
SILENT INCREASE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 pandemic has threatened all human beings all over the world. Government of various countries has imposed several restrictions just to curb the consequences of the outbreak by way of imposing lockdown. Almost half of the population all over the world is under total lockdown³. However, this lockdown has affected women and children even more worsen their conditions as they are now more prone to violence both mentally and physically. In this article, major increase in domestic violence and sexual violence against women and children have been discussed as well as lack of medical and legal assistance have been explained with the help of recognized official data of various countries. The author attempts to suggest some measures to be taken during Covid-19 pandemic regarding safety of women and children which is reported as well as those not reported. The sole motive of this article is to create awareness about this serious issue that is emerging silently (as not being taken seriously) during Covid-19 pandemic and how accountable authorities can do to handle this serious situation in order to maintain law and order, health and peace during the time of pandemic.

KEYWORDS: - *Violence, Covid-19, Women, Children, UN, Lockdown, Pandemic.*

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³ Alasdair Sandford, *Coronavirus: Half of humanity now on lockdown as 90 countries call for confinement*, EURO NEWS (April 03, 2020), <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/02/coronavirus>

INTRODUCTION

Violence is a term that includes all type of unfair things that is happens to anyone which is against their human rights. Women and children are victim of various forms of violence and during the period of COVID-19 pandemic, since the social distancing and lockdown has imposed by various countries and recommended by WHO, the rate of violence has increased.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, gives statement during COVID-19 pandemic- “*Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic*”⁴ This shows that violence against women during the pandemic is a matter of concern in the whole world.

On the other hand, Leaders’ of WHO jointly states that- “*Violence against children: A hidden crises of the Covid-19 pandemic*”⁵, this also shows the condition about children across world during the pandemic.

Lockdown has shadowed all other crises which are happening silently in the society but all the authorities, although have inference about the same not taking it this serious another societal pandemic. This is not only a violence but it can lead to a very major health crises, as sometimes violence can be so abusive that it will be led to permanent damage to body or mental health. This is an opportunity for various campaigns and also government to return back what they have gained from society.

INTERNATIONAL POSITION: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

UN Women (United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and empowerment of women) has launched the Shadow Pandemic (public awareness campaign), focused on increase in domestic violence during Covid-19 pandemic.⁶

⁴ *Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic- Statement by Executive Director, UN Women*, UN WOMEN OFFICIAL WEBSITE (April 6, 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

⁵ Leader’s statement- *Joint Leaders’ statement- violence against children: A hidden crises of the COVID-19 pandemic*, WHO OFFICIAL WEBSITE (April 8, 2020), *Violence against children: A hidden crises of the Covid-19 pandemic*

⁶ Press Release, *UN Women raises awareness of the shadow pandemic of violence against women during COVID-19*, UN Women (May 27, 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/5/press-release-the-shadow-pandemic-of-violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

Position of women

Violence against women is one of the serious issues of all times and during Covid-19 pandemic violence against women has increased at an alarming rate. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women, said, “*Even before the pandemic, violence against women was one of the most widespread violations of human rights. Since lockdown restrictions, domestic violence has multiplied, spreading across the world in a shadow pandemic. This is a critical time for action, from prioritizing essential services like shelter and support for women survivors, to providing the economic support and stimulus packages needed for broader recovery*”.

In Argentina, emergency calls increased by Twenty-Five percentage (25%) from the day of lockdown. It is thirty percentage (30%) in Singapore. In USA, number of calls received for violence during lockdown has increased. “Evidence shows that, even before the pandemic, one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime”.⁷ In Hubei province, China, a police station has reported 3x (three times) cases of domestic violence cases during the lockdown begin.

According to UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), “it is expected that millions of cases of violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and unintended pregnancies may occur during crises causing devastation”.⁸ All these data show that, the condition of women during lockdown period is much worse, where the safest place recommended to stop the spread of Covid-19 is home; on the other hand this is most dangerous place for most of the women in the world.

Position of children

There is no accurate data about the violence against children. This is because children are not mature and do not have knowledge about their rights. It is very difficult to acquire the data about violence against children and this is much more difficult in lockdown period. Here are some of the instances in the world that gives an inference about the situation of children during the lockdown period: 700% increase in calls regarding protection of children from abuse in UK itself and in France 30% increase in such calls. Children are vulnerable to cyber

⁷ Press Release, *UN Women raises awareness of the shadow pandemic of violence against women during COVID-19*, UN WOMEN (May 27, 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/5/press-release-the-shadow-pandemic-of-violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

⁸ UNFPA (2020) *Millions more cases of violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation unintended pregnancy expected due to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, (April 28,2020) <https://www.unfpa.org/news/millions-more-cases-violence-child-marriage-female-genital-mutilation-unintended-pregnancies>

bully also as all the children are under lockdown and easy access to mobile phones and high-speed internet are the reasons for it.⁹

INDIAN POSITION: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Discrimination is not a modern term in India; rather it is a familiar term. Discrimination gives birth to violence and it is evident that in India violence against women and children are in practice since ancient times. We cannot blame only patriarchy but there are so many reasons behind it such as method of parenting in India, physical capabilities are included in every teaching either by parents or teachers.

