

# PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GENDER

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## Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic intensified prevailing inequalities across different countries and it has been spread worldwide and forced the human being to keep a social distance. This pandemic has formed many challenges to our society and the barriers under the lockdown, increase the issues for gender-based violence. Gender-based violence, which includes gender inequality, is another pandemic with varying degrees of severity in all societies. This pandemic affects our psychological health in different ways and the major psychological issues that have been reported during the pandemic are anxiety, stress, depression, insomnia, frustration and fear. Women are more likely to experience helplessness and being stereotyped by others during pandemic. The government must give it the same consideration and effort that COVID-19 received. Gender-based violence significantly increased as a consequence of COVID-19, which put half of the world on lockdown (UN Women, 2020). Women are more likely to experience gender-based violence as a result of the intersection of marginalization and discrimination.*

**Keywords:** Psychological impact, Gender-Based Violence, COVID-19 pandemic, Gender inequality

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused fatalities over the world and posed an unprecedented threat to the economy and public health. This pandemic caused social and economic disruption; millions of people are at risk of extreme poverty. Some restrictions and measures prohibited women from accessing markets for buying products and slowing the access to healthy diet. This pandemic has eradicated jobs and due to lack of social support, women are triggered to work in unsafe conditions and prone to additional risk. Further, when experiencing income losses, they turned to negative coping strategies such as sale of assets, taking predatory loan and labour. Lockdown and other limitations imprisoned many women with their abuser, isolated from social support and contact, financial instability restricted many women to leave abusive circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic driven social and economic decrements are likely to increase the risk of human trafficking, child marriage and physical harassment. The pandemic has exposed women to abuse and threats; the violence against women prevents them from carrying out their duties in the society. The COVID-19 pandemic showed negative impact on women and aggravated existing disparities between women and men in nearly all areas of life.

Gender-based violence comprises acts that are harmful to a person's bodily and mental health and targeting a person based on his or her gender. The state, institutions, family and society all participate in its commission. Gender-based violence affects all social groups, societies, and cultural contexts and affects one in three women at some point in their lives (The World Bank, 2019). It has an impact on women throughout all ages, including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old life. It affects one's sense of self-worth and prevents women from expressing all of their legal rights as equal members of society and as people. As a result of the lockdown during the pandemic, which isolated women and made it more difficult for them to flee the violence, the development of the components involved in gender-based violence is facilitated by certain conditions. Cyber-violence against women has been added as a new form of violence as a result of technological advancement.

## OBJECTIVE

To investigate the trends of psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic on gender.

## METHODOLOGY

The major studies are searched through online websites like PubMed, google scholar, shodhganga, etc from the period of 2018 to 2023. The authenticated indexing sites and databases are used to find different studies related to the concerned field. To study the psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic on gender, the focus of the review concentrates on national and international literature.

## DISCUSSION

A large body of recent research has revealed that during the pandemic period, women are more susceptible to domestic violence, which makes them more vulnerable (Sen & Singaravelu, 2020). Another study on gender-based violence in natural disasters (True, 2013) discovered that women become more vulnerable if gender-based violence and unique requirements of women are not taken into account in disaster preparedness, humanitarian aid and disaster recovery plans. It increases the likelihood of future ill health in terms of psychological and physical wellbeing, as well as the adoption of additional risky behaviour. Similarly, previous research has found that domestic violence has an impact on women's mental health and overall well-being. Domestic violence is on the rise and the cases of domestic violence are common in many emergencies, economic downturns, and disease outbreaks. The anxiety associated with pandemic lockdown and the experiences of domestic violence have a psychosocial impact on women. Being incarcerated with a violent person can increase the frequency and severity of psychological and physical abuse, controlling behaviour and humiliation (Basu, 2020). During a lockdown, restrict access to financial resources, education, employment opportunities, and medical care is increased. Further, in a recent study by Bhati and Sharma (2023), boys and girls with intellectual disability were found having significant positive correlation among their working memory and activities of daily living. This suggests the importance of working memory in maintenance of activities of daily living towards a good health.

A study was conducted in the city of India to investigate the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on mental health (Kazmi, Hasan, Talib, & Saxena, 2020). During the lockdown, women experienced higher levels of anxiety than men, according to this study. Another study (Sharma & Borah, 2020) found an increase in domestic violence cases due to job loss and income loss, as well as extended domestic violence and habits. The lockdown made it more difficult for women, particularly those with mental illnesses, to handle the complications of their lives. Women's unemployment projects not only reliance on men, but also a persistent terror of being trapped with violent offenders (Schneider, Harknett, & McLanahan, 2016). However, this is likely to comprehend the psychological impact of the pandemic on gender. An increase in homicides indicates that the earlier condition is characterized by increased violence against women.

## CHALLENGES FOR GENDER EQUALITY DURING PANDEMIC

- During the pandemic, women in healthcare sector and social sector experienced health problems and challenges to work.
- At the time that half of the world's population was under lockdown due to COVID-19, there were at least 243 million women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 who had experienced physical violence from an intimate partner (UN Women, 2020). Many developed nations reported an increase in gender-based violence during the lockdown. It is more likely to occur among domestic workers, women with disability, including those living in institutions, older women, women without access to technology, women who experience discrimination and women who experience insecurity and violence.
- Elderly women and people with different disabilities living in health care centres are mistreated by family members and caregivers.
- Women are unable to work from home because they cannot access the internet. The access of important services like support groups, health information, counselling and other online services that can be helpful support to women facing violence.
- Women who experience multiple forms of discrimination or inequality are more susceptible. Women from disadvantaged groups often find themselves in the front lines of institutional racism and health inequalities as workers in many different nations.

