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## Domestic Violence during COVID Pandemic

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### Abstract:

*The Covid Pandemic looks like a three-in-one pack of devastations consisting of loss of lives, destruction of livelihood and steep rise of domestic violence. As the ongoing pandemic epitomizes isolation at family levels, there have been legitimate expectations that staying together under a single roof will foster more bonding among the family members. The quality time spent all together in the family was expected to be felt as a great way to relieve stress, improve mental health and build up greater levels of understanding and compassion with each other, including between the spouses. Reports reveal that this is just was one side of the socio-cultural reality. The other side is infested with atrocities, victimization and violence against the women members of families across the social spectrum in India and elsewhere around the world. While the infection by the Covid virus may soon be cured with discovery of vaccines and their applications, there appears to be no way to kill the virus of ingrained patriarchy that leads to the ubiquitous domestic violence.*

### 1. Introduction:

As the ongoing pandemic epitomizes isolation at family levels, there are legitimate expectations that staying together under a single roof will foster more bonding among the family members. There are plenty of reports of positive consequences of home quarantine for families and a rare one is to get enough time to bond with the family. The quality time spent all together in the family has been felt as a great way to relieve stress, improve mental health and build up greater levels of understanding and compassion with each other. The lockdown period gave us a forced opportunity to take a pause, refresh and reconnect with vigour with our loved ones. Concurrently, there was more time to relax and sleep, eating healthy home cooked food, time to work out and learning to do all household works without dependence on domestic helps. Spousal relations have been rekindled and parental bonds rejuvenated. It appeared to be a coming together akin to what we grownups have experienced in the 1970s and 80s. Thinking about relationships with people outside the immediate family, there are positive developments here too. Aided by technology there has been an exponential growth in virtual gatherings. Friends, colleagues and extended family members have found ways of connecting digitally any time anywhere over ICT platforms. The word "FAMILY" regained its inner cultural construct as "Father and Mother I Love You".

But this was one side of the reality. The other was the dark side of the pandemic marked with severe atrocities, victimization and violence against the women members of families across the social spectrum. Efforts by the State have focused on fighting two pandemics, the Covid-19 pandemic that threatens lives and the economic pandemic that threatens the livelihoods of millions. Much less attention has been paid to a third pandemic that was lurking in the shadows – increasing violence against women as a consequence of home quarantine. Months of the lockdown brought on by the COVID pandemic have struck people to no other option but to spend painfully long period of social isolation. Social distancing norms also seem to be hitting people even more than the scare of the deadly virus. As livelihoods are crippled and destroyed, it inevitably brings financial stress, mental stress, uncertainty, fear, and of course among a section of men making them highly restive and agitated. Among the rich, relatively affluent and salaried classes, even the digital windows of connectivity and proliferated social media could not douse the flames of patriarchy. It is extremely shocking that a consequence of prolonged home quarantine has taken its toll in the shape of domestic violence which has for long been a scar in our social life.

During lockdown, this social vice now has rebounded with vigour and violence. It is no mystery, therefore, that the rate of reported domestic violence and gender-based harassment cases has also gone up significantly. The sense of isolation and financial and medical anxiety coming along with the deadly pandemic and sinking economy have increased the frequency of terror within homes and most certainly challenged the concept of 'escape' for the victims. Work, school, and homes sans the abusers being different mediums of escape for women and children before the lockdown did not exist anymore during the long months of lockdown. With spaces of escape blurring out of the lives of the victims, the ideas of fear and threat usually driving abuses are now resulting in using Covid-19 as an excuse to amplify their cases. In many scenarios, the abusers have been found to spread misconceptions around the pandemic in an attempt to contain the victims at home, threaten to not provide financial support if the victim is dependent on them, not pay medical attention if the victim shows symptoms of the virus, and abuse alcohol and drugs as an excuse to cope with the ongoing stress.

