

COVID-19-Impact: Increased Violence against Women in India

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Ved Prakash

Abstract

The present study covers the relative aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic and violence against women during the lockdown period in India. The analysis of the study is based on available data at the website of the National Commission for Women (NCW), Government of India. This suggests that the significant changes occurred in violence against women during the lockdown, leading to societal disturbance and impact upon Indian nationals. The list of possible violence against women is also presented in this work and discussed the challenges women and their families face. This study reveals that violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic increased on selected indicators on violence against women in India, such as protection of women against domestic violence, right to live with dignity, harassment of married women/ dowry harassment, cybercrime against women, and rape/ attempt to rape.

Keywords: COVID-19, Domestic, India, Lockdown, Women, Violence

Introduction

Traditionally, Indian society worships women in goddesses, like Durga for powers, Lakshmi for wealth, and Saraswati for learning. As we see in the history of women's empowerment, there was no gender division in hunting, warfare, defense, and political activities during the Vedic period. Girls were allowed to be educated like boys and needed to pass through a period of *Brahmacharya*. The marriage age of women was not very low (not below 16 years). There are many names of women who made significant contributions to the advancement of education, viz. *Sulabha*, *Maitreyi*, *Vadava Prathitey*, *Vachaknavi*, and *Gargi*. The patriarchy system evolved in India in the period of *Atharva Veda*. However, the considerable importance of women (*Gandhari*, *Kunti*, *Draupadi*) may be seen in the period of *Mahabhart*, as these women are known to decide the warfare.

In the present days in India, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to become educated and empowered like men, females are found more interested in getting education. Many females face many

kinds of problems to carry out traditionally domestic work and kitchen activities, including cooking, and as such, their marriage life becomes valueless. However, in schools and colleges, the system facilitates females to get training for self-protection from males in society and live jointly like friends.

There is no doubt that women work hard for development at every level in the family & society, including childbirth and fulfilling their family requirements. For this kind of devotion, women are respected in general at every place. Men always regard and protect women everywhere. Although, there may indeed be few dominant men in the society who use women as an object and also compel women to do humiliating tasks.

The Indian society and traditional culture allow the male to dominate in family. Sometimes, he may feel irritation for any unwanted cause created by the family women, so, unfortunately, a man may be forced to commit domestic violence against his family women. Sometimes, to protect themselves, in place of rational and evidentiary discussion, women may be found in using abusive and cunning words to humiliate and insult men. Due to feeling more insult by women (including family women), humiliation may be one reason for violence against women. Such types of violence may include burns. In the present day, domestic violence reduced in the educated and well-settled families. To ensure the protection from the COVID-19 virus, as per lockdown rules, Social Distancing, zero movements in public places are characteristic ideas. An unseen mismatch in behavioral aspects amongst males and females has been felt in the families during the lockdown period. Change in unseen behavioral aspects amongst males and females indirectly creates hidden conflicts between both men & women, sometimes this created conflict finished in few movements, but in rare and more harmful cases, it extended and went to court for justice.

The lockdown in India due to COVID-19 pandemic was implemented from 25 March 2020, extending till June 2020. Some relaxations were allowed in the lockdown in various parts of India from time to time based on the requirement. During this lockdown, most working populations, including women, were not allowed to come out from their homes during the coronavirus spread sensitive time in India for the significant reason for their safety from COVID-19. Most economic activities were closed down during this period, and dependent women became handicap due to zero income. It resulted in an unwanted financial burden increased on the

