

POLICY REPORT

ANNEX

# FIT FOR WOMEN?

## SAFE AND DECENT PPE FOR WOMEN HEALTH AND CARE WORKERS

November 2021



Women in Global Health Series: Gender Equity and the Health Workforce



**WGH** | WOMEN IN  
GLOBAL HEALTH

# METHODOLOGY

## Desk based review:

- Scoping review of published literature relating to women and PPE
- Collation of media reports about PPE during the pandemic

## Online survey:

- Co-designed and tested tool with group of health workers
- Survey tool was translated into French, Spanish and Arabic
- The surveys were open for six weeks from end of June to mid-August 2021
- Responses were downloaded and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods

## Interviews:

- Interviews with self-selecting survey respondents were also undertaken to provide additional data
- 15 interviews were completed with health workers from: Pakistan, India (2), Uganda, Zambia (2), South Africa (2), Malawi, China, Taiwan, UK (2), Australia, USA

## Data analysis:

- Quantitative data was cleaned, and descriptive analysis undertaken using Stata (see tables below)
- Qualitative data was cleaned, and thematic analysis undertaken using NVivo

## Survey tool (following pages)

# Fit for Women?: Improving Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Women Healthcare Workers

Thank you for taking part in our survey.

This survey is open until Sunday 15th August.

If you can't complete the survey but would like to share your experiences via phone or email, please contact [rachel.thompson@womeningh.org](mailto:rachel.thompson@womeningh.org).

One of the many gender inequities in the health and care workforce that COVID-19 has exposed is around the fit and design of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The rapid onset and scale of COVID-19 led to shortages of PPE in most countries, causing preventable infection and mortality among healthcare workers and others on the front lines. Even though most health workers are women, manufacturing specifications for medical PPE are usually drawn up based on the male body; for example, surgical masks may be too large to fit women's faces, increasing their risk of infection. During the pandemic there have been many reports of the negative impacts of PPE not designed for women's bodies and physiological functions.

PPE, like all products, is produced in compliance with standards. Working with partners including ASTM International and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), building on the UN Economic Commission for Europe's 'Gender-responsive Standards Declaration', and under the umbrella of Gender Equal Health and Care Workforce Initiative, Women In Global Health is launching a new research project on gender equity and PPE.

Through this survey we are seeking to better understand the scale and scope of medical PPE challenges faced by women on the front lines of COVID-19. We will use the information gathered to highlight common and context specific issues around PPE, and bring them to the attention of health system and industry decision makers.

## CONSENT

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Even after you agree to participate and begin the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without having to give a reason. Only the recorded data from respondents that complete the full survey will be used in later analysis.

If, for any reason, you would like to withdraw your data from the study after you have completed a questionnaire, you can contact the project lead Rachel Thompson: [rachel.thompson@womeningh.org](mailto:rachel.thompson@womeningh.org) anytime and the data will be removed from any analyses.

## ANONYMITY

The data collected for research purposes shall not contain any personal information about

you, other than your age (collected as a range) and the country you live in. This data will be anonymised and published in aggregate and may be shared publicly with the intent to aid related research.

#### RISKS

There are no known risks for you in this study, however, if you do experience any stress or discomfort as a result of the issues raised, it is recommended that you discuss these issues with a close friend or relative, and if feelings of distress continue to contact your local doctor or counselling service.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any additional questions/comments about this project, please feel free to contact Rachel Thompson at any time and we will be happy to answer your questions. You can reach her on [rachel.thompson@womeningh.org](mailto:rachel.thompson@womeningh.org) or +44 7478143662.

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#### \* Required

1. In order to continue, please read and consent to the following: \*

*Check all that apply.*

- I have read and understood the above information and have no further questions regarding my participation in this study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the survey at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I agree to the data I provide being analysed and published anonymously.

