

# Domestic Violence: During COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

The Corona Virus came on light on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, when China informed the World Health Organization that a cluster of cases of pneumonia of an unknown cause was found in Wuhan city of Hubei Province. Subsequently the disease spread to more provinces of China and rest of the world. Subsequently the W.H.O has declared it as a pandemic. The virus has been named as SARS-CoV-2 and the disease is now called COVID-19. With the effect of COVID-19 announcement of Lock down by Prime Minister of India, National Commission for Women (NCW) reported 100% rise in the complaints of domestic violence cases against women; monthly report of NCW spokes some alternate truth of increasing of domestic violence in India during this pandemic. House became hell for many women because they were forced to live with their abusers; it increased the violence against women. The abusers felt an enormous loss of power and control over their own lives due to pandemic; they vent their frustration on the women in the houses. A research observed where Domestic violence and online sexual abuse were higher in red zone coronavirus areas as compared to those in orange and green zone, according to study which argues that gender based violence shifted from streets to domestic spaces due to restrictions on mobility during COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations Organization has advised that "helplines, psychological support and online counselling must be boosted, technological based solutions, online tools and networks to be expanded, social support, and other assistance must be furnished to the women having no access to mobile phone and internet. The electronic media can raise awareness in regional language against domestic violence is a punishable crime under Indian Penal Code 1860 & Domestic Violence Act 2005 in India". The economic survey and its report during this pandemic show one of the main factors for frustration of men women was out from the job which resulted in increasing of domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Domestic violence during lockdown, Domestic violence during COVID-19

## Introduction

The Government of India ordered lockdown on national level in four phases in COVID-19 pandemic. Phase-one from 25 March 2020 to 14 April 2020 total 21 days, phase – two, from 15 April to 3 May 2020 total 90 days, Phase three - from 4 May 2020 to 17 May 2020 and Phase four from 18 May to 31 May 2020. During this period whole country was stopped to move on certain exceptional conditions. All citizens were asked to stay at their home and were restricted to go outside from the home on certain conditions notified by Government. During this four Phase of COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown the complaints against domestic violence were filled by women, more than the last previous ten years. A report shows between 25 March 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020, total 1477 complaints were made by women against domestic violence to NCW. Hospitals, medical establishment, police, electricity water supply, laboratories, shops, food supply, milk, fruits, vegetables etc. were exempted from lockdown (1). During the lockdown about 86% women who experienced violence never sought for help and 77% of women victims never mentioned the incidents to anyone. Women's were harassed behind the wall. Millions of migrant workers who had lost their income left towards their home, due to shortage of food, water, uncertainty of their future many of them lost their life. Incidents came to know where women gave the birth to a child in midway at night, and child lost his life in next morning.

**Meaning and Definition of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence against women is ancient phenomenon domestic violence is an extremely complex and vicious form of abuse, committed within the four walls of family house or within the particular area where women find her as helpless.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, called as "The Magna Carta" of Human Right exhorts that

"All human beings are born free in equal dignity and rights"(2).

Human right to dignity, freedom from discrimination and recognition of violence as form of discrimination are the pre requisites to protect and preserve the human rights of women under special circumstances. Violence against women means any act of gender- based violence which is likely to physical, sexual, mental, psychological harm to the women, including threats of such acts, coercion of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life of women(3). "The domestic violence means the violence between the members of house hold, usually spouses, an adult, or other violent act committed by the member of house hold against another"(4). Domestic violence includes actual abuse or the threat or abuse that is physical, sexual, verbal, mental, psychological, emotional, economical, harassment by way of unlawful demand of dowry, all the relative of women will cover under this definition, in determining whether any act, omission, commission, or conduct of respondent continues domestic violence. Domestic violence is not only physical violence alone, any behaviour for the purpose which is to gain power and control over other spouse or partner, or family member, it may not only be caused by anger but mental problems, drugs, or alcohol or the other common excuses may be counted violence for next partner.

**Objective of the Study**

History of domestic violence is as ancient as civilization, most legal system around the world, domestic violence has been addressed only from the 1990 onward, indeed before the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in most of the countries there was very little protection of law or in practice against domestic violence(5). In recent decades there has been increase attention given to specific forms of domestic violence such as honour killing, dowry deaths, forced marriage, sexual harassment, physical harassment & mental harassment, India in recent decades has made efforts to curtail the violence by passing Domestic Violence Act, 2005(6). Time to time Supreme Court of India had tried to provide relief to women victims from domestic violence. With the rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases across the world, in past few months several international organisations took cognisance of global rise in Domestic Violence during

lockdown. With the announcement of Lock down by Prime Minister of India, National commission for women reported 100% rise in the complaints of domestic violence cases, NCW monthly data speaks some alternate truth of increasing of the cases against domestic violence in India. The Government need to prepare a plan and provide adequate budget to support service to survivors and ensure implementation of law against domestic violence. Many times the reports on economic survey during this pandemic show the main cause of frustration of men was out from job which resulted in increasing of cases against domestic violence.

