

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FAMILIES IN INDIA



SUMMARY

In this brief, we examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and the familial impact of COVID-19. The survey explored the pandemic's impact on families more specifically, its' impact on the loss of income, reported, health deterioration, missed hospital appointments, children's education, family stress and conflict, and family relations.

The most notable impacts reported included disturbances in children's education, loss of income, and improved family relations. A low percentage of respondents reported health impacts including health deterioration and missed hospital appointments.

ABOUT

COVID-19 has emerged as a serious challenge for all countries around the globe, especially for those individuals residing in low- and middle-income countries. In India, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged suddenly - affecting individuals and households of all strata and region. Lockdown, physical distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions have led to reverse migration and consequently reduced the workforce across all economic sectors. Service sector workers have lost their jobs, whereas many others were asked to work from home with lower pay. Furthermore, the social distancing to prevent the spread of pandemic has been linked to increased stigma, discrimination and poverty among the lower section of society.

Initially in India, COVID 19 was limited to cities and urban areas but eventually it spread from urban to rural populations and from identified high-risk groups to the general population. COVID 19 has restricted the free interaction and movement of individuals, and hence its impact reaches far beyond the health sector with severe socioeconomic consequences.

This project explored the social impacts of COVID-19 on individuals and households and its objectives included:

- (1) To document the level of information, awareness and changes in social behaviour with regards to COVID-19;

- (2) To identify the perceptions, myths and the misconceptions associated with COVID-19;
- (3) To assess the nature of influence of COVID-19 on the social life and livelihood of individuals and families;
- (4) To identify the challenges and provide recommendations for social work interventions

METHODS

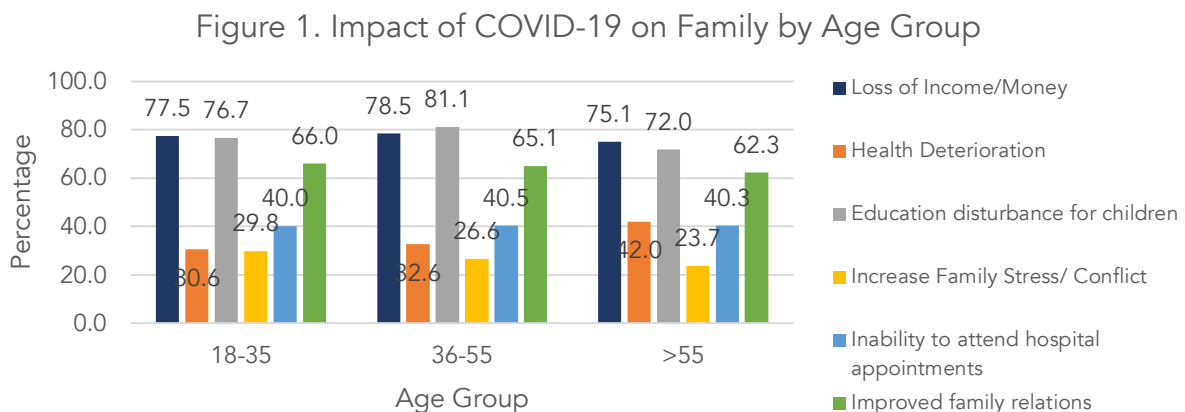
A total of 4,814 households in the State of Maharashtra participated in the survey. To assess the impact of COVID-19 on individual families, the survey examined the loss of income, reported deterioration of health, hospital appointments, children's education, family stress and conflict, and family relations. Survey Data were collected between August – September 2020. The questionnaire was drafted in English and translated into Marathi.

Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between reported familial impact and respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, including age group, gender, education, religion, family status, occupation, caste and geographic residence.

RESULTS

Familial Impact by Age Group

Most respondents, regardless of their age group, reported income loss and disturbances in their children’s education as a result of COVID-19. Across all age groups, those impacts less likely to be reported included deterioration in health and family stress and conflict. Furthermore, improved family relations were documented across all age groups (Figure 1).

