

**“Lockdown and Intimate Terrorism”: The  
Role of COVID-19 as a Facilitator of an  
Increase in Domestic Violence in India**

**Annie Anand<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> *MSc. in Social Policy and Social Research from University College London, United Kingdom*  
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## **Abstract**

*This research focuses on looking at the factors responsible for an increase in domestic violence during a pandemic emergency with close reference to the COVID-19 lockdown situation in India. The value of this research lies in understanding the key reasons that are accountable for domestic abuse on women during a lockdown and subsequently suggest policy solutions for dealing with this social problem. The research approach adopted is a combined qualitative methodology of Qualitative Content Analysis and Narrative Analysis on a myriad of secondary data collected from online sources. The key findings from the research provide evidence that socioeconomic factors such as job loss & increase in stress, cultural patriarchal set-up and associated toxic masculinity of men in Indian households and victim-blaming are responsible for increasing the problem of domestic abuse. The dissertation concludes that the measures being adopted currently by India are rather inefficient and require a multi-disciplinary framework of stakeholders to solve the domestic violence situation in the country. Finally, the dissertation recommends changes in key policies around domestic abuse combined with community awareness and better resource allocation for a brighter future for the women of India.*

**Keywords:** *COVID-19, lockdown, domestic violence, patriarchy, power-dynamics, unemployment, mental health, socio-cultural beliefs, community awareness*

## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

“When home doesn’t feel like home: I drive around in circles hoping to get to a destination— one where I would be happy. The right place. The right time.”

-Najwa Zebian, *Sparks of Phoenix*

This quote has been taken from Najwa Zebian’s<sup>1</sup> first-hand narration of domestic violence in her book, *Sparks of Phoenix* (2019). Her work fittingly pens down the struggles of a survivor of domestic violence from the viewpoint of a woman. The history of domestic violence goes back to the oldest known written legal text known as the Code of Hammurabi wherein both women and children have been defined as objects in the hands of the men of the house (Fader, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> Zebian is an author, poet, public speaker, an avid activist on various social issues with particular emphasis on domestic violence and a personal inspiration for having taken up the issue of domestic violence as the topic for my dissertation.

Domestic violence as a social issue has haunted humanity for ages now, but what is intriguing to note here, is the acceptability of ‘violence inside the house’ socially as well as under the law for several years before it was globally recognized as a social problem. Till the early 1970s, wife-beating was considered a rather correctional measure than a punishable offence by the law (Clark, 2011). It was only during the second wave of feminism that domestic violence against women was taken up as a focal point of the rights of women in the US, and an exceptional change was noticed. There was a huge public involvement in this social issue that led it to no longer be considered a “familial affair”. Further, the intensity of the feminist revolution forced judicial organisations in the US to come up with compulsory interventions for this social problem (Houston, 2014).

Currently, major international organisations working on health and gender-based concerns such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organisation (WHO) define domestic violence as “gender-based violence” that is likely to cause physical, psychological and sexual harm to an individual (WHO, 2017) (UNICEF, 2000). It is important to note the emphasis on gender in this form of violence as it is born out of the power-based privilege held by men across the globe. There are statistics to reinforce that this is a gender-based social issue as UN Women (2019) gives an estimated figure of around 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse from their intimate partners or sexual violence by a non-partner in their lifetime. In India, the figures are not very different as a report from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) estimates 28.8% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse through an intimate partner in their lifetime (International Institute for Population Science (IIPS) and ICF, 2017). These figures are alarming yet important to reiterate the continuous need for dealing with this societal concern.

With the recent lockdown in place, following the COVID-19 pandemic, a news article by the Guardian published around the end of March 2020, suggests a magnification of the problem of domestic violence amidst households, as women are now physically held captive with their violent partners (Graham-Harrison, et al., 2020). The situation in India particularly worsened in the month of April, post the COVID-19 lockdown imposed by the Prime Minister of the country on 23 March 2020. As per data received from the National Commission for Women, the government body responsible for registering cases of domestic violence in India, there was a 100% increase in the number of complaints received post the lockdown.

The NCW has received a total of 239 complaints of domestic violence from March 23 to April 16 as compared to the 123 complaints received 25 days before the lockdown (Joy, 2020). The data available in India with regards to this social problem indicates a positive correlation between COVID-19 lockdown and rise in domestic violence and creates an urgency for understanding the particular reasons that have led to this surge.

## **1.2 Research Rationale**

Whilst these mandatory lockdowns following the COVID-19 pandemic, look like the appropriate response to this public health emergency, we cannot ignore the implications of the same on another public health issue, that of domestic violence, which the world has experienced for centuries now. With the data on hand, it is safe to assume that there is a need to address this “dual public health emergency” with equal importance being given to the increase in domestic violence. Hence, in this research, the author aims to conduct a qualitative secondary content analysis of data to explore the sudden increase in the rate of domestic violence in India and investigate the possible causes of the same. A second part of the research will focus on the response to this unforeseen increase and the strategies being undertaken in India to deal with the current situation. The research will be conducted with a distinct focus on India for two reasons:

- The first would be increasingly concerning data to prove that the rate of Domestic Violence (DV) in India has increased during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- The second reason would be the need to address this public health crisis considering the weak implementation of policies around domestic violence in the country (IADV, 2020) combined with the poor interventions in place during the lockdown to take care of this problem.

Feminist theories on domestic violence such as the works of Goodmark (2012) and Schechter (1979) take into account different reasons for domestic violence that are usually not covered while understanding the complexity of the problem of Domestic violence. A few fascinating reasons that might be enablers of Domestic violence include the outlook of the victims as “battered females”, the concept of domestic violence as a “family matter” and the problem of “victim-blaming” (Houston, 2014).

These theories align well with the problem of Domestic violence in India because there are many underlying perceptions and ideologies in the cultural and social norms of the country that normalise the problem of domestic violence. Some of these theories will be used in the Literature Review and Research Findings to examine the specific causes of Domestic violence in the country, precisely following the COVID-19 lockdown. The next section would provide a base for understanding the nature of domestic violence in the country and subsequently, inform the key aim and objectives by understanding the variance in the common facilitators<sup>2</sup> for Domestic violence in India and those particular ones identified after the lockdown came into place in March, 2020. The author also aims to analyse the measures being undertaken in India to curb Domestic violence and/or support the victims of it during COVID-19. The gaps in the literature identified during the research will eventually help in providing recommended pertinent interventions and possible policy solutions for this social problem.

### **1.3 Primary Aim of the Research**

The principal aim of undertaking this research was to provide better and more rooted insight into the role of the COVID-19 lockdown in increasing the rate of Domestic violence in the country. However, it would not be possible for us to understand the distinct reasons that have caused this increase without analysing the generic drivers of Domestic violence that are particular to India. The author will use the literature review to explore these drivers and elucidate the specific manner in which these drivers increase the problem of Domestic violence. Further, this research aims to evaluate existing control mechanisms<sup>3</sup> in place and how the response to this social problem in the country needs a re-thinking. Therefore, the overall objectives of undertaking this research are meeting the following purposes:

- Identifying the common facilitators of Domestic violence in India and exploring the specific reasons responsible for an increase in the rate of Domestic violence post the COVID-19 lockdown imposed in India.
- Detecting the actions being undertaken by the government and non-governmental organisations currently to curb Domestic violence amidst the lockdown, also analysing

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<sup>2</sup> Common facilitators with reference to this research would involve general social, religious and cultural reasons that have been responsible for framing the problem of domestic violence

<sup>3</sup> Control mechanisms would be the tools that are used by the government and certain non-governmental organizations to curb the social issue of domestic abuse

the policies in place to deal with Domestic violence in the country. By studying the policies and interventions around the protection of women from Domestic violence, I aim to identify gaps in the measures required to cope with the current situation and those that are already in place. Recognizing these gaps, in turn, could help me in recommending possible policy solutions in this regard.

To condense the value of this research, these objectives when fulfilled would help to understand in detail the causes of Domestic violence in India amidst the current lockdown situation and identify the issues emerging from the analysis. Considerable research has not yet been conducted comparing the drivers of Domestic violence during the lockdown imposed in India with the generic drivers and this research paper will provide useful insight concerning the same. Overall, the research will help provide valuable contributions to the field of Domestic violence and help critically examine the frameworks in place amidst the current lockdown situation.