**Review of Literature**

During study "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence: A Retrospect" by Suneel Kumar was consulted for definition of domestic violence(7). The Article Protection of women from domestic Violence in India was studied where author has tried to highlight the provision of Domestic Violence Act 2005 reading with the provision of Indian Penal Code 1860(8). A remarkable poem "Kuchh log mile the rahon mein" by Rajiv Kumar Vishwakarma 'Sahaj' where the poet has tried to paint the actual painful image of millions of migrants men, women, children, Old Aged, who were forced to leave their shelter home, work place, and moved towards their village or home, and were exploited in mid-way during lockdown(9) & many of them died due to starvation, accident on road & railway track due to negligence of local administration(10). The Research of Manisha Sah and Sarvan Ravindran, observed that Domestic violence and online sexual abuse were higher in red – zone Corona Virus areas as compared to those in orange and green zones, according to study report argues that gender based violence shifted from streets to domestic areas because of restrictions on mobility during COVID-19 pandemic (11). The annual report of National Commission for women 2018-19 and monthly report registered on NCW during lock down were studied & daily news and reports published in various National and International agencies were consulted during the research.

**(NCW) Monthly report on Domestic Violence during COVID- 19**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus2 (SARS-CoV-2). During this pandemic 2018-19 the C & I Cell of the National Commission for Women registered 19,279 complaints within its mandate (12). Pandemic provided for an enabling environment of fear and uncertainty that may diverse forms of violence against women, more ever economic insecurity, financial instability and isolation are also some of the factors that contributed to make domestic violence during lockdown.

S. No	Nature	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1	Acid attack	1	2	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	7
2	Bigamy/ polygamy	10	7	6	6	18	14	23	4	0	0	0	0	88
3	Cybercrime against women	32	21	37	55	73	103	110	44	0	0	0	0	475
4	Denial of maternity benefit	9	10	13	2	6	13	5	5	0	0	0	0	63
5	Dowry death	32	17	18	9	27	27	49	25	0	0	0	0	204
6	Free legal aid	5	7	4	0	6	4	5	3	0	0	0	0	34
7	Gender discrimination including right to education	1	0	0	1	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	8
8	Harassment of married women/ dowry harassment	267	221	203	62	159	273	493	211	0	0	0	0	1889
9	Indecent representation of women	2	1	1	1	8	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	18
10	Not categorised yet	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	187	0	0	0	0	18
11	Outraging modesty of women/ molestation	112	103	103	29	140	203	329	133	0	0	0	0	1152
12	Police apathy against women	81	89	83	24	85	118	146	85	0	0	0	0	711
13	Domestic violence	271	302	298	315	393	461	660	345	0	0	0	0	3045
14	Rape / attempt to rape	142	112	90	12	54	82	149	52	0	0	0	0	693
15	Right to exercise choice in marriage/ honour crimes	41	28	34	6	26	45	60	14	0	0	0	0	254
16	Right to live with dignity	374	436	388	293	474	611	777	365	0	0	0	0	3664
17	Sex relative abortion	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
18	Sexual assault	12	10	19	4	1	8	14	6	0	0	0	0	74
19	Sexual harassment	22	20	19	11	8	42	50	18	0	0	0	0	190
20	Sexual harassment at work place	21	18	19	8	5	13	16	15	0	0	0	0	115
21	Stalking/ voyeurism	18	16	9	15	12	19	13	6	0	0	0	0	108
22	Trafficking/ prostitution of women	6	4	3	1	2	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	22
23	Women's right to custody of children in the event of divorce	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
24	Total	1462	1424	1347	800	1500	2043	2914	1520	0	0	0		13,010

The above monthly report of (NCW), generated on 22 August 2020 National commission for women nature wise complaint received in the year 2020 was 13,010, serial no 13 shows about domestic violence the cases were registered in the month of January 2020 was 271, February-302, March-298, April 315, May 393, June 461, July 660, August 345, the report shows rapid increasing of the cases of domestic violence during lockdown. NCW announced the WhatsApp number to receive the complaints, or larger via email, to be more accessible to women who find herself in abusive homes. "The instance of domestic violence in India have spiked since the promulgation of nationwide lockdown with husband venting their frustration on wives who have no escape from their abusers, The National Commission for Women (NCW), for instance received 58 complaints from March 23 to March 30" (13).in India 30% or nearly one in every three women of reproductive age (between 15 to 45 years) have experienced physical domestic violence (14). Among women who have been married at any time in their lives, 33% have experience physical, sexual, or emotional domestic violence by their spouse. With 57% of women having not their own mobile phone neither any other option to complain for domestic violence, among 14.3% of victims who sought help, only 7% of them reached out to relevant authorities, the police, doctors, lawyers or social service organisations, 93% of the victims sought help only from their immediate family(15).

