

“COVID 19 AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ENGAGED IN FOOD BUSINESS”

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the impact of the ongoing crisis of women entrepreneurs engaged in food business during this pandemic period. This paper also elucidates the operational problems experienced by them throughout the epidemic phase and the preventive measures they have taken to make a comeback in post COVID stage.

Key Words: Pandemic, COVID-19, Entrepreneurs

INTRODUCTION

India's first COVID-19 was announced in January 2020 and then followed by the rise in huge number of cases, in March nationwide lockdown was announced by the Government of India. This marked the beginning of various socioeconomic problems across the country. COVID-19 pandemic spread into all areas of business, especially affecting operations in most women led business firms. The pandemic had an adverse effect on all areas of society particularly food business. Women entrepreneurs were the main victims who experienced the negative impact of this global crisis. Customer demand was decreased in majority of food commodities followed by issues of raw ingredients and hence operation. Women

entrepreneurs engaged in food business suffered in finding market, along with labor problem and then supply. Some of the major issues faced by women entrepreneurs during these tough times are less demand, limited access to market, reduction in number of labors, reduction in salary, shortage of raw ingredients, operational problems, fear, less funds available for business etc. Thus, the first phase of Covid-19 has inflicted severe damage upon the women led business firms. This study mainly focuses on the following areas;

- To analyze the problems faced by the women entrepreneurs during the COVID 19.
- To study the reason behind the women entrepreneurs who began new food business during the COVID 19.
- To discuss the strategic measures adopted to overcome the COVID-19 phase.
- To study the awareness of women entrepreneurs regarding the food safety in terms of COVID 19 protocols.
- To analyze the intervention of Government in assisting women entrepreneurs to overcome the difficulties of COVID 19.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), only 27% of women in India are currently employed, and only 14% of Indian businesses are run by women. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a tremendous astonishment to our societies and economies, revealing society's reliance on women on front yards and at home. Women owned businesses experienced a massive decline in revenue and data reveals that 73% of the women entrepreneurs have been negatively impacted by the crisis and 35% of the women experience a significant decline in revenue of the businesses. In some cases, growth has remained static or decreased. This is particularly true in the case of women owned businesses. The lock down coupled with slow demand, the shutdown of production units and difficulty in paying wages, taxes and rents were the common issues of most of the business firms especially women entrepreneurs.

