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Chapter

The Psychological Aspects of Home-Makers and Women during Pandemic

Samina Firoz Wagla Wala

Abstract

Depression and anxiety are two faces of a coin and we unfortunately fail to understand the plight of a person suffering from any one of these mental conditions. However, nowadays people have started considering mental health as a serious and complex issue, but still, those suffering from it tend to shy away and hide in arrears their own dark curtains. Sometimes, a very normal looking person may also be a victim of mental breakdown and anxiety. He may be working out fine, laughing, smiling, talking and all, but somewhere deep inside and within, he may be crying his heart out. It just does not visibly appear so on the outside. Moreover, in the phase of COVID, this situation has aggravated a lot because of various reasons like loss of jobs, work from home, salary reductions and cost cuttings etc. The effect of these problems fell on the families overall, but the most suffered category was – THE HOMEMAKERS, or in other words, THE HOUSEWIVES. Housewives have usually higher resilience when it comes to handling problems and family issues as they have an inbuilt capacity and trait to handle and adjust themselves in any atmosphere and ambience after marriage, but this COVID period was equally tough to handle for them as well. Specifically, if we talk about housewives, the entire COVID period was difficult for them to handle because of multiple reasons which will be mentioned point by point.

Keywords: pandemic, housewives, anxiety, psychological, homemakers, women, depression, resilience, COVID

1. Introduction

The title chosen for the chapter is deliberately explained in a very simple yet effective manner because as a part of the global community, now we all are aware of what the word PANDEMIC means. So, let us first try to understand the term "Pandemic" and then see the effects of the COVID pandemic on the society in general and then the housewives in particular.

Pandemic. Pandemic defined by the dictionary as a disease that spreads over the whole world or a whole country. In the remarkable year 2019, the whole world found itself waking up to this brand-new pandemic – COVID.

COVID-19 has been one of the most widespread diseases the world has ever witnessed in the past century. This pandemic stretched its arms wide across the world, people died in every corner, some even very untimely, but in addition to all

the visible destructions due to COVID, there were numerous invisible effects of this pandemic as well.

Usually, when we talk about the negative or destructive impact of such an event, we consider only economic losses, decline in GDP of the country, poverty etc. Although, these impacts are also heart-breaking and pathetic, but what we often forget to pay heed to is the mental breakdown people have who suffer from such problems.

People commit suicides, relationships fail miserably, families break down and depressed minds and increased struggles snatch the mental peace bit by bit with each passing day. Now when we consider all these impacts which relate to the psychology of a person, we do not usually see it as a visible difference to the society overall, but if people who institute any society are not fit mentally, then what good can be extracted from such a societal sect?

This is a question which is vital for all of us to understand but unfortunately, many of us fail to even comprehend this as a serious matter and people do not consider mental or psychological impacts as harmful as any other visible impact.

What people usually fail to understand is that if a person is mentally unfit or mentally in a bad state, then he or she will not be able to perform any task assigned to him efficiently. But generally, people do not promote mental health and fitness as much as they appreciate physical fitness.

Physical fitness is required to perform any task physically, but mental health and fitness is equally necessary to ignite motivation to do any task – waking up after a nap, taking off shoes after coming home, cleaning dishes, washing and ironing clothes and even the toughest of jobs like reading a book, talking to a friend or playing with a child.

The latter are also not very difficult to perform, but just when someone is mentally depressed or anxious, when the person cannot breathe or when it feels like the heart is somewhere breaking into pieces inside, these easy jobs also appear very difficult and complicated. People forget how to talk to others, how to read a good book or watch a good movie. People are unable to cherish the smile of a toothless milk-dipped lips of a child. Depression does not have anything to do with a gender in particular, but when it exists in someone, then it makes people wonder and question their existence. People often suffer from existential crisis and this indeed makes them neurotic.

2. The stature of housewives in the society

The concept of housewives is quite twisted in our society. Any woman who nurtures a family is a home-maker and not a housewife. Whether or not the woman is working professionally somewhere or handling her household entirely, the psychological impact of these things is equal on both. But if we critically examine the psychology of both the categories, then we can clearly gather that both of them have their own battles to fight.

Majority housewives suffer from this kind of abuse on daily basis and become a victim of their husband's anger and frustrations. All these episodes, even if they occur just once, leave a dark and negative imprint on the mind of a woman.

