



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA DURING THE COVID 19 PHASE

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ABSTRACT :

The Covid-19 epidemic made clear how caste, class, geography, and—above all—gender dynamics connect with and go beyond the socioeconomic problems facing emerging nations. The Covid-19 epidemic has just forced the entire human race to endure upon the precipice of uncertainty. The lockdown that followed saw a spike in domestic abuse cases all around the world, bringing to light how the four walls of the family room became a hotspot of the "shadow pandemic" brought on by social inequality and personal aggravation in trying times. Another unexpected increase in domestic violence incidents, known as a "shadow pandemic," was seen in India. Some were reported, but many passed by without being recorded on any forum. This study examines Bihar, India, as a case study, as the state had a greater incidence of domestic violence during the pandemic than Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. This empirical investigation looks at the social, psychological, and economic elements that contributed to the rise in marital violence in Bihar during the Covid-19 epidemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, Women, Shadow Pandemic, Domestic Abuse

Introduction:

The Covid-19 outbreak brought to light the social and economic disparities that exist in our rapidly growing and internationally expanding world. In both rich and emerging nations, the growth engine either slowed down or veered off the path of progress. Governments had to redirect large sums of money from development to rapid prevention, containment, and treatment in order to preserve lives during the epidemic, when survival became the top priority. It caused inflation, job losses, and a decline in standard of living by upending the manufacturing and service sectors. Due to the increasing of socioeconomic disparities and vulnerabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the pre-Covid-19 period, developing nations bear the brunt of the effects. As a result, it makes it very difficult for vulnerable and economically disadvantaged groups—including women—to survive (Aneja & Ahuja, 2021). The patriarchal character of the family structure and the mistreatment of women that results from it were not among the beneficial developments that emerging nations saw in their societies. Women are still subjected to abuse if they don't do their assigned tasks and continue to suffer the weight of the conventionally defined gendered position. One in three women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner, according to a UN Women and WHO study (UN Women, n.d.; WHO, 2021). Even while domestic violence is a worldwide issue that stems from societal structures and family dynamics everywhere, things are particularly bad in emerging nations like India.

Domestic violence is defined as mistreatment of a person by their spouse or family members, which may include physical abuse, psychological injury, economic and sexual abuse, or even murder (Sharma, 2015). It also covers aggression against parents, elders, or teenagers as well as maltreatment of children. There is no denying that domestic violence against women is more common, severe, and massive than violence against males, even if men may also be harmed by their wives (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). As a result, violence against women in the home has come to be associated with "domestic violence." Worldwide, violence against women has long been common, and the current epidemic has made matters worse. India is not an anomaly.

Reduced social support networks, greater social isolation, and a rise in domestic violence incidents against women were the results of the widespread Covid-19 outbreak and the lockdown that followed to stop the virus's transmission (Aneja & Ahuja, 2021). "Any act of gender-based abuse resulting in or is liable to occur as sexual, physical, or psychological damage or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life," is how the United Nations defines violence against women (United Nations, 1993 as cited in WHO 2021). The most terrifying location for women is their home, according to the most recent Global Study on Homicide, which was released in 2018 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). However, women and girls still encounter violence in both public and private spaces (UNODC, 2018).

Lockdowns were used during the pandemic because homes are the safest places to be protected from contracting the Covid-19 virus. However, since it limited mobility, exacerbated social isolation, and raised family and work-related responsibilities, this "safe space" turned into a hotbed of violence against women. Thus, this study looks at how domestic violence against women increased in Bihar, India, during the Covid-19 epidemic. The study examines the reasons behind the increase in domestic violence in the state, talks about the value of outside assistance, and emphasizes

recommendations made by those who have experienced domestic abuse. This empirical research shows that during the Covid-19 epidemic, women in Bihar saw a surge in economic, psychological, and physical violence.

The COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in a significant number of fatalities and an increase in violence against women worldwide. One in three women suffered intimate relationship abuse during what UN Women has dubbed the "shadow pandemic".¹ Numerous facets of society are adversely impacted by violence against women, including child health, women's employment status, income, and mental health. The amount that violence against women costs the global economy ranges from 1 to 4% of GDP.² India is often cited as a dangerous country for women, and the impact of the epidemic during the lockdown was expected to further worsen this. These problems may also have significant³ negative economic effects, exacerbating the negative effects of lockdowns on female labour market participation, wages, and domestic consumption.

The rise in domestic abuse against women and COVID-19

While domestic violence has long been a problem in Indian culture, during the COVID-19 epidemic, it became alarmingly worse.⁴ According to Rösch, Amin, Gupta, & García-Moreno (2020) and the UN Women Report (2020), domestic violence cases have increased globally during this pandemic. It has been dubbed the "double pandemic," "shadow pandemic," "hidden epidemic," "bettinger-lopez & bro," "shadow pandemic," and "the other pandemic" (Nazri, 2020). Mittal and Singh (2020) observed a noteworthy surge in domestic violence cases during the COVID-19 pandemic in their recent assessment of gender-based violence. The fact that these women were cut off from their support systems during the COVID-19 outbreak and the lockdown that followed further demonstrated the clear absence of resources and procedures that might have assisted them. However, despite the limited efforts to investigate the frequency and effects of domestic violence, little research has been done on the subject of domestic violence incidents in India and how they could have affected the victims' mental health during the COVID-19 epidemic. By means of a methodical examination of media articles detailing instances of domestic violence during the COVID-19 epidemic, the current study aims to close this gap.

Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence, which is also known as "domestic abuse" and "controlling behavior," is described as any activity that involves individuals of the same home using power and control over one another without that person's consent.⁵ In addition to personal partnerships, abuse may happen in a wide range of human interactions, including cohabiting, divorcing, married, dating, and other relationships. Nonetheless, "violence against women" is the most prevalent kind of maltreatment in the globe. Any act of violence committed against a woman due to her gender is referred to as violence against women. Gender-based violence, which includes threats, acts of violence, denial of liberty, and coercion, is seen to be a chronic syndrome that causes physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological damage to women in their private or public lives. All communities have some kind of violence against women, which may take many different forms, such as forced seclusion, physical or sexual assaults within or outside the house, denying friends and relatives access, and many more.⁶

Definition of Pandemic

Any illness that spreads rapidly across wide geographic regions falls into one of three categories: trans-, inter-, or global pandemics.⁷ Pandemics are times of acute emergency with widely recognized definitions and explanations for their causes, as well as a range of experimentally supported etiologies. COVID-19, HIV, cholera, the black death, influenza, AIDS, West Nile illness, plague, dengue, and obesity are a few of the most well-known pandemics in the globe.⁸

Definition of COVID- 19

The World Health Organization [WHO] describes COVID-19 as an infectious illness that is mostly brought on by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.⁹ It first surfaced quickly in December 2019 and has since aggressively expanded over the globe.¹⁰ It's thought that anybody may get COVID-19 and become sick at any age. Headaches, fever, exhaustion, coughing, loss of taste or smell, appetite loss, sore throat, diarrhea, skin rash, and red eyes are among the

¹ Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19> Visited on 14th April,2024.

² Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-dangerous-poll-exclusive-idUSKBN1JM01X> Visited on 14th April,2024.

³ Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01513-5> Visited on 14th April,2024.

⁴Mittal, S. , & Singh, T. (2020). Gender based violence during Covid-19 pandemic: A mini review. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health, Section Women's Mental Health.*

⁵<https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>

⁶Hegarty, K.; Roberts, G. How common is domestic violence against women? The definition of partner abuse in prevalence studies. *Aust. New Zealand J. Public Health* 1998, 22, 49–54.

⁷Taubenberger, J.K.; Morens, D.M. Pandemic Influenza—Including a Risk Assessment of H5N1. *Rev. Sci. Tech.* 2009, 28, 187–202.

