



Received: 28-12-2022
Accepted: 08-02-2023

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Shadow Pandemic: A Parallel Pandemic between the Pandemic with Special Reference to Indian Women

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Abstract

On the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, in his appeals, the UN chief pointed out that violence is not confined to the battlefield as during lockdown, many women and girls were usually facing violence where they should be safest: in their own homes. Violence against women is endemic in every country and culture, causing harm to millions of women, and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020. With 90 countries in lockdown, it is estimated that domestic violence cases have increased by 20% globally, creating a "Parallel Pandemic". UN Women has referred to this rise in violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdowns as the "Shadow Pandemic". Violence against women is a problem worldwide, with economic costs in terms of medical care and declines in productivity, ranging from 1% to 4% of global GDP. The shadows of this pandemic in the form of domestic violence were more fatal, which have endangered the life of women and girls. Even we can say that the collateral damage of this

epidemic was much higher than the damage caused by the epidemic itself because unlike COVID-19, violence against women cannot be stopped with a vaccine. It must also be noted that even when the risk of this pandemic has largely subsided and the lockdown measures have been almost removed across the world, the scars of the violence would be permanent for the affected women, which points out the fact that a strong supporting system is necessary to ensure a high prior security system for them. In this view, the present study is an attempt to explore this issue using various news reports and research articles about violence against women during COVID-19 with a special focus on India, the country that has been ranked the world's most dangerous country for women. This article investigates if the magnitudes and types of violence against women have changed during lockdowns or not, speculates how different factors contribute to violence against them and attempts to suggest measures to mitigate the issue even during a future crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19, Domestic Violence, Gender, India, Lockdown, Shadow Pandemic, Women

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the coronavirus infection to be a global pandemic. With this declaration, there was a mounting pressure on governments worldwide to take a combination of various preventive methods such as proper hand hygiene, use of face masks, social distancing, following SOP, quarantine measures, and complete lockdown/shutdown to reduce the community spread of the disease. The COVID-19 pandemic has been felt among the world populace as one of the most prominent threats to humankind (Maji *et al.*, 2021) ^[21], hence, these measures were very crucial. However, just like two sides of the coin, the positive efforts to tackle COVID-19 have some negative economic-socio-psychological consequences too, including the risk of losing jobs, economic vulnerabilities, psychological health issues resulting from isolation, loneliness, and uncertainties, with the rise in 'Gender Based Violence' or 'Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAW/C). This can be regarded as the quarantine paradox (Mittal and Singh, 2020) ^[22]. In the form of VAW/G, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns on women, however, have been unprecedented and worse rather than their counterparts, as the lockdown has granted greater freedom to their abusers. Several media reports indicate a surge in cases of domestic violence in various countries, whether it is developed or underdeveloped. The UN Women termed this situation as the 'Shadow Pandemic', denoting the concealed nature of such atrocities being meted out against women in closed-door situations due to lockdowns (UN Women, 2020b) ^[41]. Also, it is significant that the cases were higher during the initial phases of the pandemic and lockdowns but gradually decreased as time progressed and lockdown measures relaxed. While the nations and societies were trying to compete with the virus by using all available resources and facilities, they forgot to address the gender impact of disease outbreaks (Arya and Kumar, 2021) ^[4]. One example is enough to show the tragedy of

this Shadow pandemic. In some calls to the helpline numbers of several NGOs/agencies during the lockdown, women used to say that they have to face the anger of their husbands now and then; and when the situation becomes extreme, they were beaten badly. Rather than dealing with this torture, they would prefer to die of Corona. Really this is very tragic.

In India, the situation was no different. Our country declared COVID-19 a “notified disaster” under the ‘Disaster Management Act’, 2005, and decided to impose a lockdown in March 2020, as an effective pre-emptive strategy. On 22nd March 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide lockdown for one day. On March 24, 2020, he announced that the lockdown would be extended for 21 days, owing to the rising number of cases in the country. On April 14, this lockdown was subsequently extended by him. On May 1, 2020, a further two-week extension of the nationwide lockdown was declared, known as “Lockdown 3.0” (Ravindran and Shah, 2020a) [32]. These extended lockdowns and other social distancing measures imposed to curb the pandemic made women more vulnerable to domestic violence. They were fighting a shadow pandemic inside their homes (Krishnakumar and Verma, 2020). According to the official data of the National Commission for Women (NCW), domestic violence complaints have increased by 2.5 times since the nationwide lockdown began in India (Tomar and Mohanty, 2020) [36]. Initial data and experiences of women’s rights organizations suggest that there were many more survivors of domestic violence than those who reached out for help (Bavadam, 2021) [5]. So the actual figure would be much higher. In low and middle-income countries, the lack of awareness, societal pressure, administrative apathy, fear of legal hassles, and inadequate knowledge–attitude–practice related to help-seeking lead to underreporting and mismanagement of domestic abuse, which can perpetuate its vicious cycle during the pandemic. India, with its socio-culturally diverse population, has been one of the nations worst hit by this shadow pandemic (Nair and Banerjee, 2021) [26]. In India, the major problem is that a lot of violence isn’t even looked upon as violence as women and girls accept it and treat it as a part and parcel of their lives due to our patriarchal setup (Lal, 2020) [20].

Scope, Objectives and Method of the Study

Humanity faces a great threat due to the Covid-19 pandemic as almost every nation was extremely affected by the numerous health-related and life-threatening impacts of this virus. In this situation, while focusing on retrieving this mishap, the government and other institutions fail to confront a leading issue, gender violence. A large section of women, without sufficient financial or family support, had been locked or even trapped within the house for a long period and had been physically affronted by their abusive partners (Arya and Kumar, 2021) [4]. However, there exists a clear gap in rigorous literature exploring the issue. Especially in India, there are only a few studies on domestic violence cases and their potential impact on the physical and mental health of women during the COVID-19 pandemic. So more inquiries and inquests are necessary to spot the aggressiveness of this crisis. The present paper attempts to fill this gap using a systematic review of various studies and reports of domestic violence cases during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the main objectives of this paper are to find out the prevalence of domestic violence during

the lockdown in India, to document some of the problems survivors of domestic violence faced, to describe the measures taken by the government and interventions by women’s rights groups to tackle the issue and to put forward some recommendations for immediate and long-term advocacy which prepared us for more pandemics/disasters in the future (Bavadam, 2021) [5]. For this, the current paper reviews the literature on the rise of gender-based violence in the times of current and past pandemics and also reviews the published reports in scientific as well as mass media literatures focusing on the rise of gender-based violence and its consequences during the imposed lockdown.

