

## Gender- inequality in Agrarian sector during the covid-19 pandemic: A Study of the ‘Parawila Watta’ Tamil State in Monaragala District

<sup>1</sup>\*H.A.S.U. Geethanjalee

<sup>1</sup>\*MA (Reading) in Public Administration & Management, PGD (Reading) in International Relations, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka

DOI: [10.55559/sjahss.v1i05.25](https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v1i05.25)

Received: 07.05.2022 | Accepted: 15.05.2022 | Published: 19.05.2022

### Electronic reference (Cite this article):

Umasha, S. (2022). No Gender- inequality in Agrarian sector during the covid-19 pandemic: A Study of the ‘Parawila Watta’ Tamil State in Monaragala District. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(05), 270–274. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v1i05.25>

### Copyright Notice:

© 2022 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0 : <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> ), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

### ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic creates a severe threat to worldwide people’s lives and livelihoods. It is not just a health disaster but also an economic, social, and, most importantly, a gender-inequality crisis. Some gender-specific impacts occurred, such as increased violence towards women & girls. The research objectives identify the differences in gender stereotypes between families and the agrarian workplace, the key issues they face, and then provide recommendations to accelerate the advancement of gender equality through the agricultural sector. The research problem is, why did agrarian estate women become more vulnerable than men during the pandemic period? A research field based on the ‘Parawila Watta’ Tamil state (rubber & sugarcane cultivation) and people aged 15-50 category, both men and women. Information was analyzed using these qualitative and quantitative methods. Interviews and observations were used as primary and statistical data sources and national and international research as secondary data sources. SPSS software is used to analyze data. The research findings explained the increase of violence against agrarian women as covid-19 has exacerbated known problematic issues of family violence, financial problems, psychological problems, unnecessary pregnancies in the family and labour exploitation, salary issues, sexual violence and job insecurity in the agrarian workplace.

According to the Patron-client relationship, the woman is the employee on the plantation and in the family. Therefore she becomes more exposed and vulnerable during the pandemic. Men worked in public spaces outside the estate while married women toiled in the agricultural sector, and many men lost their employment due to the epidemic. But they didn’t join to plantations & forcibly took the women’s daily wage. However, their daily wage of LKR 740 was also reduced due to the pandemic, which was insufficient to support her family. Finally, it’s clear that the agricultural women face several crises as employees in the workplace and in the family. Therefore, they can’t escape from the effects of patriarchy even in times of pandemics and discrimination from diverse factors against women living in agricultural estates.

**Keywords:** : Agrarian Women, Covid-19, Patriarchy, Patron-Client Relationship, Vulnerability

## **Introduction**

The outset of the global covid-19 pandemic put a halt to progress towards gender equality and instead exacerbated existing gender inequalities across groups from labor to economic stability. When the situation was out of the ordinary during the pandemic, women who lived in rural estates identified with a number of crises. During the contagious virus plague, the agricultural woman became vulnerable in her job, society, and family. At the same time, covid-19 related documents issued by interactive human rights bodies reveal notable attention to how emergency measures have particularly impacted agrarian women and disproportionately put the enjoyment of their human rights at risk (S.De Vido,2020). Activating gender equality will enable agriculture to achieve the desired sustainable goals. 2020 has been set aside for reflection on progress toward gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (United Nations, 2020). Gender equality is critical for achieving food security, nutrition, and all other sustainable development goals, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

Even though it has been generally acknowledged that women are disproportionately feeling the input of covid-19 because of pre-existing intersectional inequalities & gender norms (UN women-women count, 2020), it's identified that gender inequalities are active in many agrarian states. These inequalities are slowing many countries' progress towards sustainable development goal 02 (SDG2) to 'end hunger achieve food security & improve nutrition & promote sustainable agricultural by 2030.' The pandemic is considered an important driver of increasing global food insecurity. Even if regional variations exist, evidence suggests that women have generally been more vulnerable to social and economic risk and harder hit by the consequences of the pandemic (Profeta, 2020; Alon et al., 2020). The background of that research can be identified as the study of the risky situation faced by the women engaged in agriculture, that is, rubber & sugarcane-related occupations in the Tamil estate called 'Parawilawatta' during the pandemic period (2020 – 2021) in Sri Lanka.

## **Methodology**

The research-based on both qualitative & quantitative methods for succussing the research. The main research field was the 'Parawilawatta' Tamil estate in the Monaragala district. The research sample mainly focused on the 15-50 age category of 200, both men and women in the estate. And also includes ten people from management authority; the specific feature of all the managers and hierarchy system is that it's structured around the male people.

