

Covid-19 and the never-ending violence against women

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Abstract

In several countries, including India, COVID-19 has implemented mandatory lockdowns. Though, since the lockdown has been implemented, concern has been centered on its financial ramifications and on supplying food and housing for the vulnerable and migrants. However, the pandemic exposed flaws and even generated problems on other grounds. In specific, the loss of women's freedom in patriarchal households is further decreasing, as "homes" are no more seen as safe places, yet throughout the lockdown, are going forward as places where people are operating from homes and earning their living, children are taking part in online lectures and other events are becoming organized. Violence against women in these households grew quickly during the lockdown. Women trapped in the households with the offenders of violence are witnessing severe brutality. Appropriate measures have to be taken to resolve the crisis and make homes as "safe zones". The Government must take steps to offer protection to women and girls. In the long run, there is a need to resolve entrenched systemic inequality in order to guarantee gender equality in the household. Lockdowns can be interpreted in a variety of ways. One is to lockdown our concerted belief and enable the pre-existing stigmatizing notions of gender to persist and to replicate, or it may be, to separate the planet from oppressive beliefs and to re-conceptualize the violence-free gender-just world.

This article highlights the shortcomings in the government's response to the escalating abuse during the lockdown in India and Proposes that a comprehensive and thorough plan must be put in motion to counter the various facets of abuse experienced by women in the country. The government cannot overlook the chance to protect women against violence. To construct a gender just-abuse free society, the need is to place a lockdown on cultural imaginations that reiterate gender-stereotypical ideas and put patriarchy viruses and deprivation in isolation permanently.

Keywords: lockdown, violence, women and children, patriarchy, isolation

Introduction

In January 2020, for the first time, a majority of people in the world were introduced to the word "Coronavirus". At that time, we knew that it was a deadly virus, but we were not aware of what was about to hit us, we were unaware of the influence it was going to make on us. The virus had a far-reaching effect on everyone. It started to affect life on a very large scale, and India was one of the countries to be hit by this Virus, though it was late. By March everyone was inside their homes, locked down. Initially for the first few months, when the lockdown was placed it was not a big deal for some of us. Some were hit badly, but we were trying to recover from that. We were just continuing our lives, as we used to. COVID-19 can be perfectly termed as the once in a lifetime experience that one does not wish to go through.

One of the far-reaching effects which the virus had was on domestic violence. In many nations including India, COVID-19 led to the introduction of compulsory lockdowns. However, since the lockdown has been enforced, attention is being concentrated on its economic consequences and on supplying food and accommodation for the needy and migrants. But the pandemic revealed susceptibilities and also generated challenges at other fronts. Data suggests ^[1] that abuse against women and children in those homes has rapidly risen during the lockdown. Women and children stuck in houses with offenders of abuse are experiencing serious violence. The compulsory lockdown owing to COVID-19 is contributing to a rise in the amount of domestic abuse. Domestic violence is being recorded all over the globe.

The incidents have increased multiple times in the lockdown period. This paper examines why this violence is on a rise, moreover, the authors have also tried to explore what are the gaps in the Government's answer to escalated violence during the lockdown in India and thus what rigorous and detailed strategy must be placed in motion to resolve multiple facets of abuse women are experiencing in the country. The government can't miss the opportunity to defend women from abuse. To envision a gender abuse-free world, the need is to foist the lockdown on "collective imagination" that recapitulates gender-stereotypical beliefs and to put the viruses of patriarchy and indigence in quarantine and isolation forever.

Reasons for Gender-Based Violence

Before COVID-19 broke out, data suggests that every "third woman" on the planet has been met with abuse at least once in her lifespan ^[2]. But why does it happen, what is the reason for this? In this section, the authors try to examine, what are the reasons for domestic violence in India or even around the globe. Domestic abuse is one of the most common forms of Gender-based violence seen and reported in India ^[3]. The reasons for these kinds of violence can be tracked down to the deeply rooted discriminatory cultural beliefs and attitudes ^[4]. These beliefs do not belong to a particular religion or society, in every culture historically, Women have been discriminated against. It has been a common misbelief, that women are weaker, and people tend to assume that on a large scale, but this doesn't seem to be the scenario. These factors combined perpetuate

inequality and powerlessness, in particular of women and girls. Any kind of violence rises from these discriminations when a man starts to assume, that he is superior to a female. Modern society is based on what we call freedom, freedom of everything, of course with reasonable restrictions and such actions in today's world doesn't make a good impression. Other factors like poverty, lack of education and livelihood, freedom from crime, and abuse also tend to promote and strengthen a culture of violence and sexism.

