



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Suffering Women: The Pandemic (COVID-19) Lockdown Consequences, A Global Conundrum

Nargis Khatoon from Ladakh, Research Scholar, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Central University of Himachal Pradesh

Abstract

Regrettably, domestic violence cases are underreported across the world, especially in times of global emergencies like COVID-19. The objective of the paper is to bring out the national and international reports of Domestic violence amid pandemic lockdown in 2020 and highlight the suffering of women as a victim in their own homes. Lives became endangered, jobs loosed, businesses stopped, hatredness among humans aroused and importantly health threatened, all these are the consequences of Covid-19. Not only one or two of the countries, but countries throughout the globe witnessed tensions, stress, pressure and psychological traumas amid pandemic. Be it men, women, or children everyone got to suffer from the disease, but the very unfortunate accuse came to the notice of everyone in uttermost of the countries was the day by day rising of domestic violence cases. The women became the victim of the psychological trauma of their male family members during lockdown period. The cases of beating and torturing women by their own family members at their own homes were reaching at the peak day by day. The consequence of pandemic lockdown might be health issue and other, but the unfortunate patriarchic world could not understand that the victimized one is also feared off and suffering from the same trauma and stress of Covid-19 (disease and death). The NGO'S, UN Women Organizations and policy makers helped out those sufferers to get them out of the hell homes and provided them a relief (shelter), but not every victims could get to seek help from the NGO's and other organizations etc.

Key words: COVID-19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Women, Domestic Violence, Reports.

Introduction

“When a shelter becomes hell for a human to live, then one could take another shelter as an alternative shell, but the unfortunate days of pandemic lockdown blocked the pinch-hitting zones by making those unsafe and no backup shell left to survive safely”.

The above quotation expresses a feeling and pain of a woman, because of the inhumanly treatment of the so called family members who creates nuisances at home and made the women victim, which in other language called ‘domestic violence’. Domestic violence is one of the most pervasive human rights challenges continuing from the very past and remained a largely hidden problem and only few countries, communities or families openly confront. It is a global phenomenon as it is not limited to any particular geography, ethnicity or status. The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health issue. It is a profound shock to our societies and economies, and women are at the heart of care and response efforts underway.

The COVID-19 crisis has placed women around the world at higher risk of intimate partner and domestic violence because of heightened tensions in the household. A recent study on femicide in Serbia conducted under the EU-UN Women regional program indicated that the most dangerous place for women is their own home. While official data on domestic and intimate partner abuse in the Covid-19 context in Serbia has not been released, women's organizations in the country are saying that reports of violence and requests for assistance are on the rise.¹ While some countries are beginning to reopen, billions of people are estimated to still be sheltering at home. When households are placed under the increased strains that come from security, health and money worries, and cramped and confined living conditions, levels of domestic violence spike. Government authorities, women’s rights activists and civil society partners across the world are reporting significantly increased calls for help to domestic violence help lines and heightened demand for emergency shelter.²

Alarming Peak Rising of Domestic Violence amid Pandemic (COVID-19) Lockdown

“He’s in the next room, if he hears me, I’ll have to hang up.”

That call to the Family place, an organization in Dallas, Texas, focused on stopping family violence, reflects the reality of many women worldwide who are trapped in close quarters with their abusers during the pandemic.³ Across the globe, the shadow pandemic of domestic violence looms, with different countries responding in different ways, as glimpses of Russia, Mexico and Malawi suggest.⁴ Women stay in a line to

¹Retrieved from, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/news-europe-and-central-asia-gender-assessments-reveal-pandemics--impact-on-women>

² Retrieved from, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/indigenous-womens-maternal-health-and-maternal-mortality>

³ Seo, 2020

⁴ ibid

hold a banner during an action against domestic violence on the Patriarshy Bridge, with the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in the background, in Moscow, Russia, Dec. 14, 2019.⁵

For some, the COVID-related stress of lockdowns, job losses and other limitations is worsening an already abusive situation. For others, the abuse is new, the result of frustrations and fears.⁶ As the coronavirus spread from its point of origin in Wuhan, China, late in 2019, the United Nations in April issued a warning of a shadow pandemic, an increase in domestic violence against women.⁷ The behavior isn't restricted to physical, sexual or psychological abuse and can include tactics such as forced child marriage. Worldwide, women are the most likely to be victims in part because they are less educated and less able to exert control over their own lives than men.⁸ *"As more countries report infection and lockdown, more domestic violence help lines and shelters across the world are reporting rising calls for help,"* said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of U.N. Women.⁹