household whose income was hand to mouth. Spouse dependency for money is the standard issue for creating domestic violence. This economic dependency on her spouse was suggested as resource theory by William Goode (1971). The use of alcohol frequently by family men is another reason to create unwanted violence in low-income families. Domestic violence is concerned with women, men, family members like children and old parents, etc. They also faced many kinds of problems (including physical assault) in their homes, including unwanted ignorance & violence in their homes for a meager important reason(s). In such a conflict situation(s), sometimes, an earning male member of the family may feel the situation is like a sandwich. Numerous reports suggested the violence against women are prevalent like domestic violence, right to live with dignity, harassment of married women/dowry harassment, cybercrime against women, Rape/Attempt to Rape, Acid Attack, Bigamy / Polygamy, Denial of Maternity Benefits to women, Dowry death, Gender Discrimination including the equal right to education & work, Indecent Representation of Women, outraging the modesty of women/Molestation, Police Apathy against women, Right to exercise choice in marriage/ Honour Crimes, Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Harassment of Women at the workplace, Stalking / Voyeurism, Trafficking / Prostitution of women, etc. which is available on the website of National Commission for Women (NCW), Government of India. The NCW is a nodal organization of the Indian government, which helps cover all kinds of complaints received from women in India for their safety and protection. During defensive lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic to protect and save human life around the globe, news has been published about the increase in violence against women worldwide.

Domestic violence is antisocial acts in which (male or female) may be harassed. Still, harassment of married women/Dowry harassment is antisocial acts in which only women are harassed. However, it is one kind of mindset of the society in which only women and girls are harassed based on their gender. Harassment of men and boys can also happen, but people have less sympathetic behavior for male victims than females. Women are generally never allowed to live with dignity in their family in which women may feel in their homes that they are banned for their choices, interfere in their privacy, and taking decisions by them. As far as domestic violence is concerned, many examples reveal that men are also victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; but,

society considers such violence less seriously. It is the belief that men are fearless, sustain tremendous pain, and are more capable of self-defense than women. 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005' also has a complete favor of women protection from men against Article -14 of the Constitution of India, which has granted men and women equal rights to survive in society. According to this Domestic Violence Act, 2005, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, and economic abuse on women are considered domestic violence. While men are considered too responsible for harassment of women; likewise, women need to be accountable for discrimination against men. According to Lenore E. Walker, domestic violence is cyclic and has four phases, in which the abuser's tension situations are the cause of violence and peace. Evidence reveals that rapists are found sexually different from such men who do not commit rape. Rape incidents occur with women related to other groups or some enemies to devalue them. The overcrowding, captivity, or poor health issues may be the other reasons for commit rape).¹ Incidents of rape/attempt to rape and Cyber Crime against women may reflect the insecurity of women in a public place or another place where rape kind of crime occurs. During the lockdown period in the COVID-19 pandemic, people were found so busy on the internet, chatting through WhatsApp, Messenger, etc. The criminal-minded persons were also found in this social media system in which any person can harm or hurt anyone without physical meetings. Many identified cyber crimes committed against women, such as *harassment* through e-mails, *cyber-stalking*, cyber pornography pictures, photos, writings, etc. During the lockdown period, cyber-criminals were also in their homes. As a mindset, in the absence of other kinds of economic activities during the lockdown period, they committed more cyber-crimes against women to harass them. We need parallel securities to protect females in the public place where women are working, too. As women security needs more security personnel at public places, it may increase security costs for women at public places. Female housemaids who generally come from needy and low-income families, in addition to taking specified jobs at low wages from such housemaids, such housemaids are also forced to face humiliation and various kinds of harassment at their working place.

¹ Book Review, *The Second Sexism: Discrimination against men and boys* (2012), authored Benatar, David, Wiley Blackwell, Noor Sanauddin (University of Glasgow), ISBN: 978-0470674512, 304pp https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_249370_en.pdf Accessed 20 May, 2020

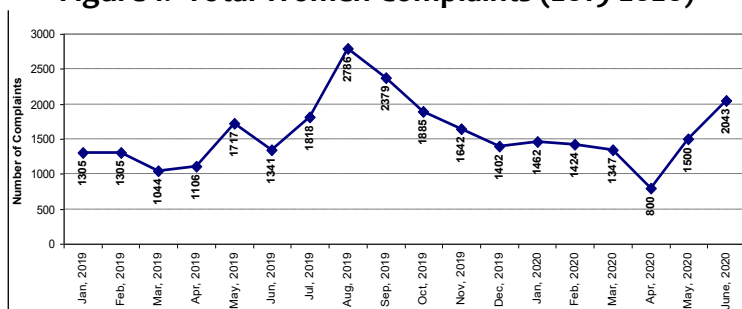
As most of the population were indoors, the violent incidents against women show a significant rise, as shown in Figure-1 (number of complaints received in NCW on Violence against women in India from January 2019 to June 2020)². Figure- 1 concludes with significant changes in the complaint received in NCW during 2020.

