

# Resilience And Self-Empowerment Strategies Of Fisherwomen Community Of Thiruvananthapuram District During The Covid-19 Pandemic

Dr. M. Dhamodharan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Maya Raveendran<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli,

e-mail: [vismayasree@gmail.com](mailto:vismayasree@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Covid-19 has created a significant impact on the livelihood of the fisherman community. The women's role in the fisherman community is been significantly important to manage the issues and challenges imposed by Covid-19. The responses to the impact of the fisherwomen are addressed in this article. This article explains the problems faced by fisherwomen and the strategies that are been adopted by the fisherwomen to empower themselves and overcome the challenges.

**Key Words:** Resilience, Empowerment, Strategies, Fisherwomen, Covid-19, Pandemic

## Introduction

In India, the impact of COVID-19 has caused unprecedented challenges for rural households, marginalized groups, and vulnerable groups. Especially, women are more affected by the same due to the overburden of family responsibilities and increased domestic violence as they are the caretakers of the family members. The pressure in handling the family during the pandemic has considerably increased the psychological issues in women like depression, anxiety, and stress. The financial crisis due to the lack of employment of family members also leads to a considerable amount of pressure on them.

On the other side, Covid-19 had drastically affected the fisher community who are already in poverty and supported by the government for their livelihood through various means. Their socio-economic condition is poor with a higher percentage of them being illiterates (Kanchi Bhargavi, 2020). The monthly income of the

fishermen was found to be low which is less than Rs.3000 for one-third of the respondents (Sheikh and Goswami, 2013). There is a drastic loss of livelihood and income among the rural people during and after covid-19 (Tankha and Rukmini, 2020). It becomes necessary for the family members to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19 on them through some means. Thus, it is natural for men to continue their fishing for their family earnings but it is not enough to manage their livelihood due to the impact of the pandemic. The lack of finance during a pandemic, the debt of the family, education of the children, lack of adequate relief measures, changes in fishing, market changes, etc influenced the fisherman family after covid-19. Thus, there is a compulsion for the women to support their families to manage the issues and return to normal life at least as before.

Thus, the support of women becomes more important to the family after covid-19 to manage the livelihood and well-being of the family

members. Out of the total fisherman, about 29.6 percent are fisherwomen who are engaged in fishery and fishery-related avocations like salting the fish, fishing cleaning, marketing fishing, etc. These women also might have lost their occupation after Covid-19 and may face challenges to continue their work. Thus, women might have taken up some measures to support the family like engaging in fishing along with their husbands, engaging in self-employment, etc. This study is an attempt to understand the resilience measures and empowerment strategies of fisherwomen after Covid-19 to support their families.

### **Review of Literature**

Indebtedness was found to be a serious problem in the fisherman community due to a lack of adequate income. Most of them have sourced loans from non-financial institutions with more interest rates. The only source of income was found to be fishery and allied fishery works (Tankha and Rukmini, 2020). Unlike men, women's employment did not recover from the impact of Covid-19 and it continues to decline. Marginalized are more affected by Covid-19 which includes the fishery community and also increased the unpaid work of women (Jayati Ghosh, 2022). The majority of the fisherwomen have joined the fisher associations to increase their status and financial support. They face challenges like transport facilities to transport the fish and also to store the fish (Ashalatha and Saravanan, 2020). The major challenges faced by fisherwomen are traditional methods of processing the fish, inadequate potable water, low margin for their fish, low wages for their work, etc. Apart from this, they also face personal problems like poor health and hygiene, poor education, overloaded responsibilities, etc (Vijaya Khader, 2019). the study found that 52 percent of the women are engaged in the fishing process and 42 percent of them are involved in marketing the fish. Fish vending was found to be

the foremost work that provided the highest income for women. The lack of education, size of the family, family income, and amount of investment is found to be the significant factor that influences the fisherwomen's income Mahesh et al., (2014). Their study revealed that there is a reduction in the entry of middlemen because of the entry of women in the fish sale. The empowerment of fisherwomen is largely influenced by their earnings. It is also found that the fisherwomen were able to earn considerably more income than their counterparts. It is also found fisherwomen's assets value is averagely increased (Radhakrishnan and Sellammalle, 2000)

### **Objectives**

1. To study the demographic profile of the respondents.
2. To study the problems faced by fisherwomen's families after Covid-19
3. To understand the ways of resilience towards the problem by the Fisherwomen Family
4. To explore the self-empowerment strategies adopted by the fisherwomen to support their families.
5. To provide suitable suggestions to enhance the resilience and self-empowerment of fisherwomen to improve their livelihood.

