

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RURAL WOMEN AND MEN IN SENEGAL

COVID-19 in Senegal

Between March 23 to June 30, 2020, the Government of Senegal imposed a nationwide curfew. Following a regionally concentrated rise in cases in certain areas, the state of emergency was reintroduced, and night curfew was imposed in Dakar and Thies from January to March 2021. Pandemic related restrictions have hit the Senegalese economy hard, affecting the country's gross domestic product. The large informal economy was particularly impacted.

Study description

To understand the impact of COVID-19 on rural women, we designed a longitudinal panel study collecting five rounds of phone survey data with data drawn from a representative face-to-face survey in rural Senegal covering Fatick, Kaffrine, Kaolack, Kedougou, Kolda, Matam, Saint-Louis, Sedhiou, Tambacounda, and Ziguinchor regions. Due to low survey coverage of females in the first round, the second and third rounds surveyed both spouses and then randomly picked one male or female respondent per household to include in the study. For comparability we focus on findings from rounds 2-5. Figure 1 provides a detailed description of the study timeline and sample size covered in each round.

KEY FINDINGS

- Almost all households reported a loss of income due to the pandemic, but experiences varied between rural women and men.
- Men were more likely to report using savings and selling assets to cope with income loss, whereas women were more likely to report reducing consumption. Both men and women reported high levels of government transfers.
- As a result of the pandemic, women's care burden increased while their work for income declined.
- Women were more likely than men to report being worried about food insecurity, unavailability, and access. Nearly half of the women were not consuming a healthy diet.
- Female-headed households were particularly affected by loss of remittances linked to COVID-19.