Observations, questionnaires, and structured and unstructured interviews collected primary data. Secondary data was collected using the desk review of publications, statistical & other national & international research on gender, poverty, covid-19, development & livelihood. And also, information available on the internet & relevant websites were utilized to collect the secondary data. Patron-client relationship theory, patriarchy theory & the concept of environmental security provided the theoretical and conceptual framework. Data were analyzed using the SPSS software. Some ethical issues have been identified the conducting research. Although the agrarian women contributed economically more actively than the men during the pandemic, they showed an unreasonable fear of the man. They were reluctant and afraid to discuss certain matters.

## **Findings**

The world economic forum (2021) estimates that the time needed to close the global gender gap increased from 99.5 years to 135.6 years due to the pandemic. (State of food

security & nutrition in the world, 2021). Female employees have been disproportionately and negatively affected by the covid-19 crisis vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Men tend to be employed in highly Cyclical sectors (manufacturing, construction, hotel management, security sectors other minor employees). Although the men lost their jobs due to the covid-19 pandemic, the women had to continue working in the rubber or sugarcane plantation or farm nearby plantation fields. However, many men lost their jobs during the lockdown. Although they could get involved and support, they didn't. Instead, many men were addicted to alcohol and other drugs, so women were subjected to domestic violence.

Both of these agricultural sectors were owned by an individual, and male people handled their management section. Many of them were not residents of the Monaragala area and resorted to the most oppressive methods of obtaining the services of agricultural women. In the first wave, too, the farm was closed for a few weeks due to the sugarcane harvest season, after which the woman had to work extra two hours in addition to the scheduled time from 6.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. Still, her daily wage was 740/= and she was not paid for the extra hours. Men in such families couldn't get rid of the habit, although they lost their jobs like they had spent their daily wages on alcohol and drugs even before the plague. The result was the woman's salary was forcibly taken to spend on it.

Almost every family has between 4-7 members and the woman's salary is used for the family as they have no other source of income. But the pandemic left them not only in domestic violence but also economically unstable. Some girls between the ages of 14-18 take with their mothers to the workplace as they were exposed to an unsafe environment due to the pandemic period. On this plantation, the houses are very small and built with minimal facilities. Accordingly, women working in the agricultural sector became a high-risk category in their workplace as well as in their families. They had to protect their daughters from men as well as prevent their boys from drugs and engaging in illegal activities. Women who were constantly subjected to domestic violence by their husbands at night had to return to their workplace the next morning and had to face violence in the workplace management due to being late to report to work. So domestic violence tends to increase during large-scale disasters, and the covid-19 pandemic is no exception (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020). Depression, anxiety disorder, panic attack, post-traumatic disorders, and psychosomatic disorders are very common among this agrarian state women.

Thus, it is clear that lower-income and lower mental health tend to encounter a vicious cycle of systematic poverty. Also, the pandemic situation has pushed pregnant agrarian workers towards more stress. Some women engaged in agricultural work regardless of pregnancy because they were mostly mothers at that time. According to the woman A, she explained what difficulties she had to face during the pandemic period,

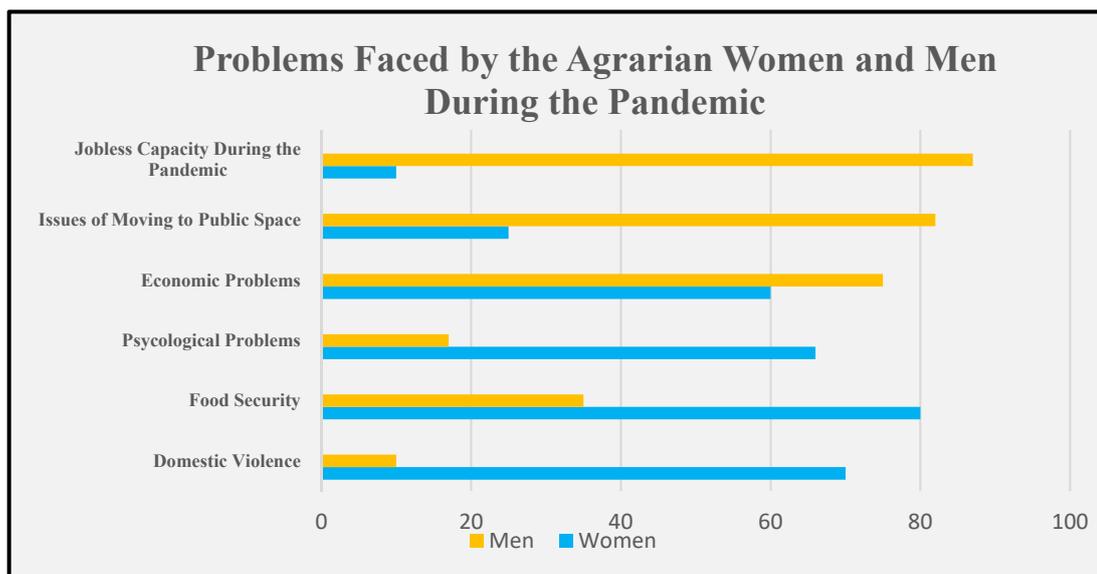
“I am 35 years woman and I have 03 children. I have been working in a rubber plantation since I was 17 years old. The result brings me lots of trouble. By this time, I was 5 months pregnant. I still go to work in the nursery as much as I can. Now, I'm tired and disappointed of living.”

