



Violence Against Women Amidst Covid-19: Risewithin the Walls

Dr. Jai Mala

Associate Professor, UILS, Punjab University, Chandigarh

Shivanshi Thakur

Research Scholar, Department of Laws, Punjab University, Chandigarh

ABSTRACT: A woman acts like a vibrant binding fabric in the society who selflessly plays variety of roles starting from being a noble mother, a loving daughter, a caring sister and a responsible wife. A lifetime of contributions made by her have not guaranteed her any respectful position in the society, rather she is still a victim of tyranny at the hands of man. It is often said that we reap what we sow and a recent example of such human misdeeds is the global outbreak of corona virus. The ferocious side of mother nature was seen when the virus infected lakhs of people in almost every country and has also resulted in the increase of violence, unemployment, financial losses, downfall of educational systems etc. It was also felt that as people got confined to their homes, the main care giver of the family (women) became subject to all the dominance and abuse within the four walls. The core of this study limits itself in inspecting the causes of increased domestic violence against women in India after the corona outbreak. The article also aims to explore the data related to women victims of domestic violence in India during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY WORDS: Covid-19 and Women, Domestic Violence Against Women, Domestic Violence Against Women During the Pandemic.

Received 07 Mar, 2022; Revised 20 Mar, 2022; Accepted 22 Mar, 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence in itself is a threat to human dignity and tranquillity. It has various forms like physical, mental, sexual, etc. and the most common of them is domestic violence. When the covid-19 scenario happened, People worldwide have been told by authorities to stay home to reduce the transmission of corona virus, and social isolation and domestic quarantine can deepen relationships between family members, intensifying intimacy, affective exchange and deepens relationships but on other hands it is found that most violence against women is perpetrated by family members in time of crisis and during pandemics. Quarantine compelled vulnerable people to share space with aggressors. Abuser had more freedom because victims freedom was restricted, very less police intervention and access to justice due to which reporting of incidents became difficult as well as limited resources and less social support for victims could all contribute to an increase risk of domestic violence's.ⁱ Across the world, countries including China, United states, United Kingdom, Brazil, Tunisia, France, Australia and others have reported cases of increased domestic violence.ⁱⁱ India, with its socio-culturally diverse population, has been one of the nation's worst hit by the pandemic.ⁱⁱⁱ It is also acknowledged that domestic violence is associated with education, employment status, caste, and religion of women, sex of firstborn child, alcohol consumption by husband, dowry, justification for wife beating, multiple sex partners of husband, controlling behaviour by husband. By the second month of lockdown, complaints about domestic abuse doubled. The national Commission for Women's records shows that domestic violence increased 2.5 times between February and may 2020^{iv}. Such complaints rose from 116 in the first week of March to 257 in the final week. A study by researcher revealed that "approximately 22.5% of married women, as compared to zero men and unmarried women, worked for more than 70 hours per week" during the lockdown. The study also said unemployed women witnessed the highest increase of 30.5 percentage points for those who spent more than 70 hours per week on unpaid work.

The Covid-19 induced lockdown "trapped" women in their own houses, depriving them of "breathing space", which they would otherwise get.^v In the present study, the researchers would examine what factors lead

to increased domestic violence in India especially against women during the pandemic. Few relevant measures are also suggested at the end of the research, which could help in decreasing the amplitude of this social evil.

II. MEANING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic abuse, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence" (IPV), can be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.^{vi}

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 defines domestic violence as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and financial abuse against a woman by her partner or family members residing in a joint family and also includes unlawful dowry demands.^{vii} Domestic violence is a public health concern and has adverse effects on the physical and mental health of women. With the expansion in the number of days in the lockdown, reports of the increased number of cases of IPV were known to the entire world. The United Nations (UN) defines IPV as any behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner who causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling attitudes. It is often viewed inseparably from domestic violence or abuse. Specifically, when directed toward the female sex, it can be intimidation, animosity, or arbitrary deprivation of autonomy, all of which have detrimental effects on their overall being and quality of life. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called out for a "ceasefire" on April 6, 2020, to address the "horrific global surge in intimate partner violence"^{viii}

III. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

The nationwide strict lockdown was imposed in India from 22nd March 2020 to 3rd May 2020, i.e., 43 days. After that also night & weekend curfews, partial lock downs, restricted gatherings were imposed during 2020 and 2021. India declared COVID-19 a "notified disaster" under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Extended lockdown and other social distancing measures imposed to curb the pandemic made women more vulnerable to domestic violence. Women were fighting a shadow pandemic inside their homes. four incidents in which the primary reason for domestic violence was alcohol. In three of the four incidents, the primary reason for perpetrating domestic violence was the abuser experiencing withdrawal symptoms due to the non-availability of alcohol. In an incident from Hyderabad, a "woman and her teenage son from an earlier marriage, were facing the brunt of her second husband's frustration over not getting alcohol during the lockdown. A domestic violence victim shared that "she was depressed as her husband had taken to alcohol abuse out of anxiety over a financial crisis". We found many incidents in which unemployment and job security were the causes of perpetrating domestic violence. A related factor that was found to be contributing to the motivation was frustration and anxiety. A victim of domestic violence reported that when her alcoholic husband had a job, things were balanced. After he became unemployed, he stayed at home the entire day, got frustrated, consumed alcohol, and created ruckus. In one incident, a man murdered his wife, in front of his daughter, suspecting her of infidelity. It was also reported a similar incident where a woman was allegedly killed by her husband for protesting against his extra-marital affair. A report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that alcohol consumption could severely impact a person's physical and cognitive functioning which reduces the self-control and in turn makes the person incapable of resorting to non-violent means to resolve a conflict in a relationship. It was also found that women whose husbands maintained stable employment were less likely to experience domestic violence. Women's visibility and accessibility during the lockdown made them suitable targets of domestic violence. With the social distancing orders in place and virus spreading rapidly, lot of battered women shelters could not accommodate victims of domestic violence. Due to the lockdown order, many women were in constant proximity to their potential abuser.^{ix} While quarantine and social distancing are necessary to contain the spread of the virus, it can also lead to social and functional isolation. Most of the women in the country do not even have access to phones for communication, as they have to depend upon their husbands, fathers, or brothers. The ineffectiveness of the law wherein marital rape is still not considered a criminal act adds to the insult. All these factors have a holistic effect on the affected person's health and rights. Clearly, in times of monetary and financial recession, human behaviour tends to be impulsive, reckless, controlling, and aggressive, and the brunt usually goes down the patriarchal power-hierarchy, so significant for India.^x Data from the National Family Health Survey 2015-16 shows that 31.1% of the ever-married Indian women aged between 15 and 49 years experienced spousal violence and almost 4% experienced violence during any pregnancy. According to National Crime Bureau's India topped the list of categories of violence against women in India.^{xi}