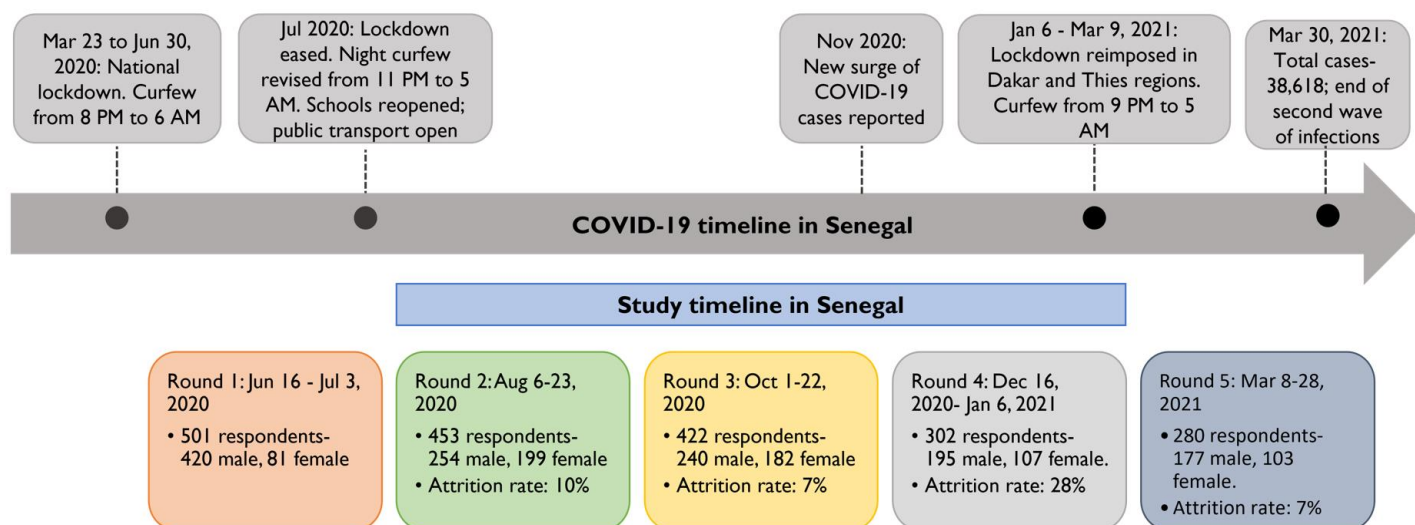


Figure 1: Senegal: COVID-19 lockdown and study timeline

Study findings

a. Economic impact

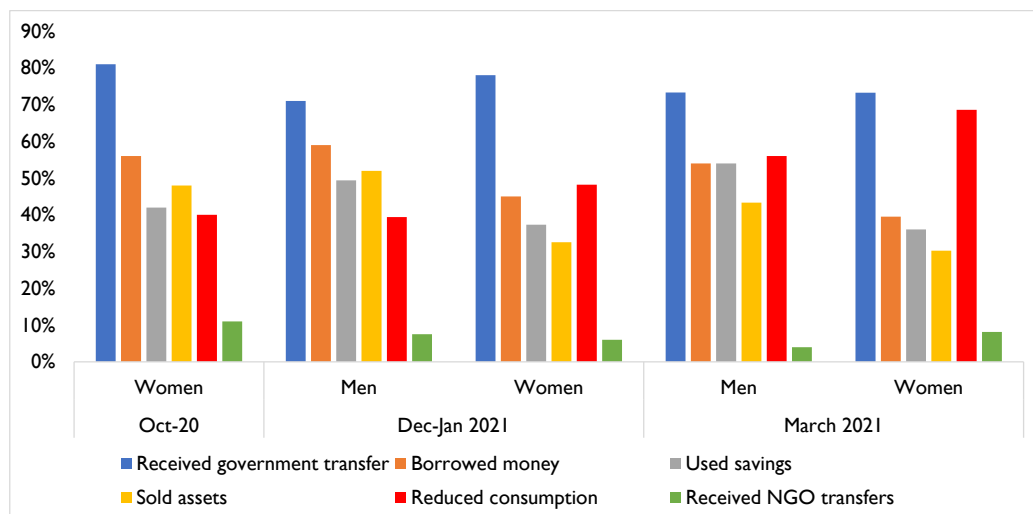


Figure 1: Coping strategies for households to deal with income loss

Farming and livestock rearing were the main sources of livelihood for most respondents. Men were more likely to be engaged in agriculture (80%) compared to women (52%). More than 95% of households reported suffering income loss due to the pandemic. While income losses experienced declined over the subsequent rounds, the share of households continuing to face economic hardships from the pandemic remained high at 80% in round 4 (Dec/Jan) and increased to 84% in March in response to the first spike of COVID-19 cases in early 2021. Men were more likely to report using savings and selling

assets to cope with income loss, whereas women were more likely to report reducing consumption (Figure 2). When asked about whose savings or assets were used in round four (Dec/Jan), most men reported selling their own assets (75%) or using their own savings (71%), to cope with income loss, whereas women were more likely than men to report the use of joint savings and assets as a coping mechanism. Use of government transfers has remained consistently high, indicating continued assistance to vulnerable people throughout the pandemic. Between 80-85% of men across the rounds reported making decisions about their incomes themselves, compared to 57-69% of women.

Among the women in employment (75%), the share working in the week preceding the survey declined from 81% to 56% between August and Dec/Jan. In round 4, more than a third of respondents said the time spent on work or employment had reduced compared to pre-COVID times. However, women spent additional hours on caring for children, elderly, and sick people in the household across all rounds. In Dec/Jan, 17% of men reported an increase in hours spent on care work, compared to 42% of women.

b. Impact on migration

In round 1 of the survey, more than a quarter of the households reported having at least one migrant household member in the preceding year. This included 26% of male-headed and 30% of female-headed households. One quarter of all migrants had returned in the August 2020 round. By round 4, 44% of households with migrants reported that at least one migrant had returned. Just over half of the households with migrants reported receiving remittances in Jun/Jul, and only 11% did in the Dec/Jan round. More than 70% of the remittance receiving households in round 1, and 56% in round 4, noted that the amount received was below pre-pandemic times (Figure 3). Based on the underlying pre-COVID face-to-face survey, remittances constituted 10% of income for male-headed households and 21% for female-headed households, suggesting that female-headed households suffered particularly from loss of remittances.