3. Impetus behind the problem

The emphasis by this study is on the shifting psychological stability of a woman. Many working women who were tied up at home during the COVID phase were

also facing the same issues as those women who were not working and were totally dedicated to their households. In addition, the newly married women also faced the many issues because of which their relationships suffered from crisis. We cannot consider using the phrase 'the main problems were ...' because there were so many issues and all of them were equally complicated.

3.1 Shortage/decrement in the total family income

The difference between the ratios of the income of the household and the expenses of the household increased to such an extent that it became very difficult to supplement the basic needs of the family. All this led to an additional burden on the housewives as they had to adjust with the scarcity of money, look after the basic needs of the family members like food and medicines, and most importantly, handle the educational expenses of children and to handle their tantrums. Obviously, the prime responsibility of handling the financial matters mostly lies in the hands of the husband, but handling and managing the children, especially the young ones who are not established enough to take care of themselves and rely entirely on parents is a rather more difficult job. Women who are totally soaked up in house chores are relatively more vulnerable to depression and anxiety because of the fact that their life revolves around just this one aspect – family and family members.

In most traditional families, who are deeply rooted into the quagmire of cliché societal rules mostly see housewives as the thread which binds the family members together. And for this one reason, whatever happens within a family becomes the prime responsibility of a housewife. If the man of the family loses his job or earns inadequately, it becomes the responsibility of the housewife to manage the expense and feed everyone according to that [1].

In fact, housewives are burdened with so many responsibilities that they hardly get any time to look after themselves or pay attention to their mental wellness even in normal conditions. Topping that, the lockdown period during the pandemic was like a cherry on the top of a cake.

The loss of jobs and massive fall in the economy during the pandemic resulted in the shortage of money due to which many families started quarreling within themselves.

The basic expenses of the household like groceries, medical expenses and various other incidentals like electricity, water and rent were also too much and the restricted income of the family was a big concern for the housewives during the pandemic.

3.2 Housewives: victims of domestic violence

In various households, the housewives also fell prey to the frustrations and aggression of their male counterparts. The frustration and foiling mindset of husbands, especially those who were out of jobs were incited to behave violently and become aggressive and misbehave with their female counterparts [2].

Many cases were reported where husbands beat their wives ruthlessly and even many children became witness to this at a very young and tender age. Usually, this behavior arises from the ruined psychological process of the various men who believe that feeding their families is their primary job and somewhere deep within they knew they are lacking in it. But, keeping in mind the egoistic characteristic of the male mindset, they reciprocated this frustration on their wives and blamed them for spending too much and not being able to survive in tough conditions [3].

3.3 Burden of nurturing the entire family

During this pandemic, the world witnessed exponential deaths and fatalities, families were infected and as a measure for safety, people were maintaining physical distances from one another and constantly sanitizing and so much more. But distances were increasing at a rapid pace not just physically, but also mentally. Another reason why housewives suffered psychological stress during the pandemic was that all the members of the family came under one roof [4, 5].

Now, prima face if we consider, this should be a good thing. But the case was not so appealing in most families. When joint families came together, in-laws came under one roof, most of them could not adjust with each other.

In addition to this, housewives were expected to bear the responsibility to make peace with the in-laws no matter how tortured they felt from within.

This perpetual burden of keeping the family tied up together along with bearing the financial issues and still keeping the family happy together by taking care of all the members of the family – husbands as well as the in-laws was a very challenging task for housewives.

If we talk about Indian families, the psychological ill-impacts on housewives were even worse. In Indian families, it is believed that joint families stay happy and family members should stay together as much as possible and because of this notion of a "happy family", many families end up "unhappily". Many such cases prevail where if we observe, women are not happy with their in-laws and are victimized badly – both physically and mentally.

Additionally, women faced issues with in-laws in terms of dominance also. Women who were working from home needed to spare time for working as well as for doing house chores. But with families living together under the same roof, division of work was not equal and all the pressure was on the shoulders of housewives.

4. The effects of migration on housewives

In addition to all this, there was one more issue we witnessed – MASS MOVEMENT. Now when we hear the word mass movement, we picture migration. But this migration is of a different kind altogether. During the pandemic, there were thousands of people who had to move to their home towns i.e., they had to shift from the place they worked at to their home towns or villages due to work from home policy and decreased income and increased expenses [6, 7].

