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The role of women in improving the welfare of their families to improve their conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to analyze women's roles in stabilizing their families to improve their conditions during the pandemic. Women have encountered setbacks as they take care of their families in the wake of the pandemic that has adversely affected people's livelihoods. It employs qualitative research methods and a descriptive study design to ascertain the role women play in improving the welfare of their families during the pandemic. It employs online survey questions and virtual interviews to collect data from a sample size of 100 randomly selected women. The study reveals that women play essential roles in enhancing the hygiene and cleanliness of their homes and children through sanitization and regular washing of hands. They also take leadership and headship of the family following the incapacitation of their spouses by the COVID-19 disease; provide for the family's basic needs, and provide psycho-social support as caregivers to their affected and infected family members. There is also a need to assist women struggling to protect the interest of their family and their livelihoods during the pandemic to emancipate them from the hurdles that have for a long time hindered them from realizing improved living standards.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a dangerous moment that threatens the lives of all humans on the planet. This is because human life cannot be divorced from the economic side. Humans must meet their ever-increasing wants, which are no exception during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can be described as different needs outside of regular planning. COVID-19 is an infectious and lethal disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 spreads via human-to-human transmission throughout the world, including Indonesia. As a result of the spread of COVID-19, it has had ramifications ranging from employment impacts (many layoffs) to behavioral changes, particularly in the health sector, to economic impacts (many daily workers of lower-level economic actors (restaurant waiters, motorcycle taxis, street vendors, etc.) who are unable to work and thus have no income). This is therefore linked to the rise of poverty in Indonesia.

In the early stages of the dissemination of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of poor individuals increased, as shown in Figure 1. In the initial days following the announcement of the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia, the number of poor individuals increased significantly. The number of poor individuals in March 2020 was 26.42 million, representing an increase of approximately 1.64 million from March 2019 to March 2020, with the trend continuing into March 2021. 14.28 percent of the working-age population was affected by Covid-19, which included unemployment due to Covid-19 (2.56 million people), not

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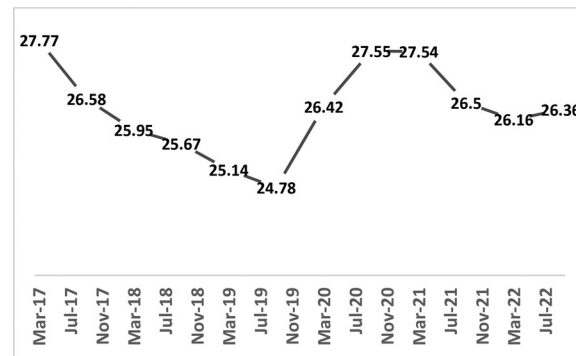


Figure 1. Number of poor people Indonesia 2017–2022. Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, (2023).

being in the labor force due to Covid-19 (0.76 million people), not working due to Covid-19 (1.77 million people), and a reduction in working hours due to Covid-19 (24.03 million people). The increase in the number of poor individuals has a devastating effect on the population's economic viability.

In response to the escalating economic conditions and demands, not only men but also women participate in domestic income generation. The high demands of the household economy necessitate the duties and roles of women in household life, especially with the increasingly complex areas of life, especially in urban communities (case in Ambon city), causing women to not only carry out activities within the scope of the household but also outside the home or in the public sphere, which increasingly requires the touch of women's presence in handling it, as well as in supporting the household economy. It is nothing new that, to increase household income, the majority of housewives labor outside the home while continuing to care for the household. All household members are essentially responsible for the common existence. Women have two primary functions that are closely related to their position and role: the production function and the reproductive function. The production function is related to the economic function in the sense that the higher the level of education of women, the more opportunities they have to become indirect and direct actors of development based on their interests and abilities as a production factor. Women also have duties and functions in supporting the household although there are still those who think that women's duties in the household are only to give birth to offspring, care for children, serve their husbands and take care of the household. This inequality occurs due to the cultural structure of society which is a social construction that has existed for centuries so that it has become an unwritten law. The problem that occurs in society is that the role of women in supporting the family economy is sometimes underestimated and considered only as a side income. The thinking in the community that men are the breadwinners in a household or family is so embedded in community life, as a result women work is seen only as an additional or side income.

