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The Big Picture: Impact of lockdown on Women and Children

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The COVID-19 crisis has a potentially far-reaching, long-term negative impact on women and children around the world. The impact is likely to be devastating especially for children, even though they appear to have less severe symptoms and lower mortality rates than other age groups. More than 1.5 billion students are out of school. Widespread job and income loss and economic insecurity among families are likely to increase the stress on this vulnerable population. Stresses on families, particularly those living under quarantines and lockdowns, are increasing the incidence of domestic violence.

Impact of Lockdown on Women and Children

Fueled by mandatory stay-at-home rules, social distancing, economic uncertainties, and anxieties caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Domestic Violence has increased globally. The pandemic and the lockdown are trying times for every individual but for the already vulnerable group, the women and young children specifically girl children, are facing the worst of it all.

- **Impact on women:** There has been a **rise in instances of violence**, sexual, physical and mental against women.
 - The National Commission for Women (NCW) has recorded a more than **twofold rise in gender-based violence**.
- **Data Analysis:**
 - **Total complaints-** Rose from 116 in the first week of March to 257 in the final week of March.
 - **Rape or attempt to rape-** Rose sharply from 2 to 13.
 - **Domestic violence-** Increased from 30 to 69 over the same comparative period.
 - **Police apathy towards women-** Almost threefold increase as the police are busy enforcing the lockdown to curb the spread of **COVID-19**.
 - **Cases under Right to live with dignity (Article 21)-** Rose to 77 from 35. Such cases could pertain to discrimination on the basis of gender, class, or caste or all three of them combined.
 - These cases might be a fragment of the actual number as many women will not be able to reach out due to various reasons.
- **Impact on Children:** Young Children are facing the brunt of discord between parents, the discord has nothing to do with the economic class, education, etc, happens across the spectrum.
 - Coronavirus can scare children now, which could create emotional problems for months or even years to come.
 - Even if the lockdown gets over the schools and colleges will continue to remain shut for the next 2-3 months that's why it is going to be very difficult to manage children and their energies.
- **Impact on students:** Separation from playgroups and friends and their daily routine of playing is creating a lot of anxiety for children, they are losing their attachments
 - Children's social life and learning have been affected and most of them are finding it difficult to stay away.
 - A lot of students from marginalised sections are finding it very difficult to cope with studies with no access to the internet. The problem of fees, examinations, and internet connectivity to attend the class.

Possible Reasons

When the economy takes a hit, its always the most vulnerable, the women and children are pushed back. The massive unemployment that will follow in the wake of the pandemic will target women much more than men, severely affecting their condition in society.

- **Anxiety and Insecurity:** Most of the individuals are facing the problem of anxiety and insecurity over their future prospects.
Lack of peer circles, unwinding spaces and patriarchal mindset are the major reasons that make women the victim of men's frustration.
- **Privacy:** Women are not able to reach out because of restrictions on movement as well as a lack of privacy within homes.
NCW had set-up Crimes Against Women Cell in Police stations in collaboration with Delhi Police under the project "**VIOLENCE FREE HOME- A WOMEN'S RIGHT**". But due to the lack of movement women are not being able to access this service.
- **Lack of counselors:** Most women, suffering domestic violence, are increasingly finding themselves isolated and without necessary support such as counseling.
Women's-rights NGOs are facing their own sets of challenges due to the lockdown. Unable to move beyond telephonic or web counselling, the organisations are struggling to be of further assistance to victims of abuse or at-risk women.
- Sexual exploitation takes place when individuals are at their most vulnerable, and the lockdown has put many women in such a condition. Human rights of both children and women are being grossly violated amidst this lockdown.

VIOLENCE FREE HOME- A WOMEN'S RIGHT

- A joint programme of the **National Commission for Women (NCW), Delhi Police and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, (TISS) Mumbai.**
- The NCW is implementing the project with Delhi Police and TISS and is committed to work on the issue of violence against women.

The scope of this programme is:

- Rebuilding violated women's self-esteem, self-worth, and dignity.
- Offering the violated woman immediate services, based on her needs, such as **carrying out counselling, arranging for shelter or medical aid, providing information on laws and her rights, harnessing police support**
- Creating awareness in the community on the issue of violence against women

About the services:

- Trained social workers/ counsellors in the Crime against Women Cell (CAW Cell) help women and children facing violence by providing them with emotional support, assisting them in negotiations to stop violence, linkages to livelihood opportunities and providing them with legal knowledge.
- The processes are aimed towards achieving a violence-free life for the woman.

Way Forward

United Nations has called for urgent action, and for governments to “put women’s safety first as they respond to the pandemic.”

- **Prioritise Mental Health:** Employers should start paying attention to not just the economic health of the employees but also their mental health and give some leverage to the employees, specifically the women employees who are more burdened with domestic work as the maids are on leave.

The Health ministries of both the center and state governments should also look into the issue of the psychological health of the population in these trying times and formulate policies to ensure access to online counselling.

- **Role of Media:** Media has a big role to play here in starting a conversation about mental health which is a taboo subject to date in India.
- Train more people to look into the issue of dealing with anxiety and stress. Identify training institutes to train volunteers who can assist women and children in distress under lockdown.

We should all come out of this the way one is rehabilitated after the war and be educated about the stress and post-traumatic stress disorders, as the effects of this pandemic will last on people’s mind specifically of children for a long time to come even after the lockdown is over.