



INCREASE IN THE CASES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19: A PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCE MECHANISM AGAINST STRESS.

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ABSTRACT

With the widespread of the pandemic COVID-19, commonly known as Corona virus the normal lifestyle of people across the globe has been disturbed and jumbled up. Humans who are social beings are asked to maintain social distance from one another as no cure has been found yet and this is the only preventive step. Many countries have been put on lockdown, where people are asked to stay at home with minimal movement in the city only in cases of necessity and emergency. For certain section of people it is possible to work from home and manage normal routine but the major distress has been seen in the life of daily wage workers and labourers. In this distressing situation of social and economic crisis there has also been increase in the number of cases reported for domestic violence and abuse. The study aims to understand the nature of distress leading to domestic violence, is it a way of coping: a displacement of stress. Secondary data was collected by analysing the reports by 'National Commission for Women' (NCW); 'Ministry of Women and Child Development'; 'United Nations' and 'World Health Organisation', a survey was also collected (N=105) to know the general perspective of people. The study also aims to explore the ways in which this situation can be controlled.

KEYWORDS : COVID-19, Domestic violence, Distress, Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence refers to the victimization of a person by the abuser physically by engaging in violent acts and assaults, psychologically by threatening to harm and humiliation and by forcing the victim to engage in non-consensual sexual acts (unprotected). Domestic violence does not imply that the victims are only women, but men, children and elderly who are being assaulted. It implies to facilitate women issues because the cases reported by women are much higher in comparison to others. The fact is also supported and seen during the pandemic called COVID-19, it is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered Corona virus. These are group of RNA viruses that cause respiratory tract infection in humans that can range from mild to lethal. Since no such antiviral drugs have been found yet to cure this deadly infectious disease, government of various countries across the world have asked people to engage in social distancing, to avoid going to places such as parks, restaurants, workplace, even schools and universities have been locked down to prevent human contact. Although it might seem a simple task to perform but its implications have been hard to believe, since people are working from home there has been disturbance in the ease to communicate and share information. Agricultural produces have been affected as the markets were closed. The measures necessary to contain the virus have led to economic, social and health crisis.

Stress build up during COVID-19

Corona virus has created havoc amongst people. As things are changing leading to alterations in peoples normal routine and as government has ordered complete lockdown people have started showing the signs of stress. A study was conducted in United States to know the general stress experienced by the parents and it showed that in 2020 the level of stress was measured to be 5.9, and stress in general level was reported to be 5.4 and prior in 2019 the level of stress reported was 4.9. Stress amongst parents is majorly reported due to basic needs, access to health care services and missing out on major milestones. Youth and students are uncertain about their future, as due to economic crisis people are losing their jobs and if not this then there has been pay cuts with increased working hours. Students are turning to online education but it is not an option for everyone. Not everyone can avail the facility of the internet, certain universities have given free access to their library or courses but to get a certificate you will need to pay the amount which is not affordable for everyone, although the knowledge may increase by going through that course but there will be no concrete evidence to claim that knowledge.

Daily wage workers are the ones who are facing the real challenge of pandemic which is highlighting the issues of poverty and also the failure of government to help them. During last few months it was seen that a huge number of daily wage workers migrating back to their home town as they are left with no money and food, and it is difficult for them to survive. As government could not do enough to provide them with the travelling facility they decided to walk from one state to another without food, water and even proper shoes. It seems impossible to

understand their plight, helplessness and disheartening situation. Agricultural industry have faced problem as the farmer had severe challenges in selling their produces. Due to lockdown the markets were closed small scale industries were not able to produce raw materials leading to disturbance in the whole chain ahead. People have lost their jobs due to recession. In this period of uncertainty regarding an optimistic future there has been rise in another issue: the cases reported for Domestic violence have been increasingly reported during lockdown.

Domestic Violence: a Displacement of stress.

Displacement is a psychological defence mechanism in which a person redirects negative emotion from its original source to a less threatening recipient that is less likely to come with repercussions. According to psychoanalytic theory psychological defence mechanisms work at unconscious level leading to pleasant or unpleasant consequence. Domestic Violence has its early roots in India. During the pandemic it could be understood as a form psychological defence mechanism i.e. Displacement. Due to lockdown business had slowed down which eventually affected country's economy, as a result people lost their jobs. People were asked to stay in their homes, they could not go out with their friends or any other place to ease out the built up tension. As a consequence people displaced their anger and frustration towards a less threatening source, it also gave chance to the perpetrators who had been abusing their family members in past, now they had their victims in front of them 24*7.