This study aimed to determine women's roles in improving the welfare and conditions of their families during the pandemic. It seeks to identify the contributions of women to strengthening and sustaining livelihoods during the pandemic that has seen the COVID-19 disease ravage economies and destroy lives (Bassey et al., 2020, p. 23; Odeku, 2021, p. 5). family as a social institution has adversely affected the pandemic making it vital to ascertain the impact the disease has had on relationships and socio-economic well-being to determine appropriate strategies to boost livelihoods. According to Rabinowitz and Rabinowitz (2021, p. 808), women have been committed to making contributions to improving their families' livelihoods. Little attention has been paid to their assistance, making it vital for this study to focus on their distinct contributions to enhancing the family conditions during the Pandemic (Coscieme et al., 2020, p. 45; Panda, 2020, p. 790). They have encountered hurdles that have discouraged them from continuing to uplift their families and exposed them to psycho-social problems undermining their well-being. However, they have been committed to changing their stories and family's situation to shield their members from the harmful effects of the pandemic that has claimed many lives worldwide and affected the socio-economic status of many people (Estrada, 2020, p. 15; Rothengatter et al., 2021, p. 254). The study's findings reveal that women have been critical in promoting the well-being of their families despite encountering numerous challenges. As Buttell et al. (2021, p. 20) opine, they have also been resilient and committed to overcoming the hurdles to make a difference in their families.

Empowering and supporting women to complement their efforts to improve their family's condition during the pandemic is imperative. This research took an economic approach as the basis for looking at empowerment that applies to Indonesian women, which is then represented by the informants who have been interviewed in this research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Effects of COVID-19 on families

The COVID-19 Pandemic has disrupted routines destabilizing the well-being of the families and its members. Families tend to engage in activities that open them to opportunities to interact freely, strengthening their bonds to have a sense of belonging. According to Mahale et al. (2020, p. 1686), family gatherings during holidays and social functions have helped individuals air their views and share their problems with relatives to benefit from the accorded psycho-social support. Such occasions have also allowed the members to enjoy sharing happy moments with their loved ones. However, the pandemic has disrupted these routines making it difficult for family members to go out on recreation, holidays, and travel around as a family, as was the norm before the onset of the COVID-19 (Malliaras et al., 2021, p. 106; Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 147; Westmattelmann et al., 2021, p. 129). Children have lacked an opportunity to play with their friends and engage in outdoor activities for fear of contracting the infection. The pandemic has compelled governments to institutionalize preventive and containment measures (Popescu, 2020, p. 212; Yunusa et al., 2021, p. 68). These measures have undermined family routines making it difficult for its members to enjoy what they were used to before the pandemic.

The pandemic has also exposed families to social seclusion, an aspect that has adversely affected relationships and roles. The infected family members have been obliged to self-quarantine with others forcefully quarantined in government institutions. This measure has disrupted family unions and relationships and psychologically affected its members despite helping to contain the disease, as Chu et al. (2020, p. 192) opine. In this regard, Suppawittaya et al. (2020, p. 19) point out that the general public has also been advised to stay clear while interacting to minimize physical contact while maintaining social distance. Overcrowding has been cited as one of the catalysts of the fast-spreading of the pandemic, making it imperative for individuals to observe the physical distance, including at the household level. Equally important, families have had opportunities to spend more time together than before the pandemic. However, as Usta et al., (2021, p. 136) posit, that has rendered them vulnerable to increased domestic conflicts and frictions. This conquers with a finding that while relationships have been improved in some scenarios, it is unfortunate that to some, the pandemic has destabilized cohesion and unity in some families and broken some (Pratt & Lutyens, 2021, p. 73; Prokhorenko & Kostenko, 2021, p. 37). Strained relationships have undermined the well-being of the family members exposing them to high risks of developing mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

