

## COVID-19 Pandemic and Domestic Violence: A Serious Issue

Dr. Sadia Habib<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

People across India are staying indoor during pandemic COVID-19 to stop the spread of corona virus. Though the measures are yielding positive results, it is dangerous scenario for women who face domestic violence. National commission for women received 587 complaints from march 23, 2020 to April 16, 2020 out of which 239, were related to domestic violence. This high number can be attributed to lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 outbreak, which has locked the abusers and the victim together. Destitute women can often be made more vulnerable to domestic violence as they have no place to escape. There are several factors responsible in the rising of violence against women and children in India during pandemic COVID-19. Unemployment due to lockdown causing a lot of uncertainty, stress and frustration, reduced income, limited resources, alcohol abuse and limited social support are likely key factors for domestic violence. It is also important to ensure that the measures cater to women across level of education, access to technology and ability to use it. In more typical circumstances, support provided by government and non- government organizations are available to women who face domestic violence. Tackling domestic violence should be a key part of the national response plans that are currently being developed to handle the COVID-19 crisis.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Domestic Violence, Lockdown, Pandemic

In many countries, the term domestic violence is used to refer to intimate partner violence, but it also includes child and older abuse by any household member, although women do not experience domestic violence, the rate of violence and abuse directed to women is high particularly by perpetrators who know them. At least 30 percent of all women in relationship have experienced physical or sexual abuse by their partners. According to the World Health Organization, one of every three women around the world encounters physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

The rate of violence against women is already high with 1 in 3 women worldwide having witnessed physical or sexual violence at some stage in their life and almost six of every ten killed by an intimate partner or other family member deliberately murdered worldwide. Many girls lacked access to the most basic free essential services for their safety, security

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<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, P. G. Dept. of Psychology, M.M. Mahila College, Ara (constituent unit of Veer Kunwar Singh University, Ara), Bihar, India

\*[Responding Author](#)

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and rehabilitation before the pandemic such as emergency help line, police and justice, health care, safe housing, shelter and psychosocial counselling.

During crises like health and disasters such as pandemics, women tend to face greater risk. We also know that there has been an increase in interpersonal abuse including the incidence of violence against women and children, during economic crises and period of unrest (Fraser, 2020; Palermo and Peterman, 2011). There has been a rise in abuse, violence, impulsive, compulsive and manipulating action and hostility directed towards cohabiting partners since the outbreak of COVID-19, a pandemic. Emerging COVID-19 pandemic data and studies have shown that all types of violence against women and girls have increased, particularly domestic violence.

On March 11 world Health Organization declared COVID-19, a pandemic. Many countries have introduced stringent steps to limited movement such as social distancing, staying home, closure of non-essential industries, travel restriction and quarantine to effectively monitor the spread of diseases, Although, these steps are useful for infection prevention but they have an acute effect on women. As family members, the risk of women and their children being subjected to violence are significantly increased. Spending more time in close proximity and growing household stress and the risk grows much greater as families often have to cope with possible economic or work losses. Staying at home orders to stop the spread of COVID-19 infection, women with violent partners increasingly find themselves isolated from the people and resource that can help them.

In fact, the regional or global nature and related fear and uncertainty of a pandemic provide a climate that can intensify or cause various forms of violence against women, girls and children. As of mid-March-2020, there are already reports from Australia, Brazil, China and the United States indicating a rise in violence against the virus in the latest novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19).

The police stations reported, receiving 162 reports of intimate partner violence in February in china's Hubei province (Central Hubei Province), which was three times more reported in February 2019 (Waquing, 2020). Ninety percent of domestic violence cases are linked to the covid-19 outbreak, according to Wan Fei, the founder of an interpersonal violence. In Australia, a survey of 400 frontline workers indicated that 40 percent reported an increase in "Please for help" and 70 percent indicated an increase in complexity of cases (Latt out, 2020). In the previous 12 months, 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 were exposed to sexual and physical violence committed by an intimate partner worldwide. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the number is likely to increase as defense, health and money concerns, developed stress and worries are accentuated by confined living conditions (UN women, 2020). During the lockdown in India, The National Commission of Women (NCW) noted a rise in the number of reports of domestic violence received via e-mail within the few days. The NCW president claims that because the majority of complaints come from women who send their complaints by post, the actual number is likely to be higher because they may not be able to access the internet. There has been a 100 % rise in complaints related to violence against women since the national lockdown was implemented in March 2020, as per the statistics released by NCW launches Mental Health helplines for those experiencing some sort of domestic violence (Chandra; 2020). Indian women have filed more domestic violence cases than reported in a comparable time in the last 10 years during the first four phases of the COVID-19 based lockdown. But even this unusual spurt is only the tip of the icebergs as 86% women who experienced domestic violence do not seek help in India (The Hindu, 22

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June, 2020). Agencies and NGO's have stated that they receive more calls compared to the non- pandemic era (Konokkara; 2020). Domestic violence data are still scary during the pandemic and we do not know the real percentage of occurrence of such incidents. Many organizations and agencies take essential steps to collect information provide advice and raise awareness of the specific impact of the pandemic and its consequences on women.

### ***Why Do Domestic Violence Increases During the Pandemic COVID-19***

Previous studies have shown that exposure to natural disaster or other extreme events is correlated with increased rates of domestic violence (Gearhart et, al. 2018). during any natural disaster, the cause of domestic violence is multifaceted, precipitate by multiple, interdependent causes such as stress due to physical confinement, economic disruption, slowed down industry, potential unemployment.

