

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

Shahzada Akhter¹, Monika Chibb², Nazneen Fatima^{3*}

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a tremendous influence on every aspect of human life, and lockdowns were instituted to stop its spread. However, these restrictions had significant consequences, causing immense distress, widespread job crises, unemployment, and a global recession. For women, adhering to lockdown procedures meant facing distinct challenges, one of them was the worrying increase in violence based on gender. This article investigates the factors that led to an increase in domestic violence incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effects of pandemic were far-reaching for women, leading to job losses, unemployment, dwindling savings, and the heart-wrenching experience of witnessing loved ones and friends battling life-threatening illnesses. Consequently, they suffered both financial and personal losses, all while shouldering an increased burden of household responsibilities. Moreover, the looming threat of domestic violence posed a double-edged sword. According to a policy brief published by the UN, there was a staggering 25% surge in violence against women during this time. Accessing essential legal, public, and health services became complicated and challenging due to the pandemic's disruptions. Women found themselves trapped with their abusers, as managing the pandemic and responding to emergencies left them overwhelmed and without avenues for escape. This paper endeavours to offer recommendations and suggestions in order to address the issue of domestic violence to deal with the problem of domestic violence in society while empowering victims with knowledge of their rights. The goal is to confront this pressing concern and create a safer environment for women amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Women, Domestic violence*

The World Health Organisation declared novel corona virus outbreak (COVID-19) as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The world was unprepared for this epidemic, and despite the precautions taken by governments throughout the world, it had a serious impact on human life. Worldwide, covid-19 has claimed the lives of almost 6.58 million individuals, many of whom went undetected. India comes in second place globally in the COVID-19 pandemic, after the United States, with 529,008 fatalities. This pandemic exposed glaring economic and social inequalities as well as adverse effects that

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

²Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

³Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: August 10, 2023; Revision Received: August 16, 2023; Accepted: August 19, 2023

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

disproportionately affect women and girls, widening the gap between the most vulnerable members of society, such as women and children. Along with damaging public health, the economic and social unrest threatens the everyday lives and wellbeing of millions of people. Numerous studies have found that domestic violence increased concurrently with the coronavirus pandemic and unquestionably emerged as a second, equally serious concern globally, also including India (Mittal & Singh, 2020). The current study aims to investigate this problem in further depth.

Historical Background

Half of the global population comprises women; their role both historically and in current scenario is unchallenged. Women notably play important role in the development and change in the society, still they suffer discrimination. They were usually seen as being weak and open to exploitation. Regardless of age, race, class, culture, or the level of education, violence against women occurs worldwide. The history of violence begins with ancient civilizations that gradually revoked women's rights until they were denied the ability to speak. Battle, geography, and the establishment of nation-states all contributed to the emergence of various patriarchal systems across ancient civilization. Women hardly had any legal rights under the ancient Athens legal system. Both the assembly and court proceedings were off limits to them. Violence against women had many different forms in ancient Rome specifically, domestic violence, sexual assault, and violence driven by politics. Women suffered extreme marginalisation. In ancient Indian society, women enjoyed equal and high status in the society. Despite of patriarchal society, they possessed freedom, respect, equality, and rights in all spheres of life. But at the end of Vedic era, the women position in the society started deteriorated slowly. Various socio-cultural norms, customs, beliefs and superstitions such as child-marriage, polygamy, sati-pratha, parda system, dowry and female infanticide etc. led to crawling of gender discrimination evil deep rooted in the society. In every society, women are treated as second class citizens, considered weak as compared to privileged gender i.e., men. Male-dominant society did not treated women equally and they face discrimination, exploitation and violence every day in their life.

Domestic Violence

The oldest and most frequent forms of domestic abuse towards the women is veiled and unrecognised. Despite the reality that males can also suffer domestic abuse (Malik and Nadda 2019), victims of domestic violence are frequently seen to be women in societies where dominance is strong (Dutt, 2018). Behind closed doors, where women are supposed to be protected from the dangers of the outside world, domestic violence occurs. Usually, it has been seen that males who are, or have been, in positions of authority, closeness, and trust frequently commit acts of violence in the home. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 defines domestic violence as the physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and financial abuse of a woman by her spouse or other family members who reside in the same household. 2016; Kalokhe et al. Wife abuse, spouse assault, bashing, conjugal violence, interpersonal violence etc. are only a few of the various types of domestic violence. She encounters financial, sexual, psychological, and physical harassment. It is one of the most prevalent ways that violate the human rights. Women are denied of their right to fundamental liberties on an equal basis with males as well as their right to equality, safety, dignity, and self-worth. According to Heise et al. (1999), Intimidation, forced sex, or other types of abuse have been experienced by one in three women globally at the hands of members of their own family. The state's law enforcement resources effectively support domestic violence by their silence and passivity. Domestic violence is more frequently a series of abusive behaviour used against a victim than it is a single, isolated incident. The