The pandemic has also altered childcare and parenthood, exposing families to increased conflicts and frictions that undermine unity and cohesion. The financial constraints occasioned by the pandemic have seen parents seeking alternative sources of income (Sayeh & Chami, 2020, p. 31; Wang et al., 2021, p. 16). Embarking on such has compelled them to work far away from their families, leaving their children back at home for a long time with their caregivers and house helps. Teenagers have used the opportunity to engage in irresponsible activities and behaviors such as drug abuse and risky sexual behaviors to make merry (Dumas et al., 2020, p. 359; Thorisdottir et al., 2021, p. 665). Likewise, McMillan et al. (2021, p. 42) argue that young one has also been ignored following the absence of their parents due to socio-economic reasons, quarantine, and travel bans that have separated family members. This undermined the growth and development of the young ones, but it also denied them parental love and guidance. Family separation has exposed spouses to infidelity issues that have threatened marriages resulting in increased conflicts and frictions, breaking families (Kulik & Ramon, 2022, p. 247; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2022, p. 192). Women have found themselves on the receiving end, being obliged to raise families on their own under challenging conditions. Families and marriage institutions have suffered immensely due to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected the health sector, but also the economic and population sectors due to the rise in divorce cases. During the covid 19 pandemic, there was a 5% increase in divorce cases in Indonesia. During this pandemic, conflicts and disputes in the home resulting from quarrels/disputes and economic problems created by the sudden layoff of a large number of workers so that family finances become unstable contribute to divorce. This is because many fathers have been laid off, affecting the economic sector of the family. These layoffs have worsened the economic conditions of laid-off employees, making it impossible to meet their various needs (Sina, 2020, p. 252). This condition will also cause the husband to experience tension and negative emotions (Ramadhani & Nurwati, 2021, p. 93). Reduced income can be a catalyst for domestic conflicts, resulting in an increase in the divorce rate.

2.2. Role of women in families

Women have played supportive roles in helping their spouses care for their families during the pandemic period that discipline-related issues and conflicts have characterized. Traditionally, men and women are responsible for the discipline of the children in a family. However, that has changed due to the pandemic making it imperative for the spouses to handle discipline alone. According to White (2020, p.23), unlike their male counterparts, women were less affected by the pandemic, with most men succumbing to the disease. Many families have been left under the headship of women after the family heads succumbed to the disease. Women have found it frustrating to raise children during the pandemic. Many admit that discipline has remained a significant challenge, especially when disciplining the children alone, as Fabbri et al. (2021, p. 104) posit. Women have also been left behind to make critical decisions about the well-being of the family and its members during the social seclusion and quarantine periods, with some extreme cases forced to take care of the children alone after the demise of their spouses. Drug abuse, substance use, and engagement in irresponsible sexual behaviors have exposed adolescents to numerous problems undermining their health and social well-being (Hill et al., 2022, p. 52; Lindberg et al., 2020, p. 64). The families under women's headship find it challenging to address socio-economic issues (Dave, 2020; Thobejane & Nyathi, 2018; Yoosefi Lebni et al., 2020, p. 9). It is crucial to offer psycho-social support to women to empower them to control family challenges such as those mentioned for them to lead their families successfully during and after the pandemic.

Women have also been a phenomenon in supporting their spouses and providing guidance and counseling to their family members to improve their psychological and social well-being during difficult times. As Greguletz et al. (2019, p. 1235) opines, women spend more time with their children than men, allowing the former to understand their children more and offer the needed assistance. Mentoring and coaching are effective ways of assisting adolescents, guiding them through their growth and development stages to become valuable people in the future (Busse et al., 2018, p. 413; Priest et al., 2018, p. 36). Parents and children have benefited immensely from the approaches that enable healthy relationships among the members to realize a cohesive and unified family. One cannot underestimate the role of women in fostering cohesion in their families for everyone to have a sense of belonging. The pandemic has resulted in chronic stress, anxiety, and social seclusion, exposing the family members to a high risk of developing depression and other mental health problems (Bacaro et al., 2020, p. 1479; de Figueiredo et al., 2021, p. 101; Moura et al., 2022). Like their male counterparts, women have taken leadership and initiative to provide psycho-social support to their children in the absence of their fathers, helping them cope with the loneliness and seclusions that characterize the pandemic period because of curfews, travel bans, and lockdowns separating family members (Bauza et al., 2021, p. 253; Karuhanga, 2022). Women empowerment is essential to support their efforts to mentor, coach, and counsel their families during and after the pandemic.

