
***COVID-19 lockdown and Gender Based Violence:
Suggestive measures and Social Work Perspective in Indian context***

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Abstract: Gender-based violence (GBV) increases during every type of emergency – whether medical crisis, economic crises, conflict or disease outbreaks. Existing social norms and gender inequalities, social and financial stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, married couples and families with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV. Many women specially married women and elderly women were in ‘lockdown’ at home with their abusers while being cut off from normal social support services. In Indian society the problem of violence against women in the family is not new. Family is considered as the first agency, which provides not only social, emotional and material support to its members but also serves as basic source of personal satisfaction, socialization and social control. This paper aims to understand about the life of women in Rural Vadodara of Gujarat State during COVID-19 lockdown with respect to Gender based Violence. Further it focuses open identifying the perception of women towards violence and the causative factors of violence. Moreover, examining the legal awareness among rural women about laws relating to women protection is also a major focus of the research work carried out. Violence also adversely affects the intra- family relations, children, physical and mental health of women as well as their children. Hence, the severity of impact is also explored in this research paper with the support of field based investigation.

Keywords: *COVID-19, lockdown, pandemic, violence, gender, domestic violence, gender based violence*

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Gender-based violence (GBV) increases during every type of emergency – whether medical crisis, economic crises, conflict or disease outbreaks. Existing social norms and gender inequalities, social and financial stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, married couples and families with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV. Many women specially married women and elderly women were in ‘lockdown’ at home with their abusers while being cut off from normal social support services. In Indian society the problem of violence against women in the family is not new. Women in our society have been the victims of torture, physical and sexual violence and exploitation from the time immemorial irrespective of the fact that they were also worshipped. Family is considered as the first agency, which provides not only social, emotional and material support to its members but also serves as basic source of personal satisfaction, socialization and social control. The family is the first and the foremost agencies of socialization and social control. In India, domestic violence has been directly related to status and role of the individuals in the family. Family, apart from providing security and emotional support, fulfils certain essential and non-essential functions. It provides the safest and the most secure environment to an individual to grow. But due to the fact family consists of the crystallized and legitimized, socially and culturally constructed rigid gender based roles and in a patriarchal set up there is fundamental inequalities between men and women. These inequalities have been a part and parcel of the Indian families for year. Most common forms of domestic violence prevalent throughout the world are women and girls being battered, raped and even murdered. Violence also includes forced pregnancy, forced abortion; sterilization dowry related violence and killing in the name of honour. Even the older and widowed women are not spared from this abuse.

The definition of ‘domestic violence’ has included ‘physical abuse’ ‘sexual abuse’ and ‘economic abuse’. It is important to clarify here the concept of ‘violence’ this has been described by Makwana (2009) has defined violence as “the overtly threatened or overtly accomplished application of force which result in the injury or destruction of persons or their reputation”. Thus rape, kidnapping, murder, wife battering, sexual abuse, eve teasing are all examples of violence against women. Gender based violence issue is not limited to India only; it is global issue. First world country like United States of America is also victim of Gender based violence. While the basic reason for violence against women is their inferior status in a male dominated society. educationally economically, politically and socially there are other factors responsible too. The increasing criminalization of society, media images of violence, inadequate means to address the cause and consequences of violence, poor enforcement of legal provision unabashed consumerism and erosion of traditional values have all added to it. Other reasons can be:

Using an emergency response infrastructure to help women who experience gender-based violence in Gujarat (World Health Organization, 2020).

The Indian Administrative Service Secretary for Gujarat, Anju Sharma, who was also the state head of the Women and Child Development Department, brought together key collaborators across sectors to establish the helpline. For ensuring the effectiveness of the interventions and for creating accountability, the secretary recruited the GVK

Emergency Management Research Institute to be responsible for the implementation and operations of the helpline. The institute is the largest provider of free emergency medical services in India, covering 15 states. It operates as a public-private, not-for-profit partnership with each state's government. The secretary also invited the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which has a history of gender-based violence research, to provide technical expertise for helpline protocols. The collaborators created a shared vision: any woman, irrespective of caste, religion, class, ability, age, sexual or political orientation, educational or economic status, would be able and empowered to seek and receive emergency services anywhere, at any time. Their mission – paid for by the Government of Gujarat – was to provide a coordinated, effective and timely multi-agency response that offered quality mental health, social, and legal services. They agreed upon a target group that reached beyond the traditional definition of gender-based violence: women in distress, which includes any woman who has or is experiencing psychological, emotional, financial, and/or social crisis or physical harassment. Here, crisis is defined as when a woman's sense of self or safety is likely to be compromised.