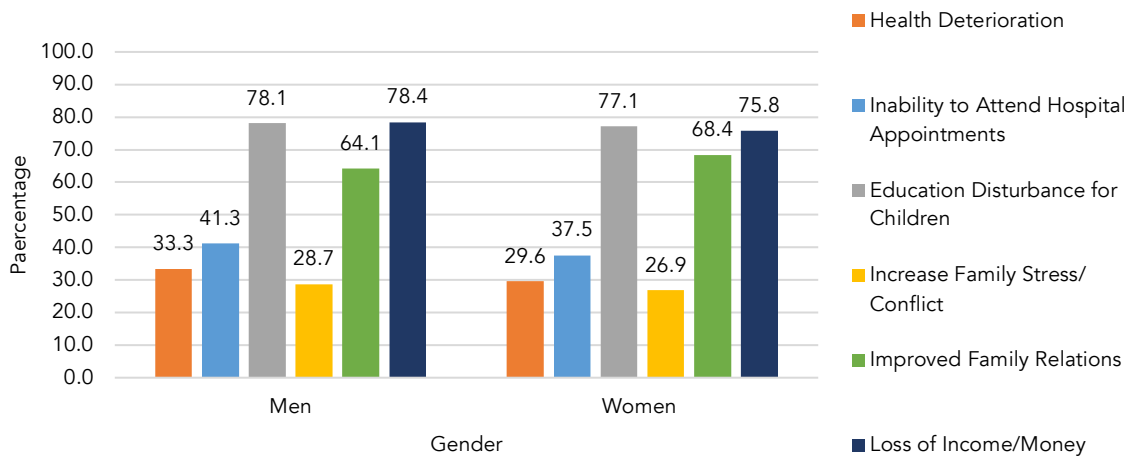


Familial Impact by Gender

Overall, a high percentage of survey respondents, regardless of their gender identity were less likely to report experiencing health deterioration, having missed hospital appointments, or

increases in family stress or conflict. Across both genders (Figure 2), respondents were most likely to report improvements in family relations. With regard to income, both men (79%) and women (78% male, 76% female) reported having lost income due to COVID-19, education disturbances for children (78% male, 77% female) and improved family relations (64% male, 68% female).

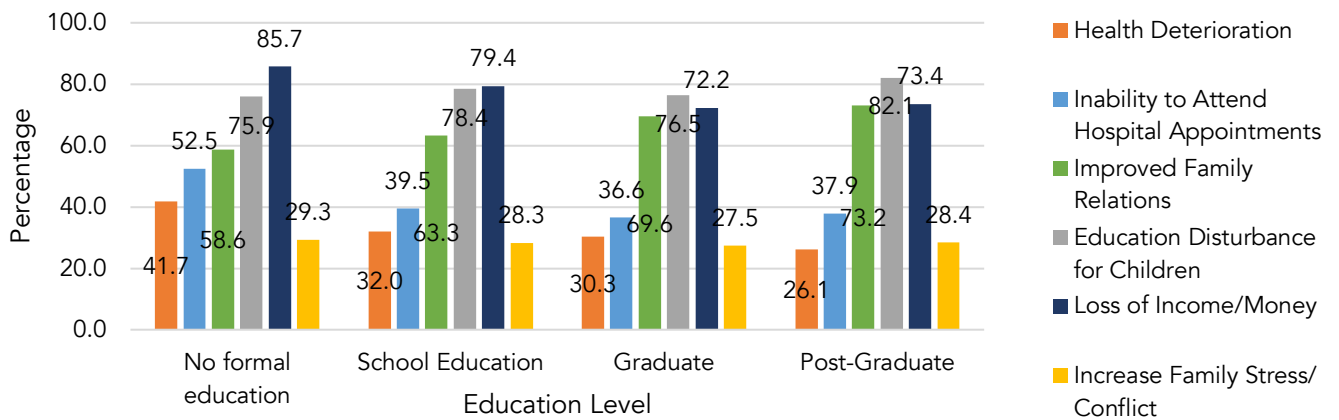
Figure 2. Impact of COVID-19 on Family by Gender