Position of women in India

According to Thomas Reuters Foundation- a survey conducted in 2018 about “*The world’s most dangerous countries in the world*”- the result was so shocking because the rank 1 in the list was India. And the most disastrous thing is that all the Muslim majority countries are better than India in terms of safety of women.¹⁰

This was the period far before the Covid-19 pandemic (lockdown). Now during the pandemic, the things get worse because violence against women are happening where all human beings are supposed to be safe during the crises of Covid-19, that is in their ‘homes’. There are some cases in which rape has been committed during lockdown when lots of restriction has imposed on citizens and police are stricter than before.

Domestic violence both mentally and physically has increased at alarming rate and child marriages, unexpected pregnancies, FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), online abuse has also increased. All the politicians, normal man (who are not suffering from any kind of violence) are demanding for stricter rules, but there is no need to add on new rules rather than focusing on implementation of existing laws in its spirit sense. Data shows that- “*about 86% women who experienced violence never gets help and 77% of the victims never tells anyone about*

⁹ *How coronavirus pandemic could cause child abuse epidemic in virtual world*, BUSINESS STANDARDS (April 15,2020, 12:47), https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/online-predators-put-millions-of-children-at-risk-during-covid-19-lockdown-120041500466_1.html

¹⁰ *The world’s most dangerous countries for women,2018*, THOMAS REUTERS FOUNDATION ANNUAL POLL <https://poll2018.trust.org/>

the incidence. Among 14.3% of victims that gets help, only 7% reached out with respective authorities such as- police, doctors, NGOs.”¹¹

As per the above data, we can imagine that the situation during lockdown is very worse. According to the official data, *“In 2020, between March 25 and May 31, one thousand four hundred seventy-seven (1477) cases/ complaints of domestic violence were made by women. This 68-day period recorded more complaints than those received between March and May in the previous 10 years”.*¹²

The responsible ministers of the Central Government denied the fact that, there is no increase in the domestic violence cases during lockdown and in fact there is decrease in the number of cases in domestic and sexual violence cases, said- Ministry of Child & Women Development.¹³

On the other hand, NCW (National Commission of Women) reported that there is a rise in the number of cases in domestic violence or abuses against women during the time of corona virus pandemic. There are so many initiatives which are carried out by various NGOs, police and also by the government, but all these are not enough to tackle with this serious pandemic.

Position of children in India

There has been no accurate data about violence against children during lockdown because children are so innocent that they don't know about their rights and cannot be able to distinguish between right or wrong. But during the announcement of lockdown by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, all the children are not allowed to go outside and communicate with the outside world as all schools and transportation are closes. As a result of that children are packed in their houses with develops isolation, threats to mental health, and prone to abuse both mentally and physically. Virtual world, nowadays has become a vital place which abuses children, as all the schools are closed and education are provided

¹¹Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Sumanth Sen and Naresh Singaravelu, *“Data- Domestic violence complaints at a 10-year high during COVID-19lockdown”*, (June 22, 2020), <https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10-year-high-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31885001.ece/amp/>

¹²Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Sumanth Sen and Naresh Singaravelu, *“Data- Domestic violence complaints at a 10-year high during COVID-19lockdown”*, (June 22, 2020), <https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10-year-high-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31885001.ece/amp/>

¹³*“Cases of Domestic violence rising, being reported from across India during Lockdown: Population Foundation of India”*, (April 24,2020), <https://www.expresshealthcare.in/amp/news/cases-of-domestic-violence-rising-being-reported-from-across-india-during-lockdown-population-foundation-of-india/419288/>

via mobile phones and there is a great opportunity for the traffickers to pull children in the field of cyber bully in the form of sexual abuse, mental abuse, cyber trafficking.

An NGO called “*All India Council of Human Rights, Liberties and Social Justice*”, filed a petition in Delhi HC about domestic violence and abuse cases in 11 days had rose up and during this period help lines across India had received about Ninety-Two thousand (92,000) calls reporting about the same.

In newspaper during lockdown, there are various news about child marriages at various places in India are seen. Children are more vulnerable to abuse and in this pandemic period this rate has risen at a faster pace.

INITIATIVE BY GOVERNMENTS AND NGOS DURING COVID-19 TO CURB THE RATE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

There are various initiatives have been taken to control violence against women and children across the world. Some of the initiative has been mentioned here.