Gender-Based Violence/Domestic Violence

Gender-based violence is a form of violence targeting a person based on the gender of an individual. CEDAW (Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women) has defined gender-based violence as a form of violence that disproportionately affects women (Mittal and Singh, 2020) [22]. Some common forms of gender-based violence include sexual violence and non-consensual sex, violence against women, domestic violence, trafficking in women, dowry-related deaths, and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation (Mittal and Singh, 2020; Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [22, 25]. Domestic violence is the most rigorous form among them. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2018, data also indicated that domestic violence was the principal crime against women in India, instead of rape (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) [16]. It is a complex phenomenon that includes combinations of sexual, physical, mental, verbal, emotional and economic violence and neglect or deprivation (Sharma and Khokhar, 2021) [34]. ‘Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act’ 2005, defines “domestic violence as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and financial abuse against a woman by her partner or family members residing in a joint family” (Kalokhe *et al.*, 2017; Sharma and Khokhar, 2021) [18, 34].

One of the most prevalent forms of domestic violence is ‘Intimate Partner Violence’ (IPV), globally affecting around 641 million (WHO, 2021) [47]. Normally, married women get abused by their husbands physically and emotionally, while unmarried women face violence from close relatives like their father, mother, stepfather, stepmother, brothers, etc. (Arya and Kumar, 2021) [4]. The United Nations (UN) defines IPV as “any behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner who causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling attitudes” (Nair and Banerjee, 2021) [26]. WHO reports that almost 30% of women experience some form of intimate partner violence and 1 in 3 women are subjected to general physical/sexual violence in their lifetimes (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) [16]. As per the UN Women report, 87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. The majority of these killings were committed by an intimate partner or family member of the victim (UN Women, 2020b) [41]. According to UN Women, more than 640 million women aged 15 and older have been subjected to intimate partner violence (26 percent of women aged 15 and older). Of those who have been in a relationship, almost one in four adolescent girls aged 15–19 (24 percent) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband (UN Women, 2022) [44]. Within this shadow pandemic, so many myths

also exist there, dominating the mind of these women. These myths are in stark contrast to reality. For example, they think that their partners get violent because they must be provoking somehow. Another myth is that they must have done something seriously wrong that made them lose control, but the reality is that these men are responsible for their own behaviour (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) ^[16].

A 'Shadow Pandemic' or 'Hidden Pandemic'

Even before COVID-19 existed, domestic violence against women and girls was already one of the greatest human rights violations (UN Women, 2020b) ^[41]. Emerging data, media reports, and anecdotal evidence suggest domestic violence has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, 80% of 28 countries with available data reported increased calls to helplines/hotlines in April, shortly after pandemic-related lockdowns began (UN Women, 2020c) ^[42]. In India, between March and September, various NGOs reported nearly 85% increase in harassment against women (Arya and Kumar, 2021; Nikore, 2020) ^[4, 28]. This parallel tragedy in the form of violence experienced by women during the COVID-19 pandemic leads to the term 'Shadow Pandemic'; a parallel pandemic between the pandemic, firstly referred by the UN Women. It is also referred to as the 'Double Pandemic', 'Hidden Pandemic', and 'The Other Pandemic' (Maji *et al.*, 2021) ^[21]. This phenomenon can be attributed to certain vulnerabilities of women due to factors such as income inequality within the household, physical overpowering by men, lack of time for self-care, lack of awareness about their rights, protecting children from perpetrators of violence, etc. which gets intensified during an epidemic. In the past, epidemics such as Ebola or Zika also have a positive correlation with cases of domestic violence against women (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) ^[16]. This has led to women being the worst affected across social strata and made them the victims of a double pandemic. One of the adverse effects of the pandemic on women is that the lockdown measures in most countries have isolated them with abusive partners (Chandra and Gandhi, 2020) ^[11]. During normal situations, it is hard for the victim to leave the house and during the lockdown, this problem is doubled as the victim cannot seek help from friends, family, relatives, doctors or police, which are known as the traditional forms of support (Tomar and Mohanty, 2020) ^[36]. According to the chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW) Rekha Sharma, "Because of the lockdown, women are not able to reach out to the police. They don't even want to go to the police because they are afraid that once their husband comes out of the police station, he will again torture her and she can't even move out," (Lal, 2020) ^[20].

Violence in the Global Context

As per the study conducted by WHO on behalf of the 'United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women: Estimation and Data' from 2000 to 2018, globally, an estimated 736 million women, almost one in three, have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner or both at least once in their life, a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade (UN Women, 2022; WHO, 2021) ^[44, 47]. The true figure may be significantly much higher due to the under-reporting of these types of violence. Alarming, this violence starts at an early age.

The study also revealed that 1 in 4 young women aged between 15-24 years, who have been in a relationship, will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-twenties (WHO, 2021) ^[47]. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated women's exposure to violence, as a result of measures such as lockdowns and disruptions to vital support services.

Interestingly, a big data analysis in eight Asian countries including Malaysia, Philippines, Nepal, etc. shows that Internet searches related to violence against women and help-seeking rose significantly during COVID-19 lockdowns. Reports from service-use data in different countries have also shown a significant increase in reported cases of domestic violence to helplines, women's refuges/shelters, and the police, linked to COVID-19. Calls to helplines have increased five-fold in some countries (UN Women, 2022) ^[44]. Emerging data collected by UN Women (UN Women, 2021) ^[43] through rapid gender assessments across the world on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women confirm a shadow pandemic. The major findings of this report are:

- 1 in every 2 women reported experiencing violence or knowing someone who has experienced it since the pandemic.
- 7 in 10 women have reported feeling that domestic violence has increased since the pandemic.
- 3 in 5 women reported feeling that sexual harassment in public spaces has gone up since the pandemic.
- Most women (4 in 5) reported that they would reach out for help in case they experience domestic violence. But only 11% or 1 in every 10 women thought they would go to the police.
- Violence against women during COVID-19 is linked to other negative outcomes. 58% of Women who experienced or know other women who experienced violence since COVID-19, were more likely to be food insecure.
- 2 in 5 women said that COVID-19 has worsened their overall mental and emotional health.
- Women who experienced or know women who experienced violence since COVID-19 were 1.3 times as likely to report increased mental and emotional stress as women who did not (UN Women, 2021 ^[43]; Millennium Post, 2022) ^[23].

