

“Domestic Violence”

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The idea that some people exhibit a feeling of superiority over some others by making them feel frail comes out as incomprehensible and despondent to me. All the more, the de-stressing that is said to follow after such populace voluntarily put their family members, particularly spouses, on a rail of negative thoughts about themselves is unintelligible. This might sound perplexing but some reports concerning domestic violence around the world appear more bemusing.

Before we get into the statistics, according to the United Nations’ definition, domestic abuse, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence", is a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Huss defined the nature of domestic violence as any action of violence perpetrated within the context of significant interpersonal relationship.¹ Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic violence can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. It affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.²

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. However, discriminatory socio-cultural attitudes and economic inequalities resulting in women’s apparent subordinate place in society make them more vulnerable to many forms of violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse, dowry-related violence etc.³ The great majority of abuse is perpetrated by men against women and makes a large problem in public health terms because of its frequency and severity.⁴ All the more worrying is that intimate partner violence is the commonest form of violence. A 2013 analysis conducted by World Health Organization, in association with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South Africa Medical Research Council, by data from over eighty countries stated that

¹*Domestic violence and abuse in intimate relationship from public health perspective*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4768593/>

² *What is domestic abuse*, <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>

³ *“Domestic violence- Law and Policy”*, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/svaw/domestic/laws/international.htm>.

⁴ Itzin C, Taket A, Barter-Godfrey S., *Domestic and sexual violence and abuse*. London, New York: Routledge; 2010.

worldwide, 1 in 3 or 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence.⁵

It has been noted that domestic violence cases tends to rise during health emergencies. World Health Organization's regional director for Europe has stated that countries are reporting up to 60% hike in emergency calls by women subjected to domestic violence under sweeping lockdowns imposed across the continent.⁶ Figures by United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and its partners (Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University in the US and Victoria University in Australia) assume 20% increase in violence during an average three-month lockdown in all 193 UN member states.⁷ Even as data are limited, reports from across the world, including the United Kingdom, the United States of America, China, and other countries suggest a significant increase in domestic violence cases related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports from other countries suggest a reduction in survivors seeking services due to a combination of lockdown measures and not wanting to attend health services for fear of infection.⁸

Today, when billions of people worldwide are subjected to some or the other form of stay-at-home orders, experts say that children and women are most vulnerable to abuse. According to recent media reports, domestic violence cases rose by 36% in Paris in one week of lockdown, France saw rise of such cases by 30%, the killing of women surged in Turkey since lockdown, Australia reported 75% increase in online searches for support on domestic violence and almost 90,000 gender-based violence were reported in South Africa during first week of lockdown. While data (from The Economist) from Chicago, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis and New Orleans (all American cities) indicate that reports of domestic violence increased by 5%, Lev Uden Vold's data show that a week after Denmark's lockdown began, calls about emergency shelters rose sharply. India is no exception to this development; as of April 17, data by National Commission for Women (NCW) stated 587 reported cases of domestic violence between March 23 and April 16 as against 396 complaints in previous 25 days.⁹ Petition filed by an NGO 'All India Council of Human Rights, Liberties and Social Justice' in Delhi High Court says that helplines across India have received 92,000 calls reporting such abuse in only first eleven days of

⁵ *Violence against women*, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> 6Coronavirus lockdown| Surge in domestic violence, says WHO, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/coronavirus-lockdown-surge-in-domestic-violence-says-who/article31529111.ece>.

⁷ The figures take into account the anticipated high levels of under-reported cases; www.theguardian.com.

⁸ *Q&A: Violence against women during COVID-19*, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/violence-against-women-during-covid-19?gclid=Cj0KCQjwuJz3BRDTARIsAMg-HxW86Sre7ByKVduX4r-eV_-JDnqEC2MpGVb0z7apzqX9tsj6u4tBD9AaAmq7EALw_wcB.