In the next section, the author has conducted a literature review on the information available on domestic violence in alignment with the research objectives mentioned above. Section 3.0 would focus on the research strategy the author would undertake to conduct their secondary data analysis and the particular research methods that they will adopt in the process. Section 4.0 will have the research findings from applying the research methods discussed in the previous section. The final section will summarize the research and literature reviews findings also drawing final conclusions and self-reflection.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This section explores the discourse on gender-based domestic violence and the complexities involved in this public health and human rights issue as articulated by WHO (2013:2): “Violence against women is a significant public health problem, as well as a fundamental violation of women’s human rights”.

Critical evaluation of the literature on this problem particularly in light of the COVID-19 situation provides the groundwork for achieving the main aims of the research as set out in part 1.3 of section 1.0:

- Identifying the common facilitators of domestic violence in India and exploring the specific reasons responsible for an increase in the rate of Domestic violence post the COVID-19 lockdown imposed in India.
- Detecting the actions being undertaken by the government and non-governmental organisations currently to curb Domestic violence amidst the lockdown, also analysing the policies in place to deal with Domestic violence in the country. By studying the policies and interventions around the protection of women from Domestic violence, I aim to identify gaps in the measures required to cope with the current situation and those that are already in place. Recognizing these gaps, in turn, could help me in recommending possible policy solutions in this regard.

The following section of the literature review focuses on the viewpoint of Domestic violence as a deprivation of human rights, hence, reinstating the importance of dealing with this social problem. In the next section, The author will highlight the adverse effect of the COVID-19 lockdown imposed in India on the problem of Domestic violence in the country. Various reasons for the increase as identified through journals, news articles and media outlets will be a substantial part of this literature review. The third part analyses the generic causes of domestic abuse in India, taking into account the physical, emotional or psychological, economic and sexual aspects of it. The concluding part supports an understanding of the steps being undertaken to tackle the issue of Domestic violence in the country. Identifying gaps during the literature review will help in justifying the need for undertaking this research and suggesting plausible recommendations for improvement.

## **2.2 Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue**

Domestic violence was not traditionally considered a dispute of human rights due to familial problems not falling under the jurisdiction of international law (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights,2003). However, a growing literature on this issue contradicts these conventional beliefs (Shuib et. al., 2013) (Rey, 2011). Domestic violence is now being examined as a constitutional rights issue and not just a public health dilemma. Currently, various international protocols such as the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and CEDAW identify the right for women to live violence-free (UN Women, 2015).

In conformity with a resolution passed by the General Assembly of the UN in 1993 on the eradication of violence against women, any kind of abuse against women is a violation of their fundamental right as human being (UN General Assembly, 2013:2). Correspondingly, this can be applied to domestic violence on women as it obstructs their right to equality, integrity and dignity and hinders their economic and social prospects. In severe circumstances of physical abuse, Domestic violence can prove to be a threat to a woman's right to live as articulated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948).

It is fitting to say that Domestic violence, which is more often than not, gender-biased, takes away from women their personal freedom at various levels. Looking at it only from a global health perspective would restrict the possibility of exploring various reasons that can possibly lead to domestic violence. In particular reference to the research, these would include religious factors and socio-cultural norms that have defined domestic violence in India. Further, with the lockdown imposed in India amidst COVID-19, the primary focus has been on reducing the rate at which the disease is spreading. In the process, there has been a trade-off of the freedom of women, further increasing the problem of Domestic violence in the country. As perfectly described by the Observer Research Foundation, "addressing domestic violence has been a forgotten agenda while locking India down" (Mehta, et al., 2020). This predicament has re-emphasised the need to look at Domestic violence as a basic violation of a woman's right alongside a health problem. It is because of this criticalness that more and more research is required on this particular issue that now affects around one-third of the women in the world (WHO, 2017). Specifically, there is an urgent need to understand the causes that have led to an increase in Domestic violence amidst the COVID-19 situation. In the following section, I aim to unfold the effect of the lockdown in India on this sensitive social issue and the possible reasons for the same as identified during the literature review.

### **2.3: Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on the Domestic Violence Situation in India**

On 30 January 2020, COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency by WHO and many countries across the world decided to go into a state of complete lockdown. Since then, news forums, international organisations and social networking platforms have been reporting an alarming rise in the cases of domestic violence globally. A report by the UN showed the upsurge in violence not limited to a specific country or region with the number of domestic violence cases



has doubled in Malaysia and up by 32% in France (Mohammed, Amina, 2020). Another article by The Economist suggests that reports of domestic violence have gone up by 5% in five of America's biggest cities. The situation is worse in the global south with countries like Brazil has reported an estimated 40-50% increase in the number of domestic abuse cases. Talking of numbers in India, the National Commission of Women in India identified a 100% increase in the number of complaints of Domestic violence received by them in the month of April post the lockdown imposed in late March (Joy, 2020). India has been one of the worst-hit countries by this phenomenon and under the prevailing circumstances, the author considers it crucial to understand the specific reasons that have led to this sudden increase.

The unforeseen global pandemic has had serious implications on the disadvantaged groups particularly the poor and women in India. Goshal (2020), a social activist calls it a twin public health emergency, emphasizing the consequences both Domestic violence and COVID-19 would have on public health particularly on those that are more vulnerable. Further, Varadarajan (2020) trying to look at the situation through a gender lens expresses the following in one of her articles- "There are millions of women living in India witnessing and experiencing another pandemic within the pandemic – the virus called domestic violence."

A report by The Wire (2020), one of India's leading news and opinion websites, states how male privilege has worsened the condition of women during the lockdown who anyway perform more unpaid labour than any other country in the world except Kazakhstan. A lockdown situation would naturally imply more household work and with no help from the partners, women are spending more time than ever doing familial tasks. This unequal distribution of work, further deteriorating the physical and mental health of women can be clearly accounted as a form of domestic violence on them. This nature of Domestic violence, which has been a product of the unplanned lockdown in the country, is less likely to be reported by women, however, it is equally necessary to note the grievousness of it. Further, there are ways in which the lockdown has directly caused an increase in the rate of Domestic violence, which are discussed below.

### **2.3.1 How the Lockdown has acted as a Facilitator for Exacerbating the Problem of Domestic Violence in India**

Whilst it is vital to understand the generic reasons that frame the domestic violence situation in India (explained in detail in section 2.4), it is also imperative to recognize the role of the COVID-19 lockdown in adding to the distressed situation of women who are being exposed to violence in their own homes. The most direct way in which the lockdown has acted as an enabler of Domestic violence is that it has restricted the mobility of women, hence, making it difficult for them to isolate themselves from their abusive partners. Women who otherwise being in an abusive situation could look for help outside their homes are now unable to approach for help or even leave the house to avoid it.

In addition to this, households currently have become spaces for work from home for men and online tuitions for children which have further taken away the freedom of women whose position is already defined as a subordinate individual in a patriarchal household (The Wire, 2020). Close proximity of women with their abusive husbands makes them more vulnerable to not just physical abuse but also emotional abuse. In a report by Nigam (2020), she shares stories of IPV on women during the lockdown and in one of the narrations, an educated man batters his 24-year-old wife after she beat him in a game of online Ludo. This particular example makes me contemplate how boredom or the need for men to impose their masculinity on women is a complimenting factor to the physical captivity of women in already crammed households. This has deteriorated the situation of women in Indian households and increased the amount of physical, emotional and sexual abuse they have been subject to.

Further, India as a country depends on physical labour for a major part of the economy and with the lockdown situation in place, a huge portion of the population has been rendered unemployed. As per a report by one of the leading business newspapers in the country, the unemployment rate reaches an all-time high at 26% during the lockdown situation and almost 14 crore<sup>4</sup> individuals have been left unemployed in the process (BusinessToday.In, 2020). Loss of jobs and the associated financial uncertainty during this phase of lockdown has also increased the levels of stress and anxiety amongst men, who in turn release their tensions on women in the form of emotional, sometimes even physical abuse (Shivakumar, 2020).

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<sup>4</sup>Crore is an Indian measurement usually of currency, which is equivalent to ten million

The embarrassment of being unable to provide for their family damages the masculinity of men in Indian households and considering the role of women in their lives, they are bound to unleash their frustration on them. These insecurities stem from the patriarchal set up of the country which has been discussed in detail in the next section. Further, the author observed in one of the news articles that young daughters who are considered a financial burden on the family are being forcefully married off during the lockdown by both the parents. (Bose, 2020). This form of emotional abuse has long term consequences and in future may subject the survivor to physical abuse as well.