According to a UN report, globally 81,000 women and girls were killed in 2020, and around 47,000 of them (58 percent) died at the hands of an intimate partner or a family member, which equals a woman or girl is killed every 11 minutes in their home (UNODC, 2021) ^[39].

Violence in India during Pandemic

Violence against women and girls is an existing global public health problem even before COVID-19 hit us, especially, in developing and populous countries such as India. India has been disreputable for gender-based violence, ranked as the fourth country in the world for gender inequality (Ahmed, 2016) ^[1]. The lifetime prevalence of multiple forms of domestic violence against women in India ranges from 18 to 75%, psychological abuse from 2 to 99%, physical abuse from 2 to 99%, and sexual abuse from 0 to 75% (Kalokhe *et al.*, 2017) ^[18]. According to the National Family Health Survey, 2018 (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015-16, every third woman in India suffer sexual and physical violence at home (Gandhi, 2020; Sharma and Khokhar,

2021)^[11, 34], with 85% of cases the perpetrators being their male partners (Nair and Banerjee, 2021)^[26]. Worse, 27 percent have experienced physical violence since the age of 15. Most of the time perpetrators of this violence against married women are husbands who unleash either physical (27 percent) or emotional violence (13 percent), while for unmarried women, the experience of physical violence stems from mothers or step-mothers (56 percent), fathers or step-fathers (33 percent), sisters or brothers (27 percent), and teachers (15 percent) (Lal, 2020)^[20]. As per the 'Crime in India Report' of 2018 released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), every 1.7 minutes in India, there is a crime against women, and every 4.4 minutes, a woman is subjected to domestic violence (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021)^[25]. The NCRB also released a report in early 2020, which noted that domestic violence was the top gender-related crime that women faced (Gandhi, 2020)^[11]. The COVID-19 outbreak has worsened the situation.

Soon after the lockdown was imposed, the National Commission for Women (NCW) reported a surge of complaints related to domestic violence so much so that it started a dedicated WhatsApp number for reporting of just domestic violence complaints. The statistics of NCW highlighted that the rates have doubled since the pandemic (Bhatia, 2021)^[6]. According to the official data of NCW, a total of 23,722 complaints of crimes had received against women in 2020 as compared to 19,730 in 2019, in which the number of complaints of domestic violence rose sharply from 2,960 in 2019 to 5,297 in 2020, the year of the lockdown (PTI, 2021; Bhatia, 2021)^[30, 6]. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, NCW received 13,410 complaints of crimes against women between March – September 2020, of which 4,350 were domestic violence. Complaints peaked in March–May period, with 1/3rd of complaints being filed in these 3 months alone (Nikore, 2020; Arya and Kumar, 2021)^[28, 4]. Between the same, in 2019, the commission received 607 cases, while in 2020, they registered 1,477 cases (Tomar and Mohanty, 2020)^[36]. In April and May 2020, 47.2 percent of all cases received by the NCW were of domestic violence, against only 20.6 percent of cases between January and March 2020, the initial stage of the pandemic (Bavadam, 2021)^[5].

A year after the lockdown, i.e. in 2021, the NCW continued to receive over 2,000 complaints every month of crimes against women with nearly one-fourth of them related to domestic violence. According to the NCW data, 1,463 complaints of domestic violence against women were received from January 2021 to March 25, 2021 (PTI, 2021)^[30]. While between January and May 2021, just after the second terrible wave of COVID-19, 2,383 complaints of domestic violence were filed with the NCW. Most complaints were received from U.P., while the highest complaint rate was recorded in Delhi (The Hindu, 2021)^[35]. These complaints are mostly from educated and upper-class sections, as in most cases, the victims do not have access to social media, the internet and cell phones, thereby keeping themselves out of the mainstream of society (Arya and Kumar, 2021)^[4]. According to the 2021 edition of the report by the NCRB, crimes against women increased by 15.3 percent in 2021 over 2020, totalling 428,278 registered cases. The majority of these cases i.e. 31.8 percent were registered under domestic abuse (Millennium Post, 2022)^[23]. At the end of 2021, the NCW had received total 30,864

complaints of crimes committed against women, while in 2022, the number slightly increased to 30,957, the highest since 2014, in which 6,970 complaints were related to domestic violence. There has been an increase because there is also a rise in awareness as women are getting more proactive in reporting and talking about it. Earlier they used to suppress their grievances and the government is also spreading awareness and women get motivated by other women reporting it. Because of social media, the reporting of domestic violence has also increased. Women have become more vocal and they have less tolerance (PTI, 2023)^[31].

Saravzana Ravindran and Manisha Shah in their working paper titled "Unintended Consequences of Lockdown: COVID-19 and the Shadow Pandemic" published in July 2020, quantifies the impacts of lockdown in India, especially by the zone-wise classification of lockdown. They estimated that in May 2020, the increase in domestic violence complaints in red zone districts was 131% higher than in green zone districts with the least strict restrictions (Nikore, 2020; Ravindran and Shah, 2020b)^[4, 33]. While domestic violence increased both in India and globally during the pandemic, a Delhi-based NGO 'Jagori' actually saw a 50% decline in helpline calls. This seems absurd at first glance, but many are likely hesitant to report abusers who are constantly under the same roof and who can also restrict their access to phones and online resources, a situation popularly referred to as 'locked down with the abuser' (Mohan, 2020, March 31; Vishwanathan, 2021)^[24, 45]. All these show that the lockdown, imposed to deal with COVID-19 has granted greater freedom to abusers. It has become easier for the abusers to enforce control tactics by limiting the access of the victims to escape or any other support system (Mittal and Singh, 2020)^[22]. According to the Lucknow-based feminist group 'AALI' (Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives), at first, they did not call it violence but women spoke about the stress and the tough time they were going through. Women had to become sponges that absorbed all the accumulated frustrations of everyone in the family. It was not violence all the time but an emotional overload surely (Bavadam, 2021)^[5].