Many of these women were reluctant to comment on their husbands, and although they wanted to come to society outside of the agrarian state, it was clear that they didn't have the freedom or ability to do so. Based on the information obtained from the research sample, the problems they face in their families and the field of the plantation as workers can be analyzed.

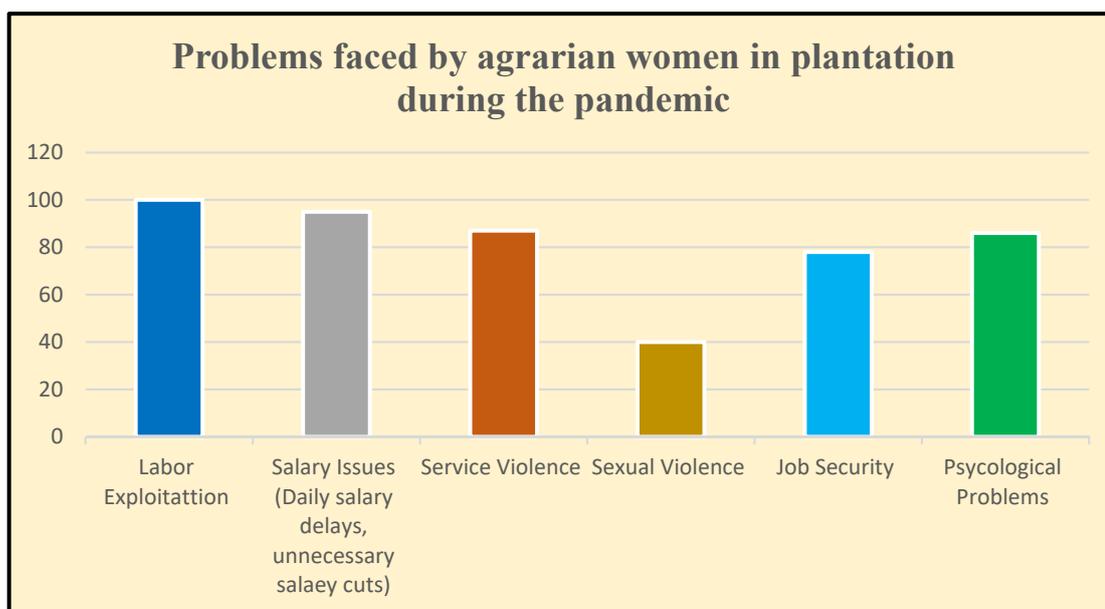
Thus, it's clear that out of the 200 men and agrarian married women used as the research sample, almost all of them faced several problems in the family, especially in their field of agriculture rather than the men. It's clear that the pandemic has been a major factor behind that situation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be identified covid-19 pandemic has held a magnifying glass to gender inequalities and, in doing so, has revealed cracks across many domains. In doing so, one thing is abundantly clear, the gender stereotypes, roles and expectations underlying these inequalities are not sustainable and can cause undue harm, especially during times of crisis. There can be identified agrarian state-society “He – Cessions” followed by “She – Recoveries,” where female agrarian plantation forms the backbone of their economic recovery.



Sample Survey, 2022



Sample Survey, 2022

**References:**

- Del – Boca, D., Oggero N. & Profeta P.** (2021) Did covid-19 affect the division of labor within the household? Evidence from two waves of the pandemic in Italy, covid economics. (Available at: <https://www.iza.org>) (Accessed: 12 December 2021).
- Calo, X., Occhinzi, R. & Profeta P.** (2021) Covid-19 & its economic impact on women and women's poverty, FEMM European Parliament: Policy department for citizen's rights and constitutional affairs. (Available at : <https://www.europarl.europa.eu>) (Accessed: 16 December 2021).
- United Nations. (2020) Policy brief:** The impact of covid-19 on women, (Available at: <https://www.un.org>) (Accessed: 20 December 2021).
- FAO. (2020) Gender, Covid-19 and food systems – civil society and indigenous** (Available at: [http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/new\\_gender-covid-19-and-food-systems-october-2020\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/new_gender-covid-19-and-food-systems-october-2020_compressed.pdf)) (Accessed: 03 January 2022)
- De. Vido, S.** (2020) Gender inequalities and violence against women's health during the covid-19 pandemic: an international law perspective, Biolaw journal – Rivista Di Biodiritto; (3) 77 – 105 (Available at : <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org>) (Accessed : 26 January 2022)
- Sachs, E.C. and Tickamyer, A.R.** (eds) (2022) Gender, food and covid-19 global stories of harm and hope. Routledge