

Problems Faced by Women during Covid -19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Women Emigrants from Neendoor Panchayat in Kottayam District of Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has made unprecedented challenges to migrants especially women migrants who are one of the most vulnerable groups of this pandemic since most of the women migrants are working in the informal and social service sectors. Kerala is one of the highest numbers of women emigrating states in India. The focal point of this study is to find out both the social and economic problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19. To find out these problems, primary data were collected from women emigrants from Neendoor panchayat in Kottayam district in Kerala through snowball sampling technique. Since the problems faced by women emigrants in Gulf and developed countries are not the same due to this pandemic, this study also examines this difference.

Key words: Covid-19, Corona Virus, Emigration, Front Line Health & Social Services, Pandemic, International Migration.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most serious crisis facing by all over the world recently is nothing other than Covid-19 pandemic. Although it has made negative impacts on all the population, its intensity is very high in the case of migrants, especially women migrants. In the case of international migration, women comprised about 48% of migrants population (World Migration Report, 2018). Since most of the women emigrants migrate independently for work and majority of them are working in front line health and social services, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic are much higher on women emigrant workers than the male emigrant workers. Women accounted 70% of global front line and social service care workers (Foley & Piper, 2020). So, the responsibility of caring people who are infected by corona virus is on women. India is a leading country of origin of international migrant stock. In India, Kerala recorded the highest male and female emigration (Bhagat et.al., 2020). Of the total emigrants from Kerala, 15.8% are women (Rajan & Zachariah, 2019). Since majority of the women emigrants from Kerala are front line health and social service workers, the study on the problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are highly significant.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyse the problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19.
2. To make a comparison of problems faced by women emigrants to Gulf and to developed countries due to Covid-19.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected mainly from women emigrants from Neendoor panchayat in Kottayam district who are working in foreign countries during the period of Covid-19 and women return emigrants who lose their job due to Covid-19. Kottayam district is selected since it is the district in Kerala from where the highest women emigration takes place and Neendoor panchayat is one of the highest women emigrating panchayats in Kottayam. Sample size selected for the analysis was 50 from the first and second wards of Neendoor panchayat. From each ward, 25 samples are selected

through snowball sampling technique. Out of the 50 samples, 11 was return women emigrants and 39 was women emigrants working in foreign countries during the period of corona. An in- depth face to face interview was conducted from return women emigrants to collect primary information and a detailed questionnaire was used to collect information from women emigrants working in foreign countries through e-mail. The secondary data was collected mainly from online sources and reports relating to emigration.

4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Women emigrants are one of the most vulnerable groups affected by Covid-19 pandemic since they represent large share of informal services like domestic work, nursing and caring of old age people. Women accounted between 6 and 8 out of 10 foreign born workers in the sales and service sector in most OECD countries which are highly affected by Covid-19. At the same time, out of 11.5 million international migrant domestic workers, women accounted 8.5 million (ILO, 2015). Because of insecure contracts and inadequate legal rights, probability of income loss and abuses are high among these women migrants during Covid-19 situation. Their freedom of movement is also restricted by this pandemic. Since many women migrants are engaged in care giving services, they have to do overtime duty and suffer problems like limited time for caring children, doing household duties, high risk of virus infection, loss of job, lack of free movement and sexual harassment. So, the study related to the problems faced by international women migrants due to Covid-19 is highly significant. At the same time, the intensity of these problems are not same among women migrants in Gulf and developed countries due to the peculiar socio- economic conditions of these countries. Kerala is the highest women emigrating state in India. So, the main focus of this study is to analyze both the problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 and to make a comparison of these problems among women emigrants to Gulf and to developed countries.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Profile of women emigrants selected from Neendoor Panchayat in Kottayam district.

