

Violence against Women in COVID-19 Pandemic and Post Pandemic Condition of India

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ABSTRACT

During the lockdown implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19, domestic violence a common issue in India rose. This article examines the factors that contribute to the current COVID-19 pandemic and violence against women (VAW), including the rise in domestic violence cases following the pandemic. The paper focuses on violence against women and is based on reports, documents, and a sample of women who experienced violence during COVID-19. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), National Crime Records Bureau reports, journals, books, daily news articles, and online surveys were among the primary and secondary sources of information used in this study.

Any type of gender-based violence that injures or is likely to injure women physically, sexually, or psychologically is considered violence against women, also known as crimes against women (CAW). Her education may offer protection against IPV, but uncertainty exists over how it might reduce risk for IPV at the community and individual levels. Violence increased as a result of the measures taken to stop the virus's spread. The crime rate for women increased from 56.5 per 100,000 in 2020 to 64.5 in 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of a

study on "violence against women in the Great Recession," men are growing increasingly afraid of losing their jobs and their financial security, which can cause them to act more controlling and sometimes abuse their partners.

Keywords: Women safety. Domestic Violence. COVID-19. Public Policy. Psychological

INTRODUCTION

Many people around the world consider the COVID-19 pandemic to be one of the biggest threats to humanity. The disease's detrimental effects extend beyond the death toll; it also has serious socio-psychological repercussions. More than 1.6 million people have died worldwide as of December 20, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Nearly everyone has suffered greatly as a result of the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns that followed. It has caused anxiety, sadness, and fear in both the general public (Bhanot, Singh, Verma, & Sharad, 2021) and medical professionals (Jaiswal, Singh, & Arya, 2020), which has led to a startling rise in suicidal and other mental health conditions (Raj, Ghosh, Singh, Verma, & Arya, 2020).

Any type of gender-based violence that injures or is likely to injure women physically, sexually, or psychologically is considered violence against women, also known as crimes against women (CAW). Whether it takes place in a private or public setting, this includes arbitrary deprivations of liberty, coercion, or threats of violence (WHO, 2021). Any act of gender-based violence, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation, that harms or is likely to cause women physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering of liberty whether it takes place in public or privately is considered violence against women, according to the UN (WHO, 2014).

Violence is one of the topics that has received the most attention recently, despite the fact that it is a concept that changes depending on the period and sociocultural structure. Until the 1980s, when women's rights organizations began emphasizing violence of all kinds, domestic violence against women (DVAW) was not a topic that attracted international attention or raised concerns (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). DVAW poses a serious threat to human rights and is a significant public health issue (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; WHO, 2014).

In the United States, 28% of women report experiencing domestic violence from their partners at least once in their lifetime. Additionally, it has been reported that over half of women in developing nations are beaten by their spouses. This rate is 45% in India, 47.2% in the Philippines, and 52% in Kenya (UNESCO, 2000).

In recent years, the problem of rape and other crimes against women in India has garnered a lot

of media and public attention, both domestically and internationally. One such horrifying case that rocked India's civil society and sparked widespread protests was the notorious Nirbhaya gang rape case that took place in Delhi in 2012 (BBC News, 2012). However, a close examination of the data shows that this was not an isolated incident; rather, it was a part of a concerning trend of rapes that have been reported in India for a considerable amount of time (Iyer, Mani, Mishra, & Topalova, 2012). Even though they may be just as significant from a policy standpoint, many of these cases go unreported in the media. In actuality, this kind of trend is not exclusive to India. The pervasiveness of violence against women worldwide is becoming increasingly acknowledged by international organizations and decision-makers. Furthermore, a wealth of data indicates that domestic violence is linked to a number of detrimental health outcomes for women, including unintended pregnancies, psychosocial disorders, HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy loss (Dunkle et al., 2004; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Patel, Kirkwood, & Pednekar, 2006; Sidibe, Campbell, & Becker, 2005; Sliverman, Decker, Saggurti, Balaiah, & Raj, 2008; Vizcarra, Hassan, Hunter, Munoz, Ramiro, & De Paula, 2004).