Table: Number and Nature of Selected Complaints Registered During (2019 -2020)

Months	Protection of Women against Domestic Violence	Right to live with dignity	Harassment of married women/ Dowry harassment	Cyber Crime against women	Rape/ Attempt to Rape	Other	Total
Jan, 2019	133	266	87	39	78	702	1305
Feb, 2019	181	296	200	30	68	530	1305
Mar, 2019	148	269	204	22	63	338	1044
Apr, 2019	193	204	228	35	49	397	1106
May, 2019	266	234	397	49	150	621	1717
Jun, 2019	260	201	316	33	88	443	1341
Jul, 2019	391	288	361	43	115	620	1818
Aug, 2019	419	747	468	61	178	913	2786
Sep, 2019	255	819	468	40	168	629	2379
Oct, 2019	252	584	391	35	129	494	1885
Nov, 2019	243	434	368	35	137	425	1642
Dec, 2019	219	352	275	37	116	403	1402
Jan, 2020	271	374	267	32	142	376	1462
Feb, 2020	302	436	221	21	112	332	1424
Mar, 2020	298	388	203	37	90	331	1347
Apr, 2020	315	238	62	55	12	118	800
May, 2020	393	472	159	73	54	352	1500
June, 2020	452	603	252	100	78	558	2043

Source: National Commission for Women (NCW)

Figure 1: Total Women Complaints (2019-2020)



Source: Developed from the Table

² National Commission for Women, Government of India, New Delhi, viewed at <http://164.100.58.238/frmReportNatureStateFin.aspx?Year=2019-2020> Accessed 02 July, 2020

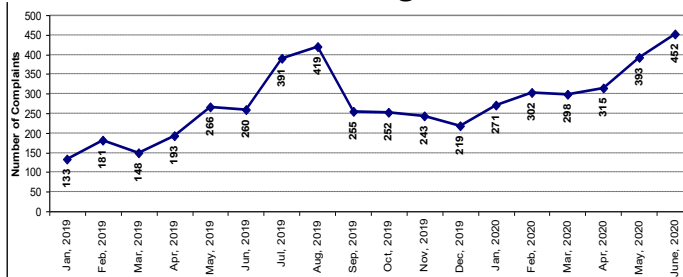
Due to the limitation of the paper, only a few selected violence against women is discussed in this paper, viz. protection of women against domestic violence, right to live with dignity, harassment of married women/ dowry harassment, cybercrime against women, rape/ attempt to rape.

(i) Protection of Women against Domestic Violence

According to “The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005”³ Domestic violence” includes actual abuse or the threat of abuse that is physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economical. Harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the woman, or her relatives would also be covered under this definition. During the lockdown period, the financial crisis directed low-income families to survive on non-nutritional/homemade foods. The hope of *ration*, which local government officials distribute, is not enough to fulfill the desired requirement of the low-income families. However, to control the present situation of Domestic Violence, the government comes up with new ideas from time to time by introducing helpline numbers, home shelters, and legal assistance.⁴ Despite this, these facilities should be in a flow to minimize the victimization towards the violence within their home. For safety reasons, most working families could not leave their homes. It resulted in over-crowding as all family members were living together for a long duration. The level of complaints about protection of Women against Domestic Violence was registered frequently around 10 to 16 percent of violence against women during the calendar year 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic period, such complaints rose from between 22 to 39 percent from March to June 2020.