⁹ *Amid lockdown, India witnesses steep rise in crime against women*, <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/04/17/amid-lockdown-india-witnesses-steep-rise-in-crime-against-women.html>.

lockdown. Consequently, the Delhi High Court has directed the Centre and the Delhi government to deliberate on measures to curb domestic violence and protect the victims.¹⁰ Although women are most often the victim of domestic violence, the gender roles can and are reversed sometimes.¹¹

Some theories propose that abusers may feel this need to control their partners because of low self-esteem, extreme jealousy, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or when they feel inferior to the other partner in education and socioeconomic background. Besides, some people resorting to long established beliefs assume that they have the right to control their partners, particularly believing in the notion that women are not equal to men. Most of such kinds have made way for such conducts while growing up in households where domestic violence was accepted as a normal part of being raised in family. Studies suggest that violent behaviour is, often, caused by an interaction of situational and individual factors meaning thereby that abusers, as they grow up, get to learn violent behaviour from their families, people in their community and other cultural influences. They may have been witnesses to such violence often or, sometimes, victims themselves. Some abusers acknowledge growing up having been abused as a child.¹²

As per some studies, other reasons that root domestic violence in homes include undiagnosed personality disorder or psychological disorder, addiction to alcohol or substance abuse, and more¹³. Nevertheless, none should be used as a justification or a rationale for the behaviour. The aforementioned possible causes are made available or listed only to understand better why an abuser believes it is acceptable to abuse their partner. Ultimately, the abuser needs to stop and get help for their unhealthy and destructive behaviour.

It is understood that women, or even people in general, who have experienced domestic violence or abuse are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing a range of mental health conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and thoughts of suicide.¹⁴ It must also be clearly recognized that the quarantine induced by the pandemic has

¹⁰ *Delhi High Court issues directions to check domestic violence during COVID-19 lockdown*, <https://theleaflet.in/delhi-high-court-issues-directions-to-check-domestic-violence-during-covid-19-lockdown/>.

¹¹ Toby D. Goldsmith, *What Causes Domestic Violence?*, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-causes-domestic-violence/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *How domestic violence affects women's mental health*, <https://theconversation.com/how-domestic-violence-affects-womens-mental-health-104926>.

created damaging repercussions in court activities leaving most of the judicial cases, if not paralyzed, inevitably deferred.¹⁵

Impact of domestic violence in homes is huge, also on children who witness or are the victims of violence and they may learn to believe that violence is a reasonable way to resolve conflict between people. Boys who learn that women are not to be valued or respected and see violence directed against them are more likely to abuse women when they grow up. Girls who witness domestic violence in their families of origin are more likely to be victimized by their own husbands.

On April 6, United Nations chief, António Guterres, called for measures to address the global surge in domestic violence directed towards women, linked to lockdowns imposed to combat Coronavirus pandemic.¹⁶ As part of its public health response, World Health Organization (WHO) has also worked with partners to develop a set of new materials on the mental health and psychosocial support aspects of COVID-19. As governments race to contain COVID-19, it is also essential for society to know what actions it can take to mitigate the behavioural health impact of the pandemic crisis. People ought to be made aware that issues surrounding psychosocial and mental health, including those triggered by domestic violence, are issues for real. Letting people know when and where to seek help is imperative. It is crucial for both the administration and the society to acknowledge the gravity of the problem. Temporary shelters for victims need to be set up accordingly. In rural areas, village-level committees of women should be established to deal with the issue. Online campaigns should be initiated to make women aware of the alternatives and assistances available.

As long as violent behaviour patterns within families are accepted as their private matter and the causes and effects of such patterns on family members and on public health, in general, are overlooked, necessary changes cannot be expected. Therefore it is required to inculcate intolerance for all forms of violence, both in family and in society. Efforts should be taken up in schools, youth settings and workplaces to educate people, help them focus on changing social attitudes and raise public awareness (also through media, politics, etc) about the same so as to prevent aggressive incidents in intimate relationships and families as a whole and at the same time introduce a new set of values, thinking processes and relationship skills which promote healthy interpersonal relationships. In fact, collaborative efforts taken up by schools and communities would prove better in raising awareness about the issue (also via online modes) among children, youth and people in general to reduce the occurrences of violence in homes and societies and also in providing them with pertinent information about local resources and ways to

¹⁵ Judge José Igreja Matos, *Access to Justice in Times of Judicial Lockdown*, <https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2020/03/access-to-justice-in-times-of-judicial-lockdown.html>.

¹⁶ Mail Today Bureau, *Domestic violence spikes in lockdown, govt told to step in*, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/domestic-violence-spikes-in-lockdown-govt-told-to-step-in-1671460-2020-04-27>.

respond to domestic violence situations when they occur. While criminal prosecutions against the perpetrators are essential those alone cannot be reaching the desired outcomes¹⁷, especially in the present times whilst access to the judicial courts has been hard hit by pandemic.

¹⁷Zlatka Rakovec-Felser, *Domestic violence and abuse in intimate relationship from public health perspective*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4768593/>.