⁸ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR2VF8TfTPkzkusNRWLxjk4luVRCpwwg4p4H0xsTjW35QTUJH0ICCXOPk8zE>

⁹<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/coronavirus>

¹⁰<https://data.who.int/dashboards/covid19/cases?n=c>

most often reported symptoms. A few more severe symptoms that COVID-19 patients may encounter include dysphagia, loss of speech, disorientation, and chest discomfort. As a result, the majority of patients recover without the need for hospitalization, and the majority of cases have mild or fairly mild symptoms. Sadly, there are situations in which hospitalization is required because patients have severe symptoms, are extremely sick, and need more time to recover. More than 267,865,289 instances of COVID-19 were recorded by December 10, 2021, and 5,285,888 of those cases resulted in death [30]. As of December 9, 2021, 8,158,815,265 vaccinations have been given out globally to stop the virus's transmission, according to the WHO. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the following preventive measures for COVID-19:

- vaccination;
- social distancing;
- wearing a fitted mask;
- frequent hand washing (or rubbing hands with antiseptic);
- covering the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing;
- choosing open places when visiting others; and
- self-isolate when feeling ill and staying at home until fully recovered from the virus.

Domestic Violence against Women and COVID-19

Domestic violence spiked during the COVID-19 epidemic and lockdowns (31, 32, 33, 34). Research indicates that a number of circumstances resulting from pandemics and catastrophes (such as sickness, illness, war, tsunamis, etc.) aggravate domestic and sexual violence [3,35,36,37,38,39,40,41]. Prior studies have shown a link between crises and incidents of gender-based violence, with inequality being worse during these times [32,42,43,44, 45]. Research indicates that when people try to get necessities like food, water, and firewood during a crisis, there is a rise in sexual assault and harassment of women.¹¹ It was discovered that the breakdown and reformation of laws, which includes the creation of lockdowns, is one of the primary reasons why domestic violence escalates during a viral epidemic.¹² When spouses are obliged to live close to one another, they spend more time together and are unable to "escape" from their house by going to work or social gatherings.¹³ Furthermore, victims of domestic violence could not get the same level of care as they had previous to the epidemic since social services and law enforcement have different responsibilities and priorities during a pandemic. Perpetrators are also not treated in the same way as they would have been before a crisis, therefore no immediate penalties or limitations apply.¹⁴ It is important to note that studies have shown that during times of crisis, interpersonal ineffectiveness and violence within families rise quickly.¹⁵ As a result, it has become more important to provide victims with assistance, which may reduce the likelihood of violence when individuals are advised to remain at home or in quarantine during a crisis.¹⁶

The body of knowledge on the connection between domestic abuse and the COVID-19 epidemic is still growing. A hint of what to anticipate may be found in previous crisis moments. Previous catastrophes, such as the earthquake in Haiti in 2007,¹⁷ the tsunami in Asia in 2004,¹⁸ and Hurricane Katrina in 2005,¹⁹ may have led to an increase in intimate partner violence, according to research. In particular, it was shown that there was a rise in incidents of sexual assault and violence against women in Sri Lanka after the tsunami. Domestic violence against women increased dramatically as a result of many past viral or illness outbreaks, including cholera, nipah, and ebola.²⁰ When the Ebola virus started to spread across Africa, there was a corresponding rise in rape, sexual assault, and other forms of violence against women.²¹ Furthermore, because of the many conditions and repercussions that arise in people's life on the inside as well as the outside, there is a relationship between crisis situations and domestic violence against women.²² Research suggests that COVID-19 has also increased intimate relationship violence, particularly against women or at least increased its prevalence.²³ Authorities, governments, and other groups have been alerting the public about the potential effects of the pandemic on issues like domestic violence since it first started to spread.²⁴ Due to the virus's transmissibility, several nations implemented forced lockdowns in an effort to lower the number of fatalities and stop the virus's spread. Following this was a worldwide economic crisis, the conditions of which led to a high number of domestic violence events. People were requested to spend extra time at home during the lockdowns, which caused tension and discomfort and had a significant

¹¹Mittal, S.; Singh, T. Gender-Based Violence During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mini-Review. *Front. Glob. Women's Health* 2020, 1, 4.