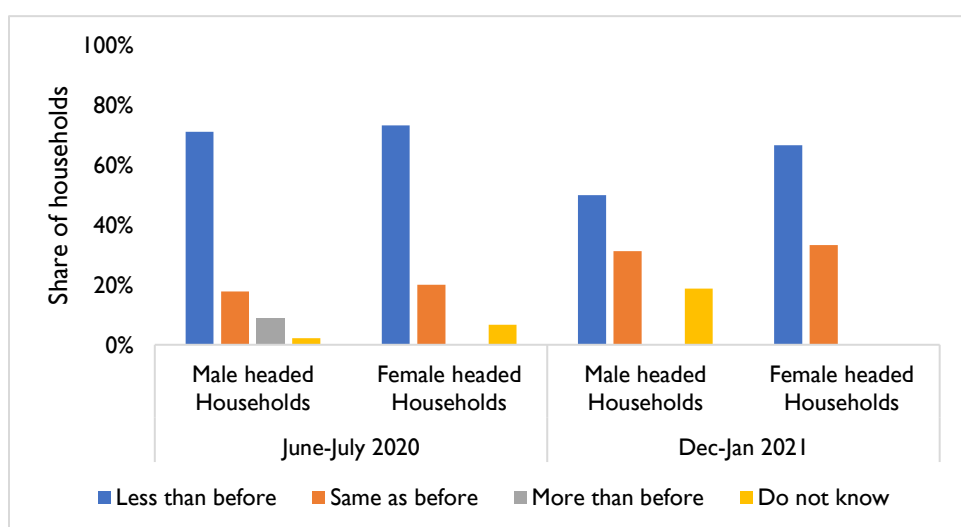


Figure 3: Changes in remittance levels by household headship

c. Impact on mobility

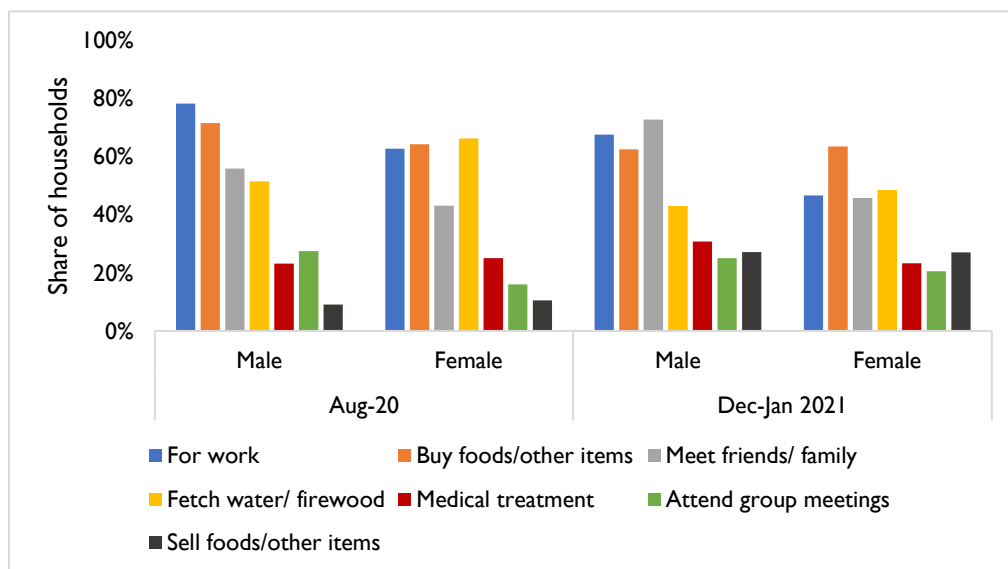


Figure 4: Mobility in the past 2 weeks preceding the survey

In August 2020, more than 71% of men reported being able to go out to buy food, while only 65% of women reported doing so (Figure 4). By Dec/Jan however, this gap had disappeared.

Men were more likely to report going out to work, attend group meetings, and meet family and friends; women were more likely to have gone out to collect water and firewood. While men's mobility for many activities improved over the survey rounds, by Dec/Jan, no such gains could be observed in women's mobility for activities such as working and meeting friends.

d. Impact on food security and dietary diversity

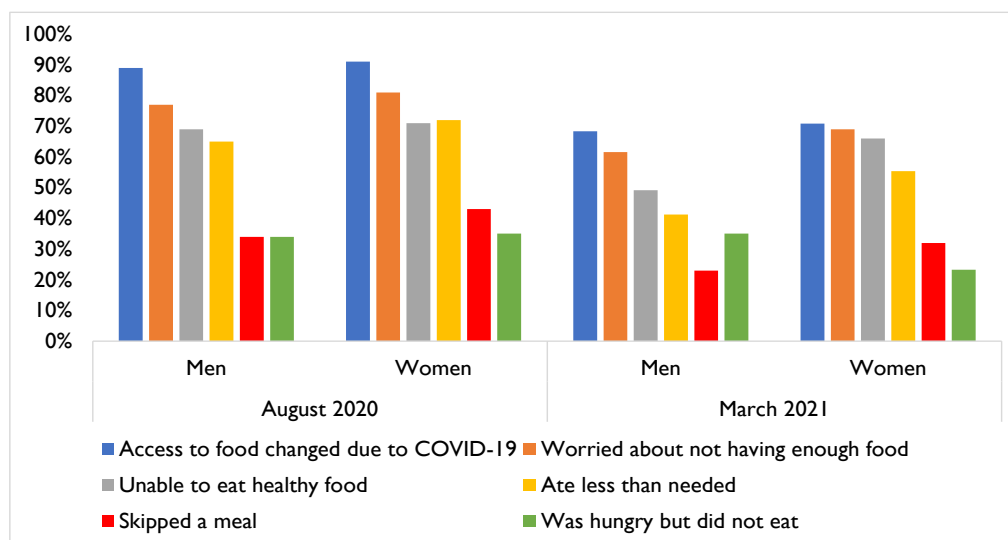


Figure 5: Food insecurity experienced by households in the past two weeks preceding the survey

Women were more likely to report being worried about not having enough food, making changes in their diet due to food unavailability such as skipping meals, and not eating healthy and nutritious foods (Figure 5). While we observe improvements in these measures over the survey rounds, access to food continued to be an issue for a large share of the respondents. In March 2021, 69% of households still reported that food access was different as a result to COVID-19, driven largely by inability to consume sufficient healthy food.