## **2. Domestic Violence:**

Domestic violence, also called intimate partner violence, occurs between people in an intimate relationship. It can take many forms, including emotional, sexual and physical abuse and threats of abuse. It can happen in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Abusive relationships always involve an imbalance of power and control. An abuser uses intimidating, hurtful words and behaviours to have sex with the partner by use of brute force against consent. It might not be easy to identify domestic violence at first. While some relationships are clearly abusive from the

outset, there are abuses that often starts subtly and gets worse over time. Domestic violence does not discriminate. Anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender can be a victim – or perpetrator – of domestic violence. It can happen to people who are married, living together or who are dating. It affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence includes behaviours that physically harm, arouse fear, prevent a partner from doing what they wish or force them to behave in ways they do not want. It includes the use of physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation. Many of these different forms of domestic violence/abuse can be occurring at any one time within the same intimate relationship. In India, most women who experience domestic violence do not share their experience with anybody or seek help. Among those who do, a “pyramid of reporting” exists. Informal sources (natal family and friends) are favoured; very few reports violence via institutional routes (non-governmental organizations and police). The conditions under which incidents of domestic violence are reported, and/or help is sought through different routes—along with the reasons why such conditions often do not occur—are highlighted using large-scale secondary survey data and primary ethnographic data. The findings have implications for mitigating domestic violence through institutional routes.

### 3. Survey:

The issue of gender-based violence in India has been creeping up the policy agenda over the past couple of years. And with substantial data, it proves one thing: rampant domestic violence against women in India is a reality. Every third women, since the age of 15, has faced domestic violence of various forms in the country, reported the National Family Health Survey (NHFS-4) released by the Union health ministry, thus, incubating a new round of debate about the cultural underpinnings to domestic violence. According to the survey, 27 per cent of women have experienced physical violence since the age 15 in India. This experience of physical violence among women is more common in rural areas than among women in urban areas. Domestic violence cases, where women reported physical abuse in rural and urban areas, were at 29 per cent and 23 percent, respectively. Most of the times perpetrators of this violence have been the husbands. 31 per cent of married women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their spouses. The most common type of spousal violence is physical violence (27%), followed by emotional violence (13%). The survey reported that among married women who have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, 83 per cent reported their present husbands as perpetrators of the violence. However, for women who are not married, the experience of physical violence stems from the most common perpetrators, which includes mothers or step-mothers (56%), fathers or step-fathers (33%), sisters or brothers (27%), and teachers (15%). However, the most worrying part of the spousal-violence is that only 14 per cent of women who experienced this violence sought help to stop it. (1,2).

According to NFHS-5, over 30% women suffered physical and sexual violence by their spouses in 5 out of 22 surveyed states (Karnataka, Assam, Mizoram, Telangana and Bihar) and union territories in India. The survey was conducted in 6.1 lakh households involving household level interviews, collecting information on population, health, family planning and nutrition related indicators. About 44.4% women aged 18-49 years experienced domestic violence. (3)

#### 4. Domestic Violence in India during Pandemic:

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, reports of domestic violence up surging all over the world is worrying. The pervasive spread of the virus has [forced domestic violence victims to stay at home with their abusers](#),<sup>1</sup> leaving them with little options to find any shelter or even solace. In abusive households, women have to battle the male aggressor inside and the virus outside. As they are closely confined within the walls of their houses, living with abusive partners hurts them both physically and emotionally. Furthermore, in low-wage households, husbands tend to be more abusive towards their partners and verbalize their exasperation on them. The lack of an income during the pandemic and the looming threat of hunger also added to the problem. Women who are financially dependent on their husbands suffered more. According to one report, [one out of the three women](#) (WHO-2018)<sup>2</sup> globally have experienced violence over their lifetimes. Due to the lockdown, many of the victims were not able to contact the police or social workers as they were trapped at home with the abusers.