¹²https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Tackling+Violence+against+Women+and+Domestic+Violence+in+Europe%E2%80%94The+Added+Value+of+the+Istanbul+Convention+and+Remaining+Challenges&author=European+Parliament&publication_year=2020

¹³<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2665910720300384?via%3Dihub>

¹⁴<https://unficyp.unmissions.org/domestic-violence-and-covid-19>

¹⁵<https://en.unesco.org/events/11th-global-summit-national-ethicsbioethics-committees>

¹⁶Mittal, S.; Singh, T. Gender-Based Violence During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mini-Review. *Front. Glob. Women's Health* 2020, 1, 4.

¹⁷Campbell, A.M. An Increasing Risk of Family Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Strengthening Community Collaborations to Save Lives. *Forensic Sci. Int.* 2020, 2, 100089.

¹⁸<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fgwh.2020.00004/full>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰Davies, S.E.; Bennett, B. A Gendered Human Rights Analysis of Ebola and Zika: Locating Gender in Global Health Emergencies. *Int. Aff.* 2016, 92, 1041–1060.

²¹<https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/126/1/103/1903433?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

²²Yasmin, S. The Ebola Rape Epidemic No One's Talking About: When the Outbreak Hit West Africa, Fevers Spiked—And So Did Rates of Teenage Pregnancy.

²³<https://time.com/5928539/domestic-violence-covid-19>

²⁴<https://publications.iadb.org/en/covid-19-lockdowns-and-domestic-violence-evidence-from-two-studies-in-argentina>

negative influence on people's life, particularly their psychological well-being. Individuals were advised to isolate themselves at home and, in some situations, to avoid contact with friends, family, schools, and even their place of employment.²⁵ Families have suffered greatly as a result of the latter, which has increased unemployment, financial instability, and isolation. All of these elements have the potential to intensify domestic violence committed by men—both those without a history of abuse and those with one.

Furthermore, because of the rise in drug use, unemployment, criminal activity, educational challenges, psychological issues, and isolation, domestic violence has become more common during the COVID-19 epidemic. During the epidemic, people's daily lives underwent a significant upheaval as they dealt with issues like mental health issues, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as challenges related to their well-being and economic stability. Additionally, research is being conducted to gather global data on the correlation between domestic violence and COVID-19 globally [33,61,62,63,64,65,66,67,68,69,70,71,72,73,74,75,76,77,78].

COVID-19's Impact on Domestic Violence Against Women

Numerous psychological impacts of previous pandemics, including the swine flu, influenza, and the current COVID-19 pandemic, have been documented.²⁶ Women who have been victims of domestic violence during COVID-19 have experienced a range of effects, including chronic pain, sleep disturbances, changes in routine, symptoms of depression, PTSD, other forms of abuse, brain injuries, sexual diseases, substance abuse, and a host of other psychological symptoms like avoidance, anxiety, hyperarousal, low mood, and reliving trauma. [89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94]. It is evident that times of crisis amplify the myriad of negative consequences that domestic abuse exacts on its victims. Domestic violence incidences against women rose as the pandemic spread, although not increasing at the beginning, according to the UN. There are a number of reasons for this. Many women lost their jobs during the lockdowns or were forced to work from home; many also homeschooled their children, and the women who lost their employment were more reliant on their boyfriends for financial support. One element that has been linked to an increase in domestic violence against women is financial dependency on partners. This is because it might make it more difficult for the victim to leave the offender. People also reported feeling more distressed and having signs of depression during lockdowns. Women who were mistreated during COVID-19 or who were dealing with mental health issues before to the pandemic reported experiencing extreme feelings of stress, sadness, and anxiety. Furthermore, there was a greater chance of mental health issues for women who had been mistreated both before and during the pandemic.

