

June 2022

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Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol24/iss5/5>

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Domestic Violence against Women during the Covid-19: A Case Study of Bihar (India)

By Priyanka Tripathi¹, Prabha Shankar Dwivedi², Shreya Sharma³

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed that the socioeconomic challenges in developing countries intersect within and beyond the dynamics of caste, class, space, and most importantly, gender. The recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic compelled the entire human population to survive on the brink of uncertainty. The subsequent lockdown witnessed an upsurge in domestic abuse cases across the globe, making us realize how the four walls of the familial space turned into a hotbed of the 'shadow pandemic' resulting from the socioeconomic disparities and individual frustration during difficult times. India also witnessed a sudden surge in domestic violence cases, often called a shadow pandemic. While some got reported, many went without being documented in any forum. In this regard, this research is a case study of Bihar (India), which encountered a higher rate of domestic violence during the pandemic than other states such as Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Himanchal Pradesh. This empirical study examines the economic, psychological, and social factors responsible for the surge in domestic abuse in Bihar during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, Domestic Violence, Women, Shadow Pandemic

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic unveiled the social and economic inequalities in our globally expanding and developing environment. The engine of growth either slowed down or derailed from the track of the development process in both developed and developing countries. During the pandemic, survival became the primary concern; governments had to divert huge funds from development to immediate prevention, containment, and cure to save lives. It disrupted both manufacturing and service sectors and led to unemployment, inflation, and deterioration of quality of life. Developing countries are affected the most because of worsening socioeconomic inequalities and vulnerabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the pre-Covid-19 period. Thus, it is making very survival difficult for economically weaker and vulnerable groups, including women (Aneja & Ahuja, 2021). Although developing countries observed various positive changes in their society, changes in the patriarchal nature of family structure and the resultant maltreatment of women were not one of these changes. Women continue to bear the brunt of the traditionally defined gendered role and face abuse if they fail to fulfill their duties. According to the UN Women and the WHO report, one in three women globally encounters physical and sexual abuse by their intimate partner (UN Women, n.d.; WHO, 2021). While domestic violence is a global problem and has its roots in the very nature of family and social structures around the world, the situation is direr in developing countries like India.

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Domestic violence means the ill-treatment of human beings by their partners or relatives, including physical torture, psychological damage, sexual and economic abuse, or homicide (Sharma, 2015). It also includes child abuse and violence against adolescents, parents, or the elderly. While we cannot ignore the fact that men are also abused by their spouses, there is no doubt that cases of domestic violence inflicted on women are of greater pervasiveness, enormity, and severity than men (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Therefore, 'domestic violence has become synonymous with violence against women in domestic space. Violence against women has always been pervasive across geographies, and the recent pandemic worsened the situation. India is no exception.

The rampant widespread of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown to prevent the virus spread led to reduced social support systems, increased social isolation, and escalated domestic violence cases against women (Aneja & Ahuja, 2021). The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based abuse resulting in or is liable to occur as sexual, physical, or psychological damage or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations, 1993 as cited in WHO 2021). While women and girls experience vehemence in open and closed quarters, the latest study of the Global Study on Homicide, published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2018, showed that the scariest place for women is home (UNODC, 2018).

During the pandemic, lockdown was imposed, considering the home is the safest place to avoid getting infected by the Covid-19 virus. However, this 'safe space' became a site for violence against women, as it restricted mobility, increased social isolation, and intensified household chores and occupational activities. Therefore, this paper examines the increase in domestic abuse against women during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bihar, India. The paper scrutinizes the causes for the rise of domestic violence in the state, discusses the role of third-party intervention, and highlights suggestions put forward by the victims of domestic violence. It is an empirical study documenting increased physical, psychological, and economic abuse against women in Bihar during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods case study design to investigate the problem of domestic violence and abuse encountered by women in Bihar (India). It applied an exploratory sequential approach, where qualitative data was first explored, followed by quantitative data analysis. A case study is an excellent methodological framework for mixed-method research in social sciences. It enables a researcher to explore individuals and assists in deconstructing and reconstructing various phenomena (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In the first phase of this study, in the month of August-September 2021 (i.e., after the second Covid-19 wave and second round of unlocking), researchers interviewed 50 married women with an average age of 36 years, who were selected through the stratified random sampling method from three districts of Bihar (viz. Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Samastipur). The quantitative data from personal interviews was based on closed and open-ended questions shared with women on the issue of domestic abuse, discussing the type of abuse, registration of complaints, and accessing help. The AIDWA Patna, *Dalit Vikas Abhiyaan Samiti* (Muzaffarpur), and *Jan Nirman Kendra* (Samastipur) are local women's organizations and NGOs operating in Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Samastipur districts; they assisted researchers with identification of women to be included in the interviews.

