from the University of Oxford available on WPRN, the main studies on the subject report biological (differences in immunity according to sex) and behavioral (more risky consumption over the course of life) explanations for this differential in mortality rates. However, the study hypothesizes that these factors are not the only explanatory variables for differences in mortality rates. The author suggests that participation in active work determines exposure to the virus and thus the risk of becoming ill. Thus, he finds a correlation between the level of women's participation in the full time labour force and their level of mortality of the Covid: the more women participate in active work, the higher their mortality is in a country.

Thus, a higher share of female deaths would be an indicator of a higher level of feminization of work. The study points out that, on average, while women die less than men from Covid, they are more contaminated by the virus, due to greater exposure in the occupational sphere. These results correspond to those of a [study](#) from the University of Exeter available on WPRN which counted at the end of June the responses of 1500 individuals representative of the British population to understand the socio-economic and well-being differences between genders after 3 months of lockdown.

The study points out that women are twice as numerous as men to work in health-related sectors.

These sectors are the most exposed to contamination. As a result, they are globally more prone to contracting the virus than men because of their professional life.

The pandemic has accentuated gender inequalities within the family sphere, and women have sacrificed more of their working lives to cope with this work overload

While the coronavirus kills more men than women, its impact on society has served to highlight and even accentuate inequalities that disadvantage women.

The University of Exeter [study](#) found that surveyed women were almost twice as likely to have lost their jobs due to Covid than men. One of the hypotheses put forward is that they are over-represented in sectors more affected by the crisis. According to this survey, women have increased their contribution to household chores and childcare work by a factor of three. School closures have indeed led to an increase in work at home, for which women have assumed the main responsibility. These data is confirmed by a [US study](#) accessible on WPRN. This study shows that women assumed a heavier burden than men in terms of childcare during the crisis. Of the working mothers who responded to the survey, 1 in 3 said that they were the sole carer of children, compared to 1 in 10 working fathers. The study points out that women had to reduce their working hours more than men to cope with child care, some of them even to the point of leaving employment altogether. This reduction in professional working time to substitute family work is even more important when women are graduates. This data may help to explain the findings of a [study](#) from Emory University in the United States, which can be consulted on WPRN.org. This study shows that the productivity of female academics decreased by between 13.9% and 17.9% compared to their male counterparts over the period of lockdown, productivity calculated from all pre-print publications during the period. The additional distribution of unevenly distributed domestic workloads during lockdown is put forward as an explanatory reason.

An ongoing [Spanish study](#), cited on WPRN, for which access to the detailed study is not yet available, appears slightly more nuanced on these findings. It shows that in Spain the job losses were similar for men and women, and that although women continued to take care of the household for the most part, men have relatively increased their participation in household tasks. A gendered distribution of roles has been established, with men, for example, taking care of the majority of shopping.

Inequalities are also reflected in different emotional perceptions of the pandemic

Different studies have identified gender differences in perceptions of the disease. An [English study](#) reviewed on WPRN analyzes 3 million tweets posted in connection with the Covid according to the gender of the person posting. Women post more about their family, social distancing measures and health protection, while men post more about the political and sporting impact of Covid.

This study shows that women would be more aware of the dangers of the virus because they are more concerned about the health aspects and compliance with health measures. Another [English study](#) «Measuring emotions in the Covid 19 Real World Dataset» available on WPRN shows the limitations of using Twitter as a source to measure people's perceptions of Covid, showing that tweets do not capture people's emotional states and concerns in depth.

The study is based on the detailed analysis of 2,500 long and 2,500 short texts written by individuals on their perception of the pandemic. The results also show that women are more concerned about the impacts of the virus on their families and loved ones and men are more concerned about the overall social and economic impacts of the virus. Women express more negative emotions about the virus such as anxiety, fear, sadness and worry. These findings are consistent with those of the Exeter University [study](#) in the UK, cited above. The women surveyed expressed 81% more anxiety and 22% more feelings of depression than men. They feel the virus is more lethal at 39% and are more concerned about having the virus than men at 12%. Explanations given include greater exposure to the virus in professional life.

Inequalities mainly highlighted by surveys should be better quantified by statistical data

In short, if men die more from Covid, it is above all strong inequalities to the detriment of women that are highlighted by the pandemic. International studies carried out in various Western countries show that women have been more involved in household and childcare tasks. They have further reduced their working hours and have been more likely to leave their jobs because of the economic and family context.

These phenomena may explain the higher levels of anxiety, stress and depression among women during the period. It would be interesting for other studies to delve more deeply into quantitative aspects and measure the part of women affected by the various phenomena more precisely than through surveys. The theme of intra-family tensions and violence against women during lockdown appears to be an important topic that would also deserve in-depth studies.