Those who were unmarried, were a bit safe from the household problems, but those who are married, especially married women, faced a lot of difficulties in adjusting in their home towns and villages again.

The main issue was that women belonging to a village first adapted themselves with the ambience and lifestyle of the cities due to their husbands' jobs in the cities. Now, when they were finally settled there, away from the daily hustles of in-laws and neighborhood, they were again compelled to shift to their native hometowns or villages.

Now going back there and adjusting with the same old typical conservatism and living up to the expectations of in-laws and society was one hell of a challenge for housewives during pandemic. Husbands could still comparatively adjust because they were living in their own family environment which wasn't new for them. But housewives faced difficulties because most of them were not treated as a part of the family but as a DAUGHTER-IN-LAW who will work and contribute towards the family's well-being in every way.

The husbands also did not understand their wives' conditions and the negative psychological impact on their minds as they were too much involved in other things like job and income.

All these factors led to a massive mental breakdown and negatively propagated the emotional dissatisfactions within families.

5. Sexual deprivation in housewives

Apart from all this tedious house-job, there was a perpetually rising tension of sexual dissatisfaction between husband and wife.

According to some researchers who conducted research in this area, 70% Indian women do not have orgasm during sexual intercourse. Sexual dissatisfaction leads to many mental disorders like neurosis and even Oedipus complex sometimes in worse cases. In a novel called Cry, the peacock by Anita Desai, the protagonist Maya suffers from psychosis and a grave neurotic disorder. This leads her to madness and results in heinous crime. Maya ends up murdering her husband Gautam and killing herself soon after [8].

Many women who were exhausted by their day's labour during pandemic and wanted some relief looked up to their male counterparts for sexual pleasures and satisfaction. But 7 out of 10 men do not pay heed to a woman's sexual satisfaction. During pandemic, women were mentally exhausted due to many reasons and the only mode of pleasure or relief was sexual intimacy. But housewives suffered from sexual disharmony also [2].

So, if we consider all these factors and reasons, we can easily imply that women were psychologically affected to an extremely disastrous degree. The psychological impact on housewives during the pandemic was so traumatic and serious, that it affected the overall functioning and mental makeup of women, especially housewives.

6. The cause-and-effect theory

Now, when we consider such reasons and the consequent effects of these, we can acknowledge very well how the conditions of the housewives would've been like during the pandemic. While we acknowledge and come to terms with these conditions, we realize that these were the conditions of those women who were unpregnant (**Table 1**) [3, 7].

7. Pregnant women during pandemic

Now considering the other paradigm of femineity, i.e., when we look at those women who were pregnant during the pandemic period, we will know and we will realize that how difficult it was all the more for those women who were facing pregnancy along with the other stresses of household. In fact, there were some women who did not only go through repeated pregnancy disorders and other stressful episodes but also went through many physical as well as mental disorders which we call Post-partum Stress Disorders. This disorder results in post-partum psychosis which is usually prominent among 20–25% pregnant women [9–11].

Reasons	Effects on Psychology and Physical Health
1. Lack of literacy or lack of disease management knowledge.	Increased risk of getting prone to the pandemic. Increased risk of spreading or catching infection from nearby people.
2. Burden of increased house chores like cooking, cleaning, washing etc.	Excessive body aches and lethargy.
3. Forceful/undesired/unwillingness to perform sexual activity.	Decreased libido resulting in sexual dissatisfaction with the partner.
4. Irregular sleep patterns.	Insomnia, increased risk of mental disorders, irritability and heart diseases like stroke.
5. Economic/financial problems.	Inability to fulfill the basic family and self needs and increased burden of affording the essentials.
6. Lack of mental health assessment/self-judgment methods.	Depression, anxiety, mental disorders, lack of self-confidence, guilt etc.
7. Irregular emotional episodes/fluctuations due to abundance of household chores and lack of time for self-enhancement.	Fluctuations in the menstrual cycle patterns, loss of appetite and irregular mood swings.

Table 1.Reasons and effects of common problems faced by housewives.