Women have also been critical of the cleanliness and hygiene of their family members, a crucial contribution to efforts to curb the pandemic's spread. Women have been at the vanguard of joining forces with others, such as the World Health Organization, government organizations, and local groups, to implement hygiene standards at the household level in order to limit the pandemic's spread. As Mallhi et al. (2020, p. 581) note, women have traditionally been responsible for home cleaning and laundry, which has enabled them to play critical roles in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 disease. Mallhi et al. found, contrary to Ofori-Manteaw et al. (2022, p. 135), that women

were more likely than males to closely adhere to the COVID-19 safety standards and protocols, such as hand-washing, sanitizing, and wearing masks. This has seen them playing a vital role in promoting the efforts to contain the pandemic at the household level by ensuring their children observe hygiene and refrain from activities that would increase their risk of contracting the disease. Women have also played the caregiver roles while at the same time taking care of their families during the Pandemic (Phillips et al., 2020, p. 123). This contribution has helped the world contain the pandemic's harmful effects on households (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020, p. 725; Htun, 2022, p. 10). Due to the increased infidelity rate during the pandemic, they have also gained resilience to take care of the children following broken marriages and family institutions. It is vital to create avenues to support women to continue contributing to the efforts to improve the well-being of their families during and after the pandemic.

2.3. Empowering women to improve family conditions

Supporting women as caregivers and providing emotional support for their affected families is critical to strengthen them to protect and improve the well-being of their family members. During the pandemic, women play essential roles as caregivers attending to their relatives infected and affected by it. According to World Health Organization (2020), some women have been overwhelmed by stress and depression following their struggles to attend to their infected relatives and the family's needs. Quite a number are at a high risk of developing depression because of a lack of emotional and psycho-social support during the difficult times of the COVID-19 disease (Deolmi & Pisani, 2020, p. 80; Joshi, 2021, p. 427; Kumar & Nayar, 2021, p. 2). Therefore, empowering them to gain resilience and overcome their psychological issues and stress is crucial to continue with the excellent work to support and improve the well-being of their families during and after the pandemic. Women as caregivers need psycho-social support to promote and protect their mental health as they commit to protecting their family's welfare during the harsh times of COVID-19 (Baber, 2022, p. 30; Farooq et al., 2020, p. 59). Women need support to enhance their efforts to uphold the well-being of their families during the pandemic.

Increased accessibility to economic and social support is crucial to opening women to socio-economic opportunities to improve their families' livelihoods during the pandemic. According to Putnam-Hornstein et al. (2020, p. 660), less fortunate and struggling families are open to social services and support, aiming to help them to access and meet their basic needs. Although some families are already enrolled in the programs, it is critical to provide specific support for women struggling to uplift the well-being of their families following the COVID-19 disease that undermined their abilities to meet the needs of their respective families (Calvano et al., 2021, p. 12; Sanford et al., 2022). Families under the headship of women and single mothers struggling to feed their families during the pandemic should be accorded special aid to empower them to improve the livelihoods of their children (Flaga-Gieruszynska, 2020; Uzobo & Ayinmoro, 2021). It is essential to provide financial support to women in businesses that have not been able to continue with their enterprises because of the pandemic. Offering such support will open them to opportunities to uphold their good deeds, such as protecting their families' health and social well-being and providing care to their loved ones affected and infected by the COVID-19 disease.

Protection of women from exploitation by their male counterparts is critical in supporting them to improve their families' well-being to overcome the pandemic's challenges. Women have been exposed to domestic violence and oppression during the pandemic, an aspect that has limited their efforts to support and improve the well-being of their families. In this regard, Adejare et al. (2021, p. 81) argue that men have subjected women to violence, physically and emotionally abusing them following their involvement in infidelity and irresponsible behaviors that undermine the cohesion and unity of their families. In situations where women have been obliged to meet the family's needs following their husband's job loss, the latter has involved themselves in risky behaviors leading to infidelity with their neighbors, jeopardizing their marriage and family stability (Dilmaç et al., 2023, p. 94; Iqbal et al., 2021). Men have subjected women to oppressions that have seen some quitting their marriages only to suffer in poverty, unable to cater to their children's needs. Strengthening the implementation of the legislation and policy protecting women from the same is crucial to better position them to continue with the good deeds of caring for and supporting their families.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling

Random sampling is used to select and identify study participants. This study had 100 informants is used to gather data to answer the research questions based on the study objectives. The technique is selected because it avoids subjective biases that could undermine the study's validity and reliability. It also offers an opportunity to conduct data analysis with minimal errors that could damage the accuracy and reliability of the findings and conclusions (Hu et al., 2021; Sablica et al., 2022). It also requires less knowledge to collect data making it an appropriate tool for the researcher because of inadequate knowledge and expertise in data collection. Random sampling also offers an equal chance for the targeted audience to be selected to participate in the study.

3.2. Data collection

The study employs a qualitative research methodology and a descriptive research design. Structured interviews and online surveys will be administered for data collection. The two methods are effective for this study because they limit physical interaction and contact, which is highly discouraged during the pandemic. Online surveys are also appropriate. After all, they do not determine participants because they can be administered to informants irrespective of their physical location and distance from the researcher.

3.3. Measures

The study employed vital measures to enhance the interaction with the correspondents. The correspondents will respond to items such as survey questions, online surveys, constructed situations, and interview questions. The correspondents have to answer all questions were given with open-ended questions type. These items will enhance data collection to answer the research questions, hypothesis, and related objectives, as (Braun et al., 2021, p. 645) observed.

3.4. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis technique formulated by Miles and Huberman (1994) consists of 1) Data collection, 2) Data reduction (data condensation), 3) Data Presentation (display data), and 4) Conclusion/verification. Conclusion drawing activities are an inseparable part of the analysis section. The technique that researchers use to analyze all data obtained from the collected data such as data from participant observation. The data obtained from this research will be analyzed by data reduction which researchers will review and take the main things, and will be presented in the form of narrative data and conclusions will be drawn from the data.

4. Results

4.1. Roles played by women

Women have been active in supporting their families to help them cope with the harsh effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The findings of the study indicate that the majority of women are dedicated to providing for the fundamental requirements of their families. However, that has seen them encountering vast obstacles threatening their well-being. The findings show that 20% of the sampled women have reported being denied the rights over their family resources, making it difficult for them to meet their needs after the separation or demise of their spouses due to COVID-19 disease. About 60% of the correspondents admitted to having been keen on upholding the hygiene of their children and homes to protect their families from the COVID-19 disease and other water-washed diseases. The study reveals that they have been at the forefront of providing the needed care to their relatives and family members affected and infected by the pandemic. 10% of the interviewed women also admitted that they were

obliged to take the headship of their families during the social seclusion, quarantine, and, in some cases, after their spouses' demise succumbing to the COVID-19 disease.

4.2. Challenges encountered

Women encounter challenges in supporting and improving their families' welfare during the pandemic. 40 out of the 100 women who participated in the online survey reported struggling to care for their families while their spouses were quarantined or hospitalized because of COVID-19 complications. This 40% women had to face financial hardship during COVID-19. Also, more than half of the informants reported being overwhelmed by their infected and affected family's situation, which rendered them vulnerable to mental health problems such as stress and anxiety. With at least 10% of the correspondents assuming headship and leadership roles in their families following the infection of their spouses.

Challenge Encountered	Those Who Encountered It (%)
Financial Hardship	40
Mental Health Problems (stress and anxiety)	50
Assuming Hardship and Leadership	10

Source: Primary Data Processed (2023).

4.3. Overcoming challenges

The study has revealed that women employed key survival tactics to overcome the challenges they faced in their efforts to improve the welfare of their families during COVID-19. Only 2% of the correspondents admitted having benefited from social security services and assistance. More than 70% of the informants got helps from their friends and families to support them financially during difficult times. However, only 20% of these individuals reported to have been supported by their relatives, friends, and employers throughout the period their spouses were quarantined. 21% of the women who participated in the study reported having relied on their savings and side hustles to meet the financial obligations of their families during the pandemic. 6% of married women also reported having separated from their husbands due to infidelity-related issues during the pandemic. However, single mothers suffered more than their married counterparts during the pandemic struggling to cater to their families' needs, especially after losing their jobs or shutting down their businesses.