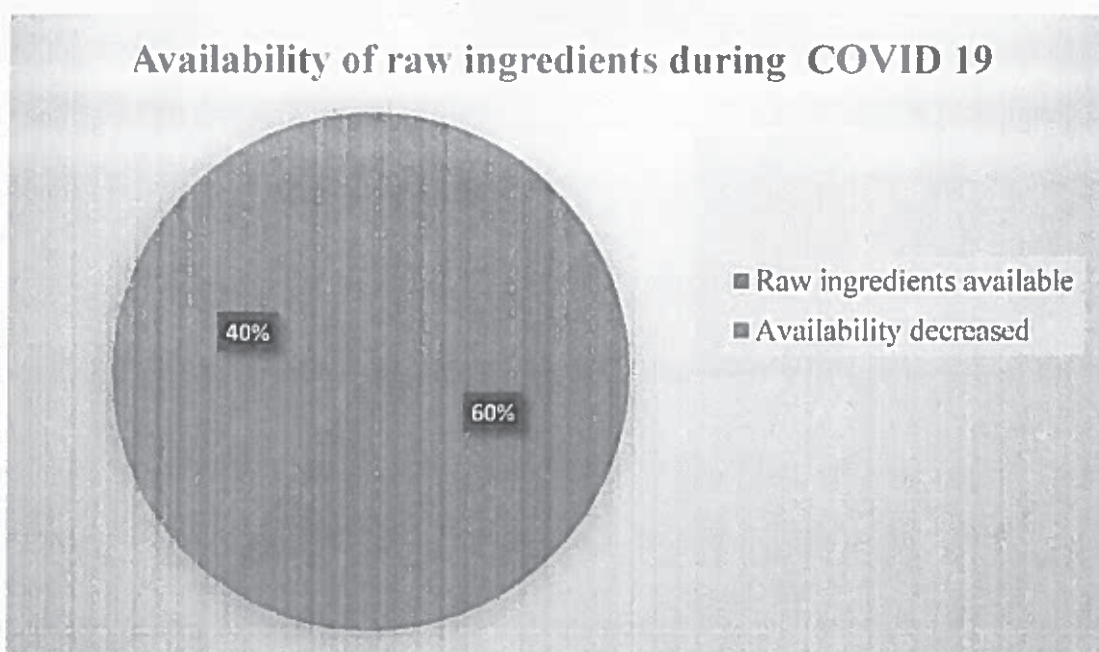
METHODOLOGY

The women entrepreneurs in Cherthala municipality are selected for the present study. A survey is included to collect all the basic information related to the business. Total 11 questions had been asked via Personal Interview to collect data needed for this study.

ANALYSIS

Table no: 1.Availability of raw ingredients during COVID 19

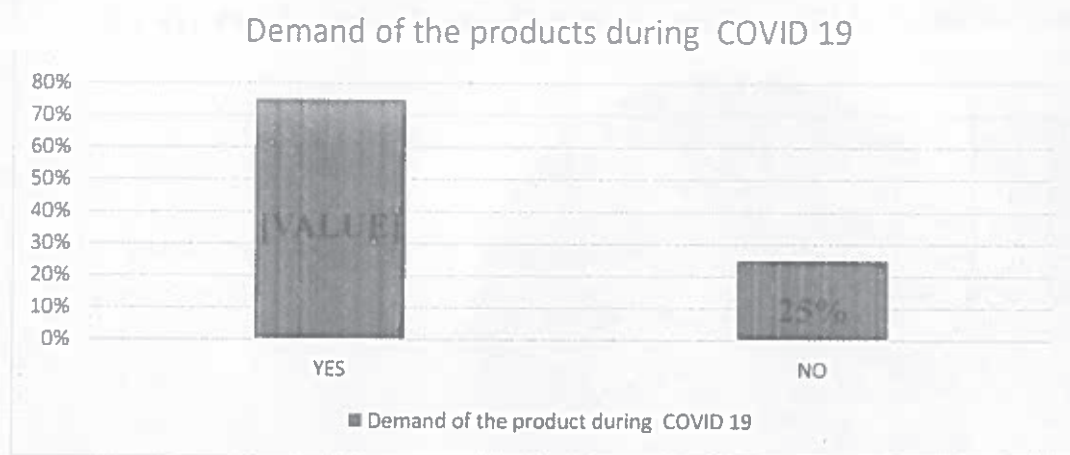
Particulars	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Raw ingredients available	12	60
Availability Reduced	8	40
TOTAL	0	100



Supply chain disruptions, separation of zones as containment areas -all factors affected availability of raw ingredients.

Table no: 2.Demand of the products during COVID 19

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Demand decreased for the products	15	75
NO	5	25
TOTAL	20	100