³ Bar act, Government of India, The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 viewed at <http://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/protection-women-domestic-violence-act-2005>, Accessed 22 June, 2020.

⁴ National Commission for Women, Government of India, New Delhi, viewed at <http://164.100.58.238/frmReportNatureStateFin.aspx?Year=2020-2021> accessed on 02 July, 2020

Figure 2: Protection of Women against Domestic Violence

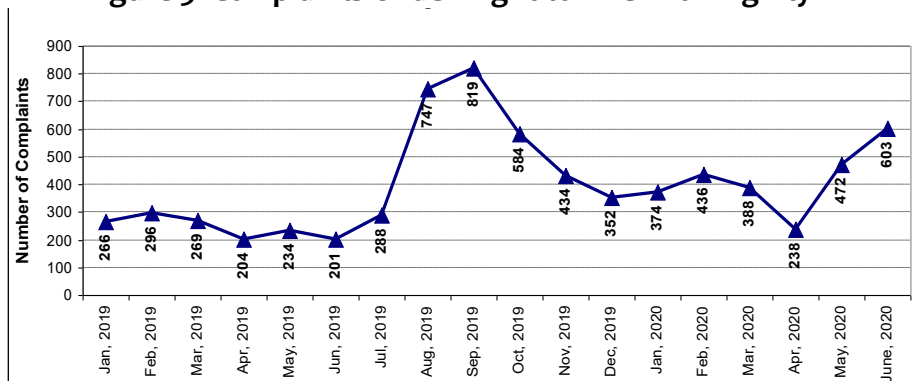
Source: Data from NSW

In August and September 2019, the cases were worst against women in India. Thirty-six percent of complaint cases in 2019 were registered during the July to September 2019 quarter. But these kinds of complaints increased momentarily during the year 2020, specifically during the lockdown period in March 2020 to June 2020. Compared to the national average of 2019, the number of complaints was registered 22, 39, 26, & 22 percent in March, April, May, & June 2020. At the beginning of the lockdown period (April 2020), the numbers of complaints were 315 in comparison to other objections raised by women, which rose to 393 and 452 in May & June 2020, respectively (Figure-2). It can be concluded that the complaints about protection of women against domestic violence increased during the lockdown period due to COVID-19. As a result, economic activity suffered, leaving people to poor earnings and affected their consumption cycle.

(ii) Right to live with dignity

The maximum number of 1854 complaints was received from July to September 2019 compared to other quarters of the calendar Year 2019. From January to March 2019, 831 complaints were registered in the NCW related to the right to live with dignity. Compared to July to September 2019, there was a downfall written from October 2019 to December 2019. This downfall felt reversed in January 2020 (25% of the month's total complaints) and February 2020 (30% of the month's crime). Still, it again reduced continually in March 2020 (28% of the month's total complaints) & in April 2020 (29% of the month's total complaints). This kind of complaint increased to 472 (31% of the month's total complaints) in May 2020 & 603 (30% of the month's total complaints) in June 2020, compared to the history of this kind of complaint raised by women. As the lockdown was imposed from April to June 2020, we may assume that the impact of lockdown in India may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure-3).