Women are not the only victims, the impact of domestic violence on children results in negative consequences. Personality theorists claim that most of personality is build by the age of five. A child who has only seen violence in the house for her/him to displace the anger on the people living in the house is the only way an argument and conflicts can be solved. For the child this is the correct and the only way in which things can be handled, now this behaviour has been established in the core of the personality and will be difficult to change later on. Children with such hostile childhood environment are at the risk of engaging in unhealthy methods of coping (alcohol and drug abuse).

Since the lockdown was implemented there has been an increase in the cases reported for domestic violence as claimed by the NCW (National Commission for Women). According to the report generated by the organisation, they received 587 complaints from March 23rd 2020 to April 16th 2020 out of which 239 are related to Domestic Violence. The chairperson of NCW Rekha Sharma addressed that "the high numbers can be attributed to the lockdown imposed due to the Corona virus outbreak which has locked the abuser and the victim together". Other women activist claims that "captivity drives people crazy and abusive situation only makes it worse" (Deccan Herald).

Survey has shown various states such as Uttarakhand where 144 of 727 cases of domestic violence was reported during pandemic caused lockdown. According to NCW since March 24th maximum number of complaints, have been received from Uttar Pradesh followed by the capital Delhi.

These women activist claim that if there had been a prior notice of the lockdown, the victims might have taken some precautionary measures such as going back to their maternal home or to a NGO where they could have felt safer. These claims, arguments and data which shows hike in the cases since COVID-19, facilitate the fact that stress, anxiety, fear and uncertainty in the life of people during the pandemic have lead to Domestic Violence which can be seen as a displacement of stress.

METHOD

The study aimed to explore the reasons behind the hike in the complaints reported for Domestic Violence. The analysis has been based on the secondary data generated by the reports of National Commission for Women; Deccan Herald (Corona Virus: No Lockdown for Domestic Violence); Ministry of Women and Child Development (Press Information Bureau: Increase in Domestic Violence against Women; and United Nations; and World Health Organisation.

A survey was conducted through Google form on 105 participants to know their general perspective and what according to them are the solution and the steps to eradicate Domestic Violence. It consisted of seven questions (close and open ended) which are as follows:

- I. Do you feel that the current situation during the lockdown is the reason behind the increase in the cases reported for Domestic Violence?
- II. Do you think that Domestic Violence and abuses occurs because the abuser believes that women are weaker, subordinate and they do not have the power to revert back?
- III. Does marriage gives the person power and autonomy over the other person?
- IV. Why do you think that there has been an increase in the cases being reported during the lockdown?
- V. Do you agree that displacement is the reason why women and children become the victims of Domestic Violence? (Displacement is a psychological defence mechanism in which a person redirects a negative emotion from its original source to a less threatening recipient that is less likely to come with repercussions.)
- VI. Do you feel that displacing your stress and anger on a person or object, ease the frustration experienced for the moment?
- VII. What can be done to empower or educate the victims who believe that their entire life is dependent on the abuser who is providing for their needs and that they are helpless because they have nowhere else to go?

The participants were selected through convenience sampling, the forms were send to those who were available and known and further snowball sampling was used as participants were asked to forward the survey to other people who were willing to participate in the study. The intent of the study was explained to the participants and consent was taken before proceeding towards the survey. The response were then qualitatively analysed along with the secondary data.

RESULT

The National commission for Women (NCW) presented a report that shows the hike in the cases registered during the period of lockdown due to COVID-19. Major states such as Bihar (total number of case registered was 254); Delhi (784); Haryana (229); Karnataka (137); Madhya Pradesh (149); Maharashtra (458); Rajasthan (173); Uttar Pradesh (968); and West Bengal (182), showed immense rise in the complaints registered. Figure 1 shows the month-wise and state-wise cases reported in the major cities from March 2020 till 20th September 2020. The complained were registered by NCW under the category – “Protection of women against domestic violence”.

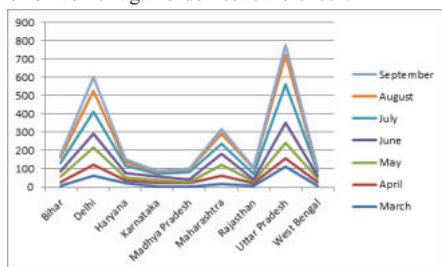


Figure 1- The state-wise and month-wise complaints registered by NCW under “Protection of Women against domestic violence”.

NCW also registered complaints under “Crime against women and deprivation of their rights”. Figure 2 shows month-wise and state-wise case registered from March 2020 till 20th September 2020.