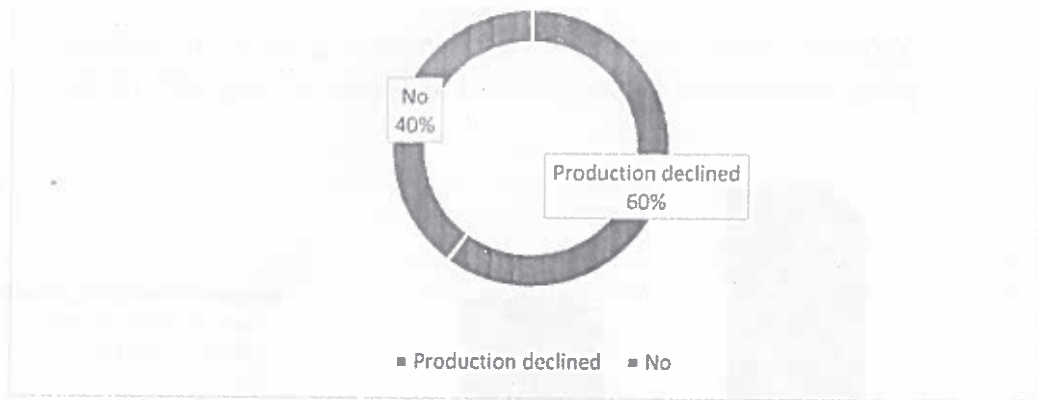


Only 25 % entrepreneurs engaged in homemade cakes, selling fish and pickles responded positively

Table no: 3.Rate of production during COVID 19

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Production declined	12	60
Not Affected	8	40
TOTAL	20	100

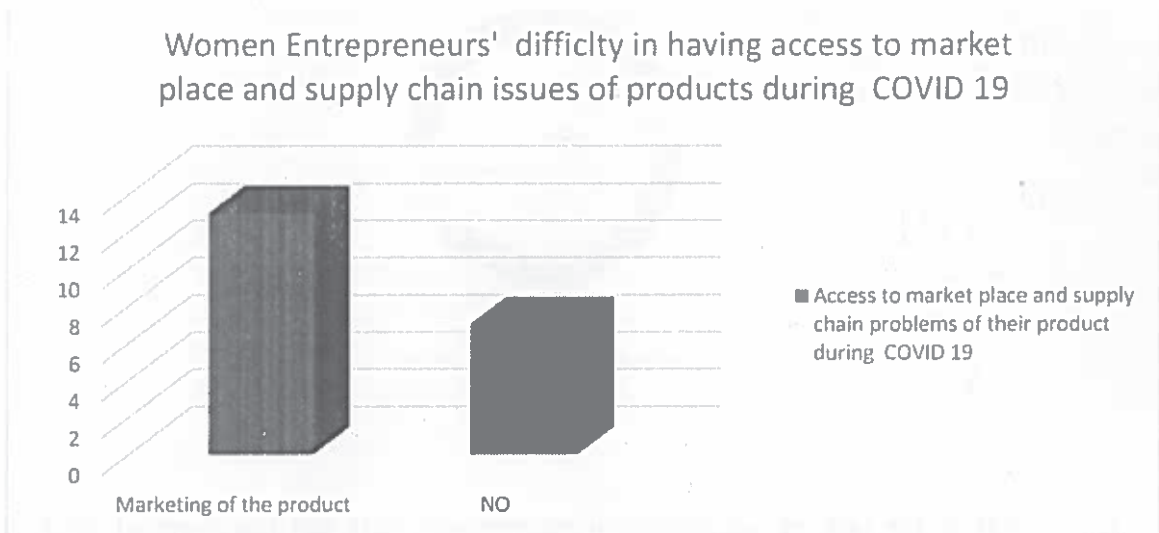
Rate of production during COVID 19



As a result of the lack of availability of maintenance staff and raw material production decreased dramatically.

Table no: 4.Women entrepreneurs' difficulties in accordance with the access to market place and supply chain during the COVID 19.

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Marketing of the product Affected	13	65
Not Affected	7	35
TOTAL	20	100



Women entrepreneurs find it difficult to reach the market place.

Table no :5. Availability of Labors during COVID 19

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Shortage of labors	15	75
Not affected	5	25
TOTAL	20	100

Availability of Labors during COVID 19



Migrant Labors returned to their native places.

Table no: 6 .Followed safety protocols in the production of food items during COVID 19.

