

## RISE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19: A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

**Dr. Anu Rastogi**

*Associate Professor & Head, Department of Sociology*

*R.G. (P.G.) College, Meerut*

*Email: dranurastogi11@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*A woman who is worshiped in India and has been a foundation block of family and society who gives birth to live, nurtures life, shapes it, strengthen it, who is transmitter of tradition and preserver of the culture, the biggest irony in our country is that she is subjected to heinous violence. Domestic violence exists irrespective of the age, race, caste, the social, financial and political status of a woman. Domestic violence can be defined as the **violence** and abuse which happens in a domestic setting like cohabitation or marriage. It is important to bring attention to the fact that domestic violence is not just confined to physical harm but any kind of behavior, aimed at a partner, spouse, or a close family member in order to gain control or exercise power over the victim. The dominant nature of males and the victimization of females makes the case more worst. Almost every home in India suffers from some kind of domestic violence (physical, mental, verbal economical abuse.) Domestic violence not only hampers women but also impedes the growth of the country. In this paper, we will look forward to the vicious cycle of domestic violence and how it increased manifolds in the pandemic.*

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**Dr. Anu Rastogi**

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## **Introduction**

According to the data available globally, 1 out of every 3 women has been subjected to violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life (World Health Organization 1997). The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted people's lives and most significantly family fabric. The worldwide lockdown, when announced in the country, was difficult particularly for women since they had to balance household chores and work. Women from backward backgrounds faced the savagery and abusive behavior of their husbands. The situation of increase in cases of domestic violence is not restricted to only India. The lives of women across the globe also came to a halt. Violence is not only repeated and perpetrated frequently, but on a regular basis during the lockdown., Domestic violence is physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse against women by a partner or family member residing in a joint family, plagues the lives of many women in India (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005.) Violence against females, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women is a major public health problem and a violations of women's human rights.

## **Causes of Domestic Violence**

Violence and atrocities happen regardless of gender. Family that is the primary support system often becomes the primary site of savagery. Domestic violence is not the result of a single factor. It is a combination of various sociological/behavioral, historical, religious, and cultural factors that lead to the perpetration of domestic violence against women, all of which is a result of unequal power relations between men and women historically. Factors responsible for these unequal power relations include: socio-economic factors, the family, fear of and control over female sexuality, belief in the superiority of males, laws and cultural warrants that have denied women and children an independent status historically. Some of the major causes of domestic violence are:

- **Social Factors:** The socio-cultural & behavioral factors like anger issues, aggressive attitude, poverty, the difference in position, dominancy, addictions, upbringing & psychological uncertainty (bipolar, depression, stress, etc.) Neglect of shared responsibilities due to extra-marital affairs or lack of trust also paves the way to domestic violence.
- **Traditional Factors:** The evil of patriarchy and superiority complex that has existed for centuries among men.
- **Religious Factors:** A subtle form of domination on women, indirectly reflected in the religion.
- **Cultural Factors:** This obsession with the desire for a male child, resulting from the lack of awareness and male superiority leads to domestic violence against women.

- **Dowry:** A dowry is a form of socio-cultural factor and the illegal demand of dowry is the reason for the rampant domestic violence cases. This has been made a separate head in the forms of abuse resulting in domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Act.

### **Forms of Domestic Violence Against Women**

Domestic violence has varied forms, all of the possible forms are-

(a) *Physical abuse* consists of an act or conducts which is of such nature as to cause bodily pain, harm to life or health, impairs the development of the aggrieved person and includes assault criminal intimidation and criminal force. It is the most pervasive method,

(b) *Psychological or emotional abuse* which has been categorized as verbal that includes- insults, ridicule, humiliation, name-calling and insults especially with regard to not having a child or a male child. It is one of the most common forms of abuse faced by women,

(c) *Sexual abuse* against women is one of the forms of violence inflicted by both public and private sectors,

(d) *Economic abuse* includes the deprivation of finances, refusal to contribute economically, deprivation of basic needs (food, clothes, etc) and limiting access to health care, employment, etc.

(e) *Psychological Abuse* includes behavior that aims to threaten (like threats of abandonment & savagery, take away custody of the children, etc) and persecute.