According to the 1993 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, "any act of gender-based violence which results in or has the potential to outcome in psychological harm, sexual, or or suffering to women, which include threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrarily stripped of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" is deemed to be VAW. The definition covers mental and psychological harm in addition to other types of violence. Intimate partners are typically the ones who commit VAW (World Health Organization, 2013c; Campbell, 2002; Martin et al., 1999; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005) which not only forces women to endure their pain in silence, but also teaches them to accept, put up with, and justify it (Prasad, 1999; Rao, 1997; Jaisingh, 1995; Hegde, 1996). Beyond class, caste, age, gender, and geographic boundaries, violence against women is pervasive (Kulkarni, 2012) as a result; they endure psychological and mental abuse at every stage of their lives, whether it be in early childhood, adolescence, adulthood, or old age (Heise, Lori, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994).

Intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence are pervasive and have a significant impact on women's physical, sexual and reproductive, and mental health, according to a recent World Health indicate regarding "Around the world and geographically areas predictions for VAW " (WHO, 2013c). According to a multi-country study on women's health conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO), between 15 and 71% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have at some point in their lives been the victims of physical or sexual abuse at the hands of their intimate partners (WHO, 2005; WHO, 2013b). According to the scant research that is currently available, between 22% and 60% of Indian women experience physical abuse (WHO,

2005; Mahajan, 1990).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on reports, documents, and a sample of women who were victims of violence during COVID-19, the paper focuses on violence against women. Both primary and secondary data, such as crime reports, journals, books, daily news articles, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), and online surveys, served as the foundation for this investigation. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India, a government agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs, provided the data for this study. It is the nodal agency in charge of gathering, organizing, and evaluating national crime data. It disseminates data on various forms of violence against women at the state and federal levels.

Many nations have implemented "stay at home" orders as a means of coping with the ongoing Corona Virus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. One such nation is India, which imposed a nationwide lockdown. Even though actions like these are necessary to stop the global pandemic, this "Hobsons choice" has had some unanticipated negative effects. Domestic violence (DV) against women is one of them (Tandon, 2020).

Since the lockdowns were put in place, there has been a rise in violence against women all over the world (UN Women, 2020). On Chinese social media, the hashtag "anti-domestic violence" was searched over 3,000 times during the pandemic (Moutafis, 2020). Following the nationwide lockdown in March 2020, there has been a 100% increase in complaints about violence against women, according to data released by the National Commission for Women (NCW) India in early April 2020. Due to this twofold increase, NCW has announced Mental Health Helplines for anyone who witnesses domestic violence (Chandra 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The incidence of violence against women remains unacceptably high in Indian society. According to the most recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 31% of women in this nation who have ever been married reported having been the victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse between 2015 and 2016. Injuries, approximately one-fourth (24.5%) of women experience various forms of violence, such as cuts, burns, bruises, deep wounds, or broken bones. In addition, almost half (49%) of women said their partners control their behavior (IIPS & ICF, 2017). The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reports that 89,097 crimes against women were reported nationwide in 2018, a 3.6% increase over the previous year. Among the various crimes committed against women, domestic violence ranks highest (Singh, 2023).

Domestic violence cases have increased globally during the period when several nations are strictly under lockdown to prevent the spread of the infectious COVID-19 virus. According to estimates from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Victoria University (Australia) and Johns Hopkins University (USA), there will likely be an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence for every three months of lockdown. India is no different. Numerous domestic violence cases nationwide have been rising at an alarming rate since the lockdown began on March 25 (Dinabandhu Mondal & Pintu Paul, 2021).

Crimes against women increased by 12.9% between 2018 and 2022, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), which reported 445,256 cases of crime against women in 2022. This increase was a result of both an increase in incidents and better reporting. The number of cases increased from 359,849 in 2017 to over 445,000 in 2022, with an average of 1,220 cases per day and 51 First Information Reports (FIRs) per hour, according to the Women and Men in India 2023 report. According to the National Family Health Survey-5, almost one-third of Indian women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been victims of violence.