The first week of the [nationwide lockdown](#), (The Hindu, April 02, 2020)<sup>3</sup> which has left many facing job losses, uncertainty over salaries, forced isolation and stressed households, has resulted in a steep rise in violence against women. During the first four phases of the COVID-19-related lockdown, Indian women filed more [domestic violence](#) (The Hindu, June 15, 2020)<sup>4</sup> complaints than recorded in a similar period in the last 10 years. But even this unusual spurt is only the tip of the iceberg as 86% women who experience domestic violence do not seek help in India. In 2020, between March 25 and May 31, 1,477 complaints of domestic violence were made by women. This 68-day period recorded more complaints than those received between March and May in the previous 10 years. Among the 14.3% of victims who sought help, only 7% reached out to relevant authorities — the police, doctors, lawyers or social service organizations. But more than 90% of the victims sought help only from their immediate family.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/18/locked-down-with-abusers-india-sees-surge-in-domestic-violence>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/violence-against-women>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-coronavirus-lockdown-april-2-2020-live-updates/article31233014.ece?homepage=true>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ncw-records-sharp-spike-in-domestic-violence-amid-lockdown/article31835105.ece>

In the first three weeks of the nationwide lockdown, data of the National Commission for Women (NCW) indicated the expeditious upsurge in the number of domestic violence cases “between March 23 and April 16. NCW registered [587 complaints](#) (The Economic Times, April 17, 2020)<sup>5</sup> related to domestic violence against women. This was a notable upsurge from 396 complaints received in the past 25 days between February 27 and March 22”. Moreover, most of the cases were reported from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, and Punjab. \* The police are taking required efficacious measures to combat with this domestic violence pandemic. The Uttar Pradesh Police launched a [helpline Number](#) (News18.com)<sup>6</sup> for domestic violence victims and the Kerala government and the NCW have launched a [WhatsApp number](#) (The Economic Times, April 10, 2020)<sup>7</sup> to report domestic violence. Several NGOs and Help Lines have been operating 24 hours to help or counsel victims of domestic violence by transferring them into a secure place and also providing counselling over the phone or on an online medium ( 4,5).

The [All India Council of Human Rights Liberties and Social Justice](#) (The High Court of Delhi, 2020)<sup>8</sup> filed a petition for the safety of victims of domestic violence which has increased rapidly since Lockdown imposed by the Government. A bench of Justices J.R. Midha and Jyoti Singh of the Delhi High Court directed the Central Government, Delhi government, Delhi Commission of Women and other authorities to summon the meeting at a high level and consider the issue of victims of domestic abuse during this period and required steps should be immediately implemented to protect the sufferers of domestic violence from abusers (6).

Ironically, women’s role as primary caregivers at home puts them at a high risk of contracting the coronavirus. And for those in abusive relationships, a cough or a sneeze could trigger violence. But this [double bind](#)<sup>9</sup> is not new. Women being neglected from public discourse that adversely affects them is eerily familiar throughout [history](#)<sup>10</sup>. For many women, staying at home is a public health crisis. India’s National Family Health Survey reveals that close to 42% of men agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife. It is then not surprising that a third of India’s [women](#)<sup>11</sup> have experienced some form of physical, emotional or sexual

<sup>5</sup> The Economic Times (April 17, 2020). <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-witnesses-steep-rise-in-crime-against-women-amid-lockdown-587-complaints-received-ncw/articleshow/75201412.cms>

<sup>6</sup> News18.com, <https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/up-police-deserves-all-the-praise-for-domestic-violence-hotline-for-women-at-the-time-of-coronavirus-2544091.html>

<sup>7</sup> The Economic Times, April 10, 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/new-launches-whatsapp-number-to-report-domestic-violence-during-covid-19-lockdown/articleshow/75082848.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>8</sup> The Delhi High Court (2020). [https://www.livelaw.in/pdf\\_upload/pdf\\_upload-373404.pdf](https://www.livelaw.in/pdf_upload/pdf_upload-373404.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-2346.12704>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-hit-women-harder-than-men/>