#### Section 1: Screening for Eligibility

2. Do you identify as a woman? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- I am non-binary
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you work in the healthcare sector? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

## Section 2: Basic Information

4. Age

*Mark only one oval.*

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

>55

5. Is the gender you identify as the same as you were assigned at birth? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

6. Country

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## 7. Place of Residence

*Mark only one oval.*

- Rural (village with less than 2,000 inhabitants)
- Urban (town or city with more than 2,000 inhabitants)

## 8. Place of Work

*Mark only one oval.*

- Rural (village with less than 2,000 inhabitants)
- Urban (town or city with more than 2,000 inhabitants)

## 9. Type of healthcare establishment you usually work in

*Mark only one oval.*

- Tertiary (e.g. regional hospital)
- Secondary (e.g. district hospital)
- Primary (e.g. family doctor's clinic)
- Residential care facility
- Mainly conduct home visits/community outreach
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. What is your main role in the healthcare sector?

*Check all that apply.*

- Clinical - doctor
- Clinical - nurse/ nurse practitioner
- Clinical - midwife
- Clinical - healthcare student
- Clinical work- other
- Healthcare assistant/auxiliary staff
- Administrative or support work (no direct patient contact)
- Public health officer (e.g. contact tracers)
- Clinical researcher (with patient contact)
- Temporary support to COVID-19 response (e.g. work at vaccination centre)
- Dentist
- Social care worker

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3: Access to medical PPE during the COVID-19 Pandemic

These questions refer to medical PPE. This is specialized clothing or equipment worn by a healthcare worker or patient for protection against infectious materials or the spread of illness during medical procedures and examinations.

## 11. Does your place of work have accessible guidelines to specify what PPE you should receive during the pandemic?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you feel your establishment's PPE guidelines are adequate to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the healthcare facility?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- N/A

13. Who provides PPE for your workplace?

*Mark only one oval.*

- PPE is provided by the employer.
- PPE is provided by the state/ local authorities.
- PPE is provided by NGOs/ private organisations.
- Staff have to provide PPE themselves.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. During COVID-19, do you feel your establishment has had an adequate supply of appropriate PPE to enable you to work safely most shifts?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never
- Not sure



15. What kind of PPE do you use during most shifts? (tick all that apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- Surgical Mask
- N95/FFP2 Mask
- Face shields
- Goggles
- Gloves
- Overalls/ gowns
- I don't use PPE

16. Please describe what PPE you think is appropriate for your role during COVID-19.

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17. During the COVID-19 response, has there been any additional instruction/training provided on how to use PPE?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, there was face-to-face/ practical training.
- Yes, there was an interactive online/ video training.
- Yes, there was a written instruction.
- No, there wasn't any training or instruction provided.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

18. If yes, after this training, how confident did you feel using PPE?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Not confident
- Moderately confident
- Very confident
- N/A

19. Would you like to have more training on PPE use?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- N/A

20. Please mark the most appropriate answer. During COVID-19:

*Mark only one oval.*

- I always have the PPE I need
- I sometimes have the PPE I need (please explain in the next question)
- I never have adequate PPE to make me feel safe at work (please explain in the next question)

21. If never or sometimes, please explain why not?

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22. If you have to provide PPE yourself, how affordable is it?

*Mark only one oval.*

- I can always afford the PPE I need
- I can sometimes afford PPE I need
- I can't afford the PPE I need

23. If you have to provide PPE yourself but you cannot always buy it, how do you mitigate infection risks?

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24. Do you have to re-use PPE more than you would like to?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

25. If you have to re-use PPE more than you would like to, please explain any issues/concerns.

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#### Section 4: Gendered Challenges Around PPE Use

26. Do you have spaces/ rooms to change into PPE privately if needed?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

27. If not, please elaborate on the challenges around the lack of safe spaces for changing.

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28. Has any of your PPE been fitted/adapted to your size?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, I only use fitted PPE.
- I sometimes use fitted PPE, when available.
- No PPE in my size is available.
- No fit test has taken place.
- N/A
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

29. If applicable, please clarify which type of PPE has been fitted.

\_\_\_\_\_

30. Have you faced any challenges using PPE related to fit (for example, items that may be too large)?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- N/A

31. If yes, please describe the challenge and if/how you overcame them.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

32. Please describe any challenges using PPE around menstruation and if/how you overcame them.

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33. Please describe any challenges using PPE during pre and postnatal periods and if/how you overcame them.