Although it is thought to be the safest place, not everyone feels safe at home. While the nation was under lockdown from March 23 to April 16, 2020, 587 complaints were filed by women to the National Commission for Women (NCW) in just 24 days. These include 239 domestic violence-related cases, which is a sharp increase from the 123 cases that occurred the previous month (February 27, 2020 to March 22, 2020) (The Economic Times, 2020). The actual number of cases, however, is anticipated to be significantly higher than those that are reported. Due to movement restrictions, women are unable to register complaints during lockdown. Since everyone is staying at home, some women are even unable to speak with their parents or friends about it. As a result, under the COVID lockdown, there are now few options for filing complaints. In a statement, the NCW stated that these messages are examined first, and those pertaining to domestic violence during the lockdown are given top priority. The NCW also stated that the state police and administration are assisting in providing immediate security to women who have been wronged.

Violence against women has become more likely as a result of the pandemic. The victim and the offenders are now bound together by this crisis. Because everyone is at home during a lockdown and there is no domestic maid available, the amount of domestic work that is typically classified as "women's work" has increased, as has the likelihood that violence will be committed against women, resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, mental health problems, or suffering.

The most frequent offenses include rape (7.1%), assault to outrage modesty (18.7%), kidnapping

and abduction (19.2%), and cruelty by husbands or in-laws (31.4%) (**Figure 1**). These numbers highlight the ongoing dangers women encounter, even in their own homes (NCRB, 2022).

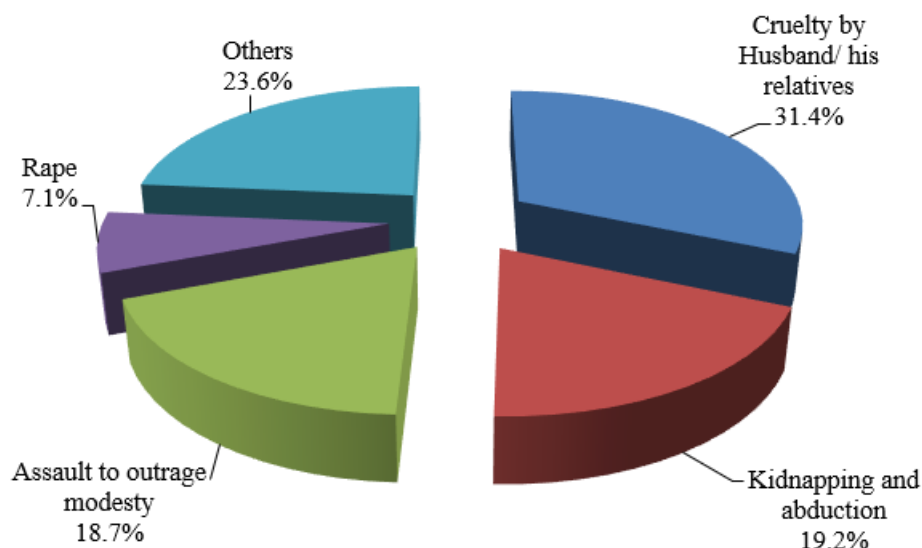


Figure 1: Crimes Against Women Under the Indian Penal Code 2022

Sources: National Crime Record Bureau 2022

With the exception of a drop during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the number of reported rapes has remained dangerously high, with annual reports continuously surpassing 30,000 cases since 2012. In 2016, attacks reached a peak of almost 39,000. The startling frequency of these crimes was highlighted by the fact that by 2018, one woman nationwide reported a rape every 15 minutes. More than 31,000 rape cases were reported in 2022, demonstrating the problem's continued seriousness. Conviction rates for rape have stayed low despite stricter laws, ranging from 27% to 28% between 2018 and 2022.

Violence against women increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, as evidenced by the crime rate rising from 56.5 per 100,000 women in 2020 to 64.5 in 2021 (**Figure 2**). Reverse migration, social isolation, and economic strain were some of the factors that led to this increase.