Furthermore, research indicates that drunkenness tends to enhance the prevalence of domestic violence against women, and alcohol sales surged during the lockdowns.²⁷ Furthermore, women who are placed in close proximity to their male spouses during a quarantine have very little to no independence, which may increase the incidence of domestic violence at home. The power dynamics in many households changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused many men to lose their employment and money. Certain men had feelings of inadequacy and emasculation as a result of feeling incapable of fulfilling the role of provider for their family. It has also been shown that men's negative emotions heighten domestic violence against women. Furthermore, during COVID-19, law enforcement was overburdened with additional responsibilities, and as a consequence of their inadequate training and readiness, they were unable to adequately safeguard women who were victims of domestic abuse at the hands of their partners. This made the abuse victims reluctant to disclose the abuse and gave the abusers a greater sense of power, which encouraged them to keep abusing their victims. Since the pandemic's beginning, there has also been a rise in domestic killings. Suicides have also been connected to the pandemic and domestic abuse. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the gravity of domestic abuse as seen by the homicide and suicide rates, which claimed the lives of several women.

The Role of the Victim

The majority of victims often think that abuse is inevitable, that it is hard to escape, and that everyone experiences it. Every time an abusive conduct takes place, victims believe that their intimate relationship is betraying them. Along with experiencing some kind of abuse, this betrayal typically results in bodily harm as well as mental suffering for the victim. Furthermore, the victim's physical and mental health decline. Specifically, victims often go through some of the following: Living in constant fear and worry for their own safety as well as the safety of others, feeling low in confidence and worth, being emotionally and financially dependent on their abuser, finding it difficult to dissolve their marriage, experiencing danger on a daily basis, being afraid of what might happen if they leave the abuser, and engaging in passive behavior to shield others and themselves from further abuse are just a few of the symptoms.

As was previously indicated, several nations claimed that the rate of domestic violence against women had not increased. As to the United Nations, there were three primary causes behind this. First of all, it was more difficult for the victim to flee and seek assistance since the ladies were confined to the same house with the abuser. Second, since they were unsure of what to anticipate during lockdowns, the ladies were reluctant to seek for assistance. Thirdly, during the epidemic and lockdowns, social services and law enforcement prioritized other issues than domestic violence against women. Domestic abuse victims may have felt helpless and had fewer choices for support during the epidemic. Many of the victims may have had additional anguish as a result of having to remain with their abuser during quarantines. The recent establishment of the refuge house created an additional layer of unease in situations when victims were able to get assistance there during lockdowns. In addition, victims of domestic abuse may have been afraid to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0163834309000474?via%3Dihub>

²⁷ <https://news.usc.edu/168549/covid-19-alcohol-sales-abuse-stress-relapse-usc-experts/>

report domestic abuse to the authorities or to go to a hospital for medical attention because they thought they may become infected. Certainly, victims of domestic abuse have faced a number of challenges throughout the epidemic.

The Role of the Perpetrator

The regularity with which abuse and violent conduct is shown by persons who commit these crimes varies; some of the offenders exhibit these behaviors more often than others. Abusers often behave compulsively, and their actions have the potential to cause severe psychological and/or bodily harm. In addition to aggressive behaviors, sociopathic inclinations, psychological or psychiatric issues, and a variety of personality disorders, some males who engage in abusive conduct get joy from the pain of their victims. The majority of abusers express extreme rage as well as regret and shame after an outburst, so it is not uncommon for them to go undiagnosed. Aggressive and dominating conduct is a tactic used by certain abusers to get what they desire. Sometimes the actions of the perpetrators are deliberate, and other times they are compulsive. A perpetrator's desire for personal benefit takes precedence above the victim's potential consequences. Research demonstrates that even when abusers behave abusively, they are aware of the potential effects on their victim.

Numerous studies conducted during the epidemic demonstrated that lockdowns provided abusers with more authority, control, and freedom to harm their victims. Because they could now access their victims' phones, social media accounts, and conversations in general, abusers found it simpler to impose their techniques on them, particularly during lockdowns. Furthermore, the pandemic's victims' limited alternatives for help emphasized the power offenders had over their victims. The likelihood of domestic violence against women rises with the offenders' increased dominance and authority.

Conclusion

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