



## Domestic Violence During Lockdown

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This article is based on “**Addressing domestic violence: A forgotten agenda while locking India down**” which was published in Observer Research Foundation on 08/04/2020. It talks about the issue of increased cases of domestic violence faced by women and lack of machinery to support them during the lockdown.

Recently, the **UN Secretary-General** appealed to governments to pay attention to and prevent a “horrifying global surge in domestic violence” over the last few weeks amid lockdown measures imposed by several countries to tackle the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

Fueled by mandatory **stay-at-home rules, social distancing, economic uncertainties and anxieties** caused by the coronavirus pandemic, **Domestic Violence** has increased globally.

In India, **the National Commission for Women (NCW)** has also flagged the issue of a spike in cases of domestic violence since the enforcement of the national lockdown.

### Domestic Violence

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- The term ‘**domestic violence**’ (**DV**) is used in many countries to refer to intimate partner violence (IPV), but it also encompasses child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household.
- According to the **World Health Organisation**, **one in every three women across the globe experience physical and/or sexual violence** by an intimate partner or sexual violence by any perpetrators in their lifetime.
- Domestic Violence may include acts of:
  - **Physical violence**, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.
  - **Sexual violence**, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion;
  - **Emotional (psychological) abuse**, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.
  - **Controlling behaviors**, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

- The **National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) (NFHS-4)** suggests that 30% women in India in the age group of 15-49 have experienced physical violence.
  - The report suggested that among married women experiencing physical, sexual or emotional violence, an alarming 83% claimed that their husbands were the main perpetrators of such forms of abuse, followed by abuse from the mothers, fathers and siblings of the husbands.
  - The major crimes reported by women in India are — cruelty by husband or relatives, assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty —, kidnapping and abductions and rape.
- In 2018, a **United Nations study** suggested globally, of all female murders, an overwhelming 82% happen in their marital homes, and are committed by an intimate partner or a family member.

## Causes of Domestic Violence

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- **Patriarchy:** Some people with very traditional beliefs may think they have the right to control their partner, and that women aren't equal to men.
  - According to NFHS data 42% of the surveyed men think there is at least one valid reason for wife-beating.
- **Societal influence:** Some abusers learn violent behavior from their family, people in their community and other cultural influences as they grow up.
  - Boys who learn that women are not to be valued or respected and who see violence directed against women are more likely to abuse women when they grow up.
  - Girls who witness domestic violence in their families of origin are more likely to be victimized by their own husbands.
- **Economic causes:** Unemployment, alcohol and drugs may also contribute to violent behavior.
- **Socio-Cultural:** Dowry related deaths and honour killings is also a reality that testifies domestic violence.
- **Individual Factor:** Some abusers may feel this need to control their partner because of low self-esteem, extreme jealousy, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or when they feel inferior to the other partner in education and socioeconomic background.

## Impact of Lockdown on Domestic Violence in India.

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- **Under Reporting of the Cases:** The National Commission of Women has recorded 291 complaints of domestic violence in March 2020 and is now only receiving complaints via email. However, actual reported cases may be quite low.
  - With curtailed mobility and a police force being engaged in ensuring that lockdown properly followed, women are losing even the avenues that could have saved them from abuse, and in extreme cases, death.
  - Further, due to the prevalence of orthodox social norms and the stigma that is placed on survivors of domestic violence, such cases are being **grossly under-reported**.
  - Women belonging to poor and vulnerable classes are not able to file any complaints.

- **Defunct NGOs:** The counselling centres are supposed to reach out to the complaint pertaining to domestic violence. However, amid lockdown the **NGOs and volunteer organisations**, that are usually the avenues for women to report such attacks are not working.
- **Undermining of Gender Equality:** The **Sustainable Development Goal** (SDG)- 5 that seeks to “eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women in the public and private spheres, and to undertake reforms to give them the same rights to economic resources and access to property by 2030,” is being enormously compromised.
- An added challenge has been the importance of intertwined negative **psychosocial impact on mental health of women.**

This further increases with job losses and other economic pressures on women.

## Way Forward

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As the steps to contain the transmission of the virus might require more stretches of isolation and confinement for the public, the government all around the globe, need to address the upsurge in domestic violence immediately. In this context:

- It is critical that governments utilise a human rights and intersectional based approach to ensure that everyone, including the most marginalised, has access to necessary information, support systems and resources during the current crisis.
- The state governments need to declare **helplines as “essential services”** that should remain open during lockdowns.
- **Media can sensitize the public** against gender-based violence, publicise resources and services available and encourage the equitable sharing of domestic tasks at home.
- **Increase resourcing for NGOs** that respond to domestic violence and aid – including shelter, counselling, and legal aid – to survivors, and promote those that remain open.
- Ensure women’s timely access to necessary and **comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services** during the crisis, such as maternal health services, safe abortion etc.
- Finally, the perpetrators of domestic violence must be brought to trial and repeated offenders must be dealt with strictly as per the provisions of law.

# Violence against women



“Violence against women is a form of discrimination, directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”. This violence seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy their human rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

CEDAW Committee General Recommendation (No.19 para.6.)



## Did you know?

Violence against women can be physical, sexual, psychological or economic, and can occur in the family, the community, and/or be perpetuated by the state.



About 1 in 3\* Caribbean women are victims of intimate partner violence



Abusers are usually men and the victims are usually women and girls



Women are more likely to be harassed, assaulted and killed



Violence against women can happen regardless of socio-economic status, religion or ethnicity.

## Major Challenges



Victims of gender-based violence often face obstacles to claim their rights and seek redress

Empowering Women



Systematic data collection and analysis on violence, that is broken down by age, sex and type of offence, remains insufficient in the Caribbean region.

Improving Data



Limited institutional, human and financial capacity and coordination among national mechanisms lead to inadequate responses to victims in need of protection.

Reinforcing national capacity

## Recommendations



Ratify and implement international and regional human rights standards in order to ensure that all women and girls in the Caribbean are able to exercise and enjoy the full spectrum of human rights



Strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, including Government, Civil Society, Private Sector and the United Nations in the field of sexual and reproductive health



Conduct systematic and regular data collection and analysis, disaggregated by gender, age, location, disability, ethnicity, types of offences against women and girls, in compliance with international standards on data protection and the right to privacy.



Develop public-information campaigns and raise awareness with education and training programmes for national and local authorities, the police, judiciary, social services, the mass media, civil society organisations and women and girls themselves

***Drishti Mains Question***

Women are the most vulnerable sections of society, especially in times of any crisis.  
Comment.