Low approach rate reflects that support service providers cannot intervene unless targets are willing to approach them. Another reason for low approach is lack of resources. The Indian Government classified domestic violence shelter and support services as One Stop Crisis Centres, supporting women who suffered abuse and need shelter, legal aid and medical attention.^{xii}

The guidelines on essential services by the Ministry of Home Affairs did not make NGOs as essential service. Both approach of NGOs towards victim and victims' approach towards NGOs limited the role of NGOs as a capable guardian in preventing domestic violence during the pandemic. Further, perpetrators of domestic violence may intensify coercion and control by controlling the technology accessed by the targets. This might include monitoring targets' communication with both formal and informal sources and restricting access to the internet.^{xiii}

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It was observed by the researchers that the increase in violence against women domestically was mainly due to isolated home environments with perpetrators, alcohol withdrawal, unemployment, access alcohol consumption, stress & anxiety. Removal of any of these factors that facilitate domestic violence from existing in the same time and space, i.e., a motivated offender, suitable target, and absence of a capable guardian could result in a drastic decrease of victims of domestic violence. In the current scenario where one cannot have the face-to-face individual session, rescue services need to be provided to the vulnerable and needy populations through telephone, online, or other virtual methods for which the necessary pamphlets or leaflets could be prepared and circulated through social media methods as promotion of mental health and protection of human rights. Besides, civil society and non-governmental organizations will play a critical role in assisting. It is a collective responsibility, and all of us, irrespective of educational or socioeconomic background, can aid in the prevention of this social evil. The government can promote "domestic abuse prevention" as an "essential service," which raises the bar of importance. The Indian Pandemic Act of 1897 unquestionably needs modification; incorporating the needs related to domestic violence might be worthy. Citizens of the country need to be sensitive to identify the earliest signs of abuse and report them to the necessary authorities. Legal and administrative provisions should be hassle-free to enable more reporting and assurance to the victims. The National Helplines by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, can integrate child and women safety services to make it more comprehensive. The authors call upon an urgent integrated and comprehensive public-mental health approach as a key to IPV prevention in India during the ongoing crisis and mental health education as an essential tool.^{xiv}

4.1 Suggestions

Domestic violence affects the mental and physical health therefore, we need aggressive nationwide campaign to promote awareness about domestic violence and highlights the various modes through which complaints can be filed. National news channels, radio channels and social media platform must strategically used.

In France and Spain, pharmacies are trained to identify people facing abuse through code word; asking for 'Mask-19' is being used as a code for people who cannot speak openly, to indicate that they are being abused and are seeking help. Indian Govt can also use such methods to help the women.

Government must allow civil society organisations, counsellors, mental health organisations and other service providers to come to the aid of people facing domestic violence.

REFERENCES

- ⁱ Domestic violence in the Covid-19 pandemic, <https://www.researchgate.net>...>domestic>
- ⁱⁱ Covid-19, and domestic violence-India development review, <https://www.idronline.org/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ "Crisis Within the Walls": Rise of Intimate Partner Violence During the Pandemic, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fgwh.2021.614310/full>
- ^{iv} Violence against women during-covid-19-lockdown, <https://www.who.int/domestic-violence>
- ^v Increased work, domestic abuse — how Covid lockdown was especially hard on women in India, <https://theprint.in/india/increased-work-domestic-abuse-how-covid-lockdown-was-especially-hard-on-women-in-india/601328/>
- ^{vi} What Is Domestic Abuse? <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>
- ^{vii} The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, s.3
- ^{viii} *Supra note 1.*
- ^{ix} Krishnakumar, A., and Verma, S., Understanding Domestic Violence in India during COVID-19: a Routine Activity Approach. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 2021. 16(1): p. 19–35.
- ^x *Supra note 1.*
- ^{xi} Domestic violence complaints at a 10-year high during COVID-19 lockdown, <https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10-year-high-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31885001.ece>.
- ^{xii} *Supra note 4*
- ^{xiii} *Supra note 6.*
- ^{xiv} Kofman, Y.B. and Garfin, D.R., Home is not always a haven: the domestic violence crisis amid the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 2020. 12 (S1): p.199–201.