Inequities as a Leading Risk Factor for Violence against Women

Globally, violence against women disproportionately affects women living in low and lower-middle-income countries and regions as compared to developed and advanced. An estimated 37 percent of women aged 15 to 49 living in countries classified by the Sustainable Development Goals as "least developed" have been subject to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life, with some of these countries having a prevalence as high as 1 in 2, i.e. 50 percent (UN Women, 2022; WHO, 2021)^[44, 47]. 22 percent of women living in these countries have been subjected to intimate partner violence during the pandemic, substantially higher than the world average of 13 percent (UN Women, 2022)^[44]. Even the risk factor is not equal for all age groups as younger women are at higher risk. The evidence from WHO data reveals that among those who have been in a relationship, the highest rates (16%) of intimate partner violence have occurred to young women aged between 15 and 24 during the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns (WHO, 2021)^[47].

Under Reporting of Cases: A Major Challenge

Globally, violence against women and girls is pervasive but at the same time widely under-reported. This under-reporting of cases has previously made response and data gathering a challenge, with less than 40 percent of women who experience violence seeking the help of any sort or reporting the crime (UN Women, 2020b) ^[41]. In the majority of countries with available data on this issue, among women who do seek help, most look to family and friends and very few look to formal institutions, such as police and health services (UN Women, 2022) ^[44]. Less than 10 percent of those women seeking help, go to the police. The circumstances during the lockdown made reporting even harder, including limitations on women's and girls' access to phones and helplines and disrupted public services like police, justice and social services. These disruptions may also be compromising the care and support that survivors need, like clinical management of rape, and mental health and psycho-social support (UN Women, 2020b) ^[41].

However, the statistics in India according to NFHS-5 data of 2019-21 state that over 70% of women who experienced physical violence did not seek help or inform anyone about it. Even among the small share (30%) of victims who sought help, only a small %age reached out to the relevant authorities, such as doctors, police, lawyers, or social service organizations (The Hindu, 2021) ^[35]. The National Commission of Woman's chairperson has briefed the media that because of the lockdown, women were not able to reach out to the police. They do not even want to go to the police because they were afraid that once their husbands would come out of the police station, they will again torture them and even the intensity of violence might increase (Lal, 2020) ^[20]. There was also a possibility that perpetrators may close all communication channels for them to reach the authority further (Brij, 2020) ^[8]. Even it is more difficult to reach for help and report cases in a country like India, as just 46% of women have access to their own mobile phones (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) ^[25] as a whole, while in rural areas, the percentage is only 37% as per NFHS-4 data. Another major difficulty in not reporting the cases, especially in rural areas, is the lack of awareness on the part of the victim about her right to live with dignity and the process of seeking suitable help. This has got exacerbated during the lockdown (Tomar and Mohanty, 2020) ^[36].

Despite there being several laws to prevent domestic violence such as the 'Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act' (PWDVA) and the penal provisions under IPC, general unawareness, victim-blaming mentality, casual attitude of police authorities, and even the unbalanced power dynamics in families has deterred the victims from reporting their cases (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) ^[25]. Even if women do want to report crimes or exit abusive relationships, they are held back from doing so due to a lack of proper support, whether it be from their families, from society or from the government (Millennium Post, 2022) ^[23]. At the same time, during lockdown most of the domestic violence cases were not reported as the entire family was at home, so even a call was not possible because of a lack of privacy as everyone in India does not have the luxury of big mansions; some of them are living in small houses and sharing them with 10-12 family members (Brij, 2020) ^[8]. Eventually, most of the resources for support about violence against women have moved to online platforms and mobile applications, but some of the vulnerable groups having no

phone or computer access, no internet facility as the internet is still a luxury for them, or no experience in online platforms limited their access (Usta *et al.*, 2021) ^[38]. India's internet penetration rate, which stands at about 50%, contributes to the problem. This is further worsened by India's poor 'digital-literacy rate (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) ^[16]. Even if they possessed a device, they were not able to safely use these at home as they might be closely monitored by the perpetrator and other family members (UN Women, 2020a) ^[40]. Many other factors have added an extra layer of misery for them as a majority of women residing in rural parts of India have no access to emails to file their complaints, do not have the money to recharge their phones, the closing of recharge shops, etc. (Brij, 2020) ^[8].

In India, the common coping strategies used by the victims of domestic violence during the lockdown period as found by Priyanka Sharma and Anita Khokhar in their study were ignoring the incident, talking to a friend or family member, and doing yoga or meditation. Only a few participants reported the domestic violence incident to the police and a women's helpline asking for help. The most common reason cited for not complaining in the present study was not feeling the need to report or feeling that no action will be taken against the perpetrator due to ignorance of authority or due to lockdown. This points toward the loss of faith in the legal system and the acceptance of violence by victims (Sharma and Khokhar, 2021) ^[34].

Impact of Violence Against Women and Girls

Any type of violence, significantly domestic violence showed an adverse impact on women, especially in developing countries like India; owing to their limited education, mobility, access to work opportunities outside the home, and ownership as well as negligible control over resources such as land and finance (Tomar and Mohanty 2020) ^[36]. Lockdown made this situation worse. It is very pathetic that while the lockdown emphasized 'stay home, stay safe', women were unsafe and confided in their households facing a variety of violence with greater intensity (ANI, 2022) ^[3]. Strict lockdown measures made them more vulnerable as they could not report or seek help. Many reports stated a peculiar problem caused by the lockdown even if the women managed to make a phone call to anyone or any help provider, it was nearly impossible to intervene by them in any manner except telephonically because no one was allowed to step out due to strict protocols of lockdown, and contact through phones was also very difficult due to not possession of phones. In severe cases, women take out of their marital homes, and either send to their parent's homes or the nearest shelter home, but due to fear of the spread of the virus, many shelter homes were not ready to admit anyone during the crisis (Brij, 2020) ^[8]. Even, if they were ready to admit, they often ask survivors for a Covid negative certificate for admission (ANI, 2022) ^[3]. It is considered as a specific impact of corona pandemic as in any other normal situation, they would not have to face this.

Violence, in all its forms, can have an impact on a woman's health and well-being throughout the rest of her life; even long after the violence may have ended. It is associated with an increased risk of injuries, depression, anxiety, unplanned pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections including HIV and many other health problems. It has impacts on society as a whole and comes with tremendous costs, impacting

national budgets and overall development (WHO, 2021) [47]. The post-lockdown impact of violence showed up in the form of long-term anxiety disorders, fear, social isolation, loneliness, work overload, lack of income, lack of space, and feelings of confinement (ANI, 2022) [3]. The victims are subjected to a portfolio of abuse, both physical and psychological/mental. The general emphasis is given to physical suffering; however, not much is anticipated or discussed about the psychological trauma that these victims go through (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [25]. Several studies stated that the frequency of being hit in the head was significantly correlated with traumatic brain injury and severe cognitive symptoms (Mittal and Singh, 2020) [22]. Pregnant women were also at higher risk of domestic violence, which increased the risk of pregnancy-related complications, such as miscarriage, pre-term labour and low birth weight in infants (Newman, 2021) [27].