To summarise the reasons, the lockdown has increased the levels of boredom, stress and anger amongst men and this acts as an enabler in an already patriarchal household that has various social and cultural norms associated with it, some of them even normalising domestic abuse. Further, loss of jobs and the inability to provide for the family and subsequently increased anxiety has also triggered this social problem. Whilst these reasons on the surface would appear rather straightforward, there have been certain factors in the Indian system of beliefs that have contributed considerably to this social issue. These can be considered as the root reasons for the problem of Domestic violence to have been normalised in the country to this extent, in turn, increasing the rate by almost two-fold during a global pandemic. In the next section, The author will be discussing the generic determinants of Domestic violence in India, also linking them to the current situation in the country.

## **2.4 Generic Determinants of Domestic Violence in India**

India is a diverse country of over 1.38 billion people with languages, castes and religions from all over the globe. Whilst this diversity is beautiful in its own way, there are certain beliefs in the Indian system that are problematic and stem from the centuries-old issue of gender bias. Some of them have contributed considerably to the problem of domestic violence in the country and it is essential to understand these to create a base for a larger picture of how these connect to the reasons identified for an increase in Domestic violence amidst the lockdown. These factors which have been discussed below will provide a deeper understanding of how religion and socio-cultural norms have affected how women are subject to abuse and close comparison with the research findings will help in accomplishing the research objectives.

- **Religious factors:** Women have been considered inferior counterparts of men since the time of ancient Hindu mythological texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. There are several instances in these holy books, that Indians have so religiously followed since time immemorial, that suggest acceptability of cruelty and sexual assault against women. In one such illustration, Sita, the female protagonist in the Ramayana is coerced to perform ‘agni-pariksha’ or torment of fire to prove her chastity to her husband, Rama, after being abducted by the villain of the narrative, Ravana. Sita’s representation in this Indian literature is that of a fearful and weak woman who idolizes her husband irrespective of the physical and emotional abuse she is subject to. Another excerpt from the ancient Hindu manuscript of law normalises the economic and emotional abuse of women: “In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.” (Laws of Manu, 1969, p.195)

In a country where religion has been an integral part of society, these holy scriptures have played an essential role in widely affecting women and men’s perception of women as the weaker gender and have bred the pernicious idea of masculinity in men that has been an influential factor for Domestic violence in India (Sahoo and Pradhan, 2007). Further, it has internalised a personal interpretation by women of these scriptures, that shows them as sinners. An interesting parallel can be drawn with the current lockdown situation wherein the Sita is physically captivated in this Indian household wherein she is subject to domestic violence when the man of the house is unable to display his masculinity to society. The perception of her as the sinner further helps maintain her silence on the abuse.

- **Cultural norms:** Male privilege is deeply embedded in the history of India despite being a culturally diverse country with a rich heritage of thousands of years. Whilst this can be linked to the concept of male-dominated religious scriptures, a special mention also needs to be made to the cultural acceptability of certain wrongs present in society.

The infamous ‘sati-system’<sup>5</sup> of a family burning the widow with her dead husband is an apt example of how malignant cultural norms supporting male privilege have accepted the physical abuse of women since the 15th century (Jain, 2018). It is to be noted that the practice of Sati has been banned in India now, but male privilege continues to flourish in smaller aspects such as wife-beating as a corrective measure for women (Visaria,2000). Another example is the practice of dowry that is still followed in almost every part of the country. Although dowry can be considered a form of economic and psychological abuse, a study of women who sought help from a counselling centre in Bengaluru, a metropolitan city of India, found out dowry to be one of the significant factors for physical abuse against women as well (Vranda, 2013). As per the study, dissatisfaction in men with the amount of dowry or the inability of women to pay dowry after marriage led to physical intimate partner violence on women. These cultural “norms” have been a driving factor of an increase in the number of Domestic violence cases coming up during the lockdown. The smallest of mistakes by the unprivileged gender who are now stranded with their abusers give a good enough reason to the men of the house to use physical and mental abuse as a corrective measure for their wives. Further, with the economic pressure increasing due to the COVID-19 lockdown, many are now forcefully marrying their daughters off, and the cultural practice of dowry in this time of economic crunch has acted as a facilitator of an increase in the amount of abuse they are subject to.

- **Patriarchy:** The patriarchal setup in India is a result of unequal gender dynamics in the country. Looking at it from a feminist perspective would help throw more light on how patriarchy has led to the reservation of power in the hands of men, specifically in terms of the rights endowed to them.<sup>6</sup> Patriarchy has also assigned gender-specific rules to both men and women and anyone who does not conform to them is subject to contempt in

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<sup>5</sup> The Sati-system was a traditional Indian system, first seen in the colonies of Bengal in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The system drew upon the malignant problem of male privilege in Indian society and involved burning a widow alive after her partner’s death. The idea was basically that a woman was not supposed to be seen as an individual identity and had to be necessarily linked to a male member of the family, the father before marriage and the husband thereafter.

<sup>6</sup> Please refer to (Waters, 1989), particularly the four main traditions in the use of the term patriarchy illustrated between p195-2010.

Indian society. Various behavioural traits such as aggression, dominance and strength are associated with men. They are also not expected to be involved in household chores. It is a prevalent behaviour for women to be more submissive and accountable to their fathers before marriage and their husbands after it. The role of women as secondary individuals in a household is articulated by Bhandari and Hughes (2017) in their study of the experiences of 21 Indian women from low-income groups. “Also, after marriage, women are considered a part of the in-laws’ household and are at the bottom of the familial ladder.”

The concept of men as the breadwinners of the family often leads women to be financially dependent on them, hence putting them to risk of economic abuse (Vyas, 2006). Further, in a study by Visaria (200), it was found that women are often subject to physical abuse such as beating by their husbands on the failure of being able to complete household tasks. This arrangement in India does not just allow men to feel that they are correct in abusing their wives but also changes women’s perspective towards freedom. In one of Miller’s (2000) works, he identifies that certain women in households feel they deserve to be punished in the form of physical violence. This again can be accounted to the primitive patriarchal ways of Indian society and how women are expected to be the compliant and accommodating individuals of a household. It is important to note that in the current lockdown situation, wherein the cultural normalities have made women rather non-resistant to abuse, the rate of domestic violence is bound to go up. Further, with the level of stress in men increasing due to lack of jobs, and their inability to be able to provide for the family, it is likely that they would release their stress in the form of wife-beating and other kinds of emotional and physical abuse.

The aftermath of the social isolation following the COVID-19 pandemic has been alarming and whilst the government is focusing on the economic consequences of the lockdown, not enough thought has been given to the social repercussions of it. The following section unravels the response of the government with the respect to the rising number of Domestic violence cases which has been far from dismal and subsequently presents a case on how it is paramount to conduct research on the causes of the same.

## **2.5 Measures being undertaken, Emerging Issues and Urgency for Factual Research**

The increasing number of Domestic violence cases around the world is highly distressing and the UN chief, Antonio Guterres, addressing the general public on 06 April, 2020 has requested an urgent need for appropriate action to address this “horrifying global surge in domestic violence” (UN, 2020). The data highlighted in section 2.3 of the review, exhibits the need to understand the measures that are being undertaken in India to deal with this shadow pandemic that has occurred within the pandemic the world is facing. Whilst certain initiatives being undertaken by the government are commendable, a failure to bring about changes at the policy level is evident in the rising number of Domestic violence cases on a daily basis (Nigam, 2020). As also observed during the review, most of the actions being undertaken to tackle this social issue have been driven by non-governmental organisations, women welfare departments and shelter homes.

NGOs and WWDs such as SNEHA and URJA have come up with 24\*7 helpline numbers and specific email ids for women who require support (Deshpande, 2020). Other NGOs like ‘Give India’ have come up with online counselling sessions for couples and support groups for domestic violence survivors and potential victims (Apnalaya, 2020). Further, noted Indian journalists and media personalities have been spreading awareness about Domestic violence using hashtags such as #lockdown on domestic violence and #dial 100 to encourage their followers to educate their friends and family (Times of India, 2020) (Mehta, et al., 2020). Speaking of measures undertaken on a political level, the efforts of the Jammu and Kashmir state government have been exemplary. Besides allocating additional funds to back shelter homes and awareness campaigns, they have also assigned certain grocery shops and pharmacies wherein women can report any domestic violence case using certain keywords (Agarwal, 2020).