International level

At international level violence against women and children during lockdown has been accepted. Due to this most of the international institutions such as **WHO** (World Health Organization) has issued certain guidelines on “*Key Actions*” to be taken to curb violence against women and children during lockdown to various governments, health care providers as well as general public also.¹⁴

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime) has launched the “*Lockdown Learners’ series*” for students and educators for online dialogues. This dialogue helps the students to get knowledge about cybercrimes, gender-based discrimination, and also help them to promote their skills and talents.¹⁵

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has urged governments to include the protection of women in their response to deadly novel coronavirus pandemic. He said “*Violence is not*

¹⁴ WHO “*Addressing violence against children, women and older people during the Covid-19 pandemic- key actions*”, (June 17, 2020), https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/WHO-2019-nCoV-Violence_actions-2020.1

¹⁵ UNODC “*With ‘Lockdown Learners’ initiative, UNODC engages youth confined by Covid-19*”, (April 24,2020), <https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2020/04/with-lockdown-learners-initiative-unodc-engages-youth-confined-by-covid-19.html>

confined to the battlefield”, and “for many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest”, he added.¹⁶

In Trento, Italy, as per a court decision, *“the abuser must leave the family home and not the victim”*.¹⁷ Apart from all that, many countries have launched SOS helpline numbers for helping women and children from violence during lockdown.

National level: - India

In India, nationwide lockdown due to spread of Corona virus (Covid-19) has also made an increase in violence against women and children. To control and help women and children who are suffering from violence during this lockdown period, there are so many initiatives taken at governmental level as well as by NGOs.

- Twitter has launched a popup message system to combat domestic violence, when someone searched for keywords like “violence” or abuse related, then helpline numbers (SOS numbers) will show on their screen, so that if they are in trouble then they could inform and ask for help during this pandemic times.¹⁸
- Promotion of app-based reporting and email-based reporting by state women commissions is a welcome step.
- Odisha Police has come out with an initiative of “**Phone-Up Programme**”, in which police enquire about the condition of women on calls who had earlier reported domestic violence. The initiative will be implemented with the help of the SCRB (State Crime Record Bureau).¹⁹
- In Tamil Nadu, “one-stop centers” are handling cases relating to women who are in distress during lockdown.²⁰

¹⁶ The Jakarta Post “*UN chief urges govts to protect women during virus lockdown*”, (April 6, 2020, 2:41 PM), <https://www.thejakartapost.com/amp/news/2020/04/06/un-chief-urges-govts-to-protect-women-during-virus-lockdown.html>

¹⁷ Sanjay Vashishtha, “*Domestic Violence during the Coronavirus Lockdown: Potential solution from a criminologist’s perspective*”, (April,2020)

¹⁸ “*No tolerance for crime against women: Twitter launched prompt to help people combat domestic violence*”, (June 17,2020)<https://m.economicstimes.com/magazines/panache/no-tolerance-for-crime-against-women-twitter-launches-prompt-to-help-people-combat-domestic-violence/articleshow/76419935.cms>,

¹⁹PTI, “*Odisha Police takes initiative to address Domestic violence during coronavirus lockdown*”, (April 18,2020, 10:51 AM),<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/odisha-police-takes-initiative-to-address-domestic-violence-during-lockdown-2213924>

²⁰ Legal Correspondent (The Hindu), “*High Court appraised of steps taken to protect victims of domestic abuse*”, (April 25, 2020, 11:45 PM), <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/high-court-appraised-of-steps-taken-to-protect-victims-of-domestic-violence-during-lockdown/article31434971.ece>

- J&K High Court has suggested some measures to curb domestic violence and take cognizance *Suo motu* regarding increase in cases of domestic violence. The Court also directed governmental authorities too.²¹
- Akshara Centers along with Special Cell for Women and Children with support from Government of Maharashtra, Police, and various celebrities to create awareness about today’s situation and urges citizens to raise their voices against violence in house during lockdown period.²²
- In totality, there are 52 help lines started across India by governments, police and NGOs, where victims of domestic violence/ abuse can ask for help.²³
- “*Chuppi Tod*” (break the silence) campaign initiated by the Raipur Police, in which they encourage the women (victims) to report against violence/ abuse as well as police also enquire through calls about welfare of previous complainants. The Indian Merchants Association and International Advertising Association (Indian Chapter) launched a campaign asking men “*beat the virus to pulp, not your wife*”. NGO Sneha has started a campaign in which most of the Bollywood celebrities through Instagram shared their unheard stories of Domestic violence under “*#LockdownMeinLockup* (locked up during the lockdown)”.²⁴
- WEFT (Women Entrepreneurs for Transformation) Foundation, launched a new initiative called “*Red Dot*” under which domestic violence victims can be identified by citizens by seeing red dot on their palm.²⁵

LEGAL ASPECT: ANTI-VIOLENCE LAWS AGAINST VIOLENCE DURING PANDEMIC

In India there is The Epidemic Act, 1897 enacted by British Parliament, to regulate the situation during epidemic. The main drawback of this Act is that, it is a very old Act and do