<sup>11</sup> The News 18. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/the-elephant-in-the-room-every-third-woman-in-india-faces-domestic-violence-1654193.html>

violence in their lifetime. Forcing families to stay at home, cooped together in the same small space, increases the risks of interpersonal violence and abuse. Such risks increase as men tend to release their frustration of losing jobs by abusing women in intimate relationships. Admirably, even though women are more likely to lose even the informal sector jobs they had first and faster than men, they do not vent their frustrations by turning violent. [Recession studies](#)<sup>12</sup> also show that victims often turn to their friends and family for temporary housing and emotional support. But given the lockdown and the economic crisis, that support network is not within reach, leaving many battered and homeless. Staying at home adds to other hardships faced by women. This places a disproportionate burden on women of taking care of the house and children. Living with an abusive partner also puts women's sexual health agency at risk. The fear of refusing sex or asking one's partner to use a condom [compounds](#)<sup>13</sup> physical and sexual violence between partners and makes it harder for women to access contraceptives, pregnancy kits and abortion services. Moreover, as the lockdown continues, women and girls will need regular and quality access to menstrual health products. It wasn't until much public outcry that [feminine hygiene products](#)<sup>14</sup> were included in the government's list of essential items (7).

For women in rural areas who have to walk miles to get firewood for cooking and open defecation, sexual violence from non-partners is [twice](#)<sup>15</sup> as likely. Reporting domestic violence even under normal circumstances is difficult. The stigma around domestic violence as a couple's so-called private matter makes it hard for women to [leave their abusive partners](#).<sup>16</sup> For those [married](#)<sup>17</sup> into large families, reporting a husband can also mean torture from in-laws. The situation worsens during a lockdown. For most women, getting [access to a phon](#)<sup>18</sup> and calling for help or reporting violence might be a challenge in itself. The deployment of police on the streets makes it even more intimidating for the already-traumatized women (6). As we live through the pandemic, a lot of victims won't make it to the official statistics. In a [survey](#)<sup>19</sup>, nearly 75% of those who reported domestic violence did not seek help from anyone. The ones who did relied on other family members and friends,

<sup>12</sup> Clarire M. Renzeetti, Vivian M. Larkin (Sept. 2009). <https://vawnet.org/material/economic-stress-and-domestic-violence>

<sup>13</sup> T. John & J. T. Messing (December, 2015). <https://academic.oup.com/hsw/article-abstract/41/1/e11/2356428>

<sup>14</sup> S. Dsouza (March-29, 2020). <https://www.bloombergquint.com/coronavirus-outbreak/coronavirus-production-of-essential-goods-runs-low-as-manufacturers-face-lockdown-hurdles>

<sup>15</sup> A. Jadhav; A. Weitzman and E. S.-Greenaway (November, 2016). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309747027\\_Household\\_sanitation\\_facilities\\_and\\_women's\\_risk\\_of\\_non-partner\\_sexual\\_violence\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309747027_Household_sanitation_facilities_and_women's_risk_of_non-partner_sexual_violence_in_India)

<sup>16</sup> S. Griffing, D. F. Ragin, et.al.; (1 March 2002). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Domestic-Violence-Survivors%27-Self-Identified-for-to-Griffing-Ragin/fl834a31ce4939a3debb8284e0bc8509f1489be5?p2df>

<sup>17</sup> C. Nigan (April, 2020). Lockdown downside: Domestic violence up. <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/lockdown-downside-domestic-violence-up-1662727-2020-04-03>

<sup>18</sup> Harvard Kennedy School (October 31, 2018). *Understanding Barriers to and Impacts of Women's Mobile Phone Adoption in India*. <https://epod.cid.harvard.edu/news/understanding-barriers-and-impacts-womens-mobile-phone-adoption-india>

<sup>19</sup> Economic & Political Weekly (05 Jan, 2019). *The Pyramid of Reporting Domestic Violence in India Speaking of Abuse*. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/1/special-articles/speaking-abuse.html>

showing that a pyramid of reporting exists where domestic violence victims tend to rely on informal networks over seeking institutional or legal help (8).

