



Emersion in Domestic violence in India during the COVID 19 Pandemic

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Abstract- Historically women have been facing gender based violence and discrimination in various aspects of life and in almost every society around the world. Gender based violence includes several forms of violence such as rape, sexual harassment, female infanticide etc. Domestic violence is another form of gender based violence that has brought attention to the entire world community exceedingly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This is because during the COVID-19 almost all the societies have been witnessing a sudden rise in domestic violence cases. India has no exception in this regard. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which was started in China in November-December 2019 had begun to spread in India mainly during March 2020. Since then the government of India has been taking various measures to break the chain of spreading the SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) for example- nationwide Janata Curfew, Lockdown (1, 2, 3 and 4), Unlock (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) etc. According to the reports published in various reputed newspapers and journals, during these 'lockdown' and 'unlock' period domestic violence against women has been largely increased around the country. In this background the present paper will examine the rise in domestic violence in India during the COVID-19 pandemic and will determine whether there is a relation between COVID-19 and domestic violence in India? The present paper will also try to trace possible measures to solve the problem of domestic violence during a pandemic. The study will completely be based on secondary sources and will follow a descriptive method of analysis.

Keywords: Domestic violence, gender, women, COVID-19, pandemic

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 that is caused due to the virus called SARS-COV-2 has become a pandemic in the present world. It has affected almost all corners of the world. As of November 22, 2020 (at 16:31 GMT) the total cases of COVID 19 in the world numbered at 5, 87, 38,009 with more than 10 lakh deaths. The USA is recording the highest number of cases at 1, 24, 70,039 and India is in the second with 91, 29,003 active cases. As of now the disease has no proper treatment. To reduce the spread of infection, countries across the world have been enacting various measures such as national quarantine, border closures, online work, school closures, work from home, physical & social distancing, lockdown etc.

Although COVID 19 has serious impact over the health of the people around the world, it has other consequences too. For example, COVID 19 has affected family relationship, national & world economy, healthcare infrastructure, social care systems, international solidarity etc. One such serious impact of COVID 19 which is being felt presently is the emersion in domestic violence cases during this pandemic. It is another serious problem before the entire world. India is also not an exception. During this COVID 19 pandemic, India has been witnessing huge hike in the domestic violence cases around the country. This has a serious impact over the health & security of women in India as well as in the world. In this background the present paper will try to determine whether there is a relation between COVID 19 and domestic violence in India. The present paper will also try to trace possible measures to solve the problem of domestic violence in India during the pandemic.

Objectives of the study

The present study is based on three major objectives;

1. To determine whether there is a relation between COVID 19 & domestic violence in India.
2. To examine the factors responsible for rise in domestic violence in India during the pandemic.
3. To trace the possible measures to solve the problem of domestic violence in India during the COVID 19 and the post-COVID 19 or hereafter.

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is also known as domestic abuse or family abuse refers to violence or other abuse at domestic level such as in marriage or cohabitation (living together without marriage). The term domestic violence is also used as a synonym for intimate partner violence that is committed by a spouse or partner in an intimate relationship with other partner or spouse. In a broader view, domestic violence also includes violence against children, parents or elderly. Domestic violence includes various forms of violence such as- physical, verbal, emotional, economic, psychological, reproductive, sexual abuse etc. Physical abuse includes choking, beating, female genital mutilation etc. Sexual abuse includes marital rape etc. Domestic violence in its severe form includes stoning, bride burning, honor killings & dowry deaths. Honor killing means murder of a girl or woman by male family members. The killers justify their act by claiming that the victim has brought dishonour or upon the family name or prestige.

COVID 19 & Domestic Violence in the World

Generally several countries have reported an increase in domestic violence cases during the COVID 19 pandemic. For example- The U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline received about 2000 calls during lockdown in The USA. Data reveals that, before COVID 19 every third woman in the world has faced violence at least once in her lifetime. During the COVID 19, lockdowns have become mandatory and imposition of lockdowns and other measures to reduce the spread of this infection, have led to sudden rise in the number of domestic violence cases around the world. Hence, domestic abuse is being reported in almost every part in the world such as China, Argentina, Germany, Turkey, South Africa, UK, France, Malaysia etc.

In response to this on 6 April 2020, UN chief Antonio Guterres appealed the countries to take steps for addressing the global emersion in domestic violence cases during the pandemic. The WHO also stated that due to social distancing people are advised to stay at home and this may lead to the rise of intimate partner violence. The European Parliament extended their support with a statement “We won’t leave Europe’s women alone during pandemic.”