It is essential to understand that whilst these measures indicate a step forward towards change, access to these resources might be a huge barrier to women, especially those in rural areas who do not even have access to telephone or internet services. The locked-down situation adds to the problems as women are rarely left alone to report to the helpline numbers. Another important aspect that is not covered in the help being offered, as noted during the review, is little to no mental health support being offered to the survivors. The helpline numbers are answered by either lawyers or the police, and the victim might not be in the correct state of mind to talk about

the legalities of the issue right away, as articulated by a Delhi-based psychotherapist, Nishi Joshi (Harsh, 2020).

Further, opening up liquor shops during the lockdown shows the government's indifference to the gender-based social problems the country is currently facing (Harsh, 2020). In a recent petition filed by the All India Council of Human Rights, Liberties & Social Justice (AICHLS), a Delhi based NGO, a request was made to improve the measures being undertaken to reduce Domestic violence during the lockdown. The Delhi High Court rejected the plea stating that sufficient systematic actions are in place to deal with this problem (PTI, 2020). It is also surprising to note The Ministry of Women and Child Development in India have been rather closed up on this issue and have not undertaken any press conferences about this problem that the country is dealing with as a result of the lockdown imposed.

The instances above reflect the inability of the government to understand the intensity of this social issue and prioritize it. There is an urgent need for the government to improve their resource allocation particularly for the problem of Domestic violence present in the country. Another important need of the hour is for credible research on this affair, particularly a deep understanding of the reasons leading to this surge. This can, in turn, help to provide a foundation for possible suggestions for dealing with this social monster.

### **3.0 Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

In the previous section, the author developed the key reasons for the problem of Domestic violence in India and specifically during the COVID-19 lockdown, as identified during the literature review of the issue. the author also elaborated on the current measures being undertaken to deal with this dual public health emergency and how the steps being undertaken are inadequate in view of the graveness of the situation. By finding gaps during the literature review, the author necessitated the need for further research on the causes of Domestic violence and subsequent interventions and policy suggestions for dealing with this social issue. Before the author moves on to the findings, it is important to understand the framework for the research that will help me convert theory into practice. Hence, this section aims to highlight the research questions and subsequently the strategy that will be followed while undertaking this research.



This will be succeeded by the methods used for data collection and the research techniques that will be used for the analysis of the data. The concluding section will bring forward the limitations to the strategy being adopted and possible concerns while analysing data using the research techniques. First and foremost, the empirical qualitative research that the author will be conducting will focus on answering the following research questions:

1. What are the specific drivers of domestic violence amidst the current lockdown situation and how are they related to the common factors responsible for Domestic violence in India?
2. What are the policy and interventions in place to fight this problem elevated during the pandemic lockdown also being referred to as the shadow pandemic?

It is also essential to develop the research design that will be undertaken by the researcher and to validate the reliability of the choice to meet the research needs. And so, it is important that the research design is appropriate to the requirements of the research being undertaken (Biggam, 2008). This research will contribute to an in-depth analysis of the reasons for domestic violence amidst the lockdown imposed in light of COVID-19 and the interventions that could help lower the rate of Domestic violence in the country. In essence, the research will be qualitative in nature, with an interpretative outlook to it. Since human observation and the interpretations of participants' experiences in respect with time and context are fundamental to the research, the author believes an interpretative perspective while conducting the research would help in understanding the multiple realities that exist for a given social issue through the lens of different individuals (Mertens 1998: 161). A combined research design of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and Narrative Analysis will be used for the analysis of secondary data that has been procured by other academics/researchers and writers and available on the internet.

### **3.1.1 Qualitative Content Analysis**

Krippendorff (2004) explains the QCA approach as a dependable technique that can help observe content and provide valuable insights to understand a specific phenomenality and advise actions that can be undertaken in response to the same- "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use."

He also claims that content analysis of different forms of texts and other types of matter such as images, sounds, symbols or numbers is especially useful wherein direct observation is not possible. Due to the current COVID-19 situation making it difficult for me to carry out face-to-face data collection and the complexity of the social issue the author has taken up as a first-time researcher, the author believes, primary QCA will prove to be an appropriate research method for analysis.

As stated by Roller and Lavrakas (2015), primary QCA can be beneficial to study content available online and see how people interact on social media. Various qualitative research in the health industry uses this method for studying social and health phenomena. Further, since the author aims to look at the different psychological traits and cultural and social aspects that might have led to an increase in the rate of Domestic violence in India amidst the lockdown, it is important to choose a method that is not just quantitative but offers a systematic way to infer valuable meaning from the data that we are analysing (Wamboldt, 2009). The author trusts that this method would be an appropriate way to analyse these variables through documents, speeches, online interviews and other forms such as media communication.

### **3.1.2 Narrative Analysis**

The second research design that will be used for the dissertation is narrative analysis, a multi-disciplinary methodology that is useful to analyse texts of different forms, such as oral, written or visual mostly having a common story that links them (Catherine, 2008). It is appropriate for analysing data for the research because this methodology offers a meaningful interpretation of discourse on certain events, in this case, Domestic violence increasing during the lockdown following COVID-19 and the stories of those that have encountered violence at home. Further, a narrative approach to data helps to answer questions of what and why. It centres around the precision of how a particular event occurred and what human forces brought about the incident (Bamberg, 2012). The diversity of narratives may range from history to drama, biography to memoirs, health journals to media documents (Riessman, 2008). Since the research entails close accounts of human lives, as identified from journals, online platforms and research papers, the author believes this methodology will be apt to interpret texts that have a common base of similar individual stories of Domestic violence struggles.

It is important to understand the depth of this social issue and also what measures can be undertaken to tackle this rapid increase in the rate of Domestic violence during the lockdown, and this design aims to fulfil the purpose of the same.

### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

It is equally important to understand the ways in which data for empirical research will be collected as it is to choose a valid and appropriate design for conducting research. Given the current lockdown situation that makes face-to-face data collection non-viable for me, the author chose to collect the qualitative data in the form of secondary research through virtual platforms. Whilst the author does agree, it restricts the opportunity of involving participants directly in the process, the author believes an in-depth analysis of data available on the open sources would help provide a strong base for the research. It would also widen the possibility of obtaining information and hence, the author would not be limiting it to a specific data set. Further, the sensitivity of the social issue under question and the lack of first-hand experience as a qualitative researcher makes this a more appropriate form of data collection for me. The data will be gathered from the starting of May 2020 to November 2020 from a variety of sources that have been listed below:

<b>Unstructured Data Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Reports	World Health Organisation, United Nations
Reports	Non-governmental organisations such as URJA, Give India
Articles	National and international news organisations such as Times of India, The Wire
Research papers and case studies	Journals and periodicals
Interviews (primary research conducted by other Individuals)	Internet using keywords specified in the next section
Trending hashtags, videos and photos	Social media such as Instagram, Twitter

Table 1: Sources for research, author's own work inspired by Nishant and Ravishankar (2018)

### **3.3 Framework for Data Analysis**

The qualitative content analysis methodology aims to interpret data that has been collected through a structured process of coding and subsequently identifying patterns and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Conventional content analysis allows for describing a particular phenomenon by dividing the information retrieved into categories and if required, subcategories as well, followed by coding of these categories. The Narrative analysis approach the author would be taking for analysing data will concentrate on categorising a particular event and then comparing all the references to the selected phenomenon within a variety of texts (Lieblich et. al.,1998).

Figure 1 below shows a graphical representation of the data analysis process that will be followed for this research. Only data that meet the tags will be taken to the next stage where it will be divided into categories. The inclusion criteria would be met through the following keywords:

1. Domestic violence
2. Women
3. COVID-19 lockdown
4. India
5. Emotional, physical, economical and sexual abuse
6. Causes and Reasons
7. Interventions and policies

Once the data is collected and refined, it will be organised into categories that would reflect the key objectives of the research started out in section 1. The data will subsequently be coded to identify certain themes that are common to them and creating relationships between them. This will help in understanding the reasons for domestic violence during a lockdown as identified through the common themes emerging during the analysis. An important part of this research, that would occur in the second stage, would be contrasting and comparing the themes emerging during the analysis of this data with the findings of the literature review. This would successively help in understanding specific reasons for a sudden shift in the cases of domestic violence and also the appropriateness of the measures being undertaken to control it.