Out of the 50 samples selected for the study, women emigrants in Gulf constituted 39. Among this, 11 are returnees from the Gulf while women emigrants in developed countries are 11 and there is no return emigrants from developed countries.. Majority of the women emigrants are from nursing profession (58%). Women emigrants engaged in domestic work comprised 20% and the women emigrants doing other than nursing and domestic work are 22%. Most of the women emigrants are married(94%) and 66% of emigrants’ family reside in home country. 54% of women emigrants are at the age of 30-39 followed by 28% at 40-49, 12% at 20-29 and only 6% at the age of 50 and above.

5.2 An analysis of the problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19.

The major problems reported by women emigrants due to Covid-19 are analysed in the following table.

Table 1 Problems Faced By Women Emigrants From Neendoor Panchayat In Kottayam District Due To Covid-19

PROBLEMS		GULF COUNTRIES	DEVELOPED COUNTRIES	TOTAL
		Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS	Lose of Job	10.26	0	8
	Delay of salary	35.90	0	28
	Reduced salary	41.03	0	32
	Difficulty in transmitting remittances during lockdown	64.10	0	50
	Extra work without salary	75	0	70.59
	Overtime duty	45.71	9.09	36.96
	Fear of losing Job	22.86	9.09	19.57
	Insecurity feeling	66.67	18.18	56

SOCIAL PROBLEMS	Inaccessibility of health services	30.77	0	24
	Discrimination in protection against Covid-19	38.46	0	30
	Difficulty of travelling to home country	79.49	45.45	72
	Sexual harassment	12.82	0	10
	Anxiety due to Covid	84.62	90.91	86
	Difficulty of managing household duty	57.14	18.19	47.83
	Difficulty of raising children	45.45	22.22	40.48

Source: Primary data

5.3 Economic Problems faced by Women Emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19

The major economic problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are job loss, delay of salary, salary reduction, non-payment of salary for extra work and difficulty of transmitting remittances during lockdown.

The above table shows that of the total women emigrants under the study, only 8% are terminated from job due to Covid-19 and out of the total women emigrants from Gulf countries, 10.26% are terminated but no women emigrants has lost their job in developed countries due to corona. Majority of the women emigrants are terminated from domestic work (75%) followed by professions other than nursing (25%). No women emigrants are terminated from nursing profession due to Covid-19. Women emigrants reported delay of salary due to Covid-19 is also low. Of the total women emigrants, only 28% suffered salary delay in atleast one month of their duty during the period of corona. Although no women emigrants in developed country reported salary delay, 35.90% of women emigrants in Gulf countries had this problem since salary delay is high in the case of domestic workers. Of the total women emigrants, 32% received reduced salary due to Covid-19 pandemic and no one in the developed countries received reduced salary from their normal monthly salary. In this case also, salary reduction is low among nurses and high among domestic workers. About 56 % of domestic workers had faced this problem followed by professions other than nursing and domestic work.

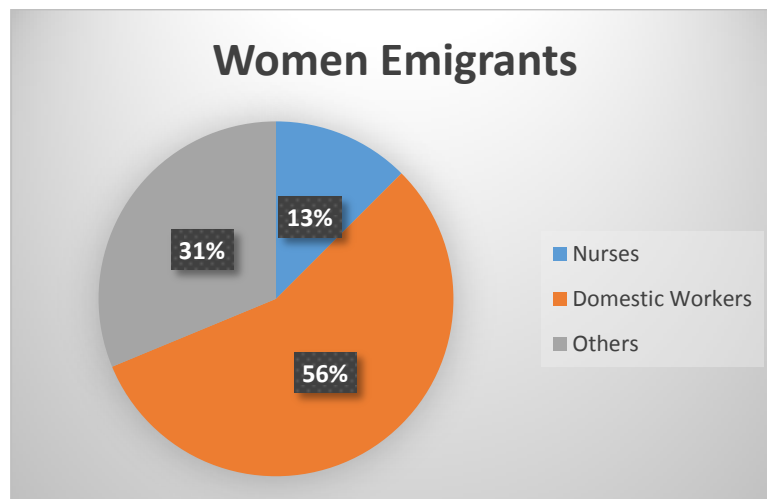


Figure. 1 Women Emigrants Received Reduced salary

Source: Primary data

50% of women emigrants have faced difficulty of transmitting remittances during lockdown. Here also, no women emigrants in developed countries reported this issue and 64.10% of women emigrants in Gulf countries have faced this problem. According to the Table.1,the major economic problem faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are non- payment of salary for extra