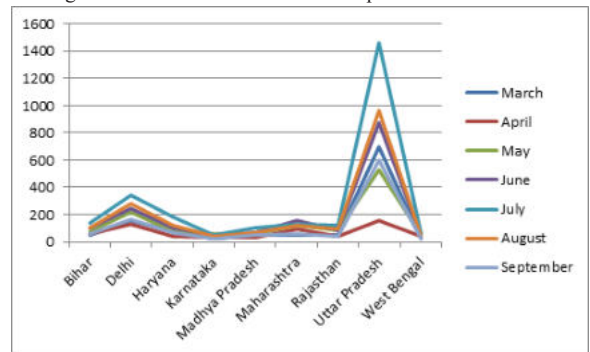


Figure 2- The state-wise and month-wise complaints registered by NCW relating to crime against women and deprivation of their rights”.

The survey was conducted to know the perspective of the public and to get a better understanding of the connection between the stress during COVID-19 and Domestic Violence. Few questions were asked and people had to state the reasons, and whether or not they agreed to the statement. The sample size for the survey was 105 of which 68.6% were female, 30.5% were male and 1% preferred not to say.

When asked whether or not the current situation is responsible for the increase in the number of complaints for Domestic violence, around 79% of the sample population agreed to this. As the cases reported where majorly by women victims so when asked that “do you think that domestic violence and abuse occurs because the abuser believes that women are weaker, subordinate and they do not have the power to revert back.” 82.9% of the sample agreed and 17.1% disagreed. As majority of the population believed that the hike in the reported complaints is due the lockdown, they are asked to state the reason why do they believe so and the most common response was frustration as there is nowhere else to go and went out the anger and irritation plus the fact that women are seen as a weaker population (physically and financially) by the abuser, as well as they are present in front of them 24*7 which makes vulnerable to abuse and violence. Many agreed to the fact that the uncertainty and work pressure in the corporate world as economy is affected severely which in turn is leading to recession. Not only the corporate world but small scale industries and agricultural industry have faced severe loss as many framers took loans so that they can generate good produce and can repay the loan through the profits but here, as the markets were closed in the initial phase of the lockdown the framers were unable to sell their products or the industries did not receive the raw material on time thus resulting in great loss and increasing tension, anxiety and frustration. Some also believed that one tends to become destructive when she/he has nothing to do (it's not the case always but the epidemic has facilitated this destructive nature).

To get an accurate view, whether displacement is the reason why the weaker section (women and children) are the victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse, people were asked regarding their perspective to which 80% of the sample population agreed that violence is a displacement of stress. They were also asked to answer whether displacement of stress on a person or an object eases the frustration, majority of the population disagreed and believed it can be the solution momentarily but not for long term but some people supported the view and stated that although it is an unhealthy strategy but displacement helps with the prolonged temper, as anger is an energy and so when it is released the person feels relaxed for the time being.

Through this survey a better understanding was developed and also the view point was supported that Domestic Violence is seen as a displacement of stress during the current pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has led some section of people to displace their mental tension in form of Domestic Violence against people whom they consider subordinate and less threatening. The situation of violence and abuse can only be controlled by managing stress, uncertainty and anxious moods of the people. Certain factors of stress can be managed by engaging oneself in productive tasks and by practicing yoga,

meditation and regular exercise. By being positive and maintaining hope that the current distressing situation will come to an end and there will be a better tomorrow. Such assurances should be given by the government to the public in the form of better job opportunity in near future, compensation for loss, etc. In the survey people were asked about what can be done to empower or educate the victims who believe that their entire life is dependent on abuser who is providing for their needs and that they are helpless because they have nowhere else to go.

People believed that at first victims must be educated and counseled. The protection officers and members of the NGOs must provide education to the victims. Women who belong to lower economic background should be given the opportunities to learn functional and operational skills that will facilitate them in being financially independent, to take care of themselves and their children. Awareness must be created amongst people through street plays (Nukkad Natak) regarding democratic rights; how to stand up against Domestic Violence; Where to go when they feel unsafe; and the importance of filing a complaint against the abuser.

Counselors and psychologist can provide with psychological first aid to the victims and their children that will help them in managing trauma. A secure and empathetic environment is necessary for their psychological wellbeing. Along with it the abusers must be counseled, this will help in understanding their mindset regarding why do they engage in violence; and why is it that they displace their anger on someone who is dependent on them. This information is necessary to make better interventions and awareness program.

Police, protection officers and government NGOs should be given permission to regulate a proper check for certain time period so that unheard complaints can be registered. The police along with protection officers should be trained in effective communication skills, it will help in spreading awareness and noticing any signs of violence. The helpline numbers must be displayed on boards nearby localities. Community education is an essential means in eradicating Domestic Violence.

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