



Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Income, Coping Strategies and Food Stockpiling: The Case of Ethiopia

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June 2022 / No.IDRC/OXFAM-001

Key highlights

- Analysis on the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is essential to inform timely and adequate policy and programme responses.
- The pandemic is widening pre-existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems, which are in turn exacerbating the impacts of the pandemic.
- The focus should be on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects income, coping strategies, and food stockpiling behaviour of households.

- COVID-19 and related containment measures have substantially impacted the income of male-headed households compared to female-headed households. About 50% and 44% of male-headed and female-headed households, respectively, were affected by income reduction induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Both male and female respondents reported saving as the most commonly used coping strategy against income decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, variations are observed across male and female respondents. About 25% of male-headed and female-headed households have stockpiled food items since the release of the news about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic has widened the difference in hours spent on reproductive and domestic activities among male-headed and female-headed households. While the number of hours spent per day on reproductive activities for men increased only from 1.63 before the pandemic to 1.8 during the pandemic, for women, the reported increase is from 3.8 to 4.4 hours per day.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is an international shock that affects, not only the global economy, but also livelihood of households and individuals in developed and developing countries alike. The rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic and subsequent preventive measures, such as movement restrictions, influence livelihoods in general and income of various segments of the population in particular. The pandemic has adversely affected poor households and individuals by pushing some households below the poverty line and further diminishing the living standards of already poor households. Specifically, the pandemic pushes about 40-60 million people into extreme poverty in which the sizeable portion of them live in developing countries (Mahler et al., 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has disproportionately affected female-headed households by reducing their employment opportunities and income levels.

The first Coronavirus case was reported in Ethiopia on 13 March 2020, and the number of cases has continued to increase afterwards. Since the time COVID-19 case was identified, the Government of Ethiopia undertook various restrictions to contain the spread of the virus. Some of these measures include suspension/closure of schools, sporting events, public gatherings, regulation for anyone entering into Ethiopia to undergo a mandatory government supervised-quarantine for 14 days, and declaration of a five-month long State of Emergency (SoE) starting on 8 April 2020. These restrictions and lockdown measures have potential impacts on income of households and individuals, and could lead to substantial economic costs, especially for the already poor segments of the population. In an effort to attenuate the negative

effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., reduction in income), households and individuals could use various coping strategies, such as using own saving, borrowing, selling of productive assets, and reduction in non-food and food expenditure, which may impact their food security.

An analysis on the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic is essential to inform timely and adequate policy and programme responses. Past pandemics have shown that health and economic consequences, as well as mitigation measures, lead to serious socioeconomic effects that unfold across populations and generations. Moreover, pandemics and measures taken to curb their spread can have a rippling effect on income and food security. Most importantly, population groups already in risky conditions, for example women, are likely to be more severely affected, as their capacity to cope with shocks is limited due to various socioeconomic problems.

However, there are no studies, to our knowledge, which systematically analysed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the extent and trends of food stockpiling, and variations across males and females in Ethiopia. In order to address this knowledge-gap, this policy brief aims to measure the impact of the pandemic on income and food stockpiling in Ethiopia, analyse whether there is a gender differentiated food stockpiling response to COVID-19, and identify and compare the most common coping strategies employed by male-headed and female-headed households in the face the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of research

Survey data from two-round phone surveys of individuals was used. In the first round of the survey, 1,037 respondents were interviewed from 9 April 2020 to 25 April 2020 in urban and rural areas of Ethiopia. The survey was urban biased due to mobile phone coverage in Ethiopia; however, the survey included respondents from Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambella, Harar, Oromia, SNNP, and Somali regions. A follow-up telephone survey was conducted in October 2021 on a sub-set of sampled respondents from the first round of the survey. This is possible, since the survey has stored telephone numbers of the interviewees in April 2020. In the second round telephone survey, a total of 453 interviews were conducted in Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambella, Harar, Oromia, SNNP, and Somali region. The survey questionnaire covers topics such as awareness and knowledge about COVID-19, attitude towards COVID-19 and its vaccination, risk perception and conditions, practice and behavioural changes, and challenges and barriers for behavioural changes, income sources, household income and livelihood, income loss, coping strategies, as well as food stockpiling.

Research findings

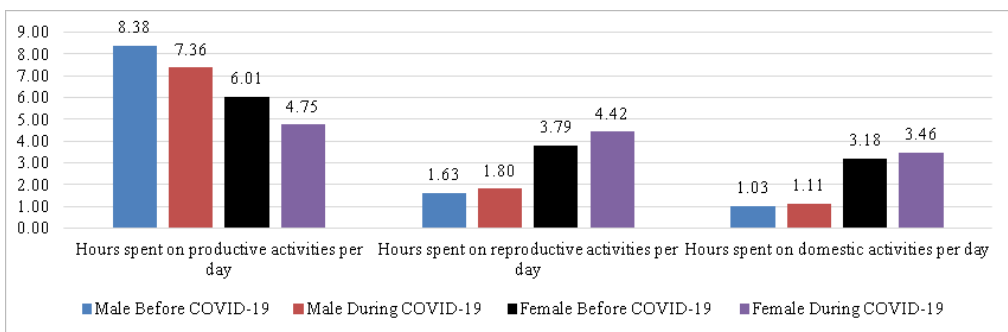
This study, to our knowledge, is the first to examine the impact of COVID-19 on income, coping strategies, and food stockpiling across male-headed and female-headed households. The policy brief shows that a more significant proportion of male respondents (50%) were severely affected by income reduction induced by the COVID-19 pandemic than female respondents (44%). This result could be associated with the fact that a higher proportion of male respondents (13%) were engaged in daily wage employment than female respondents (8%). This workforce segment is particularly vulnerable to economic shocks such as labour market and health shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, COVID-19 and its containment measures have significantly affected the employment opportunities and income levels for households engaging in daily wage employment. However, there appears to be insignificant variation among male and female respondents in stockpiling food since the news release about the COVID-19 pandemic. About one-fourth of male and female respondents have stockpiled food items.