As discussed, domestic Violence does not happen because of a singular reason, the core issue of domestic violence arises from multiple sources. The search for the solution to domestic violence can only begin when we know exactly what is causing the issue. The factors range from cultural perspectives, to even economic and Political Factors and the cultural factors are considered to be the major cause of this issue. Discrimination between a male and female starts at home, the patriarchal nature of the society has led the women over centuries to be suppressed. Also, due to this the majority of the legal fraternity and the lawmakers have been of the patriarchal mindset, which in turn has affected the legal and economic injustice for women.

Covid-19 and mandatory lockdown and the Current Situation

In India, a compulsory 21-day lockdown was placed on "24 March 2020" when the Prime Minister emerged on national TV to enforce limits on the movement of 1.3 billion people over a short-term span of four hours to decelerate the transmission of the virus.

Home is considered as a secured place in the course of lockdown. Nevertheless, not all residences are secure, and not all individuals have the privilege of a house or could sustain social distancing in a tiny space shared by several. Impoverished citizens struggle the most and are further forced to the edges. Coronavirus has revealed fragile lives and unseen forms of starvation, and preponderate amid those are, females^[5]. The administration has not provided any specific arrangements for women workers, like the establishment of shelters or the availability of food or medical treatment. Rather violent acts are being conducted in several areas by the police and the government against these workers.

In the lack of "checks and balances" in the middle of the lockdown, females are stuck in conflict at houses with violent males, and many risks grave harassment. The National Commission of Women registered a dramatic spike of about 94% in abuse against women from "23 March 2020 to 16 April 2020"^[6]. In the lockdown period, as the incidents of abuse are rising, at the same time, support programs are declining, placing women and girls at elevated danger. Women have also lost access to all support measures accessible outside the residence, like access to their parental households, which have generally established a security net.

Confined in abusive families, women are put in conditions where it is impossible to get assistance or encouragement from the "outside world". Vulnerability and incentives for violence are growing since there is no one to defend women. Locked up with their perpetrators in a condition of constrained movement and minimal confidentiality, women are continually experiencing severe hazards. Offenders are taking benefits of quarantine mechanisms and are misusing their powers. That is why the same strategy used

to shield people from the virus is having a detrimental effect on females in abusive families, as the offender is gaining more chances to inflict maltreatment.

It's not that women were not being oppressed in their households prior, yet throughout the lockdown, "the virus" is cloning and amplifying "discrimination, inequalities, oppressions, and patriarchal violence", all of which still occurs in a "male-dominated hierarchical" and stratified culture. Indeed, a systemic gender-related abuse is being reinforced amidst the lockdown, where females who are preliminarily contemplated at the bottommost level of the family system are currently being financially and socially marginalized. Statistics from the "National Family Health Survey" indicates that domestic abuse is not perceived to be a severe offense^[7]. 42% of men and 52% of women agreed that the male spouse was rightful in hitting his wife in particular cases, like when she quarrels, contravenes, unable to provide a good meal or to look after infants. Only "fewer than one percent" sought assistance from the authorities. Domestic abuse is embedded in domination and manipulation. It is already hard to obtain help from natal families or society if women experience abuse in marital households. Health treatment and psychosocial assistance are not widely accessible. Parental homes have assisted women to protect in certain situations prior, but alongside the lockdown, it is scarcely possible to obtain the corresponding. Furthermore, the lockdown leads to this "marginalization" as abuse couldn't be controlled. In the quarantine amidst the lockdown, where the offenders realize the victims have little other resources available and cannot flee quickly, they ferociously harass them. The patriarchy is brutalizing both men and women. Lockdown could neither deter men from controlling and manipulating women, nor it could prohibit men from showing their perception of privileges and rights, or from claiming their entitlement to maltreat women at houses.