The National Commission on Women has flagged the issue of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic and has been encouraging women to speak out. The woman's body chief said the lockdown has resulted in fresh challenges for women as they are unable to reach the police even if they want to. "In many cases, they [the woman] don't want to approach the police because if the husband is released from detention after a couple of days, the woman will still be unable to leave the house," - Rekha Sharma, Chairperson of NCW said. "Earlier, the women would go to their parents' home, but they are no longer able to do so." (8). Usually, a woman can register complaints with the National Commission for Women through various channels. This includes physical visits to the office in different states, postal communication, phone calls, online complaint registration, emails and through social media. However, under the lockdown, the mediums to file a complaint have been curtailed and restricted to just three forms: social media, email and online registration, Sharma said. "We are a small statutory body, so obviously the bulk of the complaints of crimes against women don't come to us but go to the police, we get a small portion," she added. "What the women are telling us that they are not approaching the police because of the lockdown. The increase in violence against women, especially domestic abuse is a very worrying trend" (9).

The restricted movement due to the lockdown has specially hit the victims of domestic violence who suddenly found themselves trapped in their homes with their abusers. Several women are either unable or too afraid to call the police to get help to move out. To help such women reach out, WEFT (Women Entrepreneurs for Transformation) Foundation, a not – for - profit body working for women's empowerment, launched a new initiative called 'red dot' under which citizens can identify a domestic violence victim by seeing a red dot on her palm and inform NGOs or authorities. The citizens who see the red dot on the palm can either get in touch with WEFT through social media or email [weftinfo@gmail.com](mailto:weftinfo@gmail.com) or they can also call 181 which is the toll-free number to get support. The initiative has been launched very recently has received over 20 complaints of domestic violence from across the country and proving very useful to get complaints. Talking about the cases received by them, WEFT said one of the cases was from Kolkata where the victim was caught at home with her husband who was jobless since the lockdown. He was beating the wife, took away all her savings and was assaulting her in front of her son. The woman contacted WEFT through the red dot initiative and she was promptly supported. The red dot initiative is a citizen-led movement under which they plan to create videos and stories that can go viral so that people start identifying this symbol as indicative of domestic violence. During the lockdown, victims are

stuck now with the oppressors as if in a jail and inside the home has become more unsafe for them than outside the home (9).

Activists and NGOs have attributed the high percentage of women suffering from domestic violence to low rate of literacy, high consumption of alcohol, among others. According to Shamina Shafiq, an activist, “ A man feels it his right to beat a woman and he enjoys the fact that he is the one in control of the life of another person. Even today the government is unable to talk about how bad it is to subject any person to violence. There should be writing on the wall that spousal violence is wrong.” (3)

### 5. Domestic Violence around the World during Pandemic:

Incidents of rising incidents of domestic violence during the Covid-19 lockdown is not unique to India. It should be noted that the cases of domestic violence have increased around the world during the lockdown period. “The Guardian” reported that in UK, frantic calls for help as received in the National Help Lines increased by 25% within a few weeks since Lockdown started and visits of websites of domestic violence increased by 150% in February, 2020 compared to that of February, 2019. It was reported that incidents of even child abuse increased many folds while the children cannot go to schools Even in countries like China and USA, among others, a rapid rise of this phenomenon has been reported. WHO has reported that the risk of intimate partner violence is likely to increase more, as distancing measures are put in place and people are compelled to stay at home? The number of domestic violence cases reported at a police station in Jingzhou, a city in the Hubei province of China, the region where Covid infection was first detected, tripled in February 2020, compared with the same period the previous year (9). In [France](#)<sup>20</sup> reports of domestic violence have risen to 30% after the onset of lockdown. In [China](#)<sup>21</sup>, according to their reports, the offenses of domestic violence nearly doubled during the lockdown, with 90% related to the pandemic. In a recent study, [UN agency for sexual and reproductive health \(UNFPA\)](#)<sup>22</sup> stated that if the lockdown continues for another some months the cases of domestic violence would be more than 31 million worldwide. This upsurge in domestic violence against women prompted UN chief Antonio Guterres to make a [frantic appeal](#)<sup>23</sup> to Governments to put women’s safety first while responding to the pandemic.