COVID 19 & Domestic Violence in India

In India nationwide lockdown was imposed since March 25, 2020 and continued & extended for long time. This has hampered the economy severely. Another important impact of COVID 19 in our country is the rise in domestic violence cases in India. This has created huge risk over the health & security of women in our country as they are the prime victims of it. Various data reveals the fact, for example;

Data from the National Family & Health Survey, round-4 (NFHS-4) (2015-16) states that every third woman in India suffers physical or sexual violence at home by their husband or partner. Lockdown and other measures to reduce the spread of COVID 19 has brought havoc on women’s mental, Physical and emotional health.

According to a report of the National Commission of Women (NCW) cases of domestic violence had doubled during pan-India lockdown compared to pre lockdown period. From March 23, 2020 to April 16, 2020 the NCW received 239 complaints mainly through whatsapp number messages and emails. About 92000 calls received by India’s Child line 1098 helpline for seeking help against abuse and violence on children during the first week of lockdown. For the Chairperson of the NCW, the real numbers, including women who have no access to emails and are unable to use the post during lockdown, would be significantly higher.

Shalu Nigam, an independent researcher in her article, “COVID 19: India’s Response to Domestic Violence Needs Rethinking” reveals that the pandemic has been made adverse gender impact in two ways –

a) Middle upper class women facing abuse in homes during lockdown.

b) Poor women who have no holes or living in slums or those who are on roads walking back home or those who are awaiting in villages for migrant men to come back. This didn’t get attention but the migrant women along with men walked hundreds of miles, some in their advanced stage of pregnancy along with their children without food. Some were forced to deliver babies on the roadside. Some received news of migrant men being died while walking on roads without food.

Causes of Rise in Domestic Violence Cases in India during Pandemic

Among several causes, some are discussed below,

a) Domestic labour

One of the most important reasons for rise in domestic violence in India during pandemic is domestic labour. During; lockdown all family members in every family are at home. This has imposed extra burden on women's shoulders. Work pressure at home has increased.

b) Lost of jobs

Most of the Indians do job at unorganized sectors. During this pandemic male members either don't go to work or have lost their jobs. This leads to poverty, frustration and culminated into violence. Not only men, number of women have also lost their jobs during the pandemic. This has increased chances of getting abused of women by their family members or partners.

c) Lack of alcohol consumption

Today a big number of the total population consume alcohol. During lockdown, some alcoholic husbands didn't get alcohol because shops were closed and due to that frustration, they abuse women in an intimate relationship. While wine shops are opened by the government after a period of lockdown, a woman is reportedly killed by her husband in Uttar Pradesh because she refused to sell her jewellery to buy alcohol.

Unmarried women often experience violence from mothers, step-mothers, fathers, step-fathers, brothers & sisters or cousins, teachers and other relatives.

d) Social & physical isolation

According to the researchers social and physical isolation is one of the most important technique used by abusers to distance victims from their support networks such as friends, family members, colleagues etc. During the pandemic social & physical isolation is a government sanctioned approach.

e) Spending time together

Study reveals that when family members spend more time together, such as the Christmas, summer vacations, domestic violence increases. It is also said that, when families spend more time together, violence may occur without any specific reason. It is a common feature of human psychology. During the pandemic (mainly lockdown) family members were bound to stay together and to spend more time together.

Impact of Domestic Violence on Women during COVID 19 in India

Women are the prime sufferers of domestic violence during the COVID 19 pandemic. Some important consequences of domestic violence on women during COVID 19 are discussed below;

1) Physical abuse

Due to COVID 19 and measures taken by the government to reduce the spread of the virus, domestic violence has been increased in all over India. This has intensely affected women in our country physically. Physical abuse of women by the partners or family members causes immediate or acute physical injuries such as burns & bites, fractures & broken bones and teeth. It also includes severe injuries including injuries to the head, eyes, chest, abdomen which may cause long term health problems and even death. Disruption in normal health services have made this more serious.

2) Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse of women by their partners or family members leads to unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, pregnancy complications, vaginal bleeding or infections, urinary tract infections, painful sexual intercourse etc. During the pandemic, social distancing, economic distress, lack of alcoholism etc. have increased the number of sexual abuse of women too.

3) Psychological impact

Domestic violence against women has serious impact over women's psychological and mental health too. Due to rise in domestic violence during COVID 19 women have been suffering from several mental disorders such as- depression, sleeping & eating disorders, stress and anxiety disorders, self harm & suicide attempts, poor self-esteem etc. WHO report shows that those who face domestic violence also experience abortion which falls them into depression.

4) Disruption in normal health services

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) report states that, due to lockdowns and major disruptions to health services during the pandemic, around 47 million women in low & middle income countries would be unable to access modern contraceptives and this could lead to seven million unwanted pregnancies in the coming months.

5) Disbanding the support system

Along with above, COVID 19 has seriously impacted the support system for women. Before the pandemic victims of domestic violence had access to support from family members and relatives, neighbours, co-workers, peers, shelter homes and even legal remedies. But during lockdowns all these support systems are not available to victims. This also makes the situation more adamant.