If we are talking about the psychological aspects of different forms of gender-based violence, many past researches have established a strong link between them. J. C. Campbell found in his study that intimate partner violence is associated with 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD), depression, chronic pain, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. Studies also found that victims of domestic violence experience a slew of psychological symptoms that include anxiety, depression, avoidance, re-experiencing of traumatic events, and hyper-arousal (Campbell, 2002; Mittal and Singh, 2020) [9, 22]. Women are also subjected to psychological abuse like demeaning, belittlement and insults, threats of being abandoned and threats of hurting someone they care about. The psychological effects of abuse are more deep-seated and unrealized, having a life-long trauma even in the absence of abuse for a long time (Ahuja *et al.*, 2000) [2]. Studies have also shown that violence against women has some negative impacts on female labour market participation, their earnings, empowerment, child health, household consumption and social status (Ravindran and Shah, 2020a) [32]. Several women have lost their jobs and sources of earning. This has led to the loss of some level of empowerment that these women had (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [25]. For women, this economic dependency is a predominant reason and their fate as well to stay in an abusive relationship.

Economic Costs of Violence

This shadow pandemic also added significant economic costs to the whole economy. These costs, resulting from VAW/G borne by everyone, including individual victims/survivors, perpetrators, the government, and communities and society in general (UN Women, 2020b) [41]. The social and economic costs of VAW/G are substantial, with broader costs associated with delivering services to victims, as well as the costs related to the criminal justice response. Costs are both direct and indirect, and tangible and intangible. For example, the costs of the salaries of individuals working at shelters are direct tangible costs (UN Women, 2022) [44]. As per UN Women, the global cost of VAW/G (public, private and social) had previously been estimated at approximately 2 percent of global GDP, or USD 1.5 trillion (UN Women, 2020a; UN Women, 2020b; UN Women, 2022) [40, 41, 44]. While globally, on an average both out-of-pocket expenditures and lost earnings represent nearly 1.5% of the GDP. More importantly, regression results for estimating productivity loss due to violence

indicate that women experiencing violence earn 35 percent less than those not abused representing another significant drain on the national economy (UN Women, 2022) [44]. That figures would be much higher in the post-pandemic period as the violence against women has increased manifold during lockdowns.

Existing Laws Regarding Violence in India

In 1983, domestic violence was finally recognized as a criminal offense in India. However, until the enactment of the 'Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act' (PWDVA), 2005, which came into effect in 2006, there wasn't any specific civil law as such to discuss the complexities of domestic abuse, including the underlying existence of violence within family networks and the urgency for protection and maintenance of the victims of abuse (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [25]. This Act is a primary legislation that deals with instances of domestic violence in India. Section 3 of the Act defines domestic violence as not only physical violence but also emotional and economic violence. However, sociocultural influences have restricted the actual exercise of Section 3 to mere physical violence in many cases (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) [16]. In April 2013, the Indian Parliament amended the Act, expanding its ambit to incorporate new categories of offenses and making punishment more stringent. There are other laws to address gender-based violence, including the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (Lal, 2020) [20]. In addition to the statutory protection, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees also to uphold an individual's right to live with human dignity (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) [16]. However, Human Rights Watch (HRW) observed that persistent gaps in enforcing them scupper a victim's chance of seeing justice done (Lal, 2020) [20]. The mere punishment and imprisonment of the abuser does not entail the fact that justice has been served through and through. The in-Toto recovery of the victim should be the main goal (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [25].

Exacerbating Factors

There are a number of factors responsible for the increase in violence cases against women during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study (2020), Akshaya Krishnakumar and Shankey Verma, which is primarily based on the secondary data collected from the newspapers articles regarding domestic violence cases reported during the lockdown period in India, found that the most prominent reason for domestic violence was alcohol. In major cases, the primary reason for perpetrating domestic violence was the abuser experiencing withdrawal symptoms due to the non-availability of alcohol. Not only experiencing alcohol withdrawal symptoms but also consuming alcohol was found to be a cause of domestic violence (Krishnakumar and Verma, 2020). People were drinking more within the confines of their homes as restaurants, bars and pubs closed during the complete lockdown phase (Usher *et al.*, 2020) [37]. This also intensified the volume of domestic violence.

WHO, in an earlier report, found that there was a strong linkage between alcohol and intimate partner violence. The report stated that alcohol leads to a loss in physical and sensory control, thereby increasing the propensity of any individual to lose control (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) [16]. Physical force and abusive language were common by the

abusers who habitually used alcohol or ganja (A type of drug). According to NFHS-4 data, 71% of women whose husbands got drunk often encountered spousal violence; either physical or sexual. The situation has become worse during the lockdown (Bavadam, 2021) ^[5]. At the same time, many victims of domestic violence reported that when their alcoholic husbands had a job, things were balanced. After they became unemployed during the lockdown, they stayed at home the entire day, got frustrated, consumed alcohol, and created a ruckus (Gatty and Rathee, 2020) ^[14]. A very interesting fact was described by Maji and others in their article after analysing the trends of various news reports that after the opening of alcohol shops, there was an additional surge in domestic violence. Based on a newspaper report on Uttar Pradesh, the cases of domestic violence complaints on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of May 2020 were 29, 34, and 34, and the number of complaints on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of May was 92, 123, and 143. This further confirms the close connection between alcohol abuse and domestic violence (Maji *et al.*, 2021) ^[21].

