

An Increase in Gender-based Violence during COVID-19 Pandemic

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According to the WHO data, one in three woman experiences GBV (Gender-based violence) once in their lifetime. WHO and other authorities have warned the different governments that during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the higher time spent indoors, social isolation, greater economic stress, uncertainties related to jobs, and health, the risk of violence may be increased (1). In fact, from the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, many reports from different countries indicate that violence, specifically against women, has been increased (2, 3).

COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is an infectious disease caused by coronavirus which is associated with clinical symptoms like mild to severe respiratory infection. For the first time in December 2019, some patients suffering from respiratory problems were admitted to hospitals in Wuhan, China (4, 5). These patients had some mild symptoms like fever and dry cough. Though, some of the patients improved, but some developed severe complications such as acute respiratory infection, organ failure, and pulmonary edema. After this incident, WHO, on 30th January 2020, announced the health emergency due to the crisis of COVID-19 (6).

Due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 infection the WHO came with the idea of quarantine as a recommended strategy, with the key goal of minimizing the different economic and social impacts of the virus in

societies. Quarantine is a precautionary measure in which the movement of infected or about to infect local community was restricted (7). From the beginning of the 14th-century, quarantine is an effective measure for controlling disease spread. From that time onwards, the quarantine practice was come into the practice to control and decrease the spread of infection (8). After the declaration of COVID-19 as an international pandemic by WHO, there is a huge pressure on the government to take instant measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 disease in the communities (8). On the other side, it also has some critical adverse effects such as mental stress and domestic violence on the people if it takes too long (9). Many reports clearly indicate that approximately 34% of the world female population have been once faced partner violence such as sexual, mental, or physical harassment and still, the mortality and rate of violence against females are increasing, annually (10).

The quarantine option is proposed as an effective measure, and all countries have to pursue this preventive strategy until any effective medication or vaccine came into the market. But the adverse part is that it brings many adjustments to an individual's day-to-day lifestyle (11, 12). After a few days, the dark or adverse side associated with it starts coming. Due to the fear of losing jobs, economic crises, and psychological issues arising due to social disconnection, isolation, loneliness, and fear of

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getting an infection, the adverse face starts exposing (8). Now its impact starts to appear in the form of violence, more precisely gender-based violence.

This gender-based violence includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence (13).

The violence adversely affects the physical, mental, and emotional conditions of women and their health-related issues as adverse effects of violence are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The different adverse effect of violence

It is generally has been seen that in almost every pandemic situation, the cases of violence are increased. A pandemic not only affects the breakdowns of economic, social infrastructures but also brings an increase in violence, weaknesses, conflicts, and stress (14). In almost every pandemic condition, the issue of gender-based inequality is being raised. The most harass and exposed gender violence is against the females, along with some elderly people. Sexual violation is among the most common violation reported in these pandemic situations (15). According to the results of different research studies, females generally do not have much right over their sexual choices, which makes them more vulnerable (16, 17). There are various reasons behind the increase in gender-specific violence cases. Some studies have also suggested that; many females have lost their jobs during the pandemic situation, as most of them were engaged in informal jobs and financially depends on their male partners (18). This economic dependence increases the risk of violence and also making it very difficult for them to leave their culprits (19). Some effects of these pandemics, like anxiety, emotional breakdown, sleep disturbances, and depression, will become common even after the COVID-19 will be over

(20, 21, 22). This pandemic will also give rise to economic vulnerabilities due to increased unemployment. Economic insecurities will be a major reason that will be going to provoke gender-based violence. During COVID-19 violence against women will be further worsened, because the security personnel are unable to handle the violence cases (23, 24).

Similar to the earlier pandemics, this COVID-19 pandemic situation seems to follow the same pattern, i.e., an increase in the number of violence cases. Further to stop the community spread of the COVID-19 disease, governments have taken the decision of lockdown, but on another side, the decision made by governments has also granted more freedom to abusers and it becomes easier for them to impose control strategies for victims by blocking access to the internet and phones. Several reports indicate that China perceived a three-fold increase in domestic violence cases after imposing quarantine (21, 22, 23). Not only in China but a rise of approximately 21–35% in the case of domestic violence was also reported in the United States. Due to this increase in family violence cases, worldwide countries have been facing concerns (21). Inally, due to the fear of getting infected by the COVID-19 disease, abuse victims may be afraid of going to the hospital to treat their injuries (25).

The first step to handle the problem of increasing gender violence during pandemics is by spreading awareness and community partnerships (26). Some other measures will include providing telephone and online

counselling services and constantly asking whether they are safe or not (27). Some common preventive measures are mentioned in figure 2.

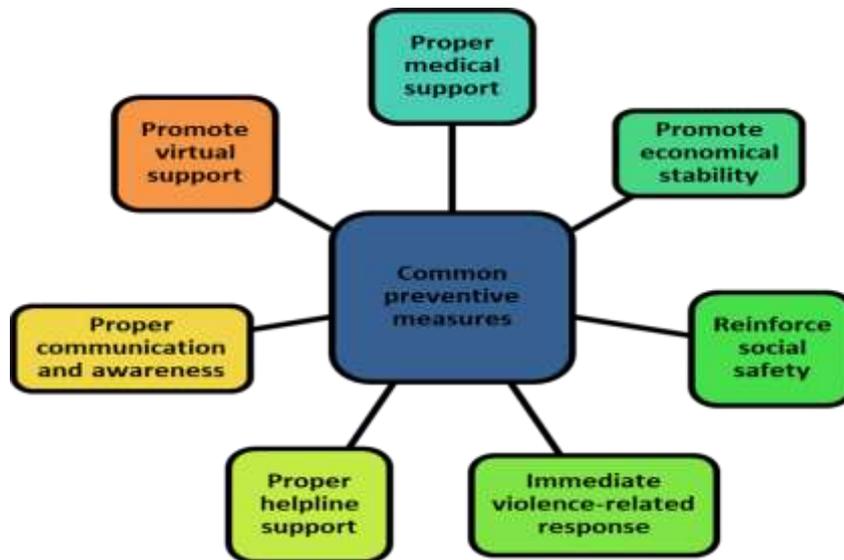


Figure 2. The systematic representation of preventive measures for violence

Whenever the pandemic situations like COVID-19 take place, it will bring an uncountable problem for the society to deal with. The same things happen as well in COVID-19 situation that quarantine was imposed to stop community spread, to maintain social distancing, and there was no effective treatment, drug and vaccines for this virus. But at the same time, it also brought some critical issues such as uncertainty, economic instability, social isolation, and mental health problems. Even though there has been vast research in which exploring the effect of COVID-19, but still, there is a lack of literature where gender-based violence was highlighted.

This also involves the issue of raising gender-based violence during the pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought a rise in gender-specific violence cases but also has disconnected the victims from their supporting networks. In the COVID-19 situation, an increase in the number of gender-specific violence was observed. Thus,

it is very important to handle the increasing issue of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemics. It has been reported in several studies that the female victims of violence will experience a series of psychological symptoms such as avoidance, anxiety, depression, emotional breakdown, re-experiencing of hyper-arousal, and traumatic events, and to reduce such types of violence government has to rethink their services and policies and strengthen the support services so that the victims may have easy access to them. But if we all play our role and make aware people about these problems, certainly it will bring a change and will definitely decrease the number of cases.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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