"It's stressful for anybody. But when you add financial problems and you have an abusive partner who is also unemployed — it's a bad recipe," said Paige Flink, executive director of the Family Place.¹⁰ An advocate works in a cubicle at the National Domestic Violence Hotline center's facility in Austin, Texas, June 27, 2016.¹¹ Overall, calls to domestic violence hotlines in Texas cities spiked in March as the state locked down, according to a roundup compiled by the magazine *Texas Monthly*, even as calls for help from rural areas fell, partly the result of a digital divide that leaves a third of the state's residents without broadband at home. Or, as some authorities have suggested, the drop occurred because victims cannot evade their abusers during lockdown to reach out for help.¹²

The daily lives of many women were tracked by their abusive partners with any unaccounted-for time often seen as a challenge to authority or proof of an affair. But the shortages and reduced services that are the pandemic's hallmark in the U.S. offered some women in Texas a lifeline.¹³

"Hours [spent] in line were natural, so some women would call us, literally from the Walmart parking lot," said Flink, whose organization provides counseling, temporary housing and other services for women and children.¹⁴ Texas had reported a COVID-19 toll of more than 585,600 confirmed cases and more than 11,400 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center.¹⁵

In New York in May, 2020, UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Seo, 2020

¹² ibid

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ ibid

empowerment of women and launched the Shadow Pandemic public awareness campaign, focusing on the global increase in domestic violence amid the COVID-19 health crisis. The Shadow Pandemic public service announcement is a sixty-second film narrated by Academy Award-winning actor Kate Winslet, who has championed many humanitarian causes. The video highlights the alarming upsurge in domestic violence during COVID-19 and delivers a vital message urging people to act to support women if they know or suspect someone is experiencing violence.¹⁶

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women said: *“Even before the pandemic, violence against women was one of the most widespread violations of human rights. Since lockdown restrictions, domestic violence has multiplied, spreading across the world in a shadow pandemic. This is a critical time for action, from prioritizing essential services like shelter and support for women survivors, to providing the economic support and stimulus packages needed for broader recovery. Through this campaign UN Women's activists, and advocates like Kate Winslet, will help spread the word so this issue comes fully to light.”*¹⁷

Pandemics like COVID-19 can exacerbate not only violence within the home, but other forms of violence against women and girls. Violence against female healthcare workers as well as migrant or domestic workers increases. Xenophobia-related violence, harassment and other forms of violence in public spaces and online is more prevalent and the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse becomes more likely. Some groups of women, including human rights defenders, women in politics, journalists, bloggers, women belonging to ethnic minorities, indigenous women, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, and women with disabilities are particularly targeted by Information and Communication Technologies facilitated violence.¹⁸

As countries around the world battle the pandemic and its multi-dimensional impacts, UN Women continues to work with governments and civil society partners to support gender-responsive fiscal stimulus packages, livelihood protection, rapid needs assessments of women on the ground, prevention of violence against women and promotion of equal sharing of care work, among other initiatives¹⁹ and with a rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases across the world in the past few months, several international organisations took cognisance of a global rise in Domestic Violence (DV) cases as a result of physical distancing regulations and its subsequent lockdowns. Many countries reported a 15-30% hike in the number of distress calls received from women who were confined in closed spaces with abusive partners.²⁰

Studies, over the years, have shown a direct link between times of crisis like these and interpersonal violence. Pandemics provide for an enabling environment of fear and uncertainty that may exacerbate diverse

¹⁶ UN Women raises awareness of the shadow pandemic of violence against women during COVID-19, 2020

¹⁷ Retrieved from, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/news-europe-and-central-asia-gender-assessments-reveal-pandemics--impact-on-women>

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ Arora and Jain, 2020

forms of violence against women. Moreover, economic insecurity, financial instability, and isolation are also some of the factors that contribute to making domestic violence even more prevalent.²¹

National and International Reports of Domestic Violence amid Pandemic

A rapid gender assessment was conducted by the the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to effectively and accurately evaluate the gendered impacts of COVID-19. The survey revealed a troubling situation in Central Asia, three out of every five women reported a higher risk of not being able to access health services.²² According to the data, women's psychological and mental health is being affected at higher rates than that of men, with extremely high proportions seen among women in Albania (69 per cent), Kazakhstan (52 per cent), Turkey (54 per cent) and the Republic of Moldova (49 per cent).²³