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34. If applicable, during shifts where you are wearing full body PPE, can you use the toilet as often as needed?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

35. If you cannot always use the toilet as often as needed, please describe any issues/concerns that arise.

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36. What are your biggest concerns about obtaining PPE (check all that apply)?

*Check all that apply.*

- I can't get the right type of PPE to protect myself
- I can't get the correct size to fit me
- The PPE I need is not available to me
- I can't afford the PPE I need
- All the above

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

37. What is your biggest concern about using inadequate and/or ill-fitting PPE (check all that apply)?

*Check all that apply.*

- Increased risk of contracting COVID-19 from my patients
- Increased risk of me transmitting COVID-19 to my patients and/or family
- Other health risks (e.g. heat stroke, dehydration, pressure sores, headache)
- Lack of dignity eg having to wear adult diapers
- Fear of soiling PPE
- Ill-fitting PPE is hindering work (e.g. constant readjustment necessary)

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

38. Please describe your concerns in more detail.

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Section 5: Recommendations

39. What would you change about the current PPE you use (for example more appropriate fit, more suitable design for climate)?

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40. Do you have any suggestions to improve PPE for women during COVID-19 and after (please elaborate eg. design)?

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41. Thank you for your time! If you are happy to be contacted for a short follow-up interview, please provide your email below. Email addresses will not be stored as part of the data set and will be deleted 24 hours after the survey closes.

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42. How did you hear about this survey?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Twitter
- Listserv
- WGH chapter network
- Via professional association
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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Google Forms

## Survey data tables

AGE	Count	%
18-24	65	7.29
25-34	306	34.30
35-44	291	32.62
45-54	148	16.59
>55	82	9.19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

AGE	Count	%
Algeria	0	0.22
Australia	68	7.62
Austria	6	0.67
Bangladesh	1	0.11
Bhutan	1	0.11
Bolivia	1	0.11
Brazil	3	0.34
Cambodia	1	0.11
Cameroon	2	0.22
Canada	18	2.02
Chile	29	3.25
Colombia	3	0.34
Croatia	1	0.11
DRC	1	0.11
Denmark	1	0.11
Egypt	1	0.11
Eswatini	1	0.11
Ethiopia	1	0.11
France	20	2.24
Germany	56	6.28
Haiti	1	0.11
India	25	2.80
Indonesia	1	0.11
Iraq	1	0.11
Ireland	4	0.45
Italy	3	0.34