<sup>20</sup> euronews.com (28.03.2020). *Domestic violence cases jump 30% during lockdown in France*

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/28/domestic-violence-cases-jump-30-during-lockdown-in-france>

<sup>21</sup> Sixth Tone (). *Domestic Violence Cases Surge During COVID-19 Epidemic*

<https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005253/domestic-violence-cases-surge-during-covid-19-epidemic>

<sup>22</sup> The Hindu (May 07, 2020). *Coronavirus lockdown | Surge in domestic violence, says WHO*

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/coronavirus-lockdown-surge-in-domestic-violence-says-who/article31529111.ece>

<sup>23</sup> R. Balakrishnan, (April 09, 2020). *Women battle domestic violence during lockdown as world wages coronavirus war*

<https://yourstory.com/herstory/2020/04/women-domestic-violence-lockdown-coronavirus/amp>



In various parts of the world, strategy to protect women from their perpetrators have developed gradually while keeping view of the lockdown and social distancing measures. Many Countries like Spain, Germany, Argentina, Italy, Norway, and France have launched the “[Campaign Mask-19](#)”<sup>24</sup> wherein whenever a woman experiences abuse at home or sexual assault, she can visit the nearest pharmacy and request for Mask-19. The pharmacy staff will note down her name, phone number and address and they inform the police stations and emergency services to tip them off about the abuse. The upsurge in the number of cases during the lockdown forced the French government to proclaim that they will [open pop-up counselling centres and pay for hotel rooms](#)<sup>25</sup> for victims. In [Italy](#)<sup>26</sup>, the government has introduced an app that enables domestic violence sufferers to seek help without making any phone calls. The government is also considering an offer to allocate 4 million euros for shelters for women who are victims of abuse. In Malaysia, the Government implemented the Talian Kasih hotline to provide proper assistance to the victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence. In Greece, officials confirmed that there are upsurges of campaign to provide women with the help they need to deal with problems that transpired from the issue of confinement. In New Zealand<sup>27</sup>, motels are offering their vacant rooms as shelters for the citizens who need to leave unsafe houses without the violation of social distancing parameters (10,11)

## 6. Legal Remedies:

The violence against women has been prevalent for so long and for the protection of women from perpetrators, [Domestic Violence Act, 2005](#) <sup>28</sup> (PWDVA), was implemented by the government. The Act provides a definition of domestic violence that is comprehensive and includes all forms of physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and economic violence, and covers both actual acts of such violence and threats of violence. In addition, the PWDVA recognizes marital rape and covers harassment in the form of unlawful dowry demands as a form of abuse.

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<sup>24</sup> Natalie Higgins; BBC News (April 13, 2020). *Coronavirus: When home gets violent under lockdown in Europe*  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52216966>

<sup>25</sup> Elena Berton, Reuters (April 01, 2020). *France offers hotel rooms to domestic abuse victims as cases jump during lockdown*  
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/france-domestic-abuse-coronavirus-covid19-lockdown-hotels/>

<sup>26</sup> Y. Talmazan, L. Sirna, H. M. Ratto & N. Ing (April 03, 2020). *European countries develop new ways to tackle domestic violence during coronavirus lockdowns* <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/european-countries-develop-new-ways-tackle-domestic-violence-during-coronavirus-n1174301>

<sup>27</sup> New Zealand / COVID-19 (April 04, 2020). *Women's Refuge sees high demand during Covid-19 lockdown*  
<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/413456/women-s-refuge-sees-high-demand-during-covid-19-lockdown>

<sup>28</sup> **Government of India Act. (2005). *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.***  
<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/542601/>

