

## **Isolation and Violence: Direful Times for Women**

*By, Somik Jindal*

*BBA LLB, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies*

### **What is Domestic Violence?**

Domestic violence, also known as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), is a behaviour used by one dominant partner to maintain power and control over another in a relationship. Domestic violence can happen to anyone despite race, age, ethnic background, economic levels, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can happen to people who are in a relationship, married, living together, or family members. It is not necessary to occur within four walls or within a home; it happens when the victim is dominated by the use of domestic abuse by the perpetrator. Domestic violence includes behaviours that physically harm, because stress or depression, arouse fear, and prevent a partner from doing what they want. It includes the use of domestic abuses such as threats, instigation fear by physical and sexual violence, emotional and economic abuse. While a woman is more often being victimized because of such abuses, men also experience the same and there is no difference. Because of social stigmas and prevalent situations, men who face domestic violence are being overlooked. A person must always feel safe, valued, and respected.

Domestic violence is among the most under-reported crimes because many people do not realize that they are abusing or are a victim themselves. They consider such abuses as family conflicts or trifle matters that got out of control. Domestic violence is a pattern or cycle of abuse. The abusers' loving and caring gestures in between the episodes of abuse make it difficult for the victim to leave or take any action thus it goes with the wind for some time, the perpetrator uses such advantage and the cycle of violence goes on. This traps the victim in an abusive relationship. In addition, due to low self-esteem, isolation, family pressure, cultural acceptance, lack of financial resources, shame, fear, and lack of community support, many victims would not be able to express and report such violence.

### **Types of Abuses that Victim Suffers in Domestic Violence:-**

- **Physical abuse** in a relationship, if you are being hurt or threatened by using means of force such as hitting, slapping, punching, burning, pulling hair, cutting, or anything which causes bodily pain, harm, or danger to life, or health and affects the health of the victim.

- **Sexual abuse** occurs when the abuser coerces the victim to engage in a sexual nature without the victim's consent. This takes the form of physical violence, marital rape, indecent assaults, and forced sex. Abusers to break the spirit and a way to control their victims use this behaviour.
  - **Verbal and emotional abuse** destroys the victim's self-worth or self-esteem, leads to anxiety and depression, and makes you feel helpless and alone. Emotional abuse often takes the form of insults, humiliation, ridicule, name-calling, criticism, insulting the victim's abilities especially for not having a child or a male child, threats to cause physical pain to the person with whom the victim is interested.
  - **Economic abuse** takes place when the abuser tries to make the victim financially deprived and dependent on him. They take control over all financial resources to which the victim is entitled, prohibit the victim from going to work, and deprive the victim of access to funds.
  - **Psychological abuse** involves the abuser invoking fear to physically hurt someone to whom the victim is attached either personally or emotionally, i.e. threatening to hurt family members, children, friends, or injuring the pets.
- **Social abuse** occurs when the abuser insults or humiliates you in front of people and hurts your reputation in society, control what you do, where you go, or keeps you isolated from family and friends.

### **Aftermaths of Domestic Violence and Risk Involved**

Victims of **domestic violence** face several physical and mental agony with health difficulties such as the risk of physical disabilities, mental illness, chronic health problems, dysregulated aggression, depression, sexual disorders, and severe psychological disorders, such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Children too have increased vulnerability to domestic violence who live in a household with violence, they also suffer from psychological problems, such as isolation, avoidance, and aggression, which may contribute to the vicious cycle of abuse in children, who take learning from such behaviours and feel that such violence is acceptable.

### **Spike in such Cases due to Lockdown and Reason thereto**

The nationwide lockdown in response to COVID-19 began on March 25, 2020. It was reported that between March 23 and April 16, 2020, the National Commission for Women's (NCW) Complaint and Investigation Cell registered 587 domestic violence complaints. This marked a significant increase from the 396 complaints that were registered between February 27 and March 22.<sup>1</sup> Such data shows the dire situation of the woman who has to go through such a miserable situation. A

---

<sup>1</sup> Ayushi Agarwal, *Domestic Violence in the Lockdown Has Been Aided by Govt Apathy*, THE WIRE (May 25, 2020), <https://thewire.in/women/lockdown-domestic-violence-government>.

shocking amount of cases was registered when the government imposed the lockdown. As per cases registered through Sakhi One-Stop Centers (centres that provide integrated support and help under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in a phased manner) in April, 89% of the total number of cases registered were of domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>

A domestic house that is considered the safest place in such an unprecedented time is proving not to be for all. Movement restrictions and lockdown aimed to stop the spread of the coronavirus are making violence and abuses in homes more frequent, dangerous, and severe. According to a New York Times report, "Add another public health crisis to the toll of the new coronavirus: Mounting data suggests that domestic abuse is acting as an opportunistic infection, flourishing in the conditions created by the pandemic."<sup>3</sup> Domestic violence always rises whenever families spend more time together, now with families in lockdown all over the world; victims of domestic violence are becoming more vulnerable and are at risk. Now that the abusive partners and victims are now bound at home, the manifestation of domestic violence, with the added stress levels, anxiety, job insecurity, loss of finance, and work because of lockdown, the abuses are at upsurge. This stress leads to the abuser projecting their frustration on the victim to a much higher degree. Many women who do not have any income or assets for themselves are trapped in the circumstances. Earlier they reach out to a friend or relative to help them or give refuge in their house even though that is now no longer possible as result there are fewer options to find safety or help for the victims. The victim couldn't flee a violent situation by staying elsewhere. Also calling out for help is a bane for the women, as they cannot reach out to anyone as the perpetrators are always near them and due to poor internet connection sometimes. Also in several cases, the neighbours of the victim tried to reach out to the authorities, but they were afraid to tell their grievances due to the lockdown. Fear of being stranded in this lockdown looms in the mind of the victim due to which they oppose taking any action against them and acts as a dominant key for the perpetrators.

### **What are the Actions available with the Victims?**

In India, The Dowry Prohibition Act, Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act deal with domestic violence. The first action of the victim of domestic violence should be reaching out to the authorities and lodging a complaint against these perpetrators. Though it might be difficult during the lockdown, there are many helplines and NGOs that deal with domestic violence the victim should try to connect with them whenever they get a

---

<sup>2</sup> TIMESOFINDIA.COM, *Domestic violence cases in India on the rise during lockdown*, says report, TIMES OF INDIA (May 18, 2020, 14:00 IST), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/love-sex/domestic-violence-cases-in-india-on-the-rise-during-lockdown-says-report/articleshow/75801752.cms>.

<sup>3</sup> *supra* note 2.

chance. If you have been injured or physically assaulted, contact emergency services or visit your nearest hospital.

### **What should Victim do?**

Victims of domestic violence should never blame themselves for what is happening. Blaming themselves will only result in lowering your worth and the perpetrator who is responsible always takes this advantage. Victims must never make excuses and expose the actions of the perpetrators. Excuses give power to the perpetrator and lead to a vicious cycle of abuse. The abuser takes advantage of the victim's plight and when a person is locked up with the abuser during the lockdown, it would make the situation worse and he feels more powerful. In most cases, try to isolate the victim and manipulate her so that she could not reach out to anyone. The victim must reach out to a friend, family, neighbour, or someone in proximity to inform and get help from there. It is also helpful to discuss this with family members or friends about the situation they are suffering from. Reaching out to the authorities will provide immediate action towards these perpetrators and the victims have all the right to get justice.