Source of Support	Number of Women (%)
Social Security Services and Support	2
Relied on Friends, Relatives, and Well-Wisher Support	71
Personal Savings and Side Hustles	21
Separated from spouses and had no source of income	6

Source: Primary Data Processed (2023).

4.4. Improving the women's livelihoods

The women who participated in the study suggested ways they could be supported. 50% of the correspondents suggested that the government should increase social security services and support single mothers to empower them to improve the welfare and livelihood of their families during the pandemic. 25% of the women who participated in the study cited the need for empowering women to regain their income-generating activities after the pandemic forced them to shut down. Another 9% of the correspondents suggested that protecting women from their spouses is critical to give them access to family resources to take care of their children.

5. Discussion

Women play essential roles in supporting the well-being of their families during the pandemic. The study aimed to establish how women participate in upholding the stability and welfare of their families following the adverse effects of the pandemic that has claimed many lives and ravaged economies, as Olufadewa et al. (2021, p. 129) posit. The study seeks to identify the contributions of women in stabilizing their families to appreciate their role in containing the aftermath of the pandemic. The study seeks

to identify the challenges they encounter in their quest to improve their families' livelihoods to identify ways that can help and support them to meet the needs of their families (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021; Gunarathna, 2021, p. 119; Nigam, 2021). Women need psycho-social support to complement their efforts and motivate them to continue doing what they do best to improve the conditions of their respective families. As Nasution & Pradana, 2021, p. 617 opine, understanding women's challenges and how they resolve them is essential to determine the needed support to complement their efforts to improve their families and well-being. The research aims to create awareness about the contributions women make to contain the spread of the pandemic and minimize its adverse effects on people's livelihoods. This information is critical in helping policy-makers make informed socio-economic policies in the quest to support communities and families to recover from the aftermath of the pandemic.

The study has revealed that women play essential roles in improving the conditions of their families during the pandemic. They have been critical in meeting the basic needs of their families, upholding the hygiene of their children and homes to prevent transmission of COVID-19, and playing the caregiver role to their infected and affected relatives and family members (Awino, 2021; Stefanova et al., 2021, p. 18). Some also took the headship of their families following the hospitalization of their spouses after contracting the disease and being obliged to quarantine. They had to take care of the family in extreme situations after their spouses succumbed to the diseases. According to Taremwa et al. (2022, p. 12), women play crucial roles in upholding the cleanliness and hygiene of their families. Barron et al. (2021) dispute that only submissive women can do that. This explains why 60% of the women who participated in the study valued hygiene and cleanliness to protect their families from infections, including the COVID-19 disease. As Browne (2021, p. 537) argues, regularly sanitizing and washing hands and surfaces help kill germs responsible for transmitting diseases. 10% of women reported taking the family's leadership to sustain the members' needs. The finding contradicts Yoosefi Lebni et al. (2020, p. 10) arguments that women are influential in leadership and can take the headship of their families to support their members without their spouses. However, Parry and Gordon (2021, p. 801) argue that women assuming leadership and headship positions in their families tend to disrespect their spouses, undermining their role as providers. In this regard, Htun (2022, p. 9) argues that not all women assume the caregiver role resulting in conflicts with their spouses, which could have contributed to the separation of some women from their spouses during the pandemic.

Women suffer immensely in the quest to meet the needs of their families to improve their welfare. Usher et al. (2021, p. 1025) argue that women are disadvantaged when accessing and controlling family resources following the separation caused by the pandemic in their marriages and broken families. The argument conquers with Zheng and Lu (2021) finding that people having no control over family resources find it difficult to cater to their family's needs. As Pietromonaco and Overall (2022, p. 192) opine, this explains why women engage in friction and conflicts with their spouses, resulting in separation and difficulty coping with hardship. Women who lost their jobs during the pandemic, yet they are single mothers, have experienced challenges in catering to the needs of their families during the pandemic. Financial hardships have remained a significant challenge yet to be conquered among the women, hampering their efforts to stabilize their families' social well-being. As Sahu et al. (2021, p. 22) posit, there is a need to create avenues to support women to empower them to have control over their livelihoods to promote the well-being of their families. It is imperative to address the challenges to enable women to touch the lives of their children and relatives during and after the pandemic, which has seen many struggling to sustain their lives due to economic hardships.