work. 36.96% of women emigrants had to do overtime duty due to the Covid-19 situation. Among them, 70.59% did not get any extra payment for this extra work. This situation is severe in Gulf countries since 75% of women emigrants had this issue. In developed countries, all the 9.09% of women emigrants doing overtime duty got extra payment. The above table depicts that the the key economic problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are non-payment for overtime duty and difficulty of transmitting remittances during lockdown. Another noticeable matter is that women emigrants in developed countries have no economic problems due to Covid-19. The major reason of this is all of them are professionally qualified.

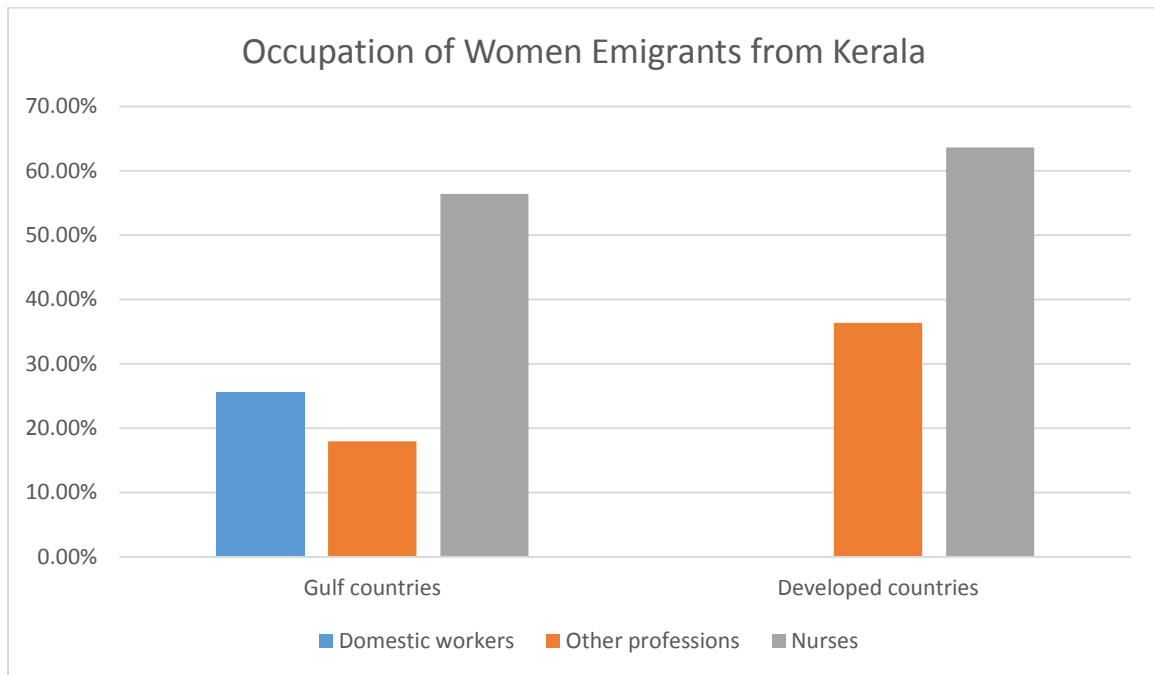


Figure.2 Occupation of Women Emigrants from Kerala

Source: Primary data

According to the above figure, in developed countries, no women emigrants are engaged in domestic work. All of them are either professionally qualified or nurses.

5.4 Social Problems faced by Women Emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19

The prime social problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are overtime duty, fear of losing job, insecurity feeling, inaccessibility of health services, discrimination in protection against Covid-19, difficulty of travelling to home country, sexual harassment, anxiety and difficulty of managing household affairs and raising children due to extra work burden.