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

pattern includes several harmful behaviour that occur often during the relationship. According to studies, many domestic abuse victims either denied to identify the offender or made excuses for their wounds (Daga et al., 1999). In few cases, married women showed acceptance or justify the beating by their husbands. Factors such as inter-spousal relationship, the sex of the children, addiction to alcohol or drugs, property ownership, dowries, education, employment position, caste, and religion have a significant impact in violence against women. There are fatalities, severe injuries, along with persistent and physical and mental health concerns for the victims of domestic violence, their children, perpetrators, and those around them.

COVID-19 Effects

The consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic pandemic extended beyond the death toll and had serious socio-psychological repercussions. It caused dread, anxiety, and despair globally. The regular daily routines of individuals have radically changed as a result of lockdowns or stay at home orders. People were only permitted to go out of their homes during the lockdown to buy the essentials. The only individuals who carried on with their regular activities during the shutdown were those engaged in rendering critical services. However, the effect of this epidemic on women has been far severe. Directly or indirectly, women experienced upswing in domestic violence, which diminished their sense of security. Women were left with little choice except to stay in prison with their abusers. Numerous studies revealed that within the first few months of the epidemic, there was an upsurge in domestic violence, child marriage, online abuse, and the trafficking of women and girls. Data provided by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) revealed alarming statistics on the prevalence of domestic abuse. There has been a 60% increase in emergency calls in Europe about intimate partner abuse against women (Mahase, 2020). Domestic violence reports surged by 30% in France, while 36 women were murdered in Turkey alone in July 2020. During the closure, there was an upsurge in violence against women in Tunisia. Sediri et al. (2020). According to 42% of the Australian practitioners (Fitz-Gibbon et al. 2020), more women are reporting marital violence for the first time. Similar to this, an initiative by UK that tracks violence against women found that over the preceding ten years, the average number of fatalities from domestic abuse had doubled. Peru has seen 48% increase in the calls on helpline numbers related to domestic violence, according to Agüero (2020). These statistics might only include the worst scenarios. In India, lockdown started with one-day nationwide lockdown declared by the Prime Minister on March 22, 2020. (Sharma et al. 2020). Out of all the complaints NCW (National Commission for Women) received; complaints about cybercrime saw an increase. Between April and May, the NCW received 3027 complaints about 22 various types of crimes against women, 47.2 % of which were of the domestic violence and assault by an intimate partner. As opposed to data gathered from January to March 2020, which revealed that 4233 complaints from women were made, 871 of which (20.6%) included domestic and sexual assault. The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly strained healthcare systems worldwide and as a result, women's health has suffered unintended consequences. During the epidemic, there were substantial increases in premature delivery, maternal mortality, and mother depression, as many countries focused their resources and efforts to give immediate COVID-19 relief. As a result, sexual and reproductive health services were neglected. The Victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) are more probable to experience a range of medical ailments, including cardiovascular disease, sleep difficulties, digestive issues, chronic pain, traumatic brain damage, and sexually transmitted infections. When abusers impose even further restrictions on access to services and psychological support, more complicated forms of violence may also emerge. It is the primary reason for homicide deaths in women. Children