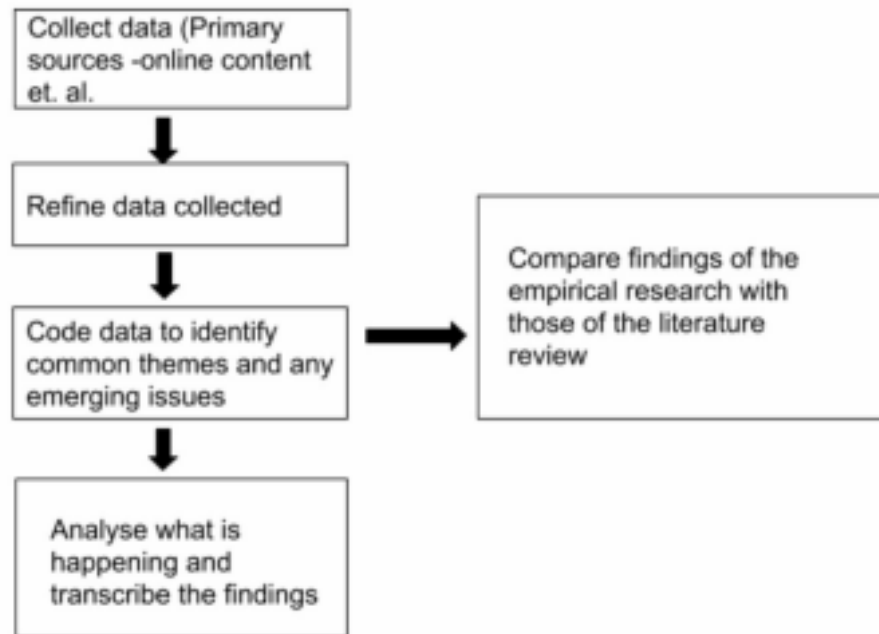


Figure 1: Qualitative data analysis process for this research, author's own work

### **3.4 Limitations and Ethical Issues**

This section highlights the limitations to the research methods that will be used in the work along with a few ethical considerations that the author needs to be mindful of while conducting the empirical research. Since the research topic is highly sensitive, a combination of QCA and narrative analysis approach is adopted and the author agrees that there could be a lack of personal touch in using this approach, which is more evident in using other qualitative methods, for example, interviews. Subsequently, issues with respect to reliability might also arise during the research. However, the author has tried to reduce the risk of the same by listing in detail the research design and the techniques for data collection that will be used, how the collected data will be framed and eventually implemented. As well, using QCA and narrative analysis as the research design would help increase the generalizability of the research to a larger audience which would not have been possible if the author had used interviews or focus groups for collecting the data.

Additionally, conducting a living piece of research can be complex, as new information appears at regular intervals and there are concerns in relation to the quality of data available with regards to the research topic. the author intends to mitigate this concern by applying the

methodology in a more meticulous manner whilst collecting and analysing data and ensuring the findings are also clearly transcribed. This will also help ensure that the data is not misconceived, hence, making sure that it has been disseminated and used in an appropriate manner. Lastly, the author understands the contextual complexities involved in undertaking this research as it is a delicate social issue during a period of a public health emergency. The author will ensure that the data research is confidential and data storage and security are taken extra care of. The author will also be mindful of the textual language that will be used while writing the findings in section 4. In the next section, the author will elaborate on the results of these methodologies applied to the secondary data and discuss the results to help achieve the objectives listed in section 1.

## **4.0 Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this section, the author aims to reveal the results of the qualitative research analysis on data collected from online sources as mentioned in section 3.2 of the dissertation. The research will focus on answering two main research questions:

1. What are the specific drivers of domestic violence amidst the current lockdown situation and how are they related to the common factors responsible for Domestic violence in India?
2. What are the policy and interventions in place to fight this problem elevated during the pandemic lockdown also being referred to as the shadow pandemic?

As illustrated in the previous section as well, a combined research strategy of QCA and Narrative Analysis was used to analyse the data that was gathered. Please note that all data was collected through online sources that published their works from March 2020 to November 2020. Initially, the data after being collected and refined was coded and divided into categories. Thereafter, the author applied QCA and Narrative analysis accordingly to derive themes that would help answer both the research questions.

Firstly, QCA was applied to the qualitative data collected from the sources that have been discussed in Table 2 below. This majorly helped in answering the first research question, the key findings to which have been attached to section 4.2.1.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Source Name</b>	<b>Source Type</b>
COVID-19 and domestic violence against women	Asian Journal of Psychiatry	Research paper
Intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in India: From psychiatric and forensic vantage points	Asian Journal of Psychiatry	Research paper
Examining the impact of lockdown (due to COVID-19) on Domestic Violence (DV): An evidence from India	Asian Journal of Psychiatry	Research paper
Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Women During COVID-19	Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine	Research paper
“The Cries behind the Closed Rooms”: Domestic Violence against Women during COVID-19, A Crisis Call	Journal of Mental Health Education	Research paper
Twin public health emergencies: Covid-19 and domestic violence	Indian Journal of Medical Ethics	Research paper
Rapid Behavioural and Sentiment Assessment	UNICEF	Report
Lockdown and domestic violence: As NGOs struggle to support women at risk, government plays catch up	The Caravan	Opinion piece
COVID-19 and domestic violence- Twin public health emergencies	Kractivism	Opinion piece
Domestic violence- looking at the pandemic from a gender lens	Yourstory	Opinion piece

While battling COVID-19, we can't let the pandemic of domestic violence continue	The Wire	News article
India's lockdown is blind to the woes of its women	The Wire	News article
The link between lockdown, COVID-19, and domestic violence	IDR	Opinion piece
Domestic violence: Still a reality in modern-day India	National Herald	News article
Locked in: What the COVID-19 pandemic spells for survivors of domestic violence	EPW	Opinion piece
Act now to address the shadow pandemic of domestic violence	WHO	Report
Covid-19 pandemic: implications of school closures on children in India	The BMJ Opinion	Opinion piece
Examining the role of the National Commission for Women in redressing domestic violence	The Daily Guardian	Opinion piece

Table 2: List of sources used to derive qualitative data where QCA was applied

Next, Narrative Analysis was applied to the qualitative data in Table 3 to help answer the second research question. The key findings have been elaborated in section 4.2.2 below.



Title	Source name	Source type
INTERVIEW: How does one fight domestic abuse during a lockdown?	Citizen Matters	Interview
When I took action: 3 Individuals share stories of helping victims of domestic violence	Amnesty International	Human interest story

Table 3: List of sources used to derive qualitative data where Narrative Analysis was applied

In the next section, the author will discuss the key findings from applying QCA and Narrative Analysis to the data. The second section will be a discussion on the key themes identified. A subsection will also compare these findings with those identified during the literature review to further understand the key reasons for the surge in domestic violence during the lockdown. By finding gaps in the literature and understanding the interventions in place for fighting domestic violence in India, the author will suggest possible solutions in this regard which will be commented on in the final section.

## **4.2 Empirical Research Findings**

### **4.2.1 Key Findings on the Specific Drivers of Domestic Violence during the Lockdown**

Upon applying QCA to the data collected through sources<sup>7</sup> referred to in Table 2, the author observed the following key findings<sup>8</sup> on the reasons for an increase in domestic violence after the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed.

**Loss of Jobs and Economic Uncertainty:** The most common reason identified during the research was the loss of jobs particularly of the male members of the household as reported by five research papers, IDR, EPW and UNICEF. One of the research papers noted “financial crisis” as a contributing factor. Another research paper also observed financial distress in women as a

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<sup>7</sup> A complete list of the links to all secondary data sources used to conduct the research are attached to Appendix A

<sup>8</sup> Only key findings of the research have been discussed due to the limited word count for this dissertation factor to the pandemic for an increase in DV (Nair and Banerjee, 2020).

cause of increased abuse- “Women whose livelihoods have been affected by the crisis, might also now be in financial distress—which is one of the barriers to removing themselves from a violent household.” (IDR, 2020)

**Increased Stress in Men:** Four research papers, YourStory, IDR and UNICEF reported either stress or anxiety in men as the key grounds for an increase in Domestic violence amidst the lockdown. An increase in “pre-existent psychiatric illness” and “onset of new mental illness” was reported by a research paper as a cause for the perpetrator to increase abuse on women. (Joseph et. al., 2020). One of the research papers recognized that financial threat during the pandemic situation affected the mental-wellbeing of men, eventually leading to increased violence on women- “A similar financial threat grips the men of the same households, creating a pressure cooker of uncertainty, frustration and stress. A combination of these three emotions, especially in patriarchal cultures such as we have, commonly leads to a perverted expression of violence upon the dependents at hand – viz the elderly, children and the women of the household.” (Ghoshal, 2020)

**Increase in Alcohol Consumption by Men:** It was noted by four research papers and Citizen Matters that alcohol-fuelled loss of control in men and increased anger that eventually led to domestic abuse on women. One of the opinion journals noticed alcohol withdrawal symptoms in men due to the complete shutdown of all liquor shops as a reason for an increase in “wife-beating” (EPW, 2020). The same was also observed by The Wire that states “forced abstinence” from alcohol as a cause of an increase in abuse on women due to the “complicated relationship between alcohol and domestic violence”.