As regards overtime duty, percentage of women emigrants doing overtime duty is high in Gulf countries and compared to nurses, overtime duty is high in the case of domestic workers. Of the total women emigrants doing overtime duty, 52.94% are domestic workers followed by nurses (35.29%). The main reason of overtime duty of domestic workers are increasing the cleaning activity since most of the households are afraid of affecting corona due to unhygienic condition. Only 19.57% of women emigrants have fear of losing job due to corona. Of this, only 9.09% has this fear in developed countries compared to 22.86% in Gulf countries. The lowest proportion of women emigrants who have the fear of losing job can be seen among nursing profession.

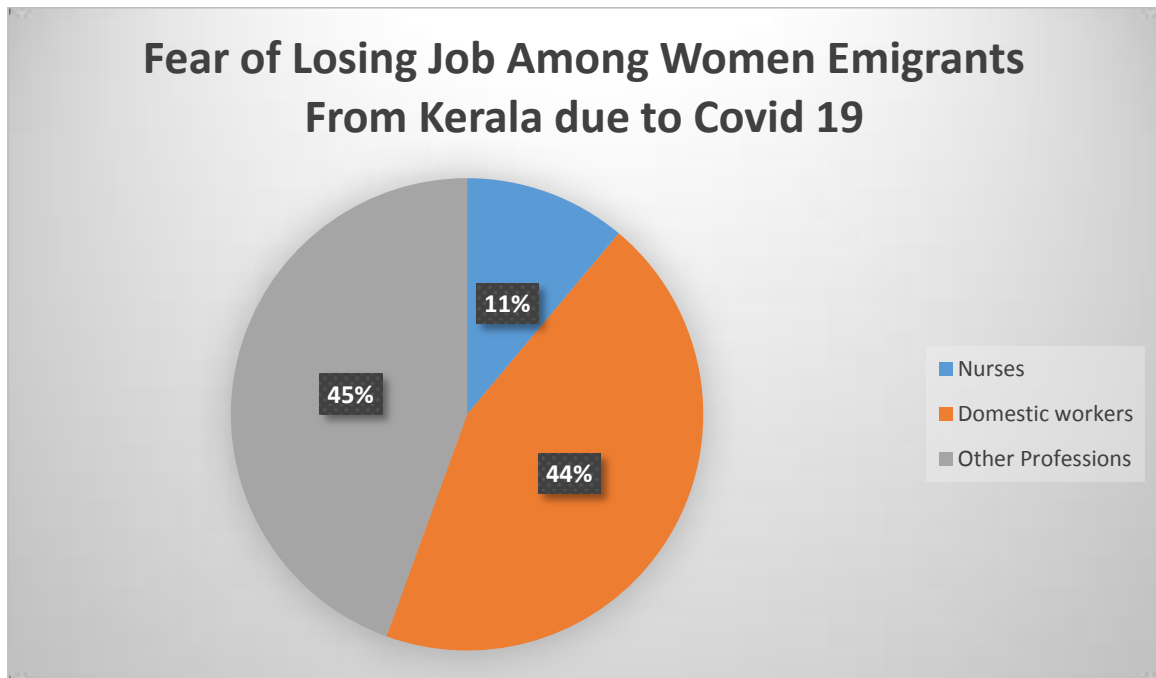


Figure.3 Fear of Losing Job Among Women Emigrants due to Covid19

Source: Primary data

One of the major social problems faced by women emigrants due to Covid-19 is insecurity feeling. 56% of women emigrants feeling insecurity in destination countries during Covid-19 situation. This insecurity is high among women emigrants in Gulf countries. Of the total women emigrants in Gulf, 66.67% felt insecurity in corona situation where as only 18.18% of women emigrants in developed countries have this feeling. It is noted that 24% of women emigrants have no accessibility of health services during corona situation in destination countries. Among this, all women emigrants in developed countries reported access of health services where as in Gulf, 30.77% has no health service accessibility. In Gulf, insufficient access of health services are high among domestic workers(83.33%). Women emigrants suffer discrimination in protection against Covid-19 is also very low and in Gulf countries it is only 38.46% and no women emigrants in developed countries face this problem. 72% of women emigrants have difficulty of travelling to home country due to corona situation and compared to developed countries this situation is severe in Gulf countries. The major reason caused by this difficulty is insufficient air services followed by air charge increase and quarantine problems. Only 10% of total women emigrants suffer sexual harassment and these are reported in Gulf and only among domestic workers. 62% of women emigrants have anxiety due to Covid-19 and one major finding in this case is that women emigrants in developed countries have more anxiety than the women emigrants in Gulf countries. The major reason of this anxiety is fear of affecting corona. 47.83% of women emigrants face difficulty in managing household duties and 40.48% face difficulty in raising children during Covid-19. Compared to developed countries, women emigrants in Gulf countries have more difficulty since overtime duty is high among women emigrants working in Gulf. Of the total women emigrants in Gulf, 57.14% reported difficulty in managing household duties and 45.45% reported difficulty in raising children. Closing of schools during Covid-19 is the major reason of difficulty of managing children.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- The social problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are higher than the economic problems.
- The major economic problems faced by women emigrants from Kerala due to Covid-19 are difficulty of transmitting remittances during lockdown and non- payment of salary for overtime duty.