Process of Filing A Domestic Violence Complaint

The process of filing a complaint of domestic violence seems to be very easy, at least on paper. One of the first steps of filing any kind of crime report is to file a First Information Report (FIR). If any woman feels that her basic human rights are being violated in the form of domestic violence, or there is a possibility of something like that happening, FIR can be filed. If a police officer says, that a particular case does not belong to their jurisdiction, one should ask for "Zero-FIR registration". Zero-FIR means the FIR can be kept at any police station (regardless of location/jurisdiction) and then sent to the appropriate police station. If one can do it in their state, they can file the FIR online. Alternatively, one can file a complaint by visiting the National Women's Council website.

Also, in each district, the Government of India has appointed a Protection officer, according to The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, which mentions that state governments must appoint protection officers in each district. These officers, ideally women, can be members of either NGOs or government officers and should have at least three years of experience in the social sector. They act as a bridge between female victims and the government, so they have the power to directly support female victims. Police officers inform women of their rights, supplement family records, or request and provide services such as legal, defence, and medical assistance^[8].

Special Recourse in Lockdown

The government has taken special recourse to tackle the cases of domestic violence in Lockdown. Although they don't seem to be much, at least it is clear that the government identified the issue of raised Gender-Based domestic violence during the Lockdown period. The government has taken special steps to tackle the situation. The government must take measures to furnish consolation to women and children. In the long term, the need is to tackle ingrained "structural discrimination" to make sure gender equality within homes. Lockdowns may be viewed in numerous forms. One is to lockdown our collective thoughts and allows the "pre-existing stereotypical gender notions" to prevail and restate, or it could be, to separate the planet from the patriarchal beliefs and to reconceptualize an abuse-free gender-just world.

With the increasing frequency and intensity of domestic violence complaints in recent years, the National Commission for Women has launched a dedicated "WhatsApp helpline +91 7217735372," which will be a unique helpline for separate domestic complaints. This is in addition to the already valid emails, links to online complaints, and helpline numbers "(women's hotline (India-wide), women's need -1091, women's hotline -181, police-100)." Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has provided psychological support to women suffering from domestic violence "through 080-4611007 in partnership with the National Mental Health Neurology Department." The Pan India emergency service 112 also works in situations like these.

While the issue of domestic violence has been posed in India, no significant actions had been implemented by the administration to resolve the concern at the "policy level". In reality, some NGOs, when appealed to the judiciary, have given orders to the states to look after the security of women and children. For eg, the "Delhi High Court", in response to a plea filed by an NGO, ordered the administration to ponder on steps to guarantee the successful enforcement of the "Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence Act, 2005", following a rise in the number of incidents. In its reaction, the State claimed that it had developed a "protocol" where the victim once calls the support line, and the telephone caller would receive the request and pass it on to the consultant who would create a telephone contact with the victim at the time of lockdown.

The "High Court of Jammu and Kashmir" took suo moto recognition and on 18 April 2020 gave several instructions, including the establishment of "special funds" and the establishment of unofficial posts for women, like at general stores and dispensaries, where women can disclose abuses without notifying the offender. The "Karnataka High Court" has informed the state administration regarding the help desks and measures over domestic abuse grievances. The State confirmed in its statement that "helplines, counselors, shelter homes, and security officers" are operating day and night to support sufferers of crime. In Tamil Nadu, security forces designated under the "Domestic Violence Act 2005" are permitted to travel in the course of lockdown and a few women in precarious circumstances have been saved and transferred to shelters. In UP, the state administration has introduced a specific help desk for sufferers of domestic violence by the name "Suppress Corona Not Your Voice". The law enforcement officers have ensured that if a woman has lodged a report, a woman official will respond to it. The

Chairperson of NCW reported that "ASHA and Anganwadi" and other proactive healthcare professionals are guiding for countering domestic abuse and that women should complain to these officials in the event of harassment.

Nevertheless, apparently and clearly, these steps are not adequate. Given India's complicated system and recognizing its limits, a multi-dimensional strategy at a national scale is needed to resolve the severe cases of domestic abuse, inclusive of refusal and neglect of their "right to health care".