²¹Devika, *J&K HC- Rising domestic violence amid lockdown- Court suggests measures and directions, take cognizance Suo motu*, (April, 2020), <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2020/04/19/jk-hc-rising-domestic-violence-amid-lockdown-court-suggests-measures-and-directions-takes-cognizance-suo-motu/>

²²EE News Desk, *Akshara Centre in association with the Government of Maharashtra urges all citizens to put #LockdownOnDomesticViolence*, (April 21,2020), <http://everythingexperiential.businessworld.in/article/Akshara-Centre-in-association-with-the-Government-of-Maharashtra-urges-all-citizens-to-put-LockdownOnDomesticViolence/21-04-2020-189798>

²³*Cases of domestic violence rising, being reported from across India during lockdown: Population Foundation of India*, (April 24,2020), <https://www.expresshealthcare.in/news/cases-of-domestic-violence-rising-being-reported-from-across-india-during-lockdown-population-foundation-of-india/419288/>

²⁴Akshaya Vijayalakshmi (Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad), *Violence No More: India’s COVID-19 opportunity for anti-domestic violence campaigns*, (June 09,2020), <https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/opinion/violence-no-more-indias-covid-19-opportunity-for-anti-domestic-violence-campaigns/3641>

²⁵*Using ‘red dot’ signal, women seek help to escape domestic violence during lockdown*, (April 04,2020 03:57 PM), <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/north-and-central/using-red-dot-signal-women-seek-help-to-escape-domestic-violence-during-lockdown-821281.html>

not meet the requirements of today’s world. Most of the states in India are following this Act to regulate the situation of Covid-19 pandemic.

Countries like UK have enacted an explicit Act- the Corona virus Act, 2020 and Singapore has passed- The Infectious Disease Regulations, 2020. In these Act there are exclusive provisions relating to criminal proceedings, gatherings, education, healthcare, financial assistance and so on.

In India, there is no such law which exclusively deals with the situation like this Corona virus pandemic in a proper manner. During lockdown, all the laws that are prevalent in normal days are applicable. Violence against women and children are reported and regulated in the traditional manner, there is no such guidelines or laws exclusively for Covid-19 pandemic.

In case of violence against women- Constitution of India, IPC, Cr.P.C., Indian Evidence Act, Information Technology Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, Prevention of Women from Domestic Violence Act, etc. In case of violence against children- Constitution of India, IPC, Cr.P.C., Indian Evidence Act, Information Technology Act, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, Child Labor (Prohibition) Act, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, etc.

In India, there is a need to enact a law which exclusively deals with all aspects during the time of pandemic like Covid-19. It is important to note that, the laws which are already in existence relating to prohibition of violence must be applicable during pandemic, but there is a need to enact a law which discuss about the pattern of implementation of those laws during pandemic. Because there are hundreds of laws but proper implementation of laws is the foremost.

OPPORTUNITIES POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We have discussed about problems or silent pandemic which is in existence during Covid-19 pandemic relating to violence against women and children. But there are so many threats which will continue to exist post Covid-19 pandemic also. Apart from that if we consider about solution it can be turned into opportunities.

- Atmnirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan²⁶ pronounced by PM Narendra Modi is an opportunity to all to being independent. Likewise, those women who are victims of any kind of

²⁶ [summary-announcements-aatma-nirbhar-bharat-abhiyaan](https://www.prsindia.org/report-summaries/), PRS INDIA <https://www.prsindia.org/report-summaries/>

violence can become independent by giving them some monetary incentives in terms of loan to start up a business in partnership with various liked women, so that they would become independent financially and help the country to boost economy. As well as this will encourage the programme of PM Modi “Vocal for Local”.

- Violence that is not of a very serious nature, should be solved by the independent committee constituted by government consisted of legal experts, psychologist, police officer, social worker and they will send their final report to the respective court. It will reduce the workload of the courts and also the justice will be delivered timely.
- Skill development programs should be broadcasted via TV so that most women and children become skilled and can be able to survive themselves and these types of programs should be of a permanent nature that is not restricted to the lockdown / pandemic time only.

CONCLUSION

Almost half of the population of the world is women and children are the third largest population in the world, but the saddest thing is that they are the most vulnerable during the lockdown period due to domestic violence and sexual violence. This is a silent pandemic towards which the whole world is moving ahead now. In the shadow of Covid-19 pandemic, this serious issue has been ignored as a result of which reporting in proper manner and investigation is not taking seriously. Apart from this, it is true that there are some positive sides of this pandemic, like on environment, most people enjoy family times, less work load, etc. but we cannot be ignorant about the serious condition which most of the women and children are facing right now. We have to take certain steps to vanish this evil from our society as happiness is also an important factor of a good civilized society and every human being has right to live with happiness and with dignity.