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Followed COVID protocols during food preparation	14	70
Not followed	6	30
TOTAL	20	100



Table no: 7. Role of Government to uplift the women entrepreneurs

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Received benefits by the Government	5	25
Not received any benefits.	15	75
TOTAL	20	100

Role of Government to uplift women entrepreneurs



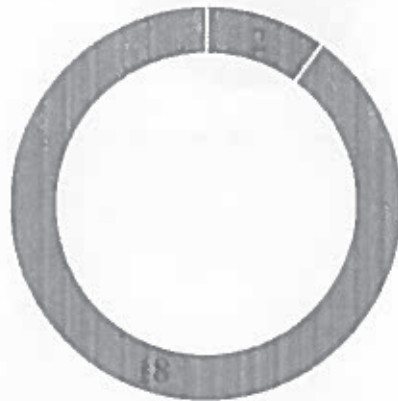
■ Received the benefit by the Government

■ Not received/not aware of Government funds.

Table no: 8. Arrival of new women entrepreneurs during COVID 19

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
New entrepreneur	2	10
Started business before COVID 19	18	90
TOTAL	20	100

New women entrepreneurs during COVID 19



■ New entrepreneur ■ Started business before COVID 19

Table no :9. Present demand and market

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Adjusted with the present (Second Phase) of COVID- 19	15	75
Not yet recovered	5	25
TOTAL	20	100

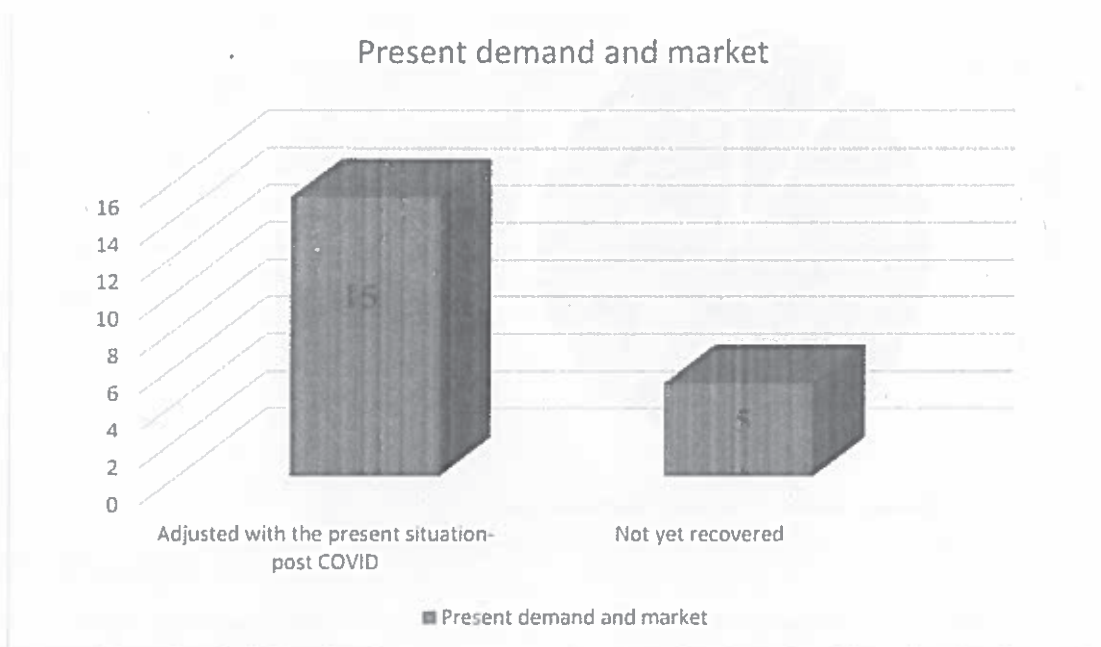
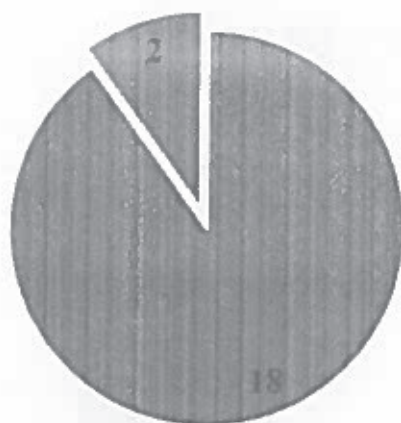