Several studies link economic insecurities to increased gender-based violence and the pandemic definitely increased economic vulnerabilities in the form of a rise in unemployment or the risk of unemployment, poverty, reduced household income, or food insecurity (Bourgault *et al.*, 2021; Mittal and Singh, 2020) ^[7, 22]. Stringent lockdown rules restricted most of economic activities, causing millions to lose their source of income. By June 2020, more or less 84% of Indian households had seen a decrease in their income (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) ^[25]. The situation of poverty and deprivation due to unemployment and job loss is a determinant of both the frequency and the severity of domestic violence. World Report on Violence & Health, 2002 by WHO also, for instance, mentions poverty as the greatest risk factor for intimate partner violence (Maji *et al.*, 2021) ^[21]. Such economic distress stemmed anxiety and feelings of helplessness among the abusers and they projected their frustration onto women. Clearly, in times of monetary and financial recession, human behaviour tends to be impulsive, reckless, controlling, and aggressive, and the brunt usually goes down the patriarchal power-hierarchy, so significant for India (Nair and Banerjee, 2021) ^[26]. This joblessness also ignites their substantive abusive tendencies, and beating and taking away all the savings of women was the common practice at that time as these women were helpless and trapped at home with their abusive partners. That's why by the end of May of the same year, the numbers of domestic violence complaints were at a ten-year high (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) ^[25]. During the lockdown, women also got laid off as most of them were in informal jobs and this led to them making more financially dependent on their male counterparts. This increased economic dependence not only increases their risk of gender-based violence but also makes it difficult to leave their perpetrators. (Usta *et al.*, 2021; Mittal and Singh, 2020) ^[38, 22]. P. E. Giannandrea in his article, published in UN Women, stated that in the United States, women earning less than \$10,000 in annual income report, face a five times greater rate of domestic violence than those with income exceeding \$30,000. Most Indian women fall into the former category and this is a major cause of domestic violence which they are facing normally and during the pandemic as well (Giannandrea, 2021) ^[15].

Apart from this, as a part of the basic support system,

hospitals, police, government welfare cells, dedicated phone lines, government-run shelter homes, One Stop Crisis Centres, legal aid cells, protection officers and others, were either not functional or occupied with COVID-19 duties, further exacerbating the intensity of domestic violence during the lockdown (Bavadam, 2021) ^[5]. The prime formal source that acts as a supporter against any form of violent crime in society, is the police but when the pandemic hit the nation, there was a shortage of police force as they were at the frontline, busy enforcing the lockdown restrictions (Chandra, 2020) ^[10]. In some cases condition of women who sought help from their parents was deplorable due to the financial stress posed by the lockdown. As well, due to travel restrictions, their parents or family members were also not able to intervene physically (Krishnakumar and Verma, 2020). One thing which aggravated the violence was the protocol of social distancing which made people believe that they cannot intervene in other people's matters due to the contagious nature of the disease. That isolation made things even worse (Bavadam, 2021) ^[5].

A significant rise in psychological issues and depressive symptoms were also reported by COVID-19 patients, particularly by men in various studies, which in turn tend to lead a rise in gender-based violence too (Mittal and Singh, 2020) ^[22]. Evidences also suggest that an increase in male migration reduces gender violence due to reduced exposure to the potential perpetrators, but in the case of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown, the reverse migration put them at greater risk (Mittal and Singh, 2020) ^[22]. The study also observed that increased visibility and accessibility of the victim during the lockdown contributed to them being subjected to violence (Krishnakumar and Verma, 2020). During the lockdown, homes became unsafe for women, as most of the males were working from home and vented their all frustration and stress on their partners (Iyengar and Upadhyay, 2021) ^[17]. Some of the reasons for physical as well as verbal abuse as reported are 'not managing resources properly', 'not serving food on time', 'not caring for kids', 'not fulfilling their sexual urge', and also 'not being able to procure ration/relief material' (Bavadam, 2021) ^[5]. In addition, with the closure of public and private leisure centres and activity places, people have lost access to usual stress-relieving mechanisms, such as exercising at gyms or going for a walk outdoors. This further hindered stress release and exacerbated the frustration level of people, finally accelerating the volume of violence. Early marriages and reduced education due to the financial crunch, further increased the female's risk of experiencing domestic violence (Usta *et al.*, 2021) ^[38]. Beyond it, not getting proper care on time or delay in seeking care due to an overwhelmed and overstretched healthcare system, especially during the second wave of COVID-19 in 2021, lead to violence against women since patients and their families as well as frustrated about not being able to receive the proper care either from health professionals or the government, they needed in such a situation (Ravindran and Shah, 2020a) ^[32].

What Have Done to Combat Increase in Domestic Violence during Pandemic

By October 2021, 52 countries had integrated violence against women and girls prevention and response into COVID-19 plans and 150 countries have adopted measures to strengthen services for women survivors of violence during the global crisis (UN Women, 2022) ^[44]. Countries

like Spain, Singapore, and South Africa declared services to protect victims of gender-based violence an essential service. France started an innovative system, where women could report domestic violence at pharmacies using the code word "Mask19". New Zealand announced a NZ\$200 million budgetary allocation to fund domestic violence prevention and rehabilitation. With domestic violence shelters at peak capacity in many of these countries, several hotels have been re-tasked to provide emergency accommodation to victims (Chandra and Gandhi, 2020) ^[11]. Globally, WHO commenced the 'INSPIRE' program, which consists of seven strategies to create awareness about domestic violence and to achieve sustainable development goals like women empowerment and ending violence against children. They also launched another initiative known as 'RESPECT' which provides guidance to prevent violence and assaults against women (Arya and Kumar, 2021) ^[4].

In India, the government adopted various initiatives to protect women from being exploited and raise awareness among them to react against the violence they were facing during the lockdown. The authorities used many community organizations and mass media to convey their messages (Arya and Kumar, 2021) ^[4]. Efforts have been made to ensure that existing government schemes such as 'One Stop Centres', 'Ujjawala', 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, and 'Emergency Response Support System' remain operational. The Government classified domestic violence shelter and support services as essential. During the first and second waves of the pandemic, 700 One-Stop-Crisis centres remained open in India, supporting over 300,000 women who suffered abuse and needed shelter, legal aid and medical attention (Vishwanathan, 2021) ^[45]. Fifty-two helpline numbers have been made operational throughout India, some being national while some being state-specific (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) ^[25]. Among them, a dedicated helpline no. '181' have put in place for addressing all the complaints of women. The NCW also launched a special WhatsApp-based helpline number in April 2020, which has recorded notably 33% of violence complaints during the lockdown period (Nikore, 2020; Bhatia, 2021) ^[4, 6]. The NCW and some NGOs such as 'Jagori' have compiled information about the One Stop Centres, protection officers, and other support services on their websites (Mittal and Singh, 2020) ^[22].