Familial Impact by Education

Regardless of educational background, a high percentage of survey respondents reported income loss and educational disturbances for children. Positive impacts of COVID-19 included respondents reports of improved family relations regardless of educational background. Last, respondents reporting having no formal education (53%) were most likely to report having missed hospital appointments (Figure 3).

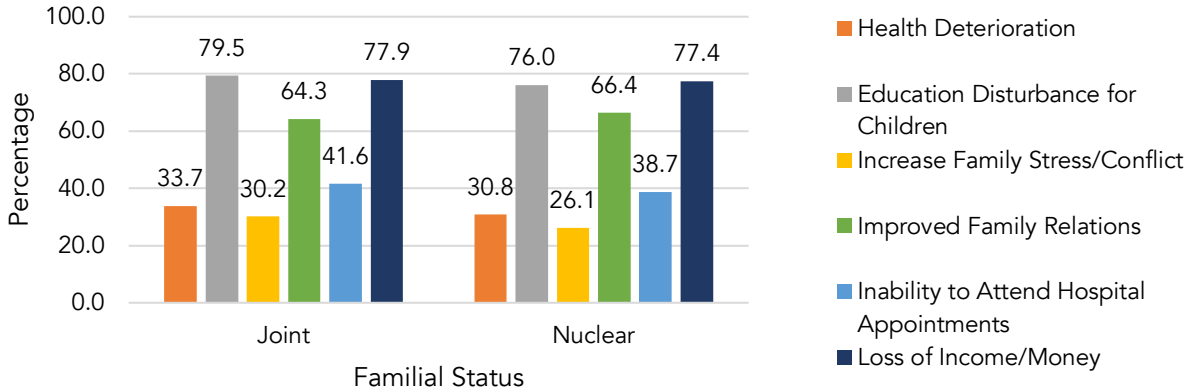
Figure 3. Impact of COVID-19 on Family by Education



Familial Impact by Family Status

Overall, a higher percentage of respondents, regardless of family status, reported COVID-19 had minimal impact on health deterioration, ability to attend hospital appointments, and increased family stress/conflict. Across joint and nuclear families and consistent with previous findings, a high percentage of respondents reported improved family relations, education disturbances, and income loss as a result of COVID-19 (Figure 4).