The gender assessment also exposed the prevalence of the shadow pandemic of violence against women. A considerable number of women reported having felt or heard of increases in domestic violence and discrimination. It is also concerning that the share of women who did not know where to seek help in cases of domestic violence ranges from around 20% in Turkey to at least 40% in Kyrgyzstan.²⁴ Overall, the findings reveal that women across the region are experiencing increased vulnerabilities and suffering from a multitude of problems due to COVID-19, with the greatest impact seen among women and girls in vulnerable domestic and economic situations.²⁵ On the other hand the emergency calls for domestic violence cases in Argentina have increased by 25 per cent since the lockdown began. Helplines in Singapore and Cyprus registered an increase in calls of more than 30 per cent. In the USA, the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported a rising number of victims who reached out via text or phone.²⁶ And a survey reported in New South Wales, Australia, showed 40 per cent of front-line workers increased in requesting for help with violence that was escalating in intensity and complexity.²⁷

In recent years, international surveys have consistently named the country Iceland as the best in the world in which to be a woman was safer enough but the current reports shows that 25% of Icelandic women have experienced domestic violence. Police had recorded bottles, bricks and even a bible amongst the weapons used. Despite making waves in the fight for women's rights, dark issues remain. Demand for places in the shelter has doubled over the last ten years.²⁸

²¹ Arora and Jain, 2020

²²<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/news-europe-and-central-asia-gender-assessments-reveal-pandemics--impact-on-women>

²³ *ibid*

²⁴<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/news-europe-and-central-asia-gender-assessments-reveal-pandemics--impact-on-women>

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/news-europe-and-central-asia-gender-assessments-reveal-pandemics--impact-on-women>

²⁸<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/announcer-call-for-applications-youth-organizations-for-action-coalitions->

In India, the National Family Health Survey-4, conducted in 2015-16, revealed that 33% of married women in the age group of 15-49 experienced physical, sexual, or emotional spousal violence. Of these women, only 14% sought help and 77% never spoke about it. Among those who sought help, 65% reported to the natal family and only 3% reported to the police.²⁹ But the grasp of domestic violence perpetrators has tightened in times of the pandemic in India. Abused victims are distanced from their regular support systems making it difficult for them to call out for help. On 24 March 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the Novel Coronavirus. Within a fortnight, the National Commission of Women (NCW) reported a 100% rise in complaints of domestic violence cases. A nationwide WhatsApp number was then launched by the NCW to provide an alternate method for women to report domestic abuse.³⁰

While there was an evident spike in the number of domestic violence cases in India at the point in time, strangely enough, the NCW monthly data spoke some alternate truth. It showed an overall decrease in the complaints received during the months of lockdown in comparison to even the initial months of 2020 (Complaints received: January: 538, February: 523, March: 501, April: 377). However, the gradual relaxation of the lockdown saw a subsequent surge in the complaints. While 552 complaints were recorded in the month of May, June saw over 730 complaints. This data shows that while the concern of a rapid increase in the domestic violence cases during the lockdown was valid, the instances were not actively reported.³¹

In Bangladesh, the growing evidence of domestic violence acted as an opportunistic infection that thrives in the pandemic's situations. Lockdown can also create a situation in which the victim cannot move out of the home to seek appropriate help and is more likely to be cut off from their normal support systems.³² Therefore The alarming situation of COVID-19 making the world apparent by its devastating character in enormous spheres. Suicide, domestic violence, mental disorders, anxiety, depressive disorders are already increasing worldwide. In March 2020, the UK-based newspaper, the Guardian, stated that the coronavirus would fuel domestic violence. During the lockdowns in all 193 UN member countries, including Bangladesh, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) predicted a 20 percent increase in domestic violence during the pandemic.³³

In the case of domestic violence, it is mostly perpetrated by family members who abuse, attack, humiliate, and torture women and children. There are numerous reports and unreported domestic violence cases in Bangladesh, including physical, verbal, financial, psychological, and sexual abuse. The consequences of

leadership

²⁹ Arora and Jain, 2020

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Arora and Jain, 2020

³² ibid

³³ Sifat, 2020

COVID-19 also limit access to life-saving resources for survivors of violence and those at risk, such as psycho-social, health, and safety programs. A recent survey conducted by a local human rights organization, the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), in 27 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh, 4,249 women, and 456 children were found to have been subjected to domestic violence in April 2020. Of these victims, 1,672 women and 424 children were facing violence for the first time in their lives. The women, who faced first time domestic violence blamed the lockdown for their situation. Furthermore, the statistics cannot show the real violence scenario against children and women taking place across during lockdown.³⁴

It was felt that the scarcity of social activities and financial pressures are increasing rifts within families. Men are frustrated about losing their jobs because of the COVID-19 lockdown. Some may express their frustration by humiliating their wives. The MJF interviewed about 53,340 women and children for the study in May 2020. The data show that 2,085 women were physically abused, 4,947 mentally abused, 404 sexually abused, and some 3,589 faced financial constraints imposed by their husbands. In June 2020, the survey about 57,704 women and children and the data show that 4,622 women were mentally tortured, 1,839 were physically abused, 203 sexually abused, and 3,009 women faced financial constraints imposed by their husbands.³⁵

