



Photo credit: Emily Kinsley, 2018



## COVID-19 Pandemic And Its Impacts As Experienced By Women in Iraq

Since 1993, Women for Women International (WfWI) programs have supported over half a million to earn and save money, improve health and wellbeing, influence decisions in their home and community, and connect to networks for support. Women for Women International-Iraq (WfWI-Iraq) believes that a woman can create sustainable change for herself, her family and community through her skills, knowledge and resources. WfWI-Iraq works with the most marginalized women to offer social and economic empowerment training programs to Syrian Refugees, internally displaced persons, and vulnerable women from host communities.

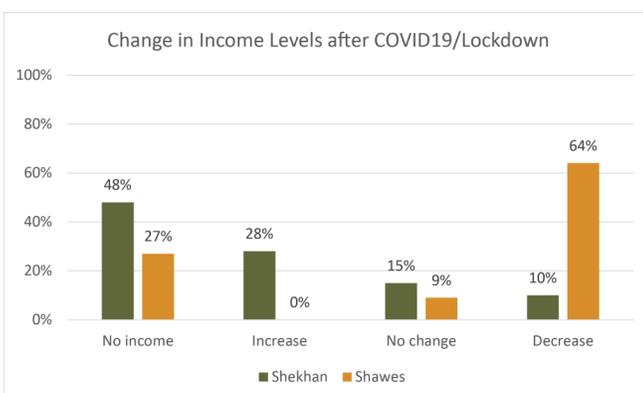
The COVID-19 pandemic created a global health crisis that altered the way we live, work, and interact. In Iraq, the pandemic aggravated the already struggling economy caused due to the political instability, ongoing violent protests, and increasing tensions between US and Iran. As Iraq adopted lockdown measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 virus, WfWI-Iraq provided training sessions to the women on COVID-19 preventive measures. As a safety precaution, WfWI-Iraq suspended all training but continued communications with the women through mobile phones to collect information on their needs and offered referrals to online psychological support or supplemental food services. This learning brief offers insights on COVID-19 outbreak impact experienced by the women from Shekhan and Shawes communities.

In June 2020, WfWI launched three surveys to learn about the effects of the pandemic on the women's lives, and their economic and social situations.

### Key Outcomes:

- Women report increased decision-making power in their homes.
- Women are facing significant decreases in savings.
- Many women are supporting their families at home through childcare, housekeeping, and caring for elderly.
- Many women who previously had income generating activities are now unable to complete them.
- The majority of participants are having difficulty paying for food and medical expenses.

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### Key Insights

**Between both communities, about half of the respondents reported lower income or no income at all since the beginning of the pandemic.** The major source of income for most respondents in Shekhan was daily labour, compared to government pension in Shawes. Most women report zero personal savings since the lockdown and have had their goals significantly impacted. This is partially due to loss of income generating activities. Despite these challenges, over a quarter of the respondents report household savings.

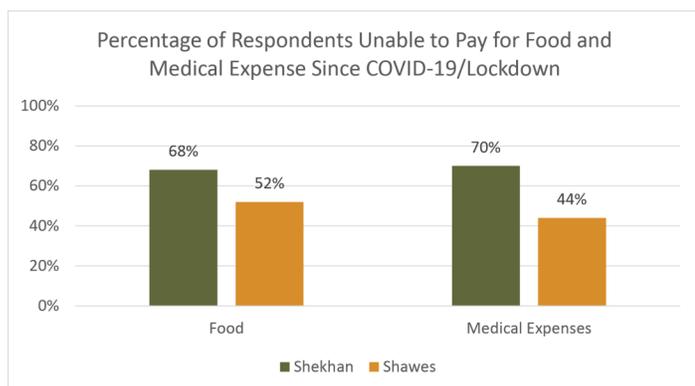
**Most women have not been earning and are unable to pay for enough food or medical expenses.**

Women and their families are in need of assistance to meet their daily needs. In the context of Iraq, most women work to supplement household income to cover expenses but their income generating activities have been largely affected since the health crisis began. With more people at home, women face the task of taking care of children and supporting the family through household chores. Some women have been able to work on vocational skills While managing their homes. Due to the lack of supplemental income, many women report not having the money to pay for daily necessities. Due to loss of income, increased expenses at home, the most pressing needs are financial assistance for medical care, food, and daily needs. In Shekhan, women requested financial support, additional psychosocial help, and additional skills trainings. In Shawes, women emphasized the need for additional sewing lessons, increased financial support, and psychosocial support.



Photo credit: Aidan O'Neill, 2019

**Despite conflict in the home, women reported increased decision-making power in their households as a result of the program. Women report finding a support network in family during this time.** More than half of the women in both locations report that they share their opinions and see the significance of joint decision making in the household. Though variance in the perception of role of decision making prevails in the two communities, there is positive and progressive change in women's agency in decisions making. As the challenges of the lockdown emerged, majority of the women in both communities reported finding a family member, usually their mothers, to be most helpful. Most women in Shekhan reported receiving help from family members for chores, while over half of the women in Shawes received no help in chores from family members.



**Women reported increased familial conflict and arguments due to financial hardship, poverty and lack of income.** Less than a quarter of women reported household conflict, but of those who did, they stated that conflict was incited by financial hardship that the family was going through. In Shawes specifically, women highlight that restrictions in movement had increased frustrations among men in their households. Most women in both communities report no knowledge of domestic violence during the lockdown. Further, at least 90% of women in both communities are aware that violence against women is not tolerable.

**Over half of the participants in both locations reported no external assistance for their communities.** The adoption of stringent lockdown measures restricted the reach of services and aid. Further, not many respondents are awareness of available resources. With significant loses in income, savings, and conflict and tensions in the home, these communities faced additional inequity and hardship due to the pandemic. Now more than ever, these communities need support to meet the needs of their families and women.

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