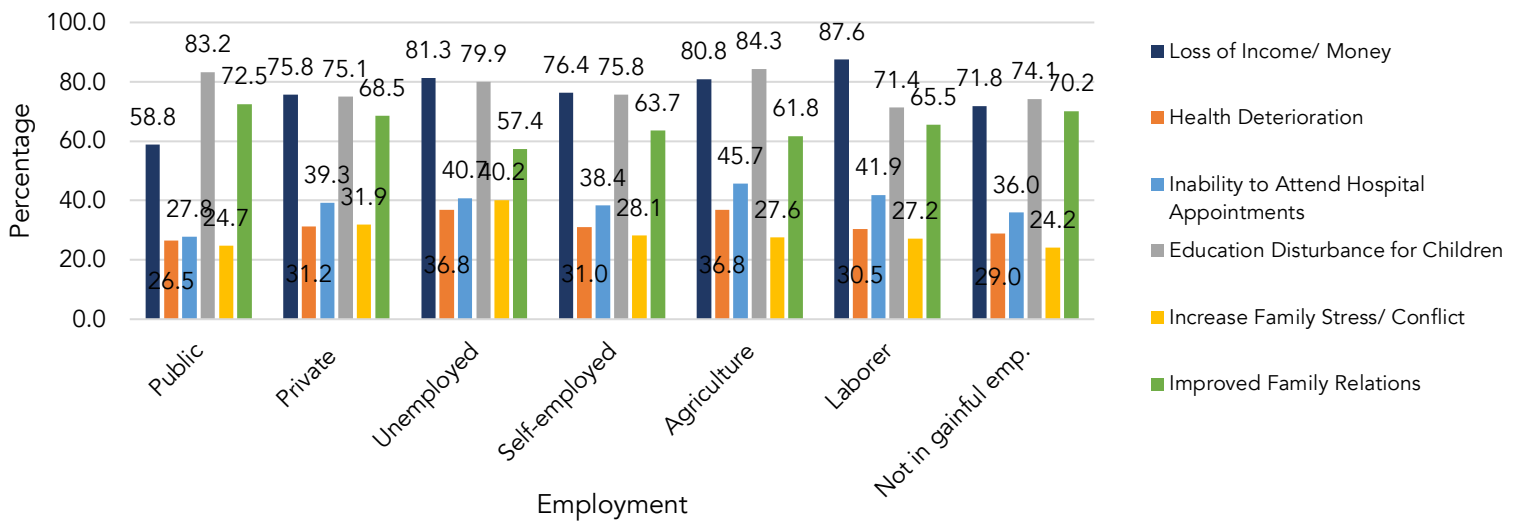
Figure 4. Impact of COVID-19 on Family by Family Status



Familial Impact by Occupation

Regardless of occupation status, a higher percentage of respondents reported COVID-19 impacted their income, disturbed children's education, and improved family relations. Deterioration in health, missing hospital appointments, and increased familial stress and conflict were least likely to be reported (Figure 5).

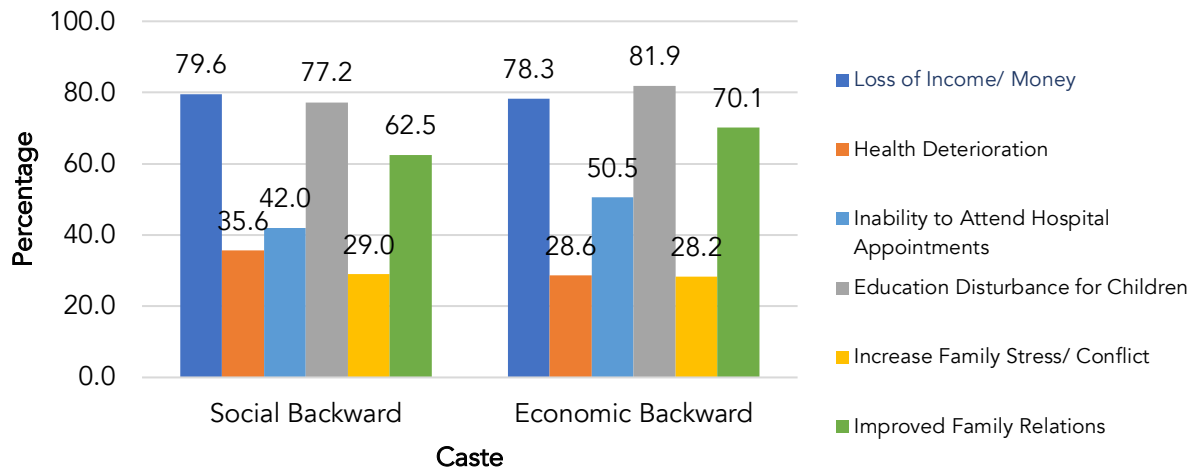
Figure 5. Impact of COVID-19 on Family by Employment



Familial Impact by Caste

Consistent with previous findings, both respondents in the social backward and economic backward caste reported COVID-19 to have impacts on loss of income, children’s educational disturbances, and improved family relations. Fifty-one percent of respondents in the economic backward caste reported an inability to attend hospital appointments compared to 42% of respondents in the social backward caste (Figure 6).