Rapes and sexual assaults occur even during the pandemic, both inside homes and outside. Married women are physically and mentally tortured by husbands, husbands' families, and their own family members. Another report showed that from January to June 2020, a total of 107 women were murdered by their husbands, but only 74 cases are filed. The husband's family members murdered 30 women, and their own family members murdered 26 women. Among them, only 33 cases were filed. Domestic violence has internalized social norms and practices in both rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. Victims are also sent back to their abusive husbands from their family homes because it affects her family's reputation. This is a situation with which we are all too familiar and has resulted in tragic outcomes for some of these victims.³⁶ Same way Russia calls to hotlines spiked. The high commissioner for human rights, Tatyana Moskalkova, said the number of calls to domestic abuse hotlines jumped from just more than 6,000 in March to more than 13,000 in April.³⁷ The rapid increase came in a country where, in 2017, 36,000 women each day suffered from beatings by their husbands and partners, and the government and police regard domestic violence to be a "private matter."³⁸

Despite the numbers provided by various women's organizations and Moskalkova, the Ministry of Interior (MVD) reported that the number of domestic violence cases registered by authorities in April 2020 had

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ Safat, 2020

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ Seo, 2020

³⁸ ibid

decreased by 9% from a year earlier.³⁹ Janette Akhilgova, Russia and Caucasus consultant at Equality Now (EN), described the discrepancy as “*very strange*” because early lockdown measures left victims of domestic violence even more vulnerable.⁴⁰

“There were women who had intimate partners threatening them that they would call police [if they left] the house,” Akhilgova said.⁴¹

The chairwoman of Russia’s Federation Council, Valentina Matviyenko, announced in April that the council would pause work on a controversial bill to counter domestic violence until after the pandemic.⁴²

Conclusion

Therefore, it is clearly shown according to the March 2020 to even today’s updating reports of Domestic violence that women are suffering a lot in the whole world. Seemingly, 100% peak rise in India and even those countries which were known as ‘the safe shelter for women’ also tasted Domestic Violence. The reports are unfortunately giving a message of the unsafe world for a woman. Therefore it can be concluded by suggesting that the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations should use various media and platforms to raise awareness. The trademark should be used as an agora to hoist awareness of domestic violence. The law enforcement bureau needed to have further workable tools available to retort and take appropriate action at all levels like district, sub-district and village areas. Different dedicated and responsive emergency helpline numbers and websites should also be introduced and expose through the social medias. The terrible fallouts of COVID-19 like domestic violence would be long last even after the virus disappeared and certainly, it may haunt the victims always. Therefore, the women and children are needed to make sensitized as well as aware about the working or functioning or may be helping of NGO’s and other organization, to whom they would have to make contact if they ever even felt themselves in a condition of harassment or domestic violence in their own homes.

³⁹ ibid

⁴⁰ ibid

⁴¹ Seo, 2020

⁴² ibid

References

1. A New Hope: Meet The Women Fighting Domestic Violence, 2020, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/announcer-call-for-applications-youth-organizations-for-action-coalitions-leadership>
2. Arora, K and Jain, K. S. (2020). Locked-down: Domestic Violence Reporting in India during COVID-19, Gender Justice, retrieved 20 January, 2021, from <https://www.oxfamindia.org/blog/locked-down-domestic-violence-reporting-India-during-COVID-19>
3. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/indigenous-womens-maternal-health-and-maternal-mortality>
4. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/indigenous-womens-maternal-health-and-maternal-mortality>
5. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response>
6. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response>
7. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/op-ed-joint-how-covid-19-can-bring-gender-justice>
8. Krishnan TR, Hassan SH, Satyanarayana VA, Chandra PS. Domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons to be learned. Indian J Soc Psychiatry [serial online] 2020 [cited 2021 Jan 25];36, Suppl S1:120-5. Available from: <https://www.indjsp.org/text.asp?2020/36/5/120/297157>
9. Seo, Natalie . (2020). Violence Against Women Increasing During Pandemic: FILE - Amid concerns about the spread of COVID-19, a woman has her temperature checked in Arlington, Texas, June 1, 2020.
10. Sifat, R.I. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence in Bangladesh. Asian J Psychiatr, retrieved, 23 January 2020 from, <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/social-distancing-domestic-violence.pdf>, doi: [10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102393](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102393)
11. UN Women raises awareness of the shadow pandemic of violence against women during COVID-19, 2020, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/indigenous-womens-maternal-health-and-maternal-mortality>