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

Gender inequalities are structuring 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 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 subject, 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 (1). Lockdown and in particular the closure of schools has led to an additional mental, family and household burden for women, which is unequally distributed (2). Inequalities are also visible in gender differences in emotional state and perceptions of the pandemic, with women expressing more anxiety about the pandemic (3).

*by Victor Gallonnier for WPRN, with the support of the Paris Institute for Advanced Study and the RFIEA Foundation*



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## The majority of deaths occur in 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.



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[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 are confirmed by [a visible US study 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 as women are graduates. These data may help to explain the results observed by [a study from Emory University in the United States, which can be consulted at the WPRN](#). 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 confinement is put forward as an explanatory reason.

[An ongoing Spanish study, cited on WPRN](#), for which access to the detailed study is not yet possible, 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, as 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.



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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 research method 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 that are mainly highlighted by surveys and that would deserve to be better quantified by statistical data**

In short, if men die more from the Covid, it is above all marked 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. Other studies would be interesting to delve more deeply into quantitative aspects and measure the percentage 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 subject that would also deserve in-depth studies.

## This note is based on a number of resources from the World Pandemic Research Network

Ding, Hao «Gender Inequality in Research Productivity During the COVID-19 Pandemic». <https://wprn.org/item/466152>

A study from Emory University in the United States that analyzes the difference in productivity of male and female academics as a result of the pandemic. The study is based on research prepublications (41858 prepublications from 76832 authors from 25 different countries). The study finds that the productivity of female academics has fallen further (from 13.9% to 17.9%) compared to that of male academics. The higher the rank of the university, the higher the differential, and this gap is found in several other countries.

Kleinberg, Bennett «Measuring emotional responses to COVID-19». <https://wprn.org/item/459652>

A study from University College London which collected testimonials where individuals were invited to indicate their emotions through texts on the Covid 19. 2500 short and 2500 long texts were collected. In terms of gender, the results show that women are more concerned about the impact of the virus on family and friends and men are more concerned about the economic and social impacts of the virus. Both sexes expressed negative emotions. However, women expressed more negative emotions about the virus such as anxiety, fear, sadness and worry. The study points out that long texts are much more relevant for understanding the emotional state of individuals than short texts. Thus, the study warns about the use of data from twitter to understand the pandemic, as has been done in several other academic studies, which the authors argue does not provide a thorough account of individuals' emotions.

Quintana-Domeque, Climent. «Gender inequality in COVID-19 times: evidence from UK Prolific participants». <https://wprn.org/item/472352>

A study conducted by the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom based on a representative sample of 1500 people to assess the socio-economic and welfare impacts of the pandemic. The study found that women are more likely than men to expect re-lockdown and are more pessimistic about the state of the UK economy. One reason for this pessimism may include the fact that women have lost more jobs to the pandemic than men and that women are more likely than men to be in jobs exposed to the pandemic. The study finds that between February and June 2020 women increased their hours spent on household chores and childcare much more than men. No differentiated impact is found according to any other factor (age, professional situation, social class, ethnicity etc).

Zamarro, Gema. «Gender Differences in Couples' Division of Childcare, Work and Mental Health During COVID-19».

<https://wprn.org/item/479652>

A study carried out in the United States using a representative sample from the «Understanding Coronavirus in America» survey. The objective is to understand the differences in the impact of Covid between men and women within households. The study finds that women have assumed a heavier burden of childcare than men, resulting in an increased risk of women leaving the workforce.

Farré, Lidia «The impact of COVID-19 on work and time-use in the family».

<https://wprn.org/item/447252>

A study that evaluates the impact of containment measures in Spain on work and family time use. The survey is carried out on 7091 people with school-age children. It found similar significant job losses for women and men. The study finds that men are increasing their participation in household chores, including shopping. However, household chores remain mostly the responsibility of women. Women who have kept their jobs thus face a double burden.

Adams, Renee «Gender Equality in Work and Covid-19 Deaths».

<https://wprn.org/item/449652>

An Oxford University study shows that women die less from Covid than men and that this difference in mortality cannot be entirely explained by biological or behavioural factors. The study hypothesizes that the level of women's participation in working life in different countries is an indicator of their mortality rate.

Thelwall, Mike «Covid-19 tweeting in English: Gender differences».

<https://wprn.org/item/448752>

Study which counts 3 million Tweet concerning the Covid pandemic. Women tweet more in the context of family, social distancing and health. Men tweet more about sports cancellations, the global evolution of the virus or political reactions. The study concludes that women take more responsibility for keeping people safe, and therefore prevention messages should be directed at them first. Failure to impose bans on sporting gatherings sends the wrong message of social distancing for men.

Caporali, Arianna «The demography of COVID-19 deaths».

<https://wprn.org/item/445752>

INED's platform which records Covid 19 deaths in several countries, notably by age group and sex.