8. Pre- and post-partum disorders

The most common symptoms of this disorder are rambling speeches, elated mood swings, erratic behavior and repeated episodes of crying over past guilt and much more. The summary is that, the longer it takes to treat them, the bigger the problem becomes. Sometimes, the stressful disorder also leads to having much serious effects that can harm the child as well as the mother herself and can be very aching for the family members as well. Now, when we talk about the treatment of such disorders, the first step which needs to be followed is to keep the woman happy during such times. But, pandemic and especially, the lock-down period was so stressful for everyone that it became very difficult and almost impossible for the family members to take care of the pregnant woman.

The financial and other crisis made the proper medication and psychiatric assistance also difficult to afford. The only method to keep the woman healthy was to keep the woman happy and the overall ambience of the family also happy but that was not possibly happening everywhere.

A similar research study conducted during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014–2015, reported that women were more likely to be infected because of their primary role as caregivers inside families and frontline health workers. The resources for reproductive and sexual health were diverted to emergency response. This led to an increase in the maternal mortality rates as well.

So, the pandemic had combined negative effects on housewives as well as women who were either pregnant or working from home.

9. Effects of pandemic on female domestic workers or house-maids

The image is taken from a leading Indian newspaper article, which captures the image of a young domestic worker who was deeply unhappy with the lockdown. She reported that the few hours she used to spend away from home was the only time



Figure 1.
https://bl.thgim.com/blink/cover/oxgaep/article31244743.ece/alternates/WIDE_615/BLINKWOMAN
MIGRANT

she had to herself in an otherwise full day. She'd get to work early, finish the chores quickly and efficiently, and once her employer left for office, relax with a cup of tea and something to eat, and watch television (**Figure 1**) [12].

But everything changed amid lockdown in pandemic. She would stay home in a joint family all day long and the entire burden of household chores were placed on her shoulders. She had to look after, her child, husband, parents-in-law, not to mention the regular cleaning and swabbing and the ceaseless reprimand. The husband who was not violent, but like many men, apathetic and mostly uncaring.

For women who live in violent households, and those hundreds who cooped up in cramped spaces things became much more difficult during the pandemic.

It's a fact that count and degrees of domestic violence increased during times pandemic lockdown. Men who were caught between the clutches of the State and local militia, men turn more and more to the violent abuse of their wives and children.

The knowledge of how pandemic impacted housewives is less common. The studies that exist, however, are consistent in their findings.

The signs of the negative impact of the pandemic on women are quite clear.

There are various research reports from mid-Asian countries like China, Malaysia and Indonesia show a sharp rise in domestic violence in recent months.

According to a recent case reported in China's Jingzhou district, there was a sharp rise in domestic abuse reporting in February 2020 as compared to the previous year.

For a country like India, it's difficult enough for women to report domestic violence in 'normal' times; if they wanted to do so in pandemic, how would they? Would their complaint be taken seriously? With social interaction down to nothing, there's no alternative to compassionate neighbors, NGOs or the community.

10. The lack of proper sanitation facilities for women

Across the world, at least 75 per cent — and the figure is higher in some countries — of caregivers are women. In India, we already know that nurses are at risk; they are being thrown out of their rented accommodation, targeted in the areas they live in [8, 13].

A recent piece in *The Lancet* asks a question that is seldom addressed — that of women's sanitary needs at times like this. Among the concerns for protective equipment, gloves, masks and so on, should there not be concern for menstrual supplies such as sanitary napkins?

A Chinese activist, Jiang Jing, who runs the Coronavirus Sister Support campaign, recently said, "Not many people thought that the frontline female health workers engaged in the battle against Covid-19 could need sanitary products for their health." [4].

Another tragedy which unfolded during the pandemic was the dolefully scarce compensation packages announced by the government which were limited only to registered workers, a minuscule number in a largely unregulated situation.

The chances were that there were few women among the registered, while many were working as part of families, and many were simply uncounted.

The urgency of dealing with pandemics took away attention from what were seen as 'smaller' issues at the time.

Lack of attention to women's needs and short supplies in such difficult times was one of the major casualties. It is however worth mentioning, that if it would have been done effectively, then it'd have had a long-term effect.