I was one of those who ended up not being able to maintain a household. The economy was lacking, we fought every day. We couldn't get along. It was difficult at that time to be together. Well, maybe because we were both still young and provoked by emotions and stress, my ex-husband and I finally agreed to separate. (RP-Worker)

Women find it difficult to survive the harsh socio-economic times that characterize the pandemic making it imperative to assist them, although a few have found ways to stay. Establishing a sustainable survival means during the COVID-19 disease has not been easy due to the period's unpredictable circumstances (Makoni & Tichaawa, 2021, p. 173; Paul et al., 2021, p. 325; Romero-Michel et al., 2021, p. 200). Personal savings and support from friends and relatives are not sustainable means to empower women

to improve the condition of their families. Although Putnam-Hornstein et al. (2020, p. 661) argue that underprivileged families are open to social security services to improve their livelihoods, the arrangement is not popular, with a few families benefiting from the program. He et al. (2021, p. 823) contend that enhancing access to social security services has been marred by numerous challenges making it difficult for the intended persons to benefit from the social security services during a crisis. Governments are committed to working closely with the relevant agencies and social work professionals to create awareness about the social security services and legibility for the targeted audiences to consider applying for the same. Well-wishers and philanthropists have played a crucial role in supporting needy countries and families to improve their livelihoods during the Pandemic (Davila et al., 2021, p. 114; Islam et al., 2022, p. 3; Olimid & Olimid, 2022, p. 187). This explains why friends and relatives with philanthropic acts have been committed to supporting their relatives and friends in dire need during the pandemic to assist them in coping with the challenging economic times. Women have benefitted immensely from their friend's support, although that has not been sustainable in helping them address the socio-economic challenges they face during the pandemic.

With each passing day, the needs grow but the income becomes more uncertain. Fortunately, my siblings help each other so it doesn't feel so heavy. Especially in the past when my family was hit by covid, full help from family and close neighbors during the quarantine period. (IB, Housewife)

Women could be empowered to promote the welfare of their families. Sanford et al. (2022) argue that the pandemic has been characterized by difficult economic times that have made it difficult for some people to meet their basic needs. This explains why the women who participated in the study reported experiencing financial difficulties during the pandemic, undermining their efforts to improve the livelihoods and welfare of their families. The argument goes hand in hand with Adejare et al. (2021, p. 81) finding that the COVID-19 disease has ravaged economies forcing businesses to shut down, resulting in unemployment and loss of jobs. Governments worldwide are providing COVID-19 stimulus to companies to assist them in regaining their stability after the adverse effects of the pandemic that brought businesses to a standstill. Epifani et al. (2021; 114) argue that women have been exposed to violence and conflicts due to financial hardship occasioned by the pandemic conquers, with Moolchandani and Kar (2022) finding that families that enjoy some degree of financial stability tend to experience fewer conflicts and frictions attributed to money problems. The study's findings reveal the need to address critical issues, making it difficult for women to stabilize and improve the welfare of their families during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital to enforce laws protecting women from abuse and violence in order to empower them and strengthen their families.

The conditions during the pandemic were really chaotic. My husband happened to be one of those laid off. Well, because I also don't work, my income was practically not enough, minus. So, I was forced to help with household finances to keep the kitchen running. I tried my hand at online business, and Alhamdulillah, it was enough to survive. Even now, the business is growing. (SA, Housewife & Entrepreneur)

During the pandemic, this study intends to improve the response to empowered women who seek to improve the welfare of their families. It provides insights that can help the policy-makers make informed decisions about allocating social security services resources to assist families struggling during the pandemic to meet their basic needs, as Edmiston et al. (2021) posit. It also points out the role of women in supporting their families to encourage the decision-makers to engage and include women in the formulation of policies that will help them bounce back from the debris of the Pandemic (Chiwona-Karlton et al., 2021, p. 808; Gupta et al., 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2021, p. 141). It is critical to upholding inclusivity in strategic decisions and responses to shield women and communities from the pangs of the pandemic and to benefit from their contributions that have proven to be a phenomenon.