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

who experience family violence may be more likely to use violence in their adult relationships. Feeling unsafe at the home many women found it challenging to phone or to look for assistance online. Abusers took advantage of women's inability to seek assistance or escape. Covid-19 is hard on women as it increased pressure on working and non-working women. Women are particularly vulnerable to losing their jobs and income during times of emergency and quarantine. In the wake of the pandemic, women lost more jobs than males. As per the report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in the UK, mothers were twice as likely as fathers to have lost their job during the lockdown or to have quit their occupations. About 740 million women labour in the unorganised sector of the economy and more than two thirds of women in developing nations work in these sectors. But as nations all across the world tightened their borders, these jobs quickly vanished. Lack of household help, higher workloads, and stay-at-home directives further increased domestic violence incidences. It was not surprising that unemployment and expanding family responsibilities lead more emotional distress in women than the men. In Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Thailand, National representative surveys found that women experience more mental health concerns than males do (UN WOMEN, 2020). Many factors, including the lack of childcare choices and the additional responsibilities women are taking on at home, are probably contributing to the thousands of women who are choosing to leave jobs on their own. Strain caused by economic uncertainty led to increased consumption of alcohol and drugs. Due to the closing of the liquor outlets, the perpetrator now resorts to violence to enforce his will when his spouse either refuses to meet his demands for alcohol use or chooses to drink in front of the family at home. In both of the above circumstances, the domestic violence worsens. Being confined with a dominating or violent person causes the frequent and severity of threats, physical, sexual, psychological abuse and humiliation to women. Increased instances of workplace violence against women were reported in the media, including online harassment and offensive texts from male co-workers. There has been more online allegations of domestic violence from women during the first four phases of lockdown than during the previous 10 years. According to UN policy brief in April 2020, the epidemic is “deepening already-existing inequalities and exposing vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems, which are in turn amplifying the pandemic’s effects”.

Measures and responses to the challenges

According to the UNICEF report, as women and girls are trapped with the perpetrators in small places with no way out. Numerous organisations and NGO's have stepped up their efforts to curb domestic abuse as a result of COVID-19.

1. Different organisations take the initiatives for spreading awareness regarding self-protection, reporting, offering survivors psychological and legal help, and campaigning for them.
2. Women's organisations and community members moved to provide telecounselling services during the lockdown, directing customers to other organisations and marketing hotline numbers via the phone, on social media, and in the areas they work and live.
3. During pandemic, the Ministry of Child Development regularly held orientation sessions via virtual conferencing on the topic of "Safety and Well-Being of Women" from women helplines, engagement with one-stop centres, menstrual hygiene education for female migrant labourers, and quarantine facilities.
4. The National Commission for Women improved the mail-in and online systems for reporting crimes against women. These mechanisms include helplines for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, options for reporting abuse and seeking

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

assistance. In order to increase its reach among women who had experienced violence and to guarantee anonymous, instant support, these helpline numbers were compatible with WhatsApp during the lockdown.

Recommendations

1. The international community needs to develop plans to protect women in scenarios similar to pandemics. Countries should create a unique approach to the hiring of workers for services that safeguard women to arrange training for those who assist with victims of domestic abuse, including medical personnel, law enforcement, and social workers.
2. To enhance domestic violence data that provide a clear picture of its nature and prevalence, make it easier to find services that address it, and make it easier to assess actions to combat it.
3. Provide interdisciplinary workers, such as psychologists, schizophrenics, and social and legal services, with training in order to prevent domestic violence and make sure that the various abuse domains are properly assessed.
4. By developing a partnership and working in conjunction with the police, government institutions, and non-governmental groups that are in charge of defending women's rights, more rehabilitation centres and women's shelters will be available for victims of domestic abuse.
5. Promoting the study of self-defence skills among women.
6. To ensure that victims of violence receive proper protection both during and after the legal process.
7. Media should start national awareness campaigns against domestic violence. They should report on the issue regularly, objectively, and without bias.
8. Provide particular financial support to non-governmental organisations and women's organisations that assist victims of domestic abuse.
9. To create special education programs for men with the goal of stopping domestic violence.

CONCLUSION

Numerous issues have arisen in the society as the consequence of Coronavirus. Countries were compelled to enforce quarantine in order to stop the sickness from spreading because there is neither a vaccine nor an efficient therapy for this virus. However, this has led to social alienation, and other concerns like isolation, mental health challenges, and unstable economies. Another concern is the rise in gender-based violence throughout the pandemic. Gender-specific violent incidents have increased as a result of COVID-19. Victims have also been isolated from their social networks. The victims of violence based on gender suffer serious repercussions. To tackle the prevalence of violence based on gender in the current and forthcoming outbreaks of disease, a comprehensive response plan is needed. The rampant nature of the problem must be identified in order to change governmental policies along with assistance structures to make it simpler for victims to get in touch with them. Health experts, the media, and community initiatives must collaborate in order to successfully address the problem, raise knowledge of it and the resources available to address it, as well as to combat the stigma attached to violence based on gender.