Is the response adequate?

"Put women and girls at the center of efforts to recover from COVID-19", said the UN Secretary-General ^[9]. Nevertheless, contrary to the above-mentioned suggestions, The "Ministry of Women and Child Development" is inactive on the question of domestic abuse and has not issued any steps to offer curative or alternative assistance to migrant women on the streets. In India, no concrete steps have yet been released at the National level to recognize domestic abuse as an extremity or to declare that domestic abuse programs or healthcare services are necessary during the lockdown. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees equality and Article 15 ensures "positive affirmation" in respect of women and children. Also, Article 21 allows for the "right to live with dignity". Nevertheless, these commitments are not being made. In reality, no political representative has made any comment about ending abuse or offering assistance to women in need. Half the billion citizens face or are at risk, and the government does not prioritize women's needs to defend them during the COVID crisis.

Instead, the first measure that the government took to relieve the lockdown, amid growing occurrences of domestic abuse, is that it agreed to open liquor stores in all "red, orange, and green zones" after 40 days of lockdown ^[10]. Throughout this time of lockdown, a restriction was placed because of the dearth of liquor, but to gather revenue, the administration neglected the clear connection between the rise in abuse against women and alcohol consumption. Anti-arack demonstrations in several areas, earlier have addressed the question of prohibiting the selling of liquor ^[11]. But the state has decided to prioritize benefit above the reduction of abuse against women. The Supreme Court declined to stay the vending of alcohol ^[12]. This strategy, which emphasizes the economy and GDP above human quality indicators such as less abuse, gender equality, social justice, illustrates the imbalanced goals, the insensitivity, and the catastrophic growth paradigm ^[13]. The "toxic masculinity" revealed its colours when the liquor stores opened. The patriarchal establishment tended to behave in an ignorant and gender-blind way to the suffering of women.

Furthermore, in the case of vulnerable migrant woman laborers who march hundreds of miles, no particular arrangements of services have been designed to help them. In its status document, the Ministry of Home Affairs claimed that "workers' daily need is being taken care of", "they do not need to go back" and that any such migration "definitely causes a serious health hazard". The Supreme Court refuses aid to migrant laborers in an appeal for "payment of wages" amid the lockdown, arguing that "it could not run the government" ^[14] and that the Centre and the state administrations have taken measures ^[15]. The

matter concerns the prayer made in the petition concerning the payment of salaries to migrant laborers, and no note has been made of the problems faced by pregnant woman migrant workers and their children, either by the court or by the administration. Women's wellbeing is not prioritized anywhere, for example, while preparing to ride by rail, in shelters, or for the women walking on roads. In such situations where migrant workers have died while commuting, none of the state administration has proposed any program to help their families. Thus, neither low nor middle-class women emerge anywhere in the list of programs, plans, policies, or some other step taken by the government regarding the COVID issue.

Conclusion

The situation right now is not just a one that arose in the lockdown, it has been in the picture for decades, and the COVID-19 made it even worse. The government has failed to address the need of the hour. The condition is that both impoverished and middle-class women struggle in separate respects, the former are refused and stripped of their basic privileges, and the latter are shut away at home with the offenders without any social programs being rendered accessible to them. The nation requires a detailed comprehensive strategy to resolve the diverse forms of abuse experienced by women in the largest democracy.

Assistance for women, regardless of their status or other factors, through offering health support facilities throughout the crisis is a major concern that demands urgent attention. It is necessary to restore the freedom and integrity of everyone. "Economic, social and political" advancement of women is critical in the long term.

In an attempt to envision a "gender-just" abuse-free society, it is important to place a lockdown on the "collective imagination" that reaffirms gender-stereotypical oppressive ideas and places patriarchy and deprivation in quarantine and isolation permanently. By ensuring social distancing from the misogynist views and by creating a strategy to eradicate all types of discrimination, gender justice, and human rights could be accomplished and the rights granted under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution could be restored outside the limits of class, caste or creed. Lockdown might mean reinforcing current stereotypical conceptions of trapping our "collective imaginations" to the concept of women as second-class people, or it could even mean locking up patriarchal concepts to envision an abuse-free gender-equal world.

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