The study is characterized by limitations that have affected its internal and external validity. The study's sample size of 100 women does not reliably and validly represent the views and findings of the general population. One cannot rely on the analysis of 100 women to generalize the study's results globally. Relying on virtual interviews and online surveys undermines the validity of the study. The participants could choose to answer the questions for the sake of responding instead of being objective throughout their responses. The lack of the application of the triangulation methods in data collection

undermines the study's validity. To improve this work, researchers should explore exploring critical regions in the future. It is crucial to examine how the COVID-19 virus has impacted the psychological and mental health of women and their ability to better their family's circumstances during the epidemic. Consider doing a research to determine how the COVID-19 Pandemic has contributed to strained relationships, separation, and the destabilization of social institutions, like as marriage and the family.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, one cannot underestimate women's role in improving their families' welfare during the pandemic despite their challenges. They have exploited the presenting opportunities to improve the conditions of their families following the adverse effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic that has destabilized them. Women have taken leadership and headship of their families. This follows the incapacitation of their spouses due to the complications of the COVID-19 disease, hospitalization, and quarantine measures (Guo et al., 2021, p. 109). They also have provided for their families, especially when their spouses have lost jobs due to the pandemic. Women have also been willing to their families' health and social well-being. This aspect has motivated them to play the caregiver role for their infected and affected family members and relatives (Cohen et al., 2021, p. 156; Kowanda et al., 2021, p. 767). They have been committed to caring for their infected relatives while simultaneously struggling to ensure their children and family as a whole are accessing their basic needs. Women have also upheld cleanliness and hygiene at home, a practice cited as one of the most effective strategies to prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 disease.

The study's objectives open the women, policy-makers, communities, and other stakeholders to numerous insights and findings that can help them join efforts to improve the well-being of the women in their efforts to stabilize their families. The study has successfully determined women's roles in improving their family's standards during the pandemic ranging from social to economic activities. Their contributions have been vital in boosting the well-being of their children, spouses, and relatives while also extending their good deeds to friends (Kusumaningrum et al., 2022, p. 11; Nieuwenhuis & Yerkes, 2021, p. 235). However, key challenges have hampered them from effectively stabilizing their families following the socio-economic hardships and problems occasioned by the COVID-19 disease. Women's commitment is encouraging as they commit to overcoming all odds to empower and stabilize their families despite being limited by the adverse effects of the pandemic. The study has also suggested evidence-based interventions that could enhance and complement the efforts of women to support their families during and after the pandemic.

The identified gaps need to be addressed to enhance women's efforts to improve their families' well-being despite their challenges. The pandemic has disadvantaged women following the increased cases of infidelity and separations that have rendered them incapable of meeting their needs and those of their families following breakups (Goldberg et al., 2021, p. 885; Uzobo & Ayinmorogun, 2023). It is imperative to strengthen the policies protecting women from ensuring they are supported in their quest to promote the welfare of their families and conditions occasioned by the COVID-19 disease, as Asman (2021, p. 232) posits. There is a need to assist women struggling to protect the interest of their family and their livelihoods during the pandemic to emancipate them from the hurdles that have for a long time hindered them from realizing improved living standards. The inclusivity of women in socio-economic programs and arrangements to alleviate the people from adverse effects of the pandemic is critical for women to feel valued and appreciated for their continued efforts to improve their families' conditions.

7. Limitation

Critical limitations characterize the study. It only focuses on a section of women employing a small sample size. Although random sampling techniques enhance reliability and validity, the small sample size of 100 participants does not reflect or truly represent the general population. It does not correspond to the number of women across the globe, making it unreliable to generalize the research findings to the people. It also focuses on women in general but does not focus on a specific population or country. It also relies on studies already done by other researchers to analyze their findings and compare them with

those collected to make conclusions. The analysis ignores the racial aspect but instead generalizes women, although their roles and contributions to the well-being of their families could be affected by race. The study does not pay attention to the socio-economic status of the women and the participants, a critical aspect that could change its results.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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