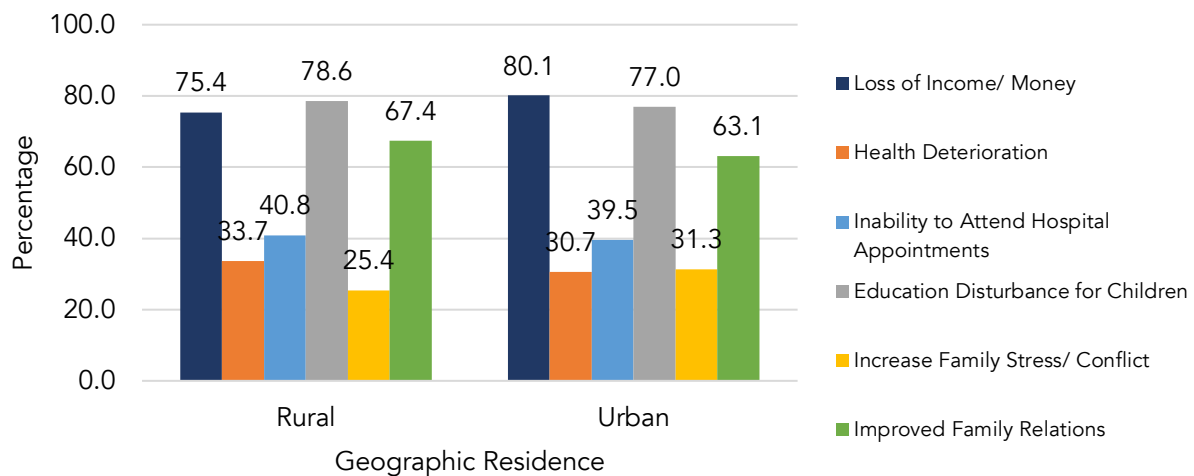
Figure 6. Impact of COVID-19 on Family by Caste



Familial Impact by Geographic Residence

Respondents of rural and urban areas reported COVID-19 had impacted their incomes (75% rural, 80% urban), children’s education (79% rural, 77% urban) and improved family relations (67% rural, 63% urban). Less likely to be reported among respondents included impacts as related to health deterioration, ability to attend hospital appointments, and increased family stress or conflict (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Impact of COVID-19 on Family by Geographic Residence



DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

Findings across sociodemographic categories reveal consistencies when looking at the familial impacts of COVID-19. For example, respondents were most likely to report loss of income and educational disturbances for children. The Indian rural infrastructure and internet connectivity is not very conducive for online education or working from home. Therefore, the findings indicate the impact on individuals and households at multiple levels.

Interestingly, however, decrease in familial stress were observed and improved familial relations reported. Traditionally multi-generational patriarchal joint families have been the norm in India. Family members who migrate for jobs always join their family for the feasts, festivals and family functions. In the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, members returned to their villages and in the difficult situation most of them took resort in family support system. These findings reveal that when considering the post-pandemic situation, the family support system can be further strengthened to overcome the traumatic conditions that members have gone through.



This research brief is a collaborative research brief series on a project conducted by the Centre for Studies in Rural Development (CSR D) at the Institute of Social Work & Research in Ahmednagar, India. The projects primary aim was to identify the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on individuals and families in India. Global Social Development Innovations (GSDI) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill supported CSR D in the analysis of data and development of this brief.

Content of this brief was prepared as follows:

CSR D: Suresh Pathare: conceptualization, methodology, supervision, and writing – review and editing; Jaimon Varghese: conceptualization, methodology and data curation; Pradeep Jare: Conceptualization, methodology, and data curation GSDI: Rainier Masa: Data curation, supervision, and writing – review and editing; Miranda Manzares: Writing – original draft; visualization, and project administration; Graham Zulu: Formal analysis and writing – original draft; Mohit Tamta: visualization; Neil Bilotta: Writing – review and editing.

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