During Covid-19, the Indian government made some special efforts in the form of economic packages but it was not fully utilized. In March-November 2020, the government announced three economic packages amounting of total INR 24.35 trillion (USD 328.8 billion). Of this, about INR 300 million (USD 4.05 billion) was set aside for the 'Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana' (PMJDY) account holders. The PMJDY is a financial inclusion program operated through banks. Between April and June, the government released three tranches of more than INR 10,300 million (\$1.3 billion) each to be directed to about 200 million women, who were supposed to receive INR 1500 (USD 20) in instalments of INR 500/month over three months, but 40% of the account holders could not avail these benefits, either because their accounts were dormant or they had limited access to banks during their difficult time (Patel *et al.*, 2020) ^[29]. Similarly, the Nirbhaya Fund (a corpus fund created by the Government of India to support the activities and initiatives of the government and NGOs working towards protecting the victims of violence) could utilize only INR 19

billion (63.45%) of INR 30 billion even after the pandemic, released since its inception in 2013 (Iyengar and Upadhyay, 2021) ^[17].

Besides, very remarkable efforts through various sensitization campaigns have been done by 'Breakthrough', an NGO, established to make gender-based violence a mainstream issue in 2000. The NGO's platform "StreeLink", allows women to share, exchange, and collaborate with other women to deal with a variety of problems at home, in public spaces, and at work to get practical, actionable solutions and find strength from each other and this was also active during the lockdown, especially, through its virtual platform. Although its reach was limited to a specific segment only (Lal, 2020) ^[20]. Another campaign, "Bell Bajao!" (Ring the Bell), is an anti-domestic violence campaign, launched in 2008 by 'Breakthrough' in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, UNIFEM and the UN Trust Fund, which urges local residents to take a stand against physical abuse through simple acts meant to interrupt domestic violence in India. During the lockdown, it called on men and boys to take a stand against domestic violence. Another of Breakthrough's initiatives; a community radio program in Uttar Pradesh, helped raise awareness about violence against women, how to recognize domestic violence, and ways to address the issue. Callers were encouraged to call in and share their experiences (Lal, 2020) ^[20].

Respective states also have taken their initiatives. The Uttar Pradesh police launched an initiative during lockdown titled 'Suppress corona, not your voice' asking battered women to call a helpline number to enable women police officers to reach them following a complaint (Lal, 2020) ^[20]. Through the 'Phone-Up programme', the Odisha government has taken a path-breaking step so that domestic violence victims would not have to visit the police station to complain during the lockdown. On receipt of the telephone, the police would reach the spot/home to collect complaints/FIR and take necessary action. They could also approach the police through the 'Odisha Police Citizen Portal' and 'Sahayata Mobile App' (Brij, 2020) ^[8]. In Kerala, the government opened an online 'Adalat' to resolve complaints related to domestic violence at the behest of the Conflict Resolution centre (Arya and Kumar, 2021) ^[4]. Kerala State Commission also started a tele-counselling facility for Women. Maharashtra Government's 'Akshara Centres', 'Special Cell for Women and Children' and the '#LockdownOnDomesticViolence' were some other important steps, signalling intolerance for domestic violence against women (Nikore, 2020) ^[4]. The contribution of ASHA workers in various states has been instrumental in controlling the spread of this shadow pandemic as they were able to act as the crucial intermediary by reporting cases of domestic violence to the police in their locality. Apart from this, during the lockdown, various pleas were filed to contain and cut down the rapid increase of domestic violence. In April, the All India Council of Human Rights filed a petition containing several recommendations and urging the Delhi High Court to take necessary steps in this regard. In this response, the Delhi High Court directed the Respondents (Union of India, Delhi Government, inter alia) to convene a high-level meeting that shall consider the implementation of the recommendations of the petitioner (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020) ^[16]. However, the actions being

taken by the authorities in India are insufficient to deal with the issue of gender violence during COVID-19.

Strategies under 'RESPECT' Framework

'RESPECT', a new framework guiding policymakers on programmes and policies that can prevent violence against women, was launched in May 2019 by the World Health Organization, UN Women, and eleven other UN bilateral and multilateral agencies. It is based on the UN framework for action to prevent violence against women from 2015 and updated new evidence (WHO, 2019) [46]. This action-oriented framework aims to guide interventions and programmes to prevent violence against women and also provides blueprints to decision-makers for building political commitments, strengthening laws and policies to address violence and promote gender equality, and allocating resources to programmes (Fletcher, 2019) [12]. The framework provides a technical package of seven evidence-based strategies and approaches that are summarized by the acronym R.E.S.P.E.C.T., with each letter representing one element of the strategy, as follows:

1. **Relationship Skills Strengthened:** refers to interventions aimed at individuals or groups of women, men or couples for improving skills in interpersonal communication and conflict management.
2. **Empowerment of Women:** refers to both economic and social empowerment interventions.
3. **Services Ensured:** refers to a range of services, including police, legal, health, and social services.
4. **Poverty Reduced:** refers to interventions, ranging from cash transfers to labour force interventions.
5. **Environments Made Safe:** refers to interventions aimed at creating safe schools, public spaces and work environments.
6. **Child and Adolescent Abuse Prevented:** refers to interventions aimed at establishing nurturing family relationships, prohibiting corporal punishment and implementing parenting programmes.
7. **Transformed Attitudes, Beliefs and Norms:** refers to interventions that challenge harmful gender attitudes, beliefs, norms and stereotypes that justify violence against women and stigmatize survivors. These may range from public campaigns and group education to community mobilization efforts.

What should be done: A Future Framework?

The impact of domestic violence, which the women have faced during the lockdown, whether it is physical or mental, is long-lasting for them, even after many years of the pandemic. We can only fight it with deep-rooted and combined efforts by governments, communities and individuals. Hence, there is a need for a holistic response model to effectively deal with this issue during any other possible future pandemics, which may include:

- The first step to tackle the issue of rising domestic violence during the times of pandemic is the acknowledgment of the issue, which has been largely ignored during this pandemic (Mittal and Singh, 2020) [22]. For women, they must know it is called domestic violence and it is not something normal that happens usually in an unhappy marriage (Bhatia, 2021) [6]. In this regard, governments and policymakers must create awareness about an increased risk of violence during pandemics, highlight the need for people to keep in

touch with each other, especially, with family, relatives, neighbours and friends; and most importantly about the importance of reporting incidents of abuse to reduce the number of such cases (Usher *et al.*, 2020; Mittal and Singh, 2020) [37, 22].