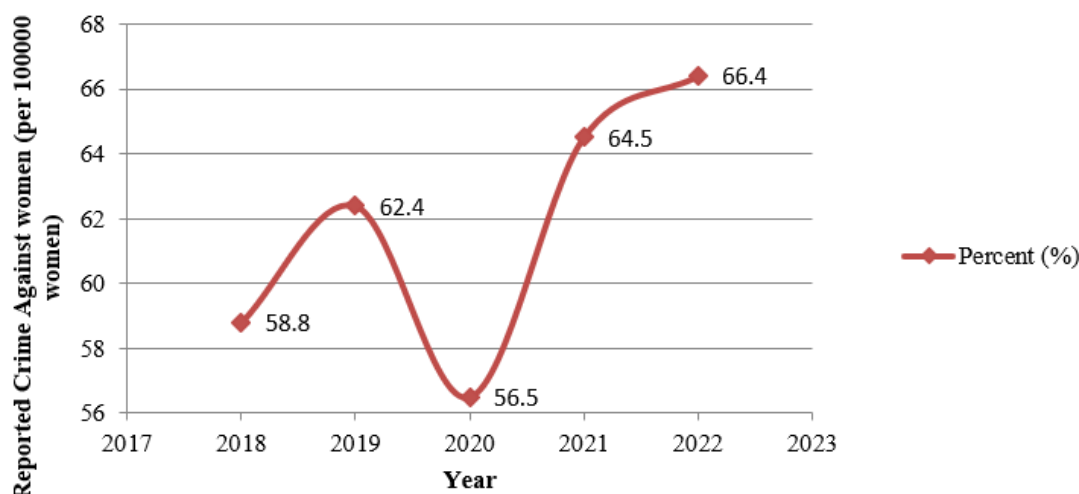


Figure 2: Violence against women increased 12.9% from 2018 to 2022 in India

Sources: National Crime Record Bureau 2022

Lockdown-related unemployment and financial hardship within the family may also be contributing factors to the sharp increase in domestic violence. In the United States, comparable experiences were noted during the 1930s Great Depression and the 2007–2009 Great Recession. According to the study "Intimate Partner Violence in the Great Recession," men are becoming more and more fearful of losing their jobs and their financial stability, which can lead to an increase in controlling behavior and occasionally abuse of their partners. A psychological phenomenon that results from the patriarchal mindset is that "Depreciation of control in one realm, such as the economy, results men to assert greater influence in another field, in this case their private relationships" (Schneider et al., 2016).

However, it is more intensified in COVID-19 crisis as the lockdown restricts the options of escape routes for women. Previously, when violence escalates, they could seek refuge at a friend's or parent's house. Domestic violence is pervasive in Indian society, particularly in light of the current emergency, despite the protection provided by the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005). A growing number of domestic violence cases were brought to the attention of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, which ordered the government to include a mechanism for redressing violence as a major component of the country's COVID-19 response plans. In a similar vein, the Delhi High Court ordered the State and Central Governments, as well as the national and state commissions on women, to take protective measures for women after hearing a PIL filed by an NGO (Hindustan Times, 2020).

Because there are currently few working redressal systems, the situation for women who are victims of domestic abuse is worse during this lockdown. In order to collect complaints from women during this lockdown, the National Commission for Women established a WhatsApp number (The Economic Times, 2020). Similar to how social distancing and mask use are encouraged to combat COVID-19, women should be educated about the different ways to register complaints in order to prevent domestic violence. Additionally, community-level awareness-raising regarding the dangers of domestic violence is necessary.

Remember that domestic violence has serious effects on women's mental and physical health as well as that of their children, in addition to being a violation of human rights. Society will only advance if all women are granted freedom, dignity, and respect.

CONCLUSION

Research shows a dramatic rise in violence, especially domestic violence, against women during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a study on "violence against women in the Great Recession," men are becoming more and more fearful of losing their jobs and their financial stability, which can lead to an increase in controlling behavior and occasionally abuse of their partners. Despite being a successful infection control strategy, quarantine can have serious negative effects on one's health, relationships, finances, and mental well-being. Higher rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were observed in the mental health outcomes of survivors.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

Data can be requested from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India, a government agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs, for data access to be granted, a data access for this

study. It is the nodal agency in charge of gathering, organizing, and evaluating national crime data are available for academic research and teaching only.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Research, data analysis, and manuscript writing are frequently their responsibilities. The researcher who has made the biggest contribution to the study is typically the first author. In the meantime, they are frequently in charge of carrying out experiments, evaluating data, and composing the manuscript. Though not as much as the first author, the second author makes a significant contribution as well. They support the writing of manuscripts, data collection, and analysis. Both authors might have contributed to particular parts of the manuscript or offered specialized knowledge. The final manuscript was read and approved by both authors.

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