#### **Top ten States with highest Number of complaints**

The data of complaint register on NCW reveals that most of the complaints are receive from the northern states of India. Top ten highest complaints register with the commission as follows (16).

S.No.	Name of State	Number of Complaints
1	Uttar Pradesh	11287
2	Delhi	1733
3	Haryana	1181
4	Bihar	754
5	Rajasthan	733
6	Maharashtra	591
7	Madhya Pradesh	533
8	West Bengal	323
9	Karnataka	271
10	Uttarakhand	267

These top ten states from Northern India were highest in registering the cases against women violence during 2018-19.

#### **Home not safe for many**

The national strategy against COVID- 19 emphasises that the safest place is home, ironically, for domestic violence home is most unsafe place for victim where they are forced to live with the person to whom they were quarantined. Home became hell for many women because they were forced to live with abusers; it increased the violence against women. The abusers felt an enormous loss of power and control over their own lives due to pandemic. They vent their frustration on the women in the house. Many times mental health issue rose due to isolation as well as reactive depression, but instead of

recognising these issue and seeking help people became more violent (17). The cases became worst where husband and wife were forced to live in metropolitan cities under small roof; the victims were unable to speak out because they were quarantined at home not allowed to go outside and complaint to appropriate authorities. The United Nations Organization has advised that "helplines, psychological support and online counselling must be boosted, technological based solutions,online tools and networks to be expanded, social support, and other assistance must be provided to such women having no access to phone and internet. The electronic media can raise awareness in regional language against domestic violence is a punishable crime under Indian Penal Code 1860 & Domestic Violence Act 2005 in India". "There is a war in our homes more than 8500 women killed by their spouses and their family member and 1,03,272 cases of domestic violence were reported in 2018 (NCRB 2018). Domestic violence is a reality that existed prior to Corona Virus(COVID-19), and has intensified as a result of the lock down, because women are locked with their abusers 24x7, their house work and care work responsibilities have increased and all stress and tension are released on women" (18).

#### **More domestic violence complaints in red zones during lockdown**

During this pandemic followed by lockdown confined people in their homes, complaints of domestic violence and cyber-crime against women during such time increased, while cases of harassment, sexual assault and rape, felt down to exceptional cases, with the effect of pronouncement of lockdown in the country. Union Health minister of India declared affected areas into three zones such as red zone, orange zone and green zone, each affected districts with strict restrictions to go outside. A study publish in US National Bureau of Economic Research University of California, Los Angeles by Sarvan Ravindran and Manisha Sah Professor of public policy at U.C.L.A., complied complaint registered with India's National Commission For Women and mapped them on to districts in red , orange and green zones. During analysis of the data researcher found that the average number of monthly domestic violence complaints in red zone district was below 1.5 in March 2020, which went up to almost 2 in the month of May 2020. At green zone districts this number was stayed at around 0.3 during the lockdown period, the red zone area also found increased in cyber-crime complaints made by women when compared to green zones. Study found that green zone registered less complaints of rape, sexual assault, and harassment as red zones in the month of April- May, word "domestic abuse" and "Domestic violence helpline" were searched on Google during the time more than the Month of January & February, the data itself speaks about the increasing of domestic violence in mid-March and peaked on April & May 2020 in India (19).

#### **Conclusion & Suggestion**

COVID-19, The Corona Virus which came in light on 31st December 2019 when China informed to the World Health Organization of about a cluster of

cases of pneumonia of an unknown cause in Wuhan city in Hubei Province. Subsequently the disease spread to other provinces in China and the rest of the world. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic. The virus has been named SARS-CoV-2 and the disease is now called COVID-19(20). After analysing all the data, and cases registered in National Commission for Woman shows that the number of cases during lock down was increased, because women were compelled to live with their abusers. The research analysis by various authors and paper published in the Hindu and other Journal shows that rate of violence against women were increased. NCW launched Whatsapp number to help the victims. During the lockdown about 86% women who experienced violence never sought for help and 77% of women victims never mentioned the incidents to anyone. Women's were harassed behind the wall and were unable to approach appropriate authorities for their grievances. The Government need to prepare a plan and provide adequate budget to support service to survivors and ensure implementation of law against domestic violence.

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