**Travel Restrictions:** Three research papers, IDR, The Caravan and Yourstory reported that physical distancing norms and travel restrictions caused the women of the house to be physically grounded with their perpetrator. As per IDR, “Mandatory stay-at-home rules”, that are a consequence of the pandemic that led to an increase in domestic violence globally with similar trends being shown in India. Further, school closures due to these travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic, furthered the problem of abuse on young women, as noted by an online blog-

“Secondly, India’s adolescents (aged 10-19 years) face challenging gendered biases and barriers when it comes to accessing essential services. The social and economic impact of covid-19 in rural communities leaves young women further exposed to domestic violence, abuse, discrimination and malnutrition.” (thebmjopinion, 2020)

**Infidelity and Lack of Sexual Awareness:** One of the research papers and the National Herald noticed women’s resistance towards their husband’s affairs during the lockdown as a facilitator of physical and mental abuse on them. The National Herald shared a video of a man beating his wife after she caught him having an extra-marital affair. Also, The Wire reported that “A couple of weeks ago, a 42-year-old man in India allegedly murdered his wife, Savithamma, in front of their daughter, in a fit of rage, suspecting her of infidelity.” It was also noticed by the same news website that refusing sex or asking their partner to use a condom could put women’s “sexual health agency at risk”.

**Victim Blaming and Inadequate Support Systems:** National Herald recognized the problem of victim-blaming and associated social stigmas many created by social media as a reason for the inflation of domestic violence during the lockdown as it shared a video wherein an IPS ranked<sup>9</sup> officers were seen beating up his wife after she caught him cheating: “What was even more disturbing was that people on social media supported his action arguing that his wife provoked him and attacked him. And that Indian men are wrongly targeted all the time.”

A research paper also saw “fake news” and “rumour-mongering” as obstacles to the freedom of women and causes of additional stress amongst men. (Nair and Banerjee, 2020)

#### **4.2.2 Key Findings on the Policies and Interventions in place to Fight the Problem of Domestic Violence amidst the Current Situation**

The author applied narrative analysis on an interview with an advocate working for domestic violence survivors, along with the stories of three individuals who helped Domestic violence survivors seek help (sources mentioned in Table 3 above).

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<sup>9</sup> IPS, abbreviated for Indian Police Service is one of the three Indian services for the Government of India that falls under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The following are the key findings identified on measures to deal with Domestic violence during the lockdown:

**Community Support as a Necessary Form of Societal Actions to be taken to Reduce Domestic Violence during the Lockdown:** The first article spoke of the experiences of three individuals who offered support to victims of domestic violence who otherwise found it difficult to report the crime. One of the individuals, Surabhi Yadav, who was a development professional by occupation noted- “A woman abused by her in-laws was texting me, and because she couldn’t reach out to her counsellor, I was mediating and telling her what to do. We are now trying to find her a lawyer.”

Further necessitating the need for community support, she explained how she “connected the dots” and arranged money for survivors of domestic violence to escape their abusive households. Another individual, Ishita Roy, a media professional, spoke of how she intervened and reported a case of domestic violence in her neighbourhood and provided her with emotional support. As per her experience, “Since the couple weren’t married, the woman felt hesitant to report the violence and was even worried about not having a place to go to during the lockdown.”

**Stakeholder Involvement and Legal Support Systems:** While analysing an interview conducted with Dr Rama Iyer, a Bengaluru based advocate, I spotted an active reporting process in the Indian legal system, wherein the survivor could officially complain to “police, health professionals, the Protection Office etc.” who can submit an application to the court on behalf of the aggrieved. She further advised on twenty-four by seven helpline numbers for women which have been strengthened during the COVID-19 lockdown for ease of reporting in cases where direct contact to the police is not possible.

She mentioned a family counselling centre in Bengaluru, and while advising on other such organisations across the country providing shelter homes and support groups also stated, “One needs to check though whether they are working during the lockdown.” She further mentioned a protection order by the official legal system of the country preventing the abuser from perpetrating further domestic violence on the survivor once a report has been lodged.

### **4.3 Discussion**

#### **4.3.1 Main Themes identified from the Findings: Exploring the Data collected through a Gender Lens**

While interpreting the reasons responsible for an increase in domestic violence during the lockdown, the author endeavoured to look at the causes for this social problem from a gender perspective. Feminist researchers of IPV have long emphasized the need for analysing the causes of the same through the gender and power lens as this is rooted in men's need to ascertain power or dominance over women (Anderson, 1997). Below are the main themes identified in the process:

**Socio-Economic Implications of a Pandemic on Domestic Violence:** The pandemic has led to many people losing their jobs<sup>10</sup> which has been followed by an era of economic uncertainty for Indian households. Unemployment amongst men, especially with daily workers has led to lesser control over economic security and financial distress that has eventually increased the rate of Domestic violence. Women losing their job have further made them financially dependent on their male counterparts exposing them to financial exploitation amongst other forms of abuse. A gripping remark here is that there is a positive relation between unemployment in men & women and a rise in the rate of domestic violence. This means that irrespective of who lost the job in the family, the brunt of the loss is borne by the female in the form of physical, emotional and/or economic abuse. This can be resultant of the unequal power dynamics in Indian households and how they play a definite role to define how any period of struggle has an adverse effect on the women of the house. Through the given example, if women lose their jobs during the pandemic, they obviously stand a high risk of being deprived of basic needs by their family, and if the man of the house loses their job, it would still be the women who would have inadequate access to these needs. Similar findings have been observed in studies from other academics as well. Bhalotra in her working research paper draws evidence from Brazil and states: "Job loss leads to increases in domestic violence, irrespective of whether it is the perpetrator or victim whose job is lost." (Bhalotra, 2020)

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<sup>10</sup> Please refer to section 2.3.1, paragraph 2 for a detailed explanation on how the COVID-19 pandemic has caused loss of jobs in Indian households imposed through the patriarchal set-up can be accounted as the reason for the same.

Further, high levels of psychological stress in men, which can also result because of economic uncertainty, is another reason for the aggravated Domestic violence cases against women in India. As noted by Ghoshal (2020), the lockdown situation created a “pressure cooker of uncertainty, frustration and stress” which was eventually released on women in the form of DV. As per a report from CARE, women are three times more likely to suffer from stress than men during COVID-19 (Mathur, 2020). If women are at a higher risk of suffering from psychiatric problems during this pandemic, why are they the ones who are also being subject to abuse in these difficult times? Women are expected to suppress their emotions and mental health needs and men, who do not find an adequate outlet to release their negative emotions ultimately resort to violence on women. The same report also shows that since more women are partly employed or employed in the informal sector<sup>11</sup>, they are at a higher risk of losing their jobs. Irrespective of the fact that these factors are beyond the control of women, them getting beaten up at their own homes and abused in other emotional/economic/sexual ways, emphasizes how the problem of patriarchy has shaped the increasing problem of DV in the country amidst this pandemic. This resonates with a feminist theory called the resource theory which claims that when an individual is unable to exert power through socio-economic means will then resort to violence to show their superiority of power over the weaker gender (Goode, 1971).

Another interesting finding during the research was an increase in alcohol consumption during the lockdown leading to domestic abuse of women. An international newspaper, South China Morning Post also shares the experiences of many Indian women that witnessed an increase in the intensity as well as the occurrence of DV after the government removed the restrictions on buying alcohol during the lockdown (Saluja, 2020). One possible reason could be the associated frustration, anger and/or loss of control from excessive alcohol consumption. This has also been shown in previous studies (Foran & O’Leary, 2008) that increased use of alcohol can cause further aggression in men and in turn cause domestic abuse on women. Other than the loss of control and increased aggression in men due to drinking alcohol, there is an underlying financial relation between DV and alcohol consumption that could lead to economic abuse on women (WHO, 2006).