(f) *Tolerance of abuse* It is found that aged women and girl child particularly vulnerable to domestic violence. The condition of women in the families is undoubtedly still quite precarious. Unmarried girls, unwanted in their father's homes could also experience violence. (a) Violence against Girl Child, (Unmarried Women), (b) Violence against Married Women, (c) Violence against Aged Women.

### **Rise During Covid-19 Lockdowns**

In times of the pandemic, the fist of domestic violence offenders has tightened in India. The distance from the regular support systems is making it difficult for the abuse victims to call out for help. Complaints about domestic abuse doubled in the second month of the lockdown. They [rose from](#) 116 in the first week of March to 257 in the final week. Reports released by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in different states suggest that Uttarakhand recorded the highest number of domestic violence cases in the last two months of lockdown, followed by Haryana on number 2 and the national capital on number 3. The data by NALSA compiled cases from the start of the lockdown till May 15 and was picked through 28 State

Legal Services (SLAs). Some shocking numbers were revealed in the report which mentioned that a total of 144 domestic violence cases were reported in Uttarakhand, 79 cases from Haryana and 69 cases from Delhi.

The NCW [monthly data](#), on the contrary, showed an overall decrease in the complaints received during the months of lockdown as compared to the starting months of lockdown. However, the gradual relaxation of the lockdown saw a subsequent rise in the complaints. Rekha Sharma (NCW chairperson) stated that the economic instability, heightened stress levels, anxiety, and lack of emotional support of the family's side may have caused the domestic violence in many cases in 2020. This data shows that while there was a rapid increase in the domestic violence cases during the lockdown, the complaints were not actively reported. About 86% of women who experienced violence never sought help and 77% of the victims did not even mention the incident to anyone. About 80% of women faced physical abuse, 81% faced sexual abuse and about 61.3 % faced both physical as well as sexual violence.

### **Barriers to Reporting in The Midst of The Pandemic**

The imposition of COVID-19 lockdowns in India proved to be the biggest obstacle in reporting of domestic violence cases. Some of the reasons are stated below:

- **Limited movement:** The lockdown restricted women by preventing them to move to safer places in instances of violence and abuse. With men and women living together, the privacy of women declined and cases of violence rose.
- **Paralyzed mediums of communication:** As only [38% of women in India have phones](#) and only a few have an internet connection, the [WhatsApp helpline number](#) launched by the NCW had a limited reach, making this platform inaccessible.
- **Reduced contact with the indigenous family:** family is the first point of contact. They do not only support the victim and motivate them in filing a complaint but also cooperate with the police. The constant presence of the offender made it difficult for the victims to contact their families.
- **Lack of the formal support system:** The services under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act had not been identified as essential during the lockdown. Therefore, the protection officers never visited households of victims, NGOs were not able to have physical interactions and the police officers being at the were not able to help effectively

### **The Way Forward**

Everyone needs a shoulder, a hand, or an emotional response sometimes, when the times get difficult. In the pandemic where people weren't allowed to have the face-to-face meetings, these services should be provided to the vulnerable and needy populations

through telephone, online, or other virtual methods. Pamphlets or leaflets could be prepared and circulated through the internet to propagate mental health and protection of human rights. . It is a collective responsibility, therefore, The society, NGO's and all of us, irrespective of differences, can aid in the prevention of this social evil that is Domestic Violence. The government can promote "domestic abuse prevention" as an "essential service," which raises the bar of importance. Moreover, the Indian Pandemic Act of 1897 undeniably needs modification. Citizens of the country need to be aware enough to identify the earliest signs of abuse and report them right away.

Provisions related to law and administration should be easy and within reach of all, to enable more reporting and assurance to the victims. The National Helplines by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare can integrate child and women safety services to make it more comprehensive. Importantly, the marked gaps in research and data related to monitoring and implementing the interventions in domestic abuse need to be filled with systematic studies. The COVID-19 pandemic brought out yet another but an excellent opportunity for us to re-visit and evaluate the blind spots in our prevention and care of domestic violence before too much damage is done. Indeed, in present times, "home is not always a haven"! (Kofman and Garfin)

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