Table no :10. Purpose of doing business

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Business for income	18	90
Business as leisure	2	10
TOTAL	20	100

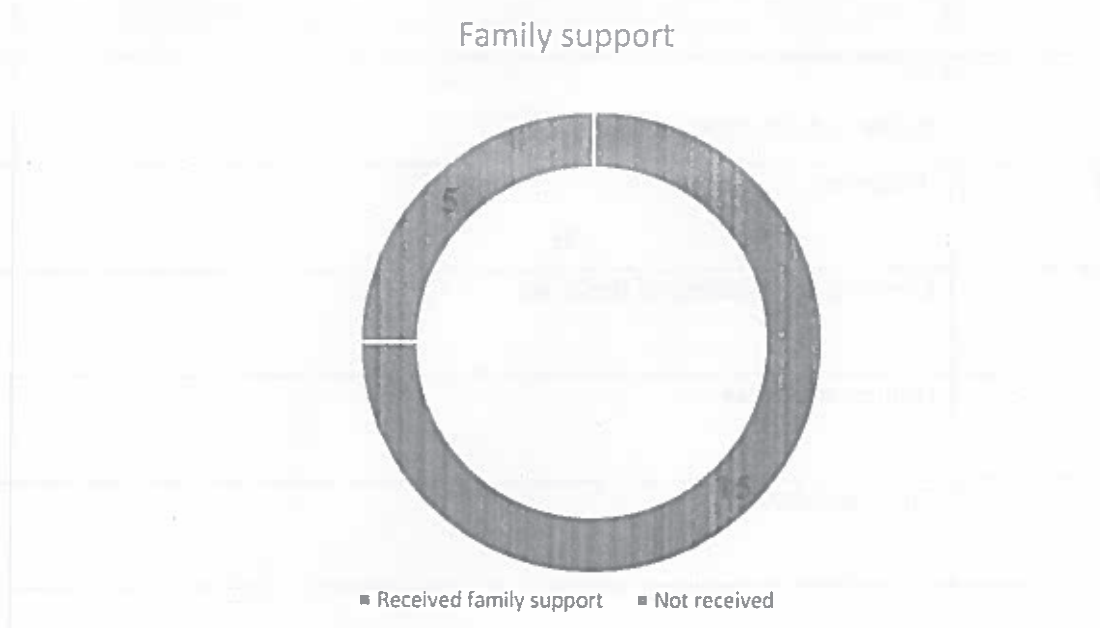
.Purpose of doing business



■ Business for income ■ Spend their leisure time

Table no :11 .Family support

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage(%)
Received family support	15	75
Not received	5	25
TOTAL	20	100



OBSERVATIONS

As observed in the survey, women entrepreneurs engaged in various food business in this area includes

Table no : 12 Various Food Businesses by Women

Sl no	Business
1	KudumbaSree hotels
2	Snacks –Unniyappam, Uzhunnudu Vada
3	Homemade pickles
4	Bakeries
5	Cleaning and packing of fresh fish
6	Homemade cakes
7	Curry powders

Source : Survey

1.Declining Demand

In the analysis 75 % of the entrepreneurs experienced a significant dip, and in many cases, a complete lack of demand because of national and international travel bans. Very few women entrepreneurs benefited from changing demand patterns caused by the pandemic. Some of them lost their job during pandemic and others' income was reduced due to pandemic.

2.Decreasing availability of raw ingredients

Women usually earn less than their male counterparts for the same work.

The pandemic had a strong impact on financial ability of women entrepreneurs. It created a cash flow crunch, limiting working capital, the ability to cover expenses and to remain operational With financial reserves drying out, some women entrepreneurs were not able to

cover all costs, resulting in increasing outstanding payments such as repayment of loans and credits.