According to the said Act, women can seek protection from violence against them. In [Savitaben Somabhai Bhatiya vs State Of Gujarat And Ors](#)<sup>29</sup>, the Supreme Court of India held that [Section 3](#)<sup>30</sup> of the Domestic Violence Act not only ensures protection to the married women but also live-in relationship couples. However, access to such legal remedy is nearly difficult for the sufferers who are confined in violent and abusive environments with the abusers during the lockdown period. The authorities need to take effective measures to protect the victims and instead of publicizing the phone number, vigilant and regular checking of suspicious houses should be done during the ongoing pandemic. Moreover, the victims who are able to get away from the torture, find themselves isolated without any facilities and support. Hence, it is necessary for the government to create shelter for the victims and give them a protective environment. Apart from these, professional counsellors, psychiatrists, mediators, lawyers, and even psychotherapists can prove to be a vital asset by helping the needy person through WhatsApp, phone calls, video-conferencing etc. during this time. Furthermore, community gatekeepers including religious, youth, and women leaders can create awareness about the negative impact of domestic violence and familiarize women about their rights within the community and they can safely report the cases of gender-based violence to the concerned authorities. The government can also declare the concept of “One-stop Centers” as earlier introduced in 2015 as a part of scheme [Sakhi](#)<sup>31</sup> sponsored by the central government as an essential service. The government can also adopt an approach similar to European nations and can initiate informal complaints centers in medical stores, grocery shops and so on. Thus, all protective measures should be declared as an important service to protect domestic violence victims. We need to ensure that these victims are not forgotten while the battle against the pandemic goes on (9,10).

## 7. Conclusion:

In a country with deep-rooted patriarchal morals, where the women are supposed to tolerate each and everything that is thrown in their way, there needs to be an equitable way out. With the extension of lockdown, the sentence of confinement for the sufferers only gets prolonged. Fighting these abusers and the beasts who prey upon the fragility of women, is as salient as tackling with the pandemic. The administration and law enforcement agencies need to understand the severity of the issue. The protection of women cannot be put on hold until we win the battle against the pandemic by discovering vaccines and recovery of the economy. Human Rights Watch (HRW)<sup>32</sup> in its November 2017 report found out that sexual harassment

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<sup>29</sup> A. Pasavant (2005). *Savitaben Somabhai Bhatiya vs State Of Gujarat And Ors on 10 March, 2005*. [CASE NO.: Appeal (crl.) 399 of 2005; Bench: Arijit Pasayat, S.H. Kapadia. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1590152/>

<sup>30</sup> Govt. of India Act.( 2005). *Section 3 in The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005*. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/406908/>

<sup>31</sup> SAKHI DASHBOARD. MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT, Govt. of India. <http://sakhi.gov.in/>

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch (Report 2017). <https://www.hrw.org/asia/india>

victims in India face significant barriers to obtaining justice and critical support services. The report, [‘Everyone Blames Me’: Barriers to Justice and Support Services for Sexual Assault Survivors in India](#)<sup>33</sup>, found that women and girls who survive rape and other sexual violence often suffer humiliation at police stations and hospitals. Under Indian law, police officers who fail to register a complaint of sexual assault face up to two years in prison. However, Human Rights Watch found that police did not always file a First Information Report (FIR), the first step to initiating a police investigation, especially if the victim was from an economically or socially marginalized community. Irrespective of all the abuse meted to women at their homes, there still is a silver lining. Education makes a difference. Reports reveal that domestic violence, including physical and sexual violence decreases sharply with schooling and education. By schooling, the percentage of women who report physical violence declined from 38 per cent among women with no schooling to 16 per cent among women with 12 or more years of formal education. Similarly, experience of sexual violence decreases sharply with schooling from eight per cent among women with no schooling to three per cent among women with 12 or more years of schooling. However, education does not automatically translate in a lower incidence of domestic violence. The administration should instigate proper steps without digressing from the Covid-19 work plan to protect and help victims of domestic violence with more pronounced legal protection, sensitive governance and awareness across the societies.

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