REFERENCES

Agüero, J. M. (2020). COVID-19 and the rise of intimate partner violence. *World Development*, 137, 105217.

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

- Amdeselassie T., Emirie G., Gazahegne K., Jones N., Marshall E. P., & Yadete W. (2020). Experiences of vulnerable urban youth under COVID-19: The case of domestic workers. Retrieved 26 December 2020 from <https://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Experiences-of-vulnerable-urban-youth-under-covid-19-the-case-of-domestic-workers.pdf>
- Anneken Tappe, "A Shocking Number of Women Dropped Out of the Workforce Last Month", CNN, October 8, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/07/economy/women-workforce-coronavirus/index.html>.
- Anneken Tappe, "Working Mothers Are Quitting to Take Care of their Kids, and the US Job Market May Never be the same", CNN, August 19, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/19/economy/women-quitting-work-childcare/index.html>
- Anneken Tappe, Clare Duffy, and Tal Yellin, "These 5 Charts Show the Pandemic's Devastating Effect on Working Women," CNN, December 17, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/17/economy/job-losses-women-pandemic/index.html>.
- Bhanot, D., Singh, T., Verma, S, K., & shared, S. (2020). Stigma and discrimination during COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Public Health, Section Public Health Education and Promotion*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.577018>
- Burki, T. (2020). The indirect impact of COVID-19 on women. *The Lancet infectious diseases*, 20, (8), 904-905.
- Carli, L.L. (2020), "Women, Gender equality and COVID-19", *Gender in Management*, Vol. 35 No. 7/8, pp. 647-655. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2020-0236> .
- Chaudhary, S. (2013). Domestic violence in India. *Journal of Indian Research* .1 (2), 146-152.
- Daga, A. S., S. Jejeebhoy and S. Rajgopal (1999). *Domestic violence against women: An investigation of hospital causality records, Mumbai. Journal of Family Welfare*, 45, (1), 1-11
- Dutt, A. (2018). Locating patriarchy in violence against women in India: Social, legal and alternative responses. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2), 212–228.
- Fitz-Gibbon, K., Pfitzner, N., True, J., Walklate, S., Meyer, S., Segrave, M., et al. (2020). COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence against women. Melbourne: Monash University.
- Frontline. [Thehindu.com/social issues/gender-domestic-violence-during-covid-lockdown/article38034608.ece/amp](https://www.thehindu.com/social-issues/gender-domestic-violence-during-covid-lockdown/article38034608.ece/amp).
- Ghouaibi A, project lead, women's health initiative, World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/09>.
- Heise, L., Ellsberg, M and Gottemoeller, M. (1999). *Ending violence against women*. Population reports, series L, No. 11. Baltimore, John Hopkins University School of Public Health, Population Information Program.
- Impact of covid-19 pandemic on prevalence of violence against women complaints in India- A cross-sectional comparative research study from 2014 to 2022. *Cambridge Open Engage*.doi:10.33774/coe-2022-5jsqs.
- Indian Express, June 01, 2020 <https://www.newsindiaexpress.com/nation/2020/june/01/covid-19-lockdown-working-women-complain-of-online-sexual-harassment-say-experts-2105824.html>.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020a). *Domestic workers and the COVID-19 pandemic understanding challenges ahead and evolving collective strategies*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/asia/ro-bangkok/sro-new_delhi/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_748030.pdf on 26th Dec 2020