3, Decrease in production

Many entrepreneurs decided to slow down their production to keep production cost minimum until the situation improves, lock down and movement restrictions were factors contributed to operational disruptions. Decentralized contaminant zones kept away many women entrepreneurs from their manufacturing units, Kudumbasree restaurants had to find alternative methods to attract customers and delivery as well. A lot of women entrepreneurs had to shift their work place to home as they were unable to pay rent.

4.Limited access to market place and supply chain problems

Women found it difficult to find their market. Physical distribution channels were totally disrupted due to pandemic, delivery channels which were heavily affected by pandemic in turn affected the women entrepreneurs. Findings reveal that 60 % food business was affected by marketing disruptions and during lockdown national and international trade and transport were completely paralyzed.

5. Availability of Labors

Lack of demand issues related to salary like reduction in salary, salary cut etc. were some of the main concerns during pandemic and apart from this migrant labors returned to their native place to look after their families also created difficulties in running business.

6.Food Safety

Due to pandemic and shortage of skilled labors women entrepreneurs faced problem to adhere to the food safety rules and regulations issued by government in terms of Covid-19.

7.Role of Government to uplift women entrepreneurs

The Government has initiated several measures including moratoriums on term loans, working capital financing and extended the GST payment deadlines, the sector would take time to back in its original stage.

With the support of Government, Kudumbasree members engaged in 'Canteen and Catering' services were able to provide food to Corona Care Centers (First Line Treatment Centers).

Kerala State Kudumbasree Mission began a new project titled as 'Janakeeya Hotels', for uplifting the livelihood of the women especially in the rural areas and with an aim to create a 'Hunger Free Kerala' as well.

8.New women entrepreneurs

During Pandemic many employed women lost their job and for some women salary was reduced and others trapped in home. Among these 10% started their own food business like homemade cakes, pickles etc.

9.Post COVID

Some women entrepreneurs turned this challenges as opportunities and successfully overcame this pandemic situation

a. Online marketing

Women entrepreneurs started marketing their product by creating new account on online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Whats App and Twitter to get in touch with their customers. Some of them created their own websites to attract more customers.

b. Attractive product

They created product packages to attract clients and encourage purchase behavior especially in online platform

c. Strengthen the labors from local areas

Labors were appointed from local areas and those employees' welfare was also taken care. They were given training to adjust with pandemic.

d. Strengthen the market channels and supply chain

They discovered many market channels instead of one supply chain. Hence whatever issues emerged their supply chain remained unaffected.

e. Revising pricing

Women entrepreneurs introduced distinctive pricing options. Some of them revised their pricing strategy to overcome the revenue loss during pandemic and others steadily reduced their price to attract more customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide training to women entrepreneurs on how to use social media platforms to increase their marketing methods. Because women entrepreneurs engage in business not only as part of their livelihood but also to spend their leisure time in a more meaningful way and strengthen their relationship bonds and communication as well. Therefore, in technologically advanced world women should be able to use internet platforms as means to enhance their

business and life too. Here support from their family is also play a vital role especially during pandemic.

Women entrepreneurs should be informed about the moratorium and schemes offered by the Government to overcome this crisis and this should reach them on time. During pandemic it is essential to identify alternate funding sources to meet their daily expenses.

Other minor recommendations are direct income support to women entrepreneurs should be given, strong support for women led businesses have to be initiated, support for illiterate women workers, support for rehabilitation of paid and unpaid workers.

CONCLUSION

The COVID 19 pandemic has severely affected all areas of business in particular disturbing the operations of majority of the women led businesses initiatives, statistics points out it as 90. This pandemic which has been spreading and evolving for the last two years have casted dark shadows over the food businesses sector, especially which are run by women.

In order to overcome this crisis, the entrepreneurship initiatives of women must be digitalized, for instance digitalization of marketing, online selling platforms etc can enhance the business of women during these tough times. Product diversification and making the product more attractive to certain extent would be a viable solution to this problem. A supportive system is an essential factor to overcome the difficulties of pandemic in long run. Government agencies and other funding organizations should develop suitable projects and programs to enable sustainable economic and socio cultural developments in India.

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