### **Research Methodology**

The study is descriptive and a quantitative approach is used to describe the phenomena. The universe of the study is the fisherwomen who are residing in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. A sample frame was adopted in the study which includes the list of fisherman families in the above district. Out of which 200 families are considered for the study and a sample of 150 women fisherwomen were finalized through a random sampling lottery method. A structured questionnaire comprised of four sections namely demographic profile;

Problems Faced by Fisherwomen Family after Pandemic; Resilience towards the problem by the Fisherwomen Family; Self Empowerment Strategies by the Fisherwomen to support their family. The above questions are framed on a

two-point scale of "Yes" / "No". The data were collected by interviewing the respondents in person. Simple percentage analysis was used in the study to describe the data.

**Table 1: Demographic profile**

Variables	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age	Below 30	32	21.3
	31-35	61	40.7
	35-40	42	28.0
	41-45	15	10.0
Education	Primary	20	13.3
	Secondary	47	31.3
	Hr. Secondary	63	42.0
	Graduation	14	9.3
	Post Graduation	2	1.3
	Others	4	2.7
Marital Status	Married	126	84.0
	Unmarried	18	12.0
	Divorced	6	4.0
Family Type	Joint	18	12.0
	Nuclear	132	88.0

The above table reveals that 40.7 percent of the respondents belong to the age group between 31-35 years, 42 percent of the respondents have completed their higher secondary level of

education, 84 percent of the respondents are married and 88 percent of the respondents are residing in a nuclear family.

**Table 2: Problems Faced by Fisherwomen Family after Pandemic**

Variables	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Income reduction	Yes	123	82.0
	No	27	18.0
Fishing market disruption	Yes	54	36.0
	No	96	64.0
Debt	Yes	137	91.3
	No	13	8.7
Unequal access to relief	Yes	57	38.0
	No	93	62.0

Reduced fish price	Yes	9	6.0
	No	141	94.0
Fishers authenticity	Yes	129	86.0
	No	21	14.0
Illegal fish caught by intruders	Yes	128	85.3
	No	22	14.7
Lack of skill	Yes	5	3.3
	No	145	96.7
Mental stress	Yes	132	88.0
	No	18	12.0
Unable to raise voice due to lack of power	Yes	76	50.7
	No	74	49.3
Increase in domestic violence	Yes	100	66.7
	No	50	33.3

The problems of the fisherwomen's families after the pandemic are given in the above table. It reveals that 82 percent of them face reduction in their family income, 36 percent of the respondents have stated that there is disruption in the fishing markets after Covid-19, 91.3 percent of them have stated that they have debts, 38 percent of them have stated that they faced unequal access to relief due to various reasons like lack of power, adequate IDs, etc, 86 percent of them face issues in getting relief because of lack of adequate IDs, 85.3 percent of them have stated that illegal fishing by intruders have

increase after Covid-19, only 3.3 percent of them lack skills in to manage the family issues, 88 percent of them have stated that they face mental stress due to financial issues in the family and inadequate resources to support them, 50.7 percent of them are unable to raise their voice due to lack of power to get the needed financial support and 66.7 percent of them have stated that after covid-19 there is a increase in domestic violence in the family due financial crisis and debt in the family.