<b>AGE</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Jamaica	2	0.22
Kenya	64	7.17
Lebanon	1	0.11
Lithuania	1	0.11
Malawi	13	1.46
Malaysia	4	0.45
Malta	2	0.22
Mexico	91	10.20
Netherlands	1	0.11
Nigeria	9	1.01
Norway	3	0.34
Oman	1	0.11
Pakistan	2	0.22
Papua New Guinea	1	0.11
Peru	5	0.56
Philippines	6	0.67
Portugal	4	0.45
Serbia	1	0.11
Slovenia	32	3.59
Somalia	1	0.11
South Africa	5	0.56
Spain	10	1.12
Sweden	1	0.11
Switzerland	30	3.36
Taiwan	1	0.11
Togo	1	0.11
Tunesia	1	0.11
Uganda	17	1.91
United Arab Emirates	2	0.22
United Kingdom	223	25.00
United States	75	8.41
Vietnam	3	0.34
Zambia	11	1.23
no answer	16	1.79
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>WORKPLACE</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary (e.g. family doctors clinic)	134	15.02
Secondary (e.g. district hospital)	192	21.52
Tertiary (e.g regional hospital)	400	44.84
Residential care facility	28	3.14
Mainly conduct home visits	51	5.72
other or mix of above	87	9.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>ROLE</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
administrative or support work	28	3.17
clinical-doctor	275	30.83
clinical - dentist	10	1.12
clinical- health care student	27	3.03
clinical- nurse / nurse practioner	256	28.70
clinical- midwife	35	3.92
clinical staff - other	89	9.98
health care assistant / auxiliary staff	18	2.02
social care worker	11	1.23
occupational / physiotherapist	21	2.35
temporary support covid-19 response	23	2.58
public health officer	14	1.57
other or mix of above	85	9.53
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>WHO Region</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
African Region	126	14.13
Eastern Mediterranean Region	9	1.01
European Region	399	44.73
Region of the Americas	228	25.56
South-East Asia Region	28	3.14
Western Pacific Region	86	9.64
no answer	16	1.79
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>Guidelines that specify PPE use</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
available	720	80.72
Not Sure if available	75	8.41
Not available	90	10.09
N/A	3	0.34
no answer	4	0.45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>Are the guidelines adequate</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	517	57.96
No	241	27.02
Not sure	128	14.35
N/A	3	0.34
no answer	3	0.34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>Who provides PPE</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
employer	632	70.85
state / local authorities	168	18.83
NGO/ private organisations	17	1.91
by staff themselves	49	5.49
mix of employer and staff	14	1.57
Unknown	7	0.78
no answer	5	0.56
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

<b>Adequate supply of PPE during COVID-19</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Always	223	25
Most of the time	415	46.52
Sometimes	192	21.52
Never	48	5.38
Not sure	10	1.12
No answer	4	0.45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

Has there been Training on PPE been provided during COVID19	Count	%
No, no training or instructions	149	16.70
Yes, written instruction	172	19.28
Yes, interactive online /video training	231	25.90
Yes, face to face training / simulation	330	37.00
Yes, face to face in combination with online	9	1.01
no answer	1	0.11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

After the training, how confident do you feel using PPE	Count	%
Very confident	323	36.21
Moderately confident	397	44.51
not confident	39	4.37
N/A	99	11.10
no answer	34	3.81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

Would you liked to have more training?	Count	%
Yes	409	45.85
Maybe	173	19.39
NO	295	33.07
N/A	11	1.23
no answer	4	0.45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

If you have to provide PPE yourself, how affordable is it	Count	%
I can always afford	221	24.78
I can sometimes afford	172	19.28
I can't afford	113	12.67
no answer	386	43.27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

Do you use fitted PPE?	Count	%
Yes, only fitted PPE	129	14.43
Sometimes, when it is available	229	25.62
No fit test has taken place	329	36.80
No PPE in my size is available	152	17.00
N/A	55	6.15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

Experienced Challenges related to fit	Count	%
Yes	556	62.33
Sometimes	109	12.22
No	193	21.64
N/A	24	2.69
no answer	10	1.12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

During COVID19:	Count	%
I have always had the PPE I needed	442	49.55
I sometimes had the PEE I needed	378	42.38
I never had adequate PPE to make me feel safe	67	7.51
no answer	5	0.56
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

Do you have to re-use PPE more than you would like to?	Count	%
Always	113	12.67
Sometimes	330	37.00
Never	421	47.20
N/A	21	2.35
no answer	7	0.78
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

Do you have enough rooms to change your PPE privately?	Count	%
Always	273	30.61
Sometimes	241	27.02
Never	243	27.24
N/A	128	14.35
no answer	7	0.78
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	

During shifts where you are wearing full body PPE, can you use the toilet as often?	Count	%
Always	98	10.99
Most of the time	150	16.82
If absolute necessary/sometimes	190	21.30
Never	176	19.73
N/A	227	25.45
no answer	51	5.72
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>892</b>	