Figure 3: Complaints Under Right to Live with Dignity

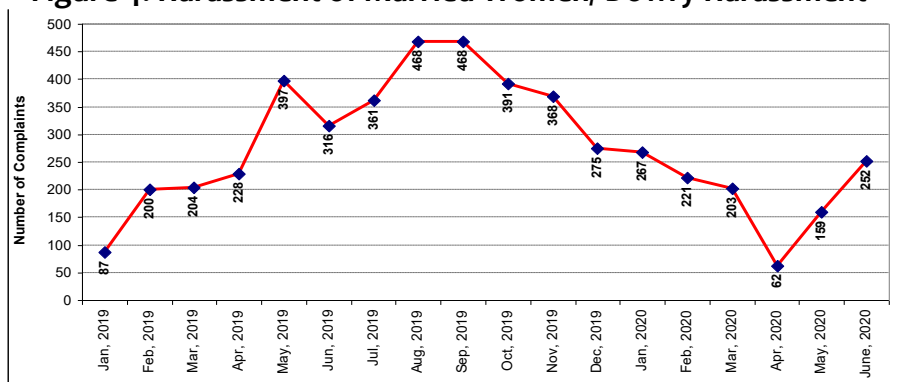


Source: Data from NSW

(iii) Harassment of Married Women/ Dowry Harassment

Compared to Jan & Feb 2019, the complaints increased from 180 to 221 in Feb 2020 in NCW. Looking at Figure-4, the number of complaints about harassment of women, i.e., harassment of married women/ dowry harassment, was found to have increased to 97 in May 2020 and is further exacerbated in the following months. During the COVID-19 pandemic, imposed restrictions resulted in adhering to commonplaces without moving to other optional places. The number of these complaints was found very low (62) during April 2020 compared to March 2020 (Table and Figure-4).⁵

Figure 4: Harassment of Married Women/ Dowry Harassment



Source: Data from NSW.

The number of these kinds of complaints were found very low (62) during April, 2020 in comparison to March, 2020 (Table and Figure-D). It is very significant to say here that the numbers of complaints were increased in May & June, 2020 in compare to April,

⁵ Mitra, Arup (2010), Women’s employment in Asia-Pacific, Asia-Pacific Human Development Report Background Papers Series, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

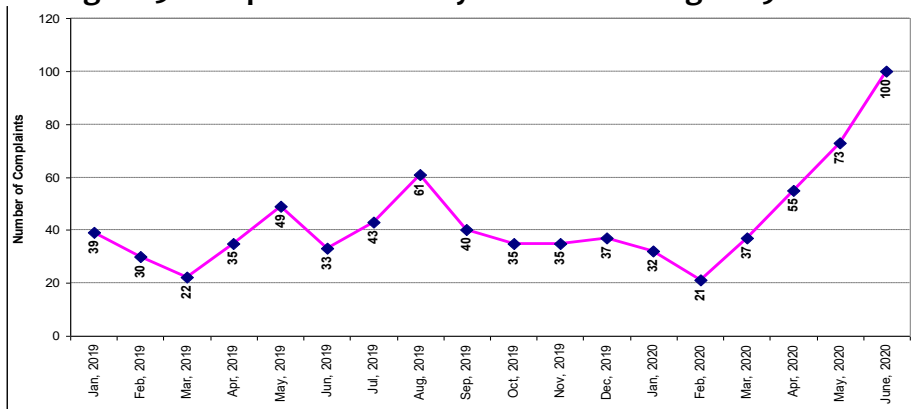
2020; perhaps, it may be possible to allow people to move from their home during some relaxation during lock down in selected places as brides may move to her parent's family to present her in-laws financial demand to meet out the financial crisis created during lock down in India. The downfall in this kind of complaint may be mainly the living of couples together which does not allow them to create quarrels due to non-movement for brides to her parent's family, and could get a suitable time to understand financial problems of each other during the lockdown period in India.

(iv) Cyber Crime against Women

The table and Figure-5 reflect those 459 complaints that were received in the NCW during January to December 2019, out of which 144 (31 percent of the total during 2019) year) complaints were received from July to September 2019. During August 2019, 61 complaints were highest (13 percent), while 49 (11 percent) complaints were registered in May 2019. Around 38 monthly complaints are found, the average of cybercrimes against women reported in the NCW during 2019, and a significant downfall began in September 2019, which continued till Feb 2020. Further, the number of complaints was 2.33 percent low out of total complaints during the year 2019. This national average increased 1.39 percent more during six months (Jan to June) 2020. During complete lockdown for three months (March, April, May, & June 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic in India, this kind of complaint was found to have increased unexpectedly from the past average incidents against women (Figure-E). In comparison to 2019, 15, 20, 24, & 67 more complaints were registered in this kind of crime Cyber Crime against women in NCW during 2020 in March, April, May, & June, respectively. We may conclude that Cyber Crime against women also increased during the lockdown period in India. An unexpected enhancement in the complaints in Cyber Crime against women registered in NCW may be the reason for the lockdown period in India, as most of the cyber-criminals were locked in their homes.⁶

