

## Women in the “eye” of a pandemic!

Dear Editor,

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has caused havoc in the lives of people all over the world. And the ‘female gender’ have had their own set of challenges. Traditionally, Indian women have been sacrificing their careers in the interest of their family and household. This is also true for women physicians in most parts of the world.<sup>[1]</sup> Indian women ophthalmologists have had to make great adjustments in their daily schedules both at work and on the home front due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which can have a negative impact on their mental, social and physical well-being. Issues that loom large are managing individual practices with falling revenues and increased cost of maintaining the set-up, providing protection to staff and more consumables like sanitizers, masks, and personal protective equipment.<sup>[2]</sup> Additional (wo) manpower for screening patients attending the ophthalmic outpatient during this pandemic is an additional strain on resources. For those who are employees at private institutes or hospitals, pink slips and pay cuts and unpaid leaves are major stressors. Ironic is the “COVID Paradox” wherein work-from-home employees are drawing full salaries, while doctors who are putting their life at risk are making do with reduced or salary.

Since female doctors tend to spend more time on home and family commitments, challenges unique to COVID-19 include online classes for children, which needs to be streamlined and their unsupervised care, as schools are yet to reopen. Though not feasible for doctors in clinical specialties, work from home during this pandemic has made the situation more complicated. Another disturbing trend is the increase in reports of mental and physical domestic abuse, possibly due to growing professional and financial frustrations. Since the COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed social activities, there is also no opportunity

for respite and renewal.<sup>[3]</sup> While women were previously encouraged or tempted to opt for branches in medicine which were amenable to flexible work hours, this is no longer true in the present day and time.<sup>[3]</sup> With more and more women taking on more challenging specialties with longer working hours and some in leadership positions, their trials and tribulations are worse during COVID-19.<sup>[4]</sup> Their potential for career growth and promotions may be compromised as they have added domestic commitments during this pandemic. There is also fear of the unknown, the “asymptomatic COVID-19 patients”, who pose a risk for all clinicians. With support groups and mental healthcare more accessible now, it remains to be seen if women emerge unscathed from this ‘life-work imbalance’ and go from “Women in times of COVID” to COVID Warriors!

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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