In the second phase, in September 2021, data on reporting domestic abuse to police during the pandemic were collected by personal interviews of women counselors from *Mahila Thana*, *Kankarbagh Thana*, and *Kotwali Thana* of Patna, Bihar. To ensure informed consent and the ethical conduct of research, prior permission was also taken from the participants. They

were also made aware of the anonymity in the proceedings and were well informed that they could withdraw their participation from the research at any point in time. The data collected in the first phase through the personal interview of 50 married women and in the second phase from police stations were further used to generate quantitative data for the study. Empirical information was broken down into themes and coded for analysis.

Further, sub-themes were divided based on the requirement for the study and analysis. The arithmetic mean was used as a statistical tool for aggregation as the small data was involved, and values were not extreme. The themes were identified and continuously reviewed for overlap and completeness. The validity of the data was checked through the triangulation method.

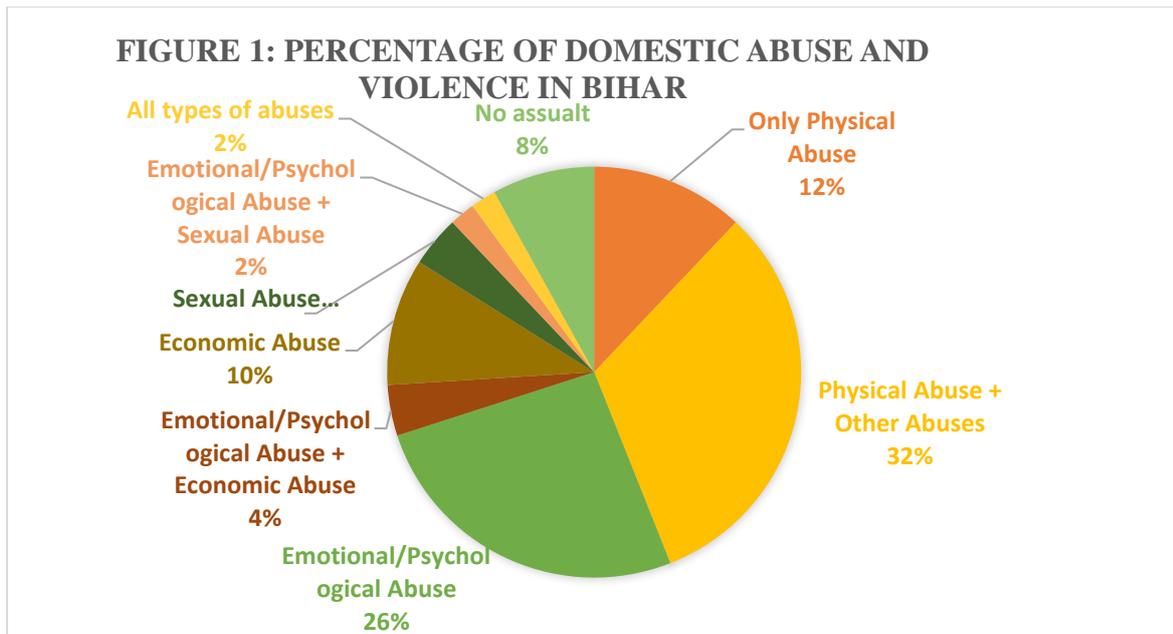
Along with quantitative data, various qualitative information was collected from the reviews of several research articles, government reports, and documents. The study examined three types of domestic abuse- physical, emotional/psychological, and economic. Then quantitative results were used to build a coherent justification for the themