

# Determinants of Working Women Social Support During COVID-19

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Working women are facing many challenges in economic, social and health factors during pandemic. All these challenges become worse whenever there is no mechanism to strengthen the social support needed by women physically and emotionally. This study aims to identify the social support factors needed by working women in facing the pandemic. This study aims at analysing the literature review, which includes the variable used. This study is conducted by studying the secondary data (websites, journal, articles) on women challenges and role of social support that are needed by women. The study found that there are four social support factors needed by working women which are (1) family support, (2) organisation/work support, (3) community support and (4) government support. Despite its wide geographic spread, the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected everyone in the same way. Every person will need different support in facing the pandemic. Thus, this study aims to identify the social support factors needed by working women in facing the pandemic.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Analysis of previous literatures is used in the study.

**Findings:** Findings from this study have identified four important social support for working women, such as family, organisation/work, community, and government.

**Study limitations/implications:** This study is limited to working women only. Further empirical study is required to gain more in-depth insights.

**Practical implications:** Practically, it would help for the maintenance of working women during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Originality/value:** This study identifies the challenges and social support needed by working women during COVID-19 pandemic.

**Paper type:** Literature review

**Keywords:** Working women, COVID-19, Social support, Pandemic

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 health crisis has had a significant impact on the world, disrupting numerous areas such as the economy, politics, social life, and gender relations. As a result of lockdown and quarantine measures, the pandemic has had a stronger impact on women than males in the workplace (especially in the health and social sectors), as well as at home. 70 percent of the world's health workers are women, and these employees are usually on the front lines of care (e.g., nurses, midwives, and community health workers). Similarly, women make up the majority of health-care service workers (such as cleaners, laundry, and catering) (Thibaut & van Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020).

With the closure of offices and institutions, online education, and a lack of domestic workers have all contributed to the rise in the number of household members performing unpaid duties like cooking, cleaning and child care that was formerly uncommon (Alon et al., 2020). For working women, the lockdown has resulted in the blurring of the lines between their professional and personal lives, causing them to juggle office work and household chores.

According to World Economic Forum (2019), women wouldn't just require job opportunities; they equally require social support that takes their full range of duties into considerations.. In social support, what important is how people perceive or experience being a part of a social community where people help each other out (Hajli et al., 2015). Study has also identified the beneficial effects of social support on women's overall mental health (Harandi et al., 2017; Spatuzzi et al., 2016).

This study aims to identify the social support factors needed by working women in facing the pandemic. This study findings will contribute theoretically on the knowledge on social support for working women during COVID-19. The findings from this study are important as one of the most serious issues of the twenty-first century is the COVID-19 pandemic. The previous pandemics did not result in a global health crisis which are affecting a greater number of marginalised communities. Pandemics are also considered as general social stressor.

This paper is organised as follows. It starts with describing the literature review, which includes the variable used in this study. Then it introduces the methodology used throughout this paper. This is followed with findings and finally it presents the study discussion and conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Challenges Face by Working Women During COVID-19***

As the COVID-19 situation drags on, the disparities in its effects become more obvious. The new coronavirus has decimated marginalised and underserved populations and communities all across the world. This is certainly true for employees. The COVID-19 crisis has significantly harmed vulnerable worker groups like as women, according to international evidence (Calvin Cheng, 2020). Preliminary evidence has also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified challenges for working women (Collins et al., 2021; Gulati & Kelly, 2020; Heggeness & Fields, 2020). Challenges face by working women during the COVID-19 are discussed below:

#### ***i) Domestic Violence***

The risk of violence against women and girls increases during crises and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception (John et al., 2020). As the world confronts the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence is more frequent than ever. When compared to the amount of calls received before the Movement Control Order (MCO) was enforced, the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) could see a four-fold increase (Tengku Nur Qistina, 2020). As couples and families are forced to hunker down together, there are early indications of

escalating domestic violence, putting many women at risk. During the COVID-19 pandemic, reports from several nations throughout the world have also mentioned an increase in spousal violence against women (Boserup et al., 2020; Gulati & Kelly, 2020; Taub, 2020).

**ii) *Unemployment***

Women often earn less and have fewer job security opportunities than men. Women in the informal sector have suffered a substantial drop in their ability to earn a living because of the pandemic's stop in economic activity. In addition to the loss of money and paid job, many women are balancing a rise in unpaid domestic and care tasks. It is consequently critical to advocate for a gender-sensitive response to COVID-19's economic shock, including support for women in the informal sector. (McKinsey, 2020). According to a survey released in May and June, one out of every four women who lost their jobs during the pandemic said that it would be due to a lack of childcare, which is twice the percentage of men. According to a more recent survey, job losses have hardly slowed: between February and August, moms with children aged 12 and under lost 2.2 million jobs, while fathers lost 870,000 jobs (McKinsey, 2020).

**iii) *Increase Workload***

In most households, the distribution of family care and domestic work is unequal between men and women. Females, mainly working mothers, are responsible for securing their jobs, caring for the family, and managing the homes due to social traditions. Therefore, they tend to shoulder these increased responsibilities due to school closures, isolation of the elderly due to movement restriction, and the growing number of sick family members (Gheed Mufied Alsalem et al., 2021). Prior to the pandemic, research has also shown that working women were already suffering from high levels of stress, guilt, and exhaustion due to the increased demands of their numerous duties in a time of increasing workloads and heightened expectations surrounding parenting and homemaking (Neale-McFall et al., 2020; Schroder et al., 2019; Shuggi et al., 2018).

***Role of Social Support***

Social support has long been regarded as crucial to health promotion since it aids to meet an individual's physical and emotional requirements while also reducing the negative consequences of stressful events on one's quality of life. Individuals' health and wellbeing improve when social support is viewed as beneficial, but a lack of social support raises the risk of disease (Baheiraei et al., 2012).

During the COVID-19 crisis, social support could be considered a coping strategy (Saltzman et al., 2020). Past literature has revealed the significance of the social support element during this crisis (Gheed Mufied Alsalem et al., 2021).

To date social support have been the most widely accepted definitions as perceived and received social support (Eagle et al., 2019). When people are in need, social support relates to how they perceive their friends and family members' availability to provide material, psychological, and general assistance, whereas received support refers to the actual quantity of support they have really received. An individual's mental capacity and physical fitness tend to be higher in those with better family or friend support (Goodman et al., 2019; Grey et al., 2020). In contrast, when people don't have the same support, they tend to have lower mental capacities and poorer mental and physical health (Labrague & Ballad, 2020; Rashid et al., 2021).

**Methods**

This study is conducted by studying the secondary data (e.g. websites, journal, articles) on women challenges and role of social support that are needed by women. Literature analysis was conducted to discuss the type of social support needed by women.

**Findings**

The goal of this research is to determine out which social support women need when coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of the sort of support supplied, social support is an external source that assists individuals in overcoming a difficulty. When confronted with the same stressful circumstances, social support may explain why some people cope better than others (Sarwono & Meinarno, 2009). Social support is often studied in terms of instrumental support, emotional support, advice or information, financial support, provision of care, moral support, and social connections to others (Hur et al., 2018).

During COVID-19, women will require several types of social support in addition to emotional and family support. During the COVID pandemic, a number of recent research have examined the importance of social supports. Studies on health-care workers by Alnazly et al. (2021) have shown that social support from family and friends was critical during the pandemic and that there was a need for additional social support to cope with the psychological suffering that was experienced.

On the contrary, findings from Zakaria et al. (2020), have identified four social support needed by women which is (1) emotional support, (2) childcare support, (3) information support and (4) financial support. Whereas, Uddin et al. (2020), study findings reveal that female workers require workplace support, superior support, and work-life balance.

Further, Alqahtani (2020), in her study has identified that women need work life balance and flexible working time, in order to balance work and family. Certainly, during the pandemic, women are expected to accomplish both work and non-work related tasks at home, requiring them to manage and balance their job and home duties. The study illustrates women professionals' expectations in terms of the support that organisations may provide to help them achieve a better work-life balance and grow in their careers.

Next, study by Arham et al. (2019) depth answers into the topic of women in the workplace. Work-life balance appears to be a bigger issue for these women, especially because many of them are married or have children. This study findings have identified that the working women needed financial support and good workplace environment.