- The key social problems of Covid-19 on women emigrants from Kerala are insecurity feeling, difficulty of travelling to home country and anxiety of affecting Corona.
- Although the problems like overtime duty, delay of salary, reduced salary, fear of losing job, inaccessibility of health services, discrimination in protection against Covid-19, sexual harassment are low among women emigrants. These problems are high among female emigrants in Gulf compared to the women emigrants in developed countries. Even in Gulf, all these problems are highly seen among domestic workers. Only in the case of fear of losing job, domestic workers and professions other than nursing are almost in equal proportion.

- 76% of women emigrants have accessibility of health care services since most of them are working in nursing profession. But 83.33% of women emigrants working as domestic workers do not get health services properly.
- Except the anxiety of affecting Covid, all other problems are high among women emigrants in Gulf countries than the women emigrants in developed countries. The major reason of this is that women emigrants in developed countries are more qualified than the women emigrants in Gulf countries.
- Problems of Covid-19 are high among unskilled women emigrants than among the skilled women emigrants.

7. CONCLUSION

Migrants are one of the most vulnerable groups in Covid-19 pandemic. As regards the impact of Covid-19, there are large scale differences in the male and female migration. In the international migrant stock, majority of the frontline and care workers are women. So, it is very relevant to study the problems faced by international women migrants due to Covid-19. In Kerala also, majority of the women emigrants are from nursing profession. According to this study, 78% of women emigrants from Kerala go to Gulf countries and only 22% go to developed countries. Although Covid-19 has resulted both economic and social problems on women emigrants from Kerala, social problems are higher than the economic problems. The major economic problems reported are non-payment of salary for extra duty and difficulty of transmitting remittances during lockdown and the prime social problems of Covid-19 on women emigrants from Kerala are insecurity feeling, anxiety problem and difficulty of travelling to home country. Another key feature is that all the economic and social problems of Covid-19 are high among women emigrants in Gulf countries than the women emigrants in developed countries except high anxiety of affecting corona. The major reason of this is that most of the women emigrants in developed countries are highly qualified than the women emigrants in Gulf countries. Among the women emigrants in Gulf, social and economic problems are high among domestic workers. This shows that the problems of Covid-19 on women emigrants from Kerala are high among poorly qualified women emigrants. So, Kerala should encourage skilled women emigration to minimise the risks of Covid-19. Women emigrants who are terminated from job due to Covid-19 is also very low(only 8%) since majority of them working in health services. It shows that although there are some problems due to Covid-19 among women emigrants from Kerala, their demand in destination countries do not show a decline. In the case of return emigration due to Covid-19, females represent small proportion than the males. So, there is high probability of increasing women emigration from Kerala in near future.

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