A key factor for the prevention of domestic violence is economic independence. For many people who experience domestic abuse without an alternate means of economic support, financial contact with an abusive spouse is too convoluted or serious. The pandemic COVID-19 exacerbated financial intervention by causing increased job losses and unemployment particularly among immigrant's women and workers.

Due to public restrictions on common places to combat the spreads of the virus, it was too difficult to access the alternative source of accommodations, housing, shelters and hotels. Travel restrictions have limited the people to access safe havens. Except it, emergence of confinement measures, the normal schedule of everyday jobs of most people have shifted. Spending more time with nearby members in the same environment could increase the possibility of disputes between family members and could be a source for provocative behaviors. COVID-19 pandemic may have induced major economic, social and psychological effects, which could raise the likelihood of domestic violence. A recently systematic findings indicate the adverse psychological effects of quarantine such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress, confusion and anger (Brooks et.al. 2020). The Pandemic of COVID-19 has contributed to higher levels of financial instability, fear and social pressure (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affair, 2020).

Closure of schools and childcare facilities have added to the stress at home. Virtual learning often required the involvement and supervision of parents and guardians. Some families do not have access to reliable internet connection and childcare obligations may fall to friends, neighbors or family members while parents on work or attempt to find work. Some parents are considered essential workers and cannot work from home and others are required to work virtually. The added stress of balancing work, child care and children's education has led to rise in child abuse.

There are so many barriers are present in the way of reporting domestic violence during the pandemic. It is possible to file police reports in many ways i.e., some may be offering online options and others requiring personal visit.

### ***What Preventive Measures are required to control Domestic Violence during pandemic COVID-19***

Unlike any other crime, the manifestation of domestic violence remains intensely personal, making it difficult for a majority of women to report. When women experience violence, entire families and communities suffer. The rate of violence against women is increased and repeated in emergencies, natural disasters, wars, economic crisis or during diseases

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outbreaks such as corona virus pandemic. The financial, household and health pressure during the lockdown are the key factors for domestic abuse. Keeping in view the seriousness of the crisis, the United Nations has called for urgent actions to combat the worldwide surge in domestic violence “I urge all Government to put women’s safety first as they respond to the Pandemic”, Secretary General Antonio Guterres wrote on twitter on April-5. He has asked all Government to make the prevention and redress of violence against women, a key part of their National response plans for COVID-19 crisis.

Government is responding under huge pressure to act fast and sometimes they may act without considering diverse perspectives. For instance, stay at home orders limit the spread of virus, but can potentially result in dangerous situation for women with violent partners. There is an urgent need for cooperation with decision makers to ensure integrated national and sub-national COVID-19 response plan, not only to achieve better outcomes for women and girls, but to achieve better out comes for the society at large. Therefore, it is urgently necessary to promote and increase plans and policies to ensure the safety and dignity of all female victims of domestic violence.

In this connection, first of all, it is important to have consistent preventive measures and government level implementation plan. It is very difficult to access protective resources in such a male dominated society. This may be reduced only by the participation of females equally in decision making processes (Vieira et.al. 2020) as well as the importance of coordination and communication to combat domestic violence during confinement. It is also important to create new ways to provide assistance to female victims during the COVID-19 pandemic by various platforms i.e., increased resources for supporting shelters, offline and online counselling, free and easy to access national helpline services that are available 24×7 (Guedes, Peterman and Deligiorgis, 2020). Coding system should be established for reporting domestic violence without alerting the abuser (UN Women, 2020). These essential services should be expanded and adopted to the crises context to ensure survivors access to support. It is also important to guarantee the economic and Psycho-social support to female victims. In case of immediate need, direct help in the form of cash or food must be provided. Another key measure to tackle domestic violence is to ensure that a strong message from justice system should be circulated containing impunity will not be tolerated. Police and justice system must ensure that incidents of domestic violence are given first priority and care must be taken to address the manifestations of violence emerging in the context of COVID-19 (UN News, 2020).

In order to raise public awareness and encourage authorities to take actions, multiple channels e.g., mass media, television, radio. Newspaper, social media are requiring.

These campaigns are effective way to show the victims that help and support are still available and to inform the public that the restrictions for abusers still apply. Physical isolation is a significant risk factor should be minimized by the use of digital platform e.g., phone calls, S.M.S., social media, video calls (Peterman et.al., 2020). Another key element in reducing domestic violence is the enhancement and strengthening of community support. Therefore, it is important to encourage informal support system and reinforce online communication (O’Donnell et.al., 2020, Peterman et.al. 2020).

Victims of domestic violence may also suffer from many serious direct and indirect-, short- and long-term health problems. Major health consequences might persist long after the abuse has stopped (Campbell, 2002). It is necessary to be careful in examining the short- and

long-term consequences of domestic violence on the psychological and physical health of victims during and after the pandemic COVID-19.

### CONCLUSION

Although COVID-19 is a major worldwide treat that is becoming a growing challenge. Domestic violence is a public health and human rights issue that primarily affects women and children worldwide. Several countries have reported a significant increase in domestic violence cases since the COVID-19 induced lockdowns and physical distancing measures were implemented. We need to promote and increase actions policies to prevent domestic violence in every country. Long term prevention solutions and immediate strategies are available and should be implemented. The pandemic has exposed the limits of existing domestic violence prevention initiatives and has shown that there is still a lot of work to be done. The COVID-19 pandemic may be an opportunity to rethink the world of tomorrow and to take long lasting and more meaningful steps. Action plans against COVID-19 must include integrated strategies, aiming to prevent and respond to domestic violence during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The prevention of domestic violence must indeed be every government's priority and every citizen's responsibility.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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