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<sup>11</sup> As per the Ministry of Labour & Employment (2015), informal or unorganized labour employment constitutes 90 per cent of the workforce.

In the given situation, wherein the financial capability of people has reduced due to loss of jobs under COVID-19, increased spending on alcohol and other forms of substance abuse would mean even lesser money for the household. This risks the women to economic abuse such as inadequate provision for their food and health needs. The lockdown has increased stress amongst individuals, and men resorting to alcohol in such a scenario only exposes women more to being abused by the men of the house. To conclude, it is evident that alcohol is a compounding factor exacerbated by confined environments and economic repercussions of the pandemic, that domestic survivors are being exposed to during this lockdown situation in India.

**Cultural Acceptability of Toxic Masculinity in Indian Households:** Toxic masculinity, an output of the patriarchal set-up that Indian households thrive upon was the next theme I observed from the key findings on the reasons for an increase in domestic violence during the lockdown. The lockdown situation has made it non-viable for men to impose this masculinity outside their houses, in social circles or workplaces. Unable to do so, they forcefully impose this masculinity on those that are physically captured with them, i.e., the women of the house. This is coherent to Campbell's theory that emphasizes the need for men to impose their masculinity in some way or the other to present to the society they have been living in and upon failure of doing so, opt for violence within their own houses (Campbell, 1993). One way of how women were being physically and emotionally abused was their acceptability of their partner's cheating on them during the lockdown phase. In another finding, men's suspicions of their wives cheating on them exposed women to the risk of abuse. Yet another finding remarked refusal of sex by women to their partners as another reason for a higher rate of physical and sexual violence on them. All of them can be connected to the positionality of power between the two genders in Indian households and how men believe it is essential to impose their authority on women to showcase their masculinity. Further, they believe that any impression of an act of infidelity on the parts of their wives makes them deserving of emotional, physical and even sexual abuse.

Lastly, toxic masculinity in men makes allowance for objectifying women and believing that they do not have any bodily autonomy, hence, taking away the sexual freedom of women. In a study conducted by Kumar et. al. on a rural section of Rajasthan, one of the states in India, to understand the link between masculinity and domestic violence in an Indian setting, he notes a similar reason-

“If a man is not sexually satisfied with his wife he may also seek satisfaction from prostitutes or other women. Respondents said that such circumstances cause discord in the family, which, in turn, leads to physical and emotional violence. Some also noted that situations where men are caught with other women often result in violence. Infidelity, either suspected or real, on the part of the wife is especially prone to result in domestic violence. For example, if a husband tells his wife not to socialize with a certain man and she continues her relationship, major disputes will take place between husband and wife.” (Kumar, et al., 2002)

**The problem of Victim-Blaming and Insufficient Social Support Means:** As noted in the findings, victim blaming was identified as another reason for an increase in domestic violence in the lockdown period. In a typical patriarchal Indian household, if a woman decides to speak up against her abuse, it is not necessary that their struggles will be acceptable by society. In the current scenario, with travel restrictions, this attitude of blaming the abused worsens the situation of women as they would physically be captured in an abusive household with no place to escape. Further, fake news with respect to COVID-19 has increased the scare amongst individuals, particularly women, and has further trapped them into this vicious cycle of domestic violence.

Berns (2001) in her political discourse on gender-based violence also speaks about how certain cultures have “degendered the violence but gendered the blame” onto women. Two of the main strategies that she highlights are responsible for gendering the blame are:

1. Making women responsible for their role in being subject to abuse
2. Not critiquing the acceptability of men’s violence

This can also be applied to the current scenario in India wherein women are being held responsible for being a victim and men are not being held accountable for their actions by the society. In addition to this, there also have been inadequate measures to support women who are subject to abuse. In the absence of a strong support network for women, domestic violence in a pandemic setting is rather inevitable. In the interview with Dr. Iyer, whilst she mentions a couple of support systems in place for women, she is uncertain of the implementation ability of these systems.



### **4.3.2 Comparing the Empirical Research with Literature Review Findings**

The literature review and research findings, both, identified a few common reasons such as lack of outputs to relieve stress and financial instability for the aggravated DV situation in the country during the lockdown. The empirical research also revealed some additional reasons, such as school closures, substance abuse, women's inability to refuse sex, and their ability and acceptability to bear DV due to physical captivation. Men also suspected their partners of extramarital affairs which prompted abuse on them as a corrective action. Again, their emotional detachment with their wives due to an extramarital affair was also a justification observed for wife-beating. Further, associated social stigmas of reporting DV and lack of external help systems along with fast-spreading fake news added to the problem.

A close comparison with the fearful and weak picture of Sita, the female protagonist in one of the Hindu holy scriptures, drawn in section 2.4 of the literature review can be made with the current research findings. Her position can be connected to the present plight of women during the lockdown, wherein they are expected to prove their chastity (when their partners suspect them of infidelity) and upon failure of doing so, are subject to domestic abuse of various kinds<sup>12</sup>. Again, this is because men believe it is necessary to impose their masculinity through violence as they fear that infidelity could hamper their masculine image in front of their house and society.

Further, India might have moved forward in terms of abolishing toxic cultural norms such as "sati"<sup>13</sup>, however, there are certain expectations that the women of the house are still expected to meet culturally. In the lockdown situation, where the domestic responsibilities have increased multiple folds, the cultural set-up of the country expects women to be the primary caretaker of their homes. Not only is this added burden a form of emotional abuse, cultural acceptability of men beating their wives as a corrective measure, also exposes the women to physical and sexual abuse during these difficult times. Lastly, the long-drawn patriarchal system in India has moulded how power plays its role within households, as there is an unequal distribution of rights and responsibilities between men and women. Men often hold greater rights in terms of decision making in the household and women are assigned bigger responsibilities of the house.

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<sup>12</sup> Please refer to section 2.4 paragraph 2 of the literature review

<sup>13</sup> Please refer to section 2.4 paragraph 4 of the literature review

This can partly be accounted to the patriarchy theory that explains how men have greater power than women as they have access to more family resources (Dobash and Dobash, 1979 (Gupta, 2020)). Since the decision-makers of the house are men, they assume that women, in a way, are accountable for these after-effects and automatically should bear the brunt of the same.

In this section, the author developed the key themes responsible for an increase in domestic violence during the lockdown, also drawing close comparisons with the literature review. The author understands that the research has been time-sensitive as the author has captured data within a very specific timeframe. The situation is rapidly changing and there might be more data available every day on the given subject, but this empirical research would provide a pathway for future research. The next section would speak of how the current measures to deal with this social issue are inadequate, also suggesting desired key changes on policy and interventional level to handle the given situation.

#### **4.4 Possible Policy Suggestions**

While the research findings revealed some commendable initiatives by the government and NGOs, such as 24\*7 helpline numbers nationally, counselling centres, shelter homes and support groups for the survivors of DV, most interventions required the survivor to contact the support mediums first. For proper implementation of these support means, it is vital that direct help is provided to these victims who already are emotionally and physically vulnerable after being subject to domestic abuse (FIRST Action Against Violence, 2017). Further, the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005<sup>14</sup>, which is the principal law that speaks about the domestic violence setting in India, would require bringing changes on a core ground level for the successful implementation of laws pertaining to DV in the country.

“The Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005 prohibits a wide range of abuse against women — physical, emotional, sexual and economical and all these are extensively defined under the Act.” (IADV, 2020) The biggest discrepancy identified in the current law is its lack of acceptance of marital abuse as a form of domestic abuse. The policy only protects women who are in a live-in relationship, the definition of which involves a couple that shares a household together.

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<sup>14</sup> Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005 has been attached Appendix B of the research

Therefore, a woman who is in a marital relationship and experiencing abuse at the hands of their partners during this lockdown situation would not be eligible to lodge a complaint under this law. The inadequacy in the basic law that concerns DV survivors makes the law rather inefficient in the current situation, wherein wives are being abused by their husbands due to a multitude of reasons as discussed in the key findings above. On the implementation level as well, it is not an easy process to report a case of DV if you are married, because in most cases, the associated social stigma prevents police from even lodging the report. Even if the case is lodged, the next step involves legislative action on the court's part which rarely is taken in support of the victim (howindialives.com, 2020). In the current scenario, this would mean exposing the victim to chances of further abuse as the law clearly fails to support married women on an implementational level. With the urgency of the social problem of Domestic violence that the women of India are suffering from, it becomes rather crucial for the government to rethink the law and take actions at the policy level first.