Rationale of the study

During lockdown phase the entire nation grappled with the spread of COVID-19, citizens working in different part of the states were asked to go home and stay in their hometown with families, for their safety and everyone else's. But for victims and survivors of gender based violence, including children exposed to it, being home may not be a safe option — and the unprecedented stress of the pandemic could breed unsafe environment in homes where violence may not have been an issue before. Although violence by a partner is one of the most common and widespread forms of violence against women, they experience violence in a variety of contexts and in diverse spheres like the family, the community and society at large. Rapid advances in technology provide another avenue for cybercrime against women. Increase in reports of domestic violence is happening at the same time that services are being compromised. Even where basic essential services are maintained, a collapse in a coordinated response between different sectors, i.e., health, police, social services response and social distancing will mean that sectors will be challenged to provide meaningful and relevant support to women who are experiencing violence.

The Jeevan Astha Suicide Helpline showed calls on domestic violence rising from 3,148 in 2019 to 5,679 in 2020 – a rise of 2,531 calls over the previous year. Similarly, data from the GVK-EMRI 181 helpline shows that the number of calls related to domestic violence in Gujarat increased from 47,567 in 2019 to 50,550 in 2020 – a rise of 2,983 calls over the previous year. A domestic violence helpline in Gujarat, reported 27 % rise in calls due to marital issues and 18% increase in domestic violence cases in the year 2020.

Gujarat State				
District-wise calls on Abhayam – 181 helpline in 2020				
Ahmedabad	Rajkot	Vadodara	Surat	Bhavnagar
20,414	11,879	11,634	9,550	6,410

In the first two weeks in March, many women found it difficult to ask for help during the lockdown. A similar drop in calls was reported by a women's shelter network in the few districts of Gujarat. This is a worrying sign of women without recourse, who cannot access resources which can help them to cope or escape situations of violence. Women at this time may not be able to reach networks, organizations that provide support and recognize abuse.

Also, given the existing gender digital divide, women in many rural and interior areas of Gujarat, especially those who face multiple forms of discrimination, may not have access to a mobile phone, computer, or internet to access services or be able to safely use these at home as they may be closely monitored by the family members. Before Covid-19 struck, families longed for some quality time together. Then, lockdown happened. While many had to adjust to work from home (WFH) as the new normal, several lost their livelihood and were forced to remain at home. This forced proximity gave rise to several relationship issues, as recorded by the trends of Abhayam 181 calls for 2020. While the call volume increased by 18% for domestic violence and 27% for marital issues, experts point out that it could well be the tip of the iceberg. They believe there are several couples that either did not have access to such remedies, or did not wish to approach any formal agency for their issues.

The pandemic has created anxiety among people leading to fear, financial concerns, insecurity, loss of a job, etc., which has its own behavioral and psychological manifestation and may lead to stress, fight, conflict, anger and violence. Besides, the pandemic followed by lockdown in many countries increased the burden on women to cook, feed and take care of household chores and family members who are at home. The closure of schools has further exacerbated this burden and place more stress on them (Mukhtar, 2020; UN, 2020; WHO, 2020b). Women in abusive relationships may be more likely to be exposed to violence, as are their children, as family members spend more time in close contact, and families cope with additional stress and potential economic or job losses (WHO, 2020). Young women and girls are at higher risk of intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence during the pandemic (UN, 2020). Women are closed behind the doors without much-extended help from male members of the family due to strong gender norms and agency like patriarchy (EPW Engage, 2020). Women's mobility and contact with their family and friends have been restricted due to lockdown, physical and social distancing which may provide support and protection from violence (WHO, 2020b). In many countries, lockdown means limited access to the outside world than usual which will have a drastic impact on their ability to seek help (Vincent, 2020). In such a situation, it is not uncommon for people who are forced to live inside their homes against their will to become a victim of domestic violence and react differently in an unusual way.

Methodology adopted for the study:

Present research was conducted to study the impact of domestic violence during COVID-19 lockdown, to understand role of formal and informal agencies in a helping process and to suggest measures to control and minimize evil of domestic violence in rural Vadodara during COVID-19 pandemic. For conducting this study response were obtained from 152 respondents of six villages of Vadodara district. Selection of universe and sample was on the basis of purposive sampling method. A detailed interview schedule was developed for the respondents and research tool was designed and developed by rigorous literature review. Various hypothetical questions were used to ensure the qualitative response from the respondents. The study consists exploratory research design as it aimed to discover the practices and perceptions of women related to gender based violence and it also gives descriptive touch as it tends to describe the nature, extent and incidence of violence among women and also the impact of violence on women.