⁶ Chandran, Jaya. (2017) Gender-based laws: a double-edged sword, Mint News Paper, New Delhi, 15 Dec, 2017, p-17 <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/OuDS7WADss4JWEyhnboiDN/Genderbased-laws-a-doubleedged-sword.html> Accessed 25 May, 2020

Figure 5: Complaints Under Cyber Crime during 2019-2020

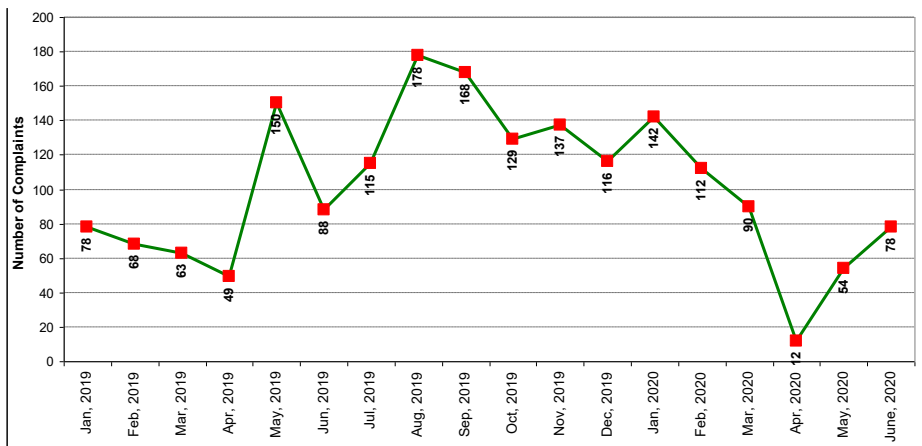


Source: Data from NSW.

(v) Rape/ Attempt to Rape

The complete lockdown in India was announced on 25 March 2020. Therefore, criminals were also in their homes. Looking at the table and Figure-6, rape complaints increased, and on average, 112 complaints added up by each passing month. During August 2019, 178 (13% of the annual) complaints were registered while 49 (4 % of the yearly) in April 2019.

Figure 6: Complaints Under Rape/Attempt to Rape During 2019-2020



Source: Data from NSW.

Figure-6 shows up & down in the rape kinds of incidents in India during 2019, but it is found down continuously in March 2020 & April 2020. After some relaxations in lockdown in selected areas in May & June 2020, the rape/ attempt to rape incidents increased in May and June 2020. There were 12, 54, & 78 complaints registered during April, May, & June 2020, respectively. It may be concluded that this significant crime reduced rapidly during the entire

lockdown period in April 2020 in India due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The crimes against women as found registered in the National Commission of Women, India are found increased on selected types of violence, viz. Domestic Violence against Women, right to live with dignity, harassment of married women/ Dowry harassment, Cyber Crime against women, and Rape/ Attempt to Rape. The complaints about Protection of Women against Domestic Violence were continuously increasing from March 2020 to June 2020. The number of complaints was raised in the right to live with dignity during May 2020 and June 2020 compared to April 2020. Harassment of married women/dowry harassment-related was also found to increase during May 2020 and June 2020, in contrast to April 2020. Unexpected enhancements in Cyber Crime complaints against women were always registered in NCW from March 2020 to June 2020. The number of complaints was found to increase in rape/ attempt to rape during May 2020 and June 2020 compared to April 2020.

About the Author

Dr. Ved Prakash, Assistant Director (Research Faculties) National Institute of Labor Economics Research and Development (NILERD), NITI Aayog, Government of India, New Delhi.
<ved_107@yahoo.co.in>