Measure to tackle the menace of domestic violence during pandemic

To stop the menace of domestic violence during COVID 19 various measures have been taken by the global community as well as different national governments. For example: the WHO has recently launched "INSPIRE" which includes seven strategies for ending violence against children. The WHO also has launched "RESPECT women" to prevent violence against women around the world.

Likewise the Indian government had passed the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) in 2005. This Act is to protect women from any kind of domestic violence. It was came into force in 2006. Along with this the National Commission for Women (NCW), a governmental body, which receives complaints of domestic violence from all parts of the country has launched a whatsapp number '7217735372' to report complain of domestic violence during lockdown period. The NCW says that this whatsapp number is in addition to the online complaint links and emails that are already operational. Apart from this, different state governments in India have also been working in this regard. For example- The Assam government has opened 181 helpline number to tackle the menace of domestic violence. In Uttar Pradesh (UP), an NGO called "Breakthrough" started a community radio programme to increase awareness among people about domestic violence. It taught people about how to recognize domestic violence and ways to address the issue. The UP Police has launched "Suppress Corona, not your voice" initiative and asked victims to call a helpline number to enable women police officers to reach them following a complaint. In Pune, Maharastra, Women's Entrepreneurs for Transformation (WEFT) a non profit organisation has launched "red dot initiative" under which people can identify a domestic violence victim by seeing a red dot on her palm and inform NGOs or authorities. This is because many women are either unable or too afraid to inform the police to get help to move out. The Kerala government has also become active and whatsapp number & other awareness programmes have been given priority.

Besides the above following measures can also play important role in bringing positive result in tackling the menace of domestic violence during the pandemic and its aftermath.

i) Helpline numbers

To tackle the menace of domestic violence during the pandemic only launching helpline numbers is not sufficient. The number must be operational for as many hours as possible. Along with this providing additional numbers is also important so that, more victims can reach out at the same time.

ii) Comprehensive plan

To tackle the problem a comprehensive plan is must be required. For example; WHO has developed the “LIVES” protocol. Here ‘LIVES’ implies a comprehensive plan of first aid. LIVES include;

L- Listening, I- Inquiry (collecting relevant information about the violence), V- Validation (knowing survivors experience about the violence), E- Enhancing safety (preparing a safety plan for the specific context of each survivor), and S- Support (Providing support to the victim).

iii) Awareness programme

Increasing awareness about the causes, consequences and remedies of domestic violence must be spread among the public through social media like whatsapp numbers, Facebook, television channels etc. Several NGOs can take leading role in organising awareness campaigns throughout India with the help of social and mass media.

iv) Speedy action

After reporting, speedy trial or action is necessary. After identification of culprit if there is delay in arrest, it will create more severe problem during the pandemic as victim and abuser will have to share the same spaces. Due to lockdowns and other measures taken by the government to stop the spread of the infection, it will be difficult to separate the two parties if legal actions are not taken quickly.

v) Digital monitoring

Many countries have been using digital monitoring of their citizens during the pandemic. Specific apps have been launched by the governments to trace the abusers and provide support to the victims. Governments should keep hotlines open 24x7.

vi) Providing psychological support

Research states that creating positive psychological support system such as hope, resilience, optimism and self efficacy are vital for creating a positive mindset among people for a positive future. This is very much important when the environment is so uncertain.

vii) Response to heterogeneity

A strategy is needed to know whether the vulnerable sections of society are also experiencing the domestic violence. For example- migrant workers and their family members are already vulnerable community. During this pandemic they are bound to leave their jobs and thus women of this migrant community are facing violence at their home and may not even report their problem.

viii) Preparing multi-ministry guideline at national level is also essential to fight against domestic violence during the pandemic and its aftermath. Formulation of standard operating procedure and budgetary allotments are important in this regard.

II. CONCLUSION

The above discussion clearly refers that, COVID 19 has become a serious threat for the present world. The present study reflects that there is a significant relationship between COVID 19 & rise in domestic violence in India as well as in the world. Although various reasons such as social distancing measures, lost of jobs, alcoholism etc. play significant role behind the rise in domestic violence in India, it has serious impact over the health and security of women in India as well as in the world. History reveals that at the time of disasters women are the worst sufferers. Women constitute half of the total population in the earth and they are like one of the two wheels of a cart. And balance between these two wheels is essential for moving the cart properly. Otherwise the cart can't run smoothly. During the COVID 19 crisis when the environment is so uncertain. Along with various measures, both national government and the community should take responsibility to ensure safety and security of women at home as well as in the society. In this regard responsibility of the community is very much important as any victim of domestic violence first can approach & get help from the community.

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