



Family Digest 46

30th March 2022

Women's History Month

International Women's Day¹ is celebrated on 8th March every year. This year, the focus of the day was on 'Breaking the Bias', where we are all challenged to "imagine a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that's diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated."² Gender bias is still prevalent in many employment policies and practices. As a result, many women are seriously disadvantaged in labour market participation. The month of March is an opportunity to acknowledge the "accomplishments and contributions women have made to history, culture and society",³ contributions that are all too often overlooked.

The National Women's History Alliance designates a yearly theme for Women's History Month. The 2022 theme is 'Women Providing Healing, Promoting Hope'. This theme is "both a tribute to the ceaseless work of caregivers and frontline workers during this ongoing pandemic, and also a recognition of the thousands of ways that women of all cultures have provided both healing and hope throughout history".⁴ The devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed to contain its spread have been a "profound shock to our societies and economies. The COVID-19 pandemic underscores society's reliance on women both on the frontline and at home, while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection."⁵ While everyone is affected by COVID-19, not all are equally impacted. "In times of crisis, when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far-reaching consequences that are only further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies."⁶

Across every sphere the impacts of COVID-19 are being exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex.⁷ Women tend to occupy low-paying jobs in the informal sector, as well as in the hospitality and personal care sectors. All of these activities were severely restricted. It has been easier for men to return to the job market than for women. This has resulted in women continuing to take on more unpaid work than men at home, while workplaces remain hostile to women and have inadequate family policies.⁸ School closures, meanwhile, led to an increase in women's domestic workloads. The pandemic has disproportionately forced women out of employment, primarily due to child-care obligations. It is estimated that 47 million women and girls worldwide have been pushed into extreme poverty since the declaration of the pandemic.⁹

According to Oxfam, "women have kept the world running during the COVID-19 response, picking up the care workload in clinics, in homes and at the workplace. Globally, women make up 70% of the health and social care workforce. They are also most of the domestic workers in the world. While these jobs are essential for the pandemic response, they have long been undervalued and poorly paid".¹⁰ Furthermore, women are over-represented in the health sector and thus more likely to be on the frontline of the pandemic.¹¹

A greater involvement of women at a policy-making level is imperative for the social change required to eliminate gendered poverty. The under-representation of women as policymakers delays the development of gender-neutral policies.¹² However, the pandemic has provided the opportunity to collect data pertinent to the understanding of both the vital contribution made by women, as well as the opportunity to develop programmes and policies promoting equality and fairness. Accordingly, UN Women emphasises that “with the latest data, we now understand the vital link between gender, social equity and climate change, and recognise that without gender equality today, a sustainable future, an equal future, remains out of reach”.¹³

The links below provide information on the above in more depth.

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-ways-women-and-girls-have-been-hardest-hit-covid-19>

<https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-has-made-life-harder-for-south-african-women-169705>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>

https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/en/index.html?gclid=Cj0KCQjw5-WRBhCKARIsAAId9FnNo9iCy_IsNbXSRy11DSXeouy2VbWPhXGfZRav-wX_tcWe

<https://www.golegal.co.za/female-leaders-bias/>

<https://theconversation.com/retired-women-in-south-africa-carry-a-huge-burden-of-poverty-177379>

<https://theconversation.com/after-two-years-in-a-pandemic-mothers-expressing-rage-are-harnessing-their-power-175809>

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¹On 8th March 1911 the first International Women’s Day was celebrated in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark.

² <https://www.golegal.co.za/female-leaders-bias/>

³ <https://www.golegal.co.za/female-leaders-bias/>

⁴<https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/womens-history-month>

⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-whttps://>

⁶ https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/en/index.html?gclid=Cj0KCQjw5-WRBhCKARIsAAId9FnNo9iCy_IsNbXSRy11DSXeouy2VbWPhXGfZRav-wX_tcWe

⁷ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-ways-women-and-girls-have-been-hardest-hit-covid-19>

⁸ <https://theconversation.com/after-two-years-in-a-pandemic-mothers-expressing-rage-are-harnessing-their-power-175809>

⁹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-ways-women-and-girls-have-been-hardest-hit-covid-19>

¹⁰ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-ways-women-and-girls-have-been-hardest-hit-covid-19>

¹¹ https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/en/index.html?gclid=Cj0KCQjw5-WRBhCKARIsAAId9FnNo9iCy_IsNbXSRy11DSXeouy2VbWPhXGfZRav-wX_tcWe

¹² <https://theconversation.com/retired-women-in-south-africa-carry-a-huge-burden-of-poverty-177379>

¹³ <https://www.golegal.co.za/female-leaders-bias/>