Although the difficulties have emerged from the pandemic over the past year, the governments have worked hard to advance the Gender Equality Strategy's implementation. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 is built on the belief that all people, including women, men, girls, and boys, should be free from discrimination and violence and given the chance to succeed. To achieve this, all socialization and developmental institutions and processes must be devoid of discrimination and accept girls and women as equal and noteworthy population that justifies being acknowledged for the work (paid or unpaid) assumed in the same way as accepted for men. The services for women like help line numbers, safe havens, and police stations are crucial to mention as essential services that must be operational and accessible to women in all circumstances. This can occur when the nation has zero acceptances for any form of violence against women.

### Ways to solve gender issues

- Expansion of service resources to meet heightened requirement
- Provide protection from gender-based violence, effort to combat violence against women in all areas of life

- Acknowledge the communication requirements of women and with access to technology by setting up help line system in grocery and pharmacy stores
- Providing information and make communication modes accessible for women with disabilities
- Initiate public awareness campaigns and funding to organizations supporting women
- Develop and implement different strategies to resolve cyber violence
- Enabling access to regular and long-term income to make women financially independent
- Providing shelters, women's organizations, helpline, justice, and social services to increase survivors' access to vital services
- Providing emergency services for legal assistance

In many cases, physical violence has increased during the pandemic, which has an adverse impact on women's psychological health. Gender-based violence and the factors that define it have also increased. It indicates the presence of any diseases caused by the violence. The economic and social effects of the pandemic prevent women from freely leaving their homes, gender-based violence's main objective is to control women. Risk factors like chronic environmental stress, which are known to get worse during a pandemic, are more common in women. At first, there were symptoms of anxiety, but as time went on, the reaction changed to one of depression. The lockdown's conditions breed a sense of helplessness and a lack of escape, allowing depressive symptoms to develop and eventually overwhelm all other psychological indicators.

#### Psychological consequences are as given below:

- **Depression and anxiety:** The symptoms of depression and anxiety increased during the pandemic and are more common to occur among women and young adults. Adolescent girls have also mentioned feelings of hopeless and depressed than their male peers. Even before the pandemic, women were more likely than men to report having psychological issue, especially severe mental illness.
- **Sleep disorder:** Sleep deprivation appears to have been widespread during the pandemic. Furthermore, sleep disorders have been linked to higher levels of psychological distress.
- **Low self-esteem:** People with low self-esteem suffer the most during the pandemic because low self-esteem is linked to stressors (Dolan & Sanchez, 2020). A person's subjective evaluations of their own feelings of self-respect, self-worth and confidence, and the extent to which they have favourable or unfavourable self-perceptions are all covered (Sedikides & Gress, 2003).
- **PTSD:** It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Some individuals during this pandemic experienced physical discomfort, social isolation, and life-threatening fear. These exposures make it more likely that PTSD will manifest itself.
- **Eating disorder:** The symptoms of corona virus can affect eating habits of an individual. This can make it more difficult to have a healthy, well-balanced diet and slow down your recovery. The COVID-19 lockdown results in developing eating disorders in present as well as in the future among adolescents and young adults. Individual's mental health is deteriorating, and an increase in eating disorders has been linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research indicated that the number of young adults with eating disorders at least doubled during the pandemic.
- **Alcohol abuse:** The consumption of alcohol is increased during the pandemic. The pandemic has corresponded with an increase in substance usage and death rates as a result of substances. The increase in mortality has been mostly caused by substances tainted with synthetic opioids, such as illicitly made fentanyl. Furthermore, the total drug overdose fatality rate increased by 50% during the pandemic, but this differed by state.
- **Suicidal ideation:** Suicidal ideation and suicide fatalities have also become a source of concern during the pandemic. Surprisingly, suicidal ideation has grown among female adolescent adolescents. Other studies revealed that as the pandemic proceeded, the number of suicidal attempts among adolescents increased, with females leading the way. As of 2021, suicide deaths are on the rise once more. Furthermore, suicidal ideation and self-harm have increased faster in adolescent females than in males.

Gender-based violence escalated during the lockdown, as it has been explained. The requirement for medical attention escalated as a result of the lockdown's violence's negative health effect and the deterioration of other illnesses' symptoms. This indicates that in order to effectively treat the disease and support the adoption of various ways to handle the risk of homicide during the pandemic, a policy for exposure is needed for cases of gender-based violence.

#### CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 is present pandemic in many countries to varying levels which creates the mental health issues among vulnerable group, mainly women. This pandemic is a prompt to the world for the need to remove discrimination. India is fighting the battle against the pandemic and followed different approaches to overcome the pandemic. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the person experienced stress, depression,

anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness. The pandemic distress results in discouragement to follow the suggested protecting behaviour, emerged gradually over the time and being affected by experience, emotion and perception. Due to the pandemic, psychological distress, depression, anxiety, lack of self-esteem, alcohol abuse and suicidal ideation differ from one country to another. The current issues related to poverty, food, hygiene, education and migration have been considered, but the issue like gender-based violence having its roots in our society has acknowledged minor consideration. The conditions used by the invader to attack on the basis of gender, mean that there is a border for the spotting the situation to create protective and preventive protocols. The pandemic lockdown increases the rates of gender-based violence we should handle the situation for the safety of women and permit them to get away from the violence in our society and country.

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