Results and Discussion

The main instigator of violence was found to be husband, as chosen by 55% of the respondents and remaining respondents chose multiple members of the family as instigators of violence. Moreover, 46% of respondents experienced all forms for violence including physical, mental, economic and verbal abuse. More than 75% of

respondents agreed that husband can beat the wife because of several reasons ranging from if wife disobeys husband, if she is having extra marital relationship, if she refuses to have sexual relationship with him or if she does not complete the household work properly.

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Nature of violence	Frequency
Verbal abuse	90
Physical violence	76
Psychological violence	51
All of the above	43
Multiple response *	

During data collection it was also revealed that more than 75% of respondents agreed that husband can beat the wife because of several reasons ranging from if wife disobeys husband, if she is having extra marital relationship, if she refuses to have sexual relationship with him or if she does not complete the household

work properly. As a part of emotional violence, respondents felt that they were treated as a servant in family, denied required nutritional uptake, had no freedom to express their views and were demeaned for lack of intelligence. Further, as a matter of economic abuse 41% of women mentioned that their earning was taken away by their husband leaving nothing with them for personal expenditure and other respondents mentioned that they were prohibited to spend money as per their own choice. It was found that because of violence, 42% women are facing physical problems. More than 32% women are facing psychological issues, 15% women are having suicidal ideation, and 6% and 4% of women are facing reproductive and unwanted pregnancy related issues respectively. Additionally, more than 51% of respondent were suffering from various kinds of mental disorder ranging from depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. The impact of violence on social and personal life of respondents were also observed as 38% women reported that they are unable to take care of self and 15% women mentioned that they are having restricted social contacts or are ashamed of mixing with relatives.

Impact of Gender Based Violence among children

Impact of Gender based violence on Children	Frequency
Children remain under tension and are not able to concentrate on studies	127
Children have lost respect for father, mother and other family members	98
Deviant behaviour is observed	39
They are likely to become abuser in life	13
Multiple response *	

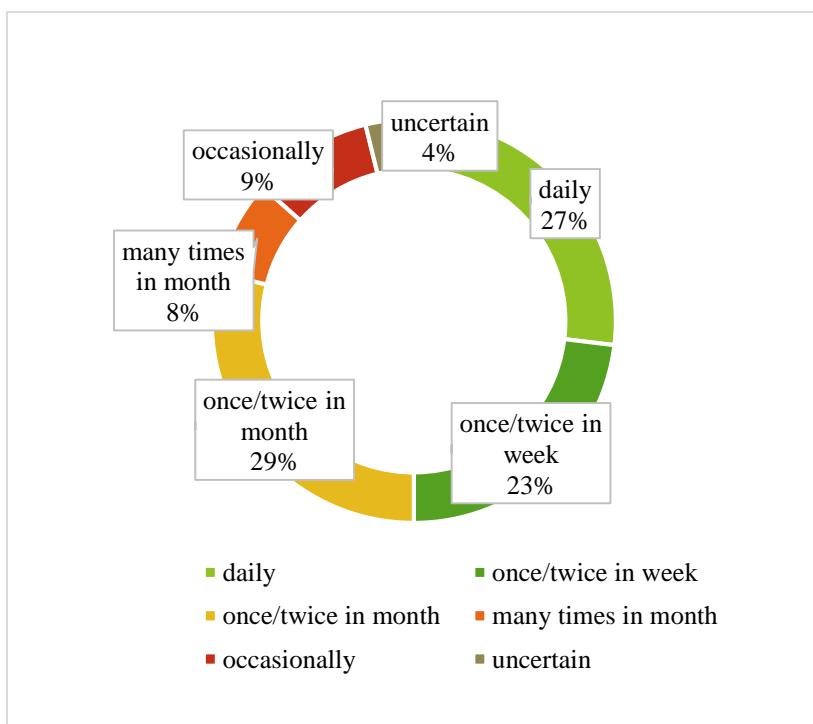
Men and women lose interest in household activities. If they are employed they fail to work with full capabilities in workplace. Children are found to concentrate less on studies. They drop out of school and do not get the education which otherwise they might have got if they were not tormented and thus the state loses a productive asset. Therefore, the nation’s productivity altogether gets affected because of domestic violence in homes. When old people mainly elderly women are tortured and physically abused, they separate themselves from family members and their daily activities are restricted to themselves. The guardianship they can provide out of their experience, the moral values which they can instill in the grandchildren are all not done as they are unwanted in their own homes.