- Community awareness is also necessary so that friends or relatives may come forward and report such incidents. Government and various agencies should be needed to publish specific guidance on domestic abuse focusing on what friends and family can do to support victims in the time of any crisis (Usher *et al.*, 2020) [37].
- It is found that attitudes toward domestic violence play an important role in the incidence and reporting of domestic violence during the lockdown, which suggests that additional interventions are needed to reverse the trends in violence against women (Ravindran and Shah, 2020b) [33].
- To ensure gender-equitable behaviour from the side of boys and men, a school-based intervention in the form of gender-based education and curriculum and gender-sensitizing campaigns must be formulated that create gender equality and gender sensitive attitude among students.
- In India, though many helpline numbers have been made operational during the pandemic, women were not so much aware of them. So, steps must be taken to make wide publicity of all these helpline numbers through radio, television, social media, newspapers, Internet, SMSs, Tele-Calls, and other media sources, so that they become aware of any further crisis (Brij, 2020; Sharma and Khokhar, 2021) [8, 34].
- For simplicity, there should be a common emergency helpline number for the entire country with trained women personnel, and effective recording and monitoring systems, which should remain functional and available 24/7 during any crisis.
- Creating and publicising a directory of services that can be accessed by survivors and their relatives or friends with information and mobile numbers during any crisis is also suggested (Bavadam, 2021) [5].
- There should be the inclusion of domestic violence-related support systems including police, counsellors, protection officers, crisis centres, helplines, shelters and safe accommodation, justice and social services for women and girls in 'essential services' to ensure their smooth continuance during further pandemics and lockdowns.
- It is advisable for the police to build the capacity of personnel for ensuring the safety of women in judicial and police custody and keep some personnel available for future emergencies.
- There should be a provision to allow women facing violence to leave their houses to escape abuse, without being subject to any type of sanctions and limitations for breaching any lockdown restrictions, as not everyone has a safe space in their homes.
- Proper arrangements of women's hostels and shelters in adequate numbers along with basic amenities, proper staff and infrastructure are also required to provide women a safe space (Gandhi, 2020) [11].
- Along with this, strengthening the capacity of functionaries of One-Stop Centres with Standard Operations Procedure (SOP) for guidance must be needed.

- The majority of the victims chose to ignore and only a few complained to the police or a women's helpline, one of the reasons cited for not complaining was a lack of assurance of action from legal agencies (Sharma and Khokhar, 2021) [34]. For this, Police and justice services must ensure that incidents of VAWG are given high priority with a strong message that impunity will not be tolerated so that victims would feel free to seek legal help (UN Women, 2020a; UN Women, 2020b) [40, 41].
- Not only the government and law enforcement agencies but also the NGOs and the general public must come together to create conditions in which reaching out for help is made easy (Maji *et al.*, 2021) [21].
- In this consonance, the ASHA workers can help the victims by responding quickly as they form a major part of the healthcare network at the village level in India. When some women who reported through them, get successful in seeking support and justice, more women will come forward over time to report such cases (Tomar and Mohanty, 2020) [36].
- It should be advised to follow up telephonically or in person, the domestic abuse victims, who had reported such incidents in past during normal times to check if they are facing violence during the lockdown (Sharma and Khokhar, 2021; Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [34, 25].
- With the increase in telehealth and telemedicine during lockdown restrictions and social distancing, healthcare workers are advised to be trained to monitor the possibility of domestic violence and play an important role in identifying, providing support and guidance to survivors. They are advised to learn and use special signs or symbolic language/code words to indicate abuse or domestic violence as it might be difficult for the victims to report such incidents in presence of the perpetrator (Sharma and Khokhar, 2021 [34]; Usta *et al.*, 2021) [38].
- There is a need for several interventions at the individual and community level like awareness programs about violence, to mitigate the issue and advocate for nonviolent ways to cope with stress and anger during any abnormal situation that must help in decreasing violent reactions during a crisis.
- Psychosocial support for women and girls affected by violence must be prioritized to reduce their grievances (UN Women, 2020b) [41].
- Further, free and immediate counselling should also be provided to victims over calls if they needed such.
- It would be suggested that macro-level changes such as empowering women through economic and livelihood support, e.g., cash transfers, tax relief, unemployment insurance, vouchers for provisions or assets, etc. and creating a broad support network for them can help to reduce financial strain and poverty (Newman, 2021) [27].
- Along with this, increasing digital literacy for making use of different virtual platforms and securing equal access to technology as well as possession of their personal digital devices should also be advocated (Usta *et al.*, 2021) [38].
- It is also suggested that the best way to tackle the shadow pandemic is to collaborate with all the stakeholders whether it is global, national, or local as well as governmental or non-governmental organisations. To this end, an Interprofessional

collaboration must take place in which not only the police officials and legal and law enforcement officers but also the health care workers, social services, local community leaders and neighbours can play their roles and responsibilities to fight against domestic violence (Gurpur and Banyal, 2020; Newman, 2021) [16, 27].

- The role and responsibilities of the private/corporate sector towards this issue must be ensured in the form of 'Corporate Social Responsibility'.

Conclusion

The corona outbreak is new and scientists across the world are struggling to find out a solution to root out it, but the patriarchal virus is ancient, especially in our country and there is still no remedy for it. To build a better world, a better nation, and a better society, addressing patriarchy, orthodox approaches and all other types of injustice and prejudice is necessary (Mohanty and Mohanty, 2021) [25]. Along with this, in a country where every third woman faces some form of domestic violence, and every second woman believes it is justified for a husband to hit them, there is a need for a long-term national strategy to combat violence against women (Nikore, 2020) [4]. It is a known fact from history that violence has always increased against women during various kinds of epidemics and pandemics, but our system has never tried to learn from past pandemics and epidemics about violence against women (Brij, 2020) [8]. This Corona pandemic has shown us that there is still a lot of work that must be done. Even this pandemic may be seen as a window to rethink our future and take long-lasting steps. Especially, when we are moving towards a 'new normal' after the pandemic, we need to heed the lessons we have been taught in this period as this was not the last, there will be many such pandemics and crises in the future and women will need different forms of support which we will have to build today to prepare for tomorrow (Bavadam, 2021) [5]. The goals of sustainable development cannot be attained by 2030, unless we all work together, whether it is government, private sector or individuals to irradiate violence against women and children. In this direction, an effective, more inclusive and gender-sensitive policy by the government and policymakers is required to deal with the shadow pandemic, 'The Silent Disaster'.

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