**Table 3: Resilience towards the problem by the Fisherwomen Family**

Variables	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Change in food habits	Yes	55	36.7
	No	95	63.3
Family and neighbors support	Yes	19	12.7
	No	131	87.3
Psychological counseling	Yes	2	98.7
	No	148	1.3
Financial support from friends	Yes	133	88.7
	No	17	11.3
Engaged in other income generation activities	Yes	106	70.7
	No	44	29.3

Received loans from money lenders	Yes	52	34.7
	No	98	65.3
Increased Women's participation in economic activity	Yes	112	74.7
	No	38	25.3
Support from community leaders	Yes	60	40.0
	No	90	60.0
Community initiatives were taken to handle the problem	Yes	35	23.3
	No	115	76.7
Formal fisher associations are strengthened	Yes	86	57.3
	No	64	42.7
Plan to migrate in search of alternative livelihood	Yes	14	9.3
	No	136	90.7

The above table reveals that, 36.7 percent of them have changed their food habits like taking vegetables, grains, etc, 12.7 percent of them managed their family issues through family and neighbours support like getting micro credits, only 2 respondents received the professional help through counseling to manage their psychological issues due to the impact of covid-19, 88.7 percent were able to recover from their problems through the financial support from their friends, majority (70.7 percent) of them have started to engage in any one kind of income generation activity, 34.7 percent of the

respondents have received loan from money lenders to manage the situation after covid-19, 74.7 percent of the respondents have stated that women participation in economic activities have increased after covid-19, 40 percent of the respondents have received support from their community leaders and organizations, 57.3 percent of the respondents have stated that after Covid-19 the fishers associations have strengthened to support the women and 9.3 percent of them have stated that they have plans to migrate to cities in search of alternative livelihood.

**Table 4: Self-Empowerment Strategies by the Fisherwomen to support their family**

Variable	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Engaging in fishing to support the family income	Yes	11	7.3
	No	139	92.7
Engaging in the selling of fish to support the family income	Yes	92	61.3
	No	58	38.7
Participating in government skill development programmes	Yes	42	28.0
	No	108	72.0
Engaged in self-employment	Yes	37	24.7
	No	113	75.3
Utilizing the government schemes and programmes for women	Yes	143	95.3
	No	7	4.7
Employed in a private organization	Yes	10	6.7
	No	140	93.3

Attending the training programs by NGOs	Yes	44	29.3
	No	106	70.7
Joined and receive support from SHG	Yes	114	76.0
	No	36	24.0

The above table depicts that, majority of the respondents (92.7 percent) of them have engaged in fishing activities with their husband to support the family income, 61.3 percent of the respondents are engaged in selling the fish caught by their husbands or others fishes in the market, 28 percent of the respondents are participating in government skill development programmes like tailoring, soap and phenol making, handicrafts, etc., 24.7 percent of them have engaged in self –employment like selling fruits, vegetables, etc, 95.3 percent of the respondents are using the government schemes and programmes like Sahya Hastham, Educational scheme to women, etc. 10 percent of the respondents are working as employees in private organizations to support the family, 44 percent of them are also engaged in various training programmes conducted by NGOs through which they try to lean the vocational skills and engage in income generation activities through their support and majority (76.0 percent) of the respondents are members of Kudumbashree scheme through which they get micro credits to manage their economic needs of the family.

### Findings and Discussion

Income reduction, debt, lack of relief measures, stress, and domestic violence are some of the problems faced by fisherwomen and their families. Change in food habits, financial support from friends, engagement in other income generation activities, joined in fisherman association are some of the resilience measures taken by the fisherwomen to manage the present situation. Local fishing, fish selling, utilizing skill development programmes, joined in self-help groups are some of the self-empowerment

strategies taken by the fisherwomen to support their families and the situation. As fishing is the primary occupation of the fisherwomen's family, the impact of Covid-19 has disrupted the occupation and completely reduced their income. For managing the situation they have to depend on other income sources like money lenders, friends, and neighbors for more interest rates which in turn caused problems in the family like domestic violence, conflicts, stress, etc. Thus, women managed to support the family by engaging in various means like engaging in local fishing, fish cleaning, fish salting, selling fish, etc. Many of them joined SHGs and also skill development programmes to develop the income of the family.

### Conclusion

The fisherwomen play an important role in the economic development of the community. They participated in income generation activities to support their family and the participation of fisherwomen in the workforce slightly increased after Covid-19 which is a good sign for economic development. The government has to encourage the fisherwomen by supporting them through subsidies for self-employment, stipends for working women, providing loans, etc which will help them in their self-empowerment process.

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