For respondents who reported an income reduction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked them a follow-up question about their coping strategies in response to income loss. Both male and female respondents reported saving as the most commonly used coping strategy against income decline. However, a higher proportion of male respondents reported using savings as the most important coping strategy. Specifically, about 70% and 64% of male and female respondents, respectively, reported using their savings to compensate for the income reduction. This result could be strongly associated with the existing gender disparity in financial inclusion in Ethiopia. Specifically, in Ethiopia, males are 16.6% more likely to have formal savings; and 8.4% more likely to use savings for emergencies than females.

This policy brief shows that there is insignificant variation in male and female respondents who engaged in farming activities using various coping strategies. In particular, when looking at self-employment, 28% and 41% of male and female respondents, respectively, used borrowings from family and friends to cope with the income reduction induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, about 50% of male respondents involved in daily wage employment had higher opportunities to access formal credit than their female counterparts (38%). This policy brief also shows that a more significant proportion of male and female respondents borrowed from family and friends than from using credit from formal institutions. This result could be the case that, while the number of banks is increasing, most Ethiopians, mainly the very poor and those engaged in micro and small businesses, do not have access to formal credit. The value of assets and collateral is one of the main factors affecting households' likelihood of accessing credit in Ethiopia.

Our data also enables us to assess the amount of time allocated to reproductive (e.g., childcare and caring for the sick) and domestic (e.g., house cleaning and cooking) activities by men and women in the time frame before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1). This policy brief shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the pre-existing difference between male and female respondents' hours spent on productive activities per day. The result shows that the pandemic has widened the difference in hours spent on reproductive and domestic activities among male and female respondents. While the number of hours spent on reproductive activities for men increased only from 1.63 to 1.8 hours per day during the pandemic, for women, the reported increase is from 3.8 to 4.4 hours per day. The average number of hours spent on domestic activities follows a similar trend.

Figure 1: Time allocation on various activities before and during COVID-19 by male and female respondents



Source: Authors' calculations from the survey data.

Policy recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic put the limited gains made (in terms of gender equality) in the past decades at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is widening pre-existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems, which exacerbates the pandemic's impacts. This result indicates that, post COVID-19 recovery must lead to an equal world more resilient to future crises. Governments in many countries have put in place various policy responses, including fiscal stimulus packages and emergency measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Hence, all policy responses must place women's inclusion, representation, rights, social and economic outcomes, equality, and protection at the centre. This approach will play an essential role in rectifying long-standing inequalities and building a just and more resilient economy. Although women are hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic, they will also be the backbone of recovery in communities in particular and the entire economy in general. Thus, policy responses that recognize this could be more impactful in achieving speedier recovery.

In order to achieve these goals, this policy brief recommends the following cross-cutting priorities.

- Promote women's access to financial services to attenuate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We find that both males and females used savings as the most common coping strategy against income decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a lower percentage of females used savings as the primary coping strategy than males. This result could be strongly linked with the existing gender disparity in financial inclusion in Ethiopia, where males are 16.6% more likely to have formal savings and 8.4% more likely to use savings for emergency funding than females (see Hundie & Tulu, 2021). Hence, the Government of Ethiopia needs to increase access to financial services and financial capability training for women.
- Ethiopian Government needs to look at how economic and health-related shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, affect women's involvement in every aspect of activity and their level of household food security. Our findings indicate that the government's support concerning the COVID-19 pandemic did not consider the more distinct effect of the pandemic on female-headed households. However, it is already evident that food insecurity among females has increased twofold compared with their male counterparts (e.g., Negesse et al., 2020). Moreover, at the macro-level, the severity of food insecurity among female-headed households in Ethiopia was a more pronounced issue than the general national estimate of food insecurity. Therefore the need for promoting due emphasis on women's representation in planning and decision-making in all COVID-19 policy responses, particularly food security.
- Initiate revolutionary change for equality by addressing issues related to reproductive and domestic activities, such as, monetization and recognition of these activities. It is evident that, in the home, women perform the bulk of reproductive activities (e.g., childcare and caring for the sick) and domestic activities (e.g., house cleaning and cooking). Although these jobs are unpaid and invisible, they are fundamental aspects of daily life in particular and the entire economy in general.

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Acknowledgements and funding

This policy brief presents independent research funded by the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) under the Programme Grants for AERC-OXFAM-IDRC Collaborative Research Project on “Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Livelihoods in Africa”. The views and opinions expressed by authors are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the AERC, OXFAM, IDRC, and/or any other funders.



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