Women were much less likely to have a minimally adequate diet¹ compared to men. In August 2020, only 43% of women had consumed food from five or more food groups while for men this figure was 51%. By end of 2020, 54% of women and 62% of men adequately showed minimum dietary diversity. Cereals, meats, and leafy vegetables dominated diets of most respondents while consumption of fruits, nuts and seeds, and eggs and dairy products was very low (Figure 6). Throughout the panel survey, on average, one third of respondents noted that they could not obtain fruits or vegetables for the family.

¹ Based on a 24-hour recall period, the minimum dietary diversity (MDD) module was used to assess changes in the consumption of different food groups by both male and female respondents.

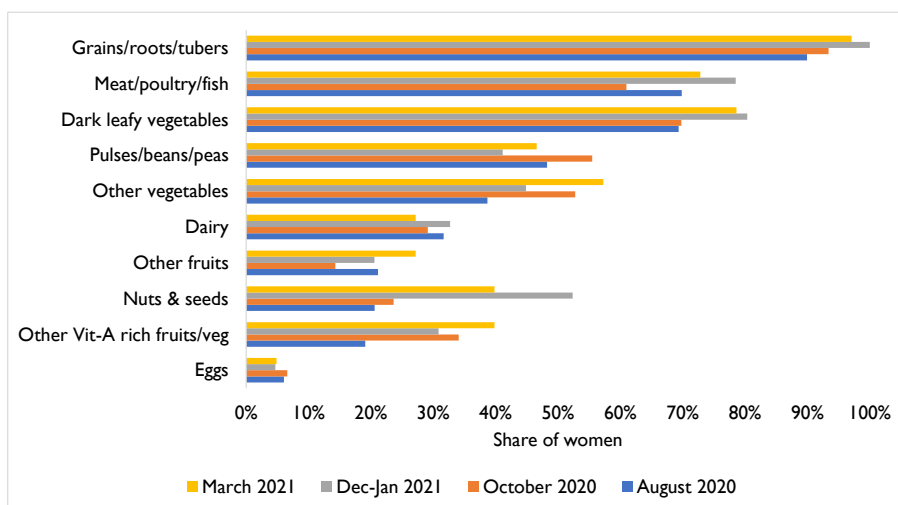


Figure 6: Food groups consumed by women in the 24 hours preceding the survey

e. Impact on water security

Most households relied on running water and dug wells as a source of drinking water. The source of drinking water was located on own property for more than half of all households while 43% of respondents had to travel elsewhere to access water. Of these respondents, nearly 52% of women reported spending 30 minutes or more on fetching water, compared to 40% of men. For most households, levels of water insecurity were moderate, and improved slightly over time. However, 20-40% of respondents noted water insecurity regarding overall access, for drinking water, or for washing hands across survey rounds. Around 54% of households reported paying for domestic water consumption and of these, nearly 29% noted that they paid more compared to before the pandemic. Women were more likely to report an increase in expenditure on water.

f. Impact on children's education

The module on children's education was administered in round 4 (Dec 2020/Jan 2021). Around 94% of households reported having at least one boy or girl of school age. Out of these households, 28% and 35% of households had at least one school-age girl or boy, respectively, not attending school before the pandemic. The pandemic led to a small, further decline in attendance.

Conclusions

As demonstrated in the survey results, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected vulnerable groups and exposed them to income losses, food insecurity, and magnified existing gender disparities. Reducing these negative impacts would require both short-term strategies to help households restore pre-pandemic conditions, and long-term strategies that aim to build their resilience to minimize the impact of such shocks in the future. For women in rural areas, the findings of our phone surveys suggest that interventions should focus on improving access to more varied diets, particularly for women, reducing individual and household indebtedness, particularly of female-headed households that lost remittance incomes, and growing overall opportunities and mobility of women farmers. Through its Economic and Social Resilience Program (PRES), the Government of Senegal has implemented a substantial assistance package with short-term measures, such as the distribution of masks and basic food items as well as the payment of electricity and water bills, while other measures focus on longer-term objectives to support the private sector and related employment. As a response to youth protests in March 2021, the government also promised a reorientation and acceleration of current action plans which fall under the comprehensive Plan for an Emerging Senegal (PSE), including additional funding of around 350 billion FCFA targeting youth and women. Gender-responsive responses for rural areas are so far lacking.

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