For example, when domestic violence went up, so did the sexual activities. In India, one sector that had been badly affected by the lockdown is the production of contraceptives. Factories have shut down as workers were unable to commute. While the contraceptive pill is manufactured in one state, for example, some of the ingredients are sourced from another. With borders closed, this too had to stop and with the global supply chain under stress, the implications were felt nationwide as well as globally.

11. Pandemic: a positive outlook

However, there were some positive aspects of the pandemic too. Many women who were physically and mentally strong enough to handle to the pressures and burden of household chores, were engaging in self-enhancement activities too like grooming themselves, exercising regularly and spending quality time with their families and friends.

Although, due to many restrictions all the clubs and other leisure-seeking places were closed down, but people still were able to host gatherings constituting limited number of people, like only family and close friends. Many women were engaging in these activities with their family members and were really bonding well with them. In fact, for those families who usually did not get enough time to spend with their families were enjoying this time period in a very well manner. For those women, who are usually always tied up at work and their husbands also busy in their offices were able to spend time with their children and bond with them well [14–17].

On the other hand, some joint families having senior citizens were also able to spend time with their sons and daughters, daughters-in-law and grand-children. The reason behind this is as the schools and colleges were closed, students were studying online. So, those students who wanted to prepare for higher studies got ample time to prepare due to the decreased burden of school activities. Additionally, school-going children who are usually so burdened with the loads of home work and assignments were also relieved for some time and got to spend quality time with their parents and family members.

12. Enhancement in relationships within the family

Usually, when husbands left for work and children for schools, housewives were left with no other option than to pass their time doing house chores all the time

or may be going hither and wither to keep themselves engaged. This resulted in a reduced level of bonding within the families. Weather we talk about joint or nuclear families, those women who were resilient and buoyant enough to handle their families and the changed environment due to pandemic and were constantly supported by financial aids were far away from any depressing or anxious episodes.

Many housewives after getting free from basic household work like cooking and cleaning engaged themselves in many recreational activities with their families like playing games, crafting with children and DIY home making items and much more [16].

Reportedly, The Hindu, an Indian editorial showed several pictures of children as well as parents engaging into various recreational activities which benefitted the environment as well like making best out of plastic and other wastes using social media and YouTube tutorials, planting trees and many other activities of the similar kind. Below are some pictures which evidently display the positive sides of the pandemic for those who were resilient enough to handle the situations in a robust manner (**Figures 2** and **3**).

Komal Narang at @myhappinesz says in the MOMS SPEAK section of The Hindu, "Earlier, my three-year-old was an outdoor kid and never had screen time. Now that I allow him to watch YouTube (mainly our family vlogs), he is taking some time to adjust to the change. Apart from his sleeping and eating schedule, which remain the same, we take each day as it comes. We've even started our own book club! It is restricted to six picture books or so a day. We used to read page after page, but now that we have the time, we have slowed down. We take time to look at the illustrations, I ask him what he sees ... It is a more mindful way of reading."

This testimonial statement by Komal Narang evidently proves the argument that how working women belonging from relatively well-to-do families were enjoying their quality time with children. Many mothers who otherwise were unable to spend much time with their children and family members were keenly involved and engaged in teaching their children various art of living activities and were getting to know them better.



Figure 2. https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/j71xx2/article31181375.ece/alternates/FREE_615/iStock-688400020-2



Figure 3. https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/9h3jcg/article31207944.ece/alternates/FREE_320/Komal-Narang

13. Engagement of women in social activities during the pandemic

Another example of people engaging in social works is given below where we can see how women were helping the underprivileged children and families by visiting the nearby non-government organizations and donating various books and other stationary items to those children who could not afford them otherwise so that they can do something creative and can utilize the time of quarantine (**Figures 4** and 5).

These images are a clear evidence of how housewives and other social workers were engaged in helping the less privileged children and people in educating and feeding them as well.



Figure 4.https://humanitariansupport.wordpress.com/2019/07/29/rural-education-in-india-challenges-of-rural-area-students/



Figure 5. http://www.governancetoday.co.in/incentives-teachers-remote-areas-khattar/

14. Research studies in support of the argument

According to a study known as 'Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)' which is a 21-item self-rated scale that evaluates the key symptoms of depression including mood, pessimism, sense of failure, self-dissatisfaction, guilt, punishment, self-dislike, self-accusation, suicidal ideas, crying, irritability, social withdrawal, indecisiveness, body image change, work difficulty, insomnia, fatigability, loss of appetite, weight loss, somatic preoccupation and loss of libido (Beck and Steer, 1993; Beck, Steer & Garbing, 1988), women, especially housewives suffered from extreme levels of depression and anxiety during the pandemic period [18, 19].