Number of Respondents who reported against acts of Violence

Reported against act of violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	40	26
No	112	74
Total	152	100

Most of the respondents (74%) shared that they did not reported to any helpline services provided and they did not shared incidents to their family members, relatives or social network. Men and women lose interest in household activities. If they are employed they fail to work with full capabilities in workplace. People need to spend their part of income for medication when they are met with worse forms of domestic violence which again leads to loss in productive use of a family’s income. The cumulative effect of the domestic violence at all levels and across all regions is the country’s hindered development and slow economic growth.

Respondent’s views on frequency of violence:



Violence against women has also impacted the family relations as all of the respondents mentioned that intra-family relations are strained and always remain under tension because of violence. Further, according to 29% of respondents their children always remain under tension and are not able to study properly and 17% respondents reported that deviant behavior is observed in their children. Majority of respondents that is 58% believed that violence is a part of women's life and it exists everywhere. Also, only 62% of women believed that women should fight against violence while the remaining 38% believed that women should not fight against violence for the sake of family reputation. Further, Alcoholism, Patriarchal mind-set, extra marital relations and husband's unemployment were some reasons mentioned by women as causative factors behind violence. The study also depicted that 52% of respondents did not report against violence because they thought that nothing can be done, 28% women did not report because they feared to get reject by friend and family, and 12% women had fear of discrimination and 8% women stepped back due to embarrassment. Further, only 38% of respondents have natal family support to fight against the violence. And 47% of respondents reported that their natal family members advised them to patch-up in one or other way. It was also observed that 35% of respondents compromised in the sake of their children while 31% women remained silent because they accepted it as their destiny, 16% women did not do anything because of lack of economic support, 10% women hesitated for the interest of natal family member and 4% each women chose for social security as a reason behind compromise.

Suggestive Measures

Domestic violence is poison of Indian rural society. As country, society or human, we must eliminate this poison from society as soon possible. Intervention with the survivor of violence – providing them various services ranging from counseling, employment support, and shelter homes etc. plays very important role. Apart from this, role and intervention of Social Worker – Direct services to the survivors of violence that include counseling and support through shelter programs, advocacy for legal and social justice, and community organizing efforts will positively make difference to cope up with domestic violence. Besides international campaigns such as the recent U.N. one, what you can do to raise awareness? There are lots of options, such as:

- Tell your own story; listen to others' stories.
- Awareness building by campaigns on peace, kindness, reconciliation for a local school or library.
- Help publicize efforts in your community to end violence against women, such as a Take Back the Night march or Domestic Violence Month in October.
- Use social media to raise awareness about violence against women and programs working to end it.
- Supporting local shelters for destitute women or victims of violence
- Awareness building regarding domestic violence in local language.
- Door to door campaign regarding awareness.
- Gender sensitivity course should be introduced in syllabus at school level as well as university level and awareness building programme need to be organised for
 - ✓ The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005.
 - ✓ The Indian Penal Code Amendment in 1983.
 - ✓ The 2013 Criminal Law Amendment.
 - ✓ The Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Work Place Act, 2013.
 - ✓ The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986.
 - ✓ The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.

Conclusion

Human dignity is being enchanted worldwide and yet it has been molested and denied social justice. There are social, cultural and economic factors which combine to compel people to play the role of silent victims of violence. Many individuals and groups are recognized by the constitution as weak and vulnerable, they are given special protection for non-existent or, if existing, insignificant, will conceived, delayed or simply not implemented for such issues like violence and sexual harassment, are being seen within socio-political structure. Women themselves need to develop a self-identity and respect so that they can lead a life of security and dignity. This has to be done from childhood. Women are subject to various forms of molestation physical and mental torture. Sexual harassment in streets, public places, and work places is very common whereas ragging in college campus and hostels is deeply rooted. If the various factors are controlled, then it will indirectly lead to prevention of more than one form of violence in family and in community. Society will become a much better place both for men and women to live in if we address gender based violence in a right way. Awareness of initiatives like 181 Abhayam, Mahila Police Volunteers' under Nirbhaya Fund Framework, Grievance Redressal Cell and One Stop Centre' for violence affected women - taken up by state and central Government can help women to fight against Domestic violence.

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