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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Domestic abuse is one among many other social challenges posed by the conditions created by the pandemic. Discuss (250 words)

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Approach:

- Define the term violence against women with an emphasis on domestic abuse.
- Establish the link between the recent surge in domestic violence cases and COVID-19.
- Briefly explain the causes behind domestic violence and challenges associated.
- Discuss various steps need to be taken.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Recently, the UN Secretary-General appealed to governments to pay attention to and prevent a global surge in domestic violence amid lockdown measures imposed by several countries to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

The term **domestic violence** is used in many countries to refer to intimate partner violence, but it also encompasses child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household. It includes **acts of** physical violence, sexual violence, emotional (psychological) abuse and controlling behaviours.

Body

COVID-19 and Domestic Violence:

- In India, the **National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) (NFHS-4)** suggests that 30% of women in India in the age group of 15-49 have experienced physical violence.
- Further, various data suggest that the domestic violence cases in India have also increased after the mandatory stay-at-home rules, social distancing, economic uncertainties and anxieties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Causes of Domestic Violence:

- **Gender Disparity:** It is one of the deep-rooted cause of violence against women that put women at risk of several forms of violence. Discriminatory gender norms and gender stereotypes result in structural inequality.
- **Psychiatric Morbidity:** Generally refers to the incidence of both physical and psychological deterioration as a result of a mental or psychological condition, generally caused due to the consumption of alcohol.
- **Sociodemographic factors:** Patriarchy has been cited as the main cause of violence against women.

- **Family factors:** Exposure to harsh physical discipline during childhood and witnessing the father beating the mother during childhood is a predictor of victimization and perpetration of violence against wife in adulthood.

Other challenges:

- The violence **negatively impacts** on the mental health of women. This further increases with job losses and other economic pressures on women.
- Any form of violence against women hinders their realization of **fundamental rights** under article 14, 21, and 19 of the Indian constitution.
- It also impacts on child well being, female and **child mortality, intergenerational social and psychological cost.**
- Further, the **SDG- 5** which seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women by 2030 is compromised.

Steps Need to be Taken:

- **Availability of essential services:** It is critical that governments utilise a human rights and intersectional based approach to ensure 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.
- **Sensitization efforts:** Media can sensitize the public against gender-based violence, publicise resources and services available and encourage the equitable sharing of domestic tasks at home.
- **Role of civil society:** Increase resourcing for NGOs that respond to domestic violence and provide aid like shelter, counselling, and legal aid to survivors.
- **Providing health services:** 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.
- **Ensuring rule of law:** The perpetrators of domestic violence must be brought to trial and repeated offenders must be dealt with strictly as per the provisions of law.

Conclusion

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.