Taking a pragmatic approach to the situation would also involve taking some urgent short-term measures to deal with this social problem. There is a need for the support systems to get in direct contact with the survivors rather than the other way around. Further, measures such as around the clock helpline numbers and Whatsapp support groups can only be helpful if the survivor has technological equipment to reach help. Below are suggestions for a multidisciplinary approach inclusive of the government, local NGOs, health and police sector and the general community to battle this social problem:

**Higher Resource Generation and Allocation:** It is vital for the government to consider fighting off domestic violence in India as an emergency that needs urgent attention. Higher resource generation and allocation need to be done in order to create better safe homes for women who are subject to abuse and provide better human support (patrolling officers and counsellors) for identifying possible households that breed domestic abuse.

**Raising Community Awareness:** The research findings have also necessitated the need for the government to partake in awareness campaigns regarding the consequences of Domestic violence amongst the community and providing general education about the roles and responsibilities of women in a social household. Radios, televisions or physical methods such as distributing

pamphlets to ensure community outreach can opt. Following this would not only help in spreading awareness but would also help reduce the stigmas associated with a typical patriarchal Indian household.

**Improving Mental/Emotional Support Systems:** Domestic violence is a human rights and public health issue, and it is essential for the government to take steps to integrate the health sector into social programmes that help the victims of domestic abuse. Safe spaces should be created for survivors who have been emotionally and mentally been affected by the abuse they have been subject to.

This section focused on possible solutions for the loopholes in the current process for dealing with domestic violence amidst a pandemic. In the last and concluding section, the author will provide a summary of the findings with respect to the research objectives, also providing recommendations for future research and articulating any self-reflections during the process of working through this research.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary of the Findings pursuant to the Research Objectives**

The research objectives as elaborated in the Introduction section of this research aimed to discover the key reasons responsible for the increase in domestic violence in India during the lockdown and understanding the measures being undertaken to tackle the current situation, subsequently, suggesting policy solutions in regard to the increasing problem of Domestic violence in the country.

The empirical research revealed three primary themes around the problem of domestic violence during the lockdown, the first one being socio-economic factors such as economic uncertainty due to loss of jobs, and the associated increase in alcohol consumption and mental health problems such as growing stress and anger. The second theme unearthed the patriarchal setup of the country and the toxic masculinity that brews in the country from it. This was linked to the research findings of the infidelity of men during the lockdown and physical confinement of women amongst others.

Lastly, the issue of victim-blaming and complementing inadequate support systems was identified as the third theme. These themes helped disclose the factors that might have led to an increase of lockdown during the lockdown, but also necessitated the need for better support systems to fight this social evil that encompasses the country in this pandemic.

Next, the findings discussed measures such as general community support, 24\*7 helpline numbers, support shelters and counselling centres which are currently in place to tackle the problem of domestic violence. However, it was observed that the primary law against domestic violence, the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005 did not entertain marital rape and other forms of marital domestic abuse that made me question the suitability of the legal system in India. This restated the requirement of looking at solving the problem of domestic abuse by working our way up the ladder from the ground levels. The immediate need of the hour is to generate higher resources for tackling this problem as per the latest data, there has been a two and a half times increase in the rate of domestic violence since the lockdown was imposed in March 2020 (Tomar & Mohanty, 2020). Community awareness should be the government's priority as this could not just help the survivors in reporting their abusers, but also educate potential abusers and prevent domestic violence to happen to women in the first place. The mental and emotional repercussions of abuse are petrifying, and a stronger medical support system needs to be created for the survivors of domestic violence. Further, with proper psychological counselling of families, it is also possible to prevent domestic violence during the lockdown.

To summarize the significance of the research, understanding the socio-cultural factors that frame the problem of Domestic violence during the literature review, helped in providing a more rounded approach to looking at the research findings through a gendered path. The findings of the research helped in identifying the very distinct reasons that would have caused an increase in domestic abuse and looking at them from a feminist gender perspective helped determine the key themes that frame the problem of DV currently. Lastly, the findings also helped in establishing the measures in place to curb domestic violence and eventually helped to comment on the need for further interventions and policy adjustments in this regard.

## **5.2 Recommendations for Future Research and possible Policy Implications**

This research creates a deeper understanding of the social problem of domestic violence in India and offers suggestions for designing policies and interventions more efficiently. The research unfolds different perspectives that frame the issue of DV including social, economic, religious and cultural factors. Whilst the situation of DV during periods of emergency is a subject matter which is not extensively researched upon, this research creates a base for more streamlined future research on this issue which can subsequently reduce the possibility of domestic abuse during such adverse conditions.

Finally, as indicated in section 4.5 of Findings and Discussion, the current position of Domestic violence in the country is one that demands immediate attention with the collaborative efforts of a multitude of stakeholders. It is vital to bring about a few changes at the grassroots policy level. Further, it is essential to ensure that the interventions planned are cognizant of the refurbished policy. Whilst the major change on a policy stage involves acknowledging marital rape and other forms of abuse under the law, it is also important to work on the implementation of this law (Vaishnavi, 2020). For example, with the police sector involved in managing the health aspects of the COVID-19 situation, it is unlikely they will be able to give adequate attention to survivors that report cases of Domestic violence. As seen during the research, the police sector appears rather unapproachable and various survivors do not feel comfortable in making police their first point of contact while reporting their abusers. Hence, a more strongly knit group of NGO workers, mental health professionals and counsellors needs to be assigned for the law to be properly implemented.

It is equally crucial to work together as a society to tear down these social and cultural barriers that look at women as inferior beings of their male counterparts and report any identified cases of domestic abuse in our neighbourhood instead of engaging in victim-blaming. This would also make the victims more open to reporting their abusers without having a fear of societal abandonment. It is only through the combined efforts of a multi-disciplinary network of psychiatrists, social workers, lawyers, counsellors, the general public and the government can we look at reducing this daunting issue that needs to be immediately taken care of.

### **5.3 Self Reflection**

An initial methodological choice when the author first started looking at the reasons for the prevalence and acceptability of Domestic violence in India, entailed conducting primary research by interviewing a small sample set of women who have experienced domestic abuse in their lives. The COVID-19 lockdown situation made it difficult for me to collect face to face data, hence, the author decided to reassess both the research questions and the methodologies the author intended to use during the research. The author eventually decided to look at the domestic violence situation in India amidst the current pandemic situation and resorted to secondary data collection for the research. Further, Domestic violence as a research subject has been widely investigated, however, there is not sufficient research yet on looking at how pandemic or emergency situations affect this social problem. Deciding to look at this problem with respect to the current situation, makes it more contemporary and provides a base for further research on this topic. To conclude, the author is content to have chosen a research methodology and topic more ideal to the current set of circumstances we have been surrounded with. Secondary data analysis is a rather non-conventional form of research, however, it is possible to meet your research expectations using this methodology through a proper research strategy and by utilising appropriate data collection methods.

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#### **Appendix A: Links to the secondary qualitative data sources**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7295494/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7365082/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7413053/>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0253717620966735>

<http://jmhedu.org/special-edition/brief-commentary/the-cries-behind-the-closed-rooms-domestic-violence-against-women-during-covid-19-a-crisis-call/>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32546463/>

<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/9241/file>

<https://caravanmagazine.in/gender/lockdown-domestic-violence-ngo-struggle-government-catch-up>

<https://www.kractivist.org/covid-19-and-domestic-violence-twin-public-health-emergencies/>

<https://yourstory.com/herstory/2020/04/domestic-violence-pandemic-coronavirus>

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<https://idronline.org/the-link-between-lockdown-covid-19-and-domestic-violence/>

<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/domestic-violence-still-a-reality-in-modern-day-india>

<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/locked-what-covid-19-pandemic-spells-survivors>

<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/detail/25-11-2020-act-now-to-address-the-shadow-pandemic-of-violence-against-women>

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<https://citizenmatters.in/interview-how-to-get-redress-for-domestic-violence-during-lockdown-18169>