Another study conducted by the NPHEC in 2020 on the acute impacts of COVID on the mental health of women, psychological abuse is one of the most widely occurring reason behind depression in women [20]. The organization assessed the mental wellness of women by conducting an online survey using the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21). After this survey, the observations were that those women who had a history of mental illness and who were

allegedly abused during lockdown were found to have more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Around 40% of housewives reported problematic social media use. Violence against women also reportedly increased significantly during the lockdown [1, 4].

Psychological abuse was the most frequent type of violence during the pandemic which was approximately 96%. Women who had experienced abuse before the lockdown were at an increased risk of violence during the period of lockdown. It is widely accepted that women are the most affected, given that they are known to have a more anxious temperament and a higher emotional quotient. The emotional index of a woman is highly refined as compared to men and housewives are more vulnerable to any psychological impact because their time was engaged completely in their family and house chores surrounded by these situations all the time. Working women still could divert their mind for a little while but housewives had no options at all to do so.

In the above image, it is quite clear that a woman, especially the one who is designated as a HOUSEWIFE had to perform multiple tasks.

15. Conclusions

Considering the entire argument and various causes and its effects discussed above, we can summarize the entire discussion in a nutshell saying that the pandemic had a two-way effect on people around the globe, especially working women and housewives – both negatively and positively.

For those who could withstand such an unusual time and were resilient in such harsh situations came out with a neutral psychology, but for those who were not so strong and robust psychologically were impacted in a much worse way than one could ever think of. The chapter also tries to emphasize on the fact that being psychologically strong and being able to resist and withstand in such difficult times was a boon to many. Psychological strength is more important as compared to physical strength because a physical problem can be cured by medications, but a psychological disorder or imbalance lasts longer in a person's mind than expected. This is a bit more complex in women because of their higher emotional quotient and involuntary responses towards any emotional tension. Women and especially housewives are relatively more prone to any kind of family issue because they are more inclined towards keeping the family bound together and they are usually solely responsible for nurturing the family, being given the role of the "Mother" in nature.

Hence, this chapter concludes that the effects of the pandemic were global and worldwide but had far more deeper and complex effects on women – housewives and working women. The researches or the arguments taken up for the same prove how a woman's psychology - positively and negatively, was affected during the pandemic episode and especially during the lockdown.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on my own experiences and somewhat on the experiences I witnessed during the pandemic and the following lockdown. I am highly grateful to my mother, Mrs. Tahira Wagla and father, Mr. Firoz Hussain who supported the family in every possible manner with their immense support and patience.

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Since, I spend most of my time away from the family, but still somehow my mother, more than my father manages to keep the family together despite of her own physical ailments and weaknesses.

This one fact motivated me a lot to contribute for this chapter and that is the sole reason why I chose to write about the plights and struggles of home-makers and women during the pandemic.

I would like to thank the Almighty for giving me such a beautiful family and the intellect to be able to write on such issues.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude towards my organization for supporting me in writing for this book, especially my beloved Aaditya M, without whom, I would not have been able to understand what guidance and support truly means.

Declaration

I, Samina Firoz Wagla Wala, hereby declare that my work entitled "The Psychological Aspects of home-makers and women during Pandemic" submitted as a chapter contribution to the book entitled "Anxiety, Uncertainty, and Resilience During the Pandemic Period - Anthropological and Psychological Perspectives" for Intech Open Publication is an original work done by me under the guidance of my family and friends. The work is submitted to be published as a research/review paper and I take complete responsibility for unfollowing any compliance(s) or protocol(s) of the publishers.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease-2019 GDP Gross Domestic Product

NGO Non-Government Organization

DIY Do-it-yourself

BDI Beck Depression Inventory

DASS-21 Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales
NPHEC Nature Public Health Emergency Collection

Author details

Samina Firoz Wagla Wala Techno India NJR Institute of Technology, Udaipur, India

*Address all correspondence to: saminawagla@gmail.com

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