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

- Jaiswal, A., Singh, T., & Arya, y.k. (2020). Psychological antibodies to safeguard frontline healthcare warriors' mental health against COVID-19 pandemic-related psychopathology. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, Section Mood and Anxiety Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.590160>
- Kalokhe, A., del. Rio, C., Dunkle, K., Stephenson, R., Metheny, N., Paranjape, A., et al. (2016). Domestic violence against women in India: A systematic review of a decade of quantitative studies. *Global Public Health, 12*(4), 498–513.
- Krishnakumar, A., & Verma, S. (2021). Understanding Domestic Violence in India during COVOD-19: a Routine Activity Approach. *Asian Journal of Criminology*. (16) 19-35. <https://dio.org/10.1007/s11417-020-09340-1>.
- Maji, S., Bandod.S, & Sing, T., (2020). Domestic Violence during COVID-19 pandemic: The Case for Indian Women, *Journal of Community & applied Social Psychology, 32*(3), 374-381.
- Mahase, E. (2020). COVID-19: EU states report 60% rise in emergency calls about domestic violence. *BMJ: British Medical Journal (Online)*, 369.
- Malik, J. S., & Nadda, A. (2019). A cross-sectional study of gender-based violence against men in the rural area of Haryana, India. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 44*(1), 35–38.
- Mittal, S. & Sing, T. (2020). Gender based violence during covid-19 pandemic: A mini review. *Frontiers in Global Woman's Health, Section Women's Mental Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fgwh.2020.00004>
- Perez L. M., & Gandolfi A. (2020). Vulnerable women in a pandemic: Paid domestic workers and COVID in Peru. *Bulletin of Latin American Research, 39*, (S1). Retrieved 30 December 2020 from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/blar.13212>
- Raj, S., Ghosh, D., Singh, T., Singh, T, Verma, S.K., & Arya, Y.K. (2020). Theoretical mapping of Suicidal risk factors during COVID-9 pandemic: A mini-review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, Section Mood and Anxiety Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.589614>
- Sediri, S., Zgueb, Y., Ouanes, S., Ouali, U., Bourgou, S., Jomli, R., et al. (2020). Women's mental health: Acute impact of COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence. *Archives of Women's Mental Health, 23*, 749–756.
- Sharma, G.D., Talan, G., & Jain M. (2020). Policy response to the economic challenge from COVID-19 in India: A qualitative enquiry. *Journal of Public Affairs, 20*(4), e2206.
- Sumalatha, B. S., Bhat, L. D., & Chitra, K. P. (2021). Impact of covid-19 on informal sector: A study of women domestic workers in India. *The Indian Economic Journal, 69*(3), 441-461.
- Thibaut, F., & van Wijngaarden-Cremers, P. J. (2020). Women's mental health in the time of Covid-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in global women's health, 1*, 588372.
- The Hindu, June 24, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10years-highduring-covid-19-lockdown/article318855001.ece>.
- The Times of India June 8, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/union-minister-smiriti-irani-debunks-claims-of-lockdown-leading-to-increase-indomestic-violence/article-show/76256622.cms>.
- The Times of India, June 24.2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/domestic-violence-accounts-for-over47-complaints-to-new-inlockdow/articleshow/76/61829.cms>.
- The Times of India June 22, 2020, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/76161829.cms/utm_source=content_of_interest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19

- U. S. Census (2020), “*Household pulse survey public use file, week 4*”, Washington, DC, available at: www.census.gov/householdpulsedata
- UN Women (2020). Violence against women and girls, The shadow pandemic. Retrieved November 8, 2022, from UN Women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2022/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>.
- UN Women (2020), “*Surveys show that COVID-19 has gendered effects in Asia and the Pacific*”, Bangkok, available at: <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/surveys-show-covid-19-has-gendered-effects-asia-and-pacific>
- UN WOMEN. (2020). Domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean during the COVID-19 crisis. Policy Brief. <https://www2.unwomen.org//media/field%20office%20americas/documentos/publicaciones/2020/07/brief%20%20trabajadoras%20del%20hogar%20ingles%20 comprimido.pdf?la=en&vs=5712>
- Van Gelder N.E., Van Rosmalen Nooijens K.A.W.L; A Ligthort S. Prins J.B., Oertelt-Prigione S., Lagro-Janssen A.L.M. (2020).
- SAFE: Health intervention for women experience intimate partner violence-study protocol for a randomized controlled trial, process evaluation and open feasibility study. *BMC public Health*, 20(1), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1186/S12889-020-08743-0>
- World Health Organisation (2020). WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard. Retrieved from <https://covid-19.who.int/>
- <https://www.Wereforum.org/agenda/2021/09lessons-must-belearnes-from-covid-19-impact-on-women-s-health-and-rights/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7295494/>

Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Akhter, S., Chibb, M. & Fatima, N. (2023). Behind Closed Doors: The Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence during Covid-19. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(3), 2424-2431. DIP:18.01.228.20231103, DOI:10.25215/1103.228