Abbas et al. (2019) and Khan (2016) similarly, have identified that women required spouse support, friends support and family support. It is proven that, women who had more support are more satisfied with their work and family lives and faced less guilt, stress and work-family conflict; those who had little support displayed less satisfaction with work and family lives and more stress and conflict on daily basis

The findings from Noor et al. (2019) contribute to the knowledge of the role of supervisor informal workplace social support and family support among Malaysian women. According to the findings, women employees do have work-family conflict, and supervisor work-family support does not suffice to reduce it. For this study, the factors derived from the literature review findings, are as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Women Social Support Factors

Alnazly et al. (2021)	Zakaria et al. (2020)	Uddin et al. (2020)	Alqahtani (2020)	Arham et al. (2019)	Abbas et al. (2019)	Noor et al. (2019)	Khan (2016)
Social support from friends	Emotional support	Workplace support	Work life balance	Financial support	Friends Support	Social support from work domain (supervisor support)	Spouse support
Social support from family	Childcare support Information support Financial support	Supervisor support	Flexible working hours	Workplace environment	Family Support	Family domain (family support), Work-to-family and Family-to-work conflict	Social support Friends Support

From the findings above, a wide range of factors has been found to contribute to address working women challenges during pandemic such as social support, friend support, supervisor support, childcare support, flexible working hours, and etc. It's also crucial to understand that social support can occur in several ways, depending on the types of help supplied by different people, such as family, friends, or strangers. Study has also highlighted that different kinds of support can have different impacts. Thus, for the purpose of this study in the context of working women during pandemic, this study will introduce four factors which are (1) family support, (2) organisation/work support, (3) community support and (4) government support. The factors are discussed in details in the following section.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In the event of a pandemic, women will need the support of those in the micro and macro contexts (e.g., spouses, families, and friends) as well as society at large. As discussed in the findings above based on previous study, it can be concluded that women require differences social support which can be categorised into several factors. Ultimately, the current study addresses four major variables, i.e., family, organisation/work, community, and government. All the variables' proposed are important in playing a major role for social support among working women during pandemic. As for instance, because of the family role, employees may put in more effort and concentrate more, which improves performance and reduces tensions, pressures, and anxieties. The factors include in family, such as family support, work life balance and spouse support also have it owns role for women. Spousal support on the other hand, can help in decreasing tension and stress and increase women quality of life. As for work life balance, if women are able to balance between work and non-work duty, it can also support working women quality of life (Irawanto et al., 2021).

The next factor is organisation/work support for women, which, according to research, will encourage working women to put in more time, effort, and energy into achieving both their personal and professional goals. It can help to balance women work and family roles in a positive way by sharing the thoughts and the problems arising out of work and personal affairs.

In this study context, organisation/work support are measure through supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible working time.

Organisational support and employee views have a direct relationship that can be explored. More emotionally supportive employers are more likely to have dedicated employees who work harder and longer hours. This is especially true if employees feel valued and believe they will be supported in managing their job responsibilities and overall well-being during times of crisis (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Flexible work policies, for example, can help people integrate work and family obligations, resulting in a better work-family balance. Aside from that, measures that promote work-family balance include job sharing, unpaid family leave, on-site childcare, and support groups for working parents, among others (Alqahtani, 2020).

Few studies of social support have looked on linkages to other groups and the greater community, where help is also available. The structure of the social network in terms of the support provider's relationship type is an important feature of social support. Friends and neighbours are used to measure community support in this study. During the COVID-19 pandemic, support from neighbours and friends appears to have helped people feel supported and share their experiences (Torices, 2020).

Support from neighbours and friends is a vital part of everyday life that can benefit a variety of social groups' health and well-being. Although commonly thought of as a behavioural variable reflecting social interactions and support exchange between neighbours, the idea of neighbouring attempts to convey the sense of mutual aid that is also an important feature of being a part of a community (Herrero & Gracia, 2007). Furthermore, neighbour-based activity is crucial in emergency response, assistance, resilience, and recovery in a community (Jones et al., 2020). During this pandemic, the neighbour's role as highlighted in Islamic teaching is very much needed.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic affects every sector of business, technology, and society for the government. The key to navigating this situation is having a competent government. Malaysia's government has put in place a number of support measures, including the plan PRIHATIN economic stimulus package, to assist businesses and individuals in dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 below, summarises the social supports needed by women found in this study.

Table 2: Summary of Social Support Needed

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Variable</b>
<b>Family</b>	Family Support
	Work-family balance
	Spouse Support
<b>Organisation</b>	Supervisor support
	Co-worker support
	Flexible working hours
<b>Community</b>	Friend's support
	Neighbor support
<b>Government</b>	Financial support

### ***Theoretical Implications***

Theoretically, this study adds knowledge to the previous study by exploring the social support needed by working women, which would help further understand each role of social support factor.

***Practical and Social Implications***

Practically, the findings are essential for the maintenance of working women during the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study***

This study is a literature study, where the focus is on working women, thus it lacks generalisability. Future study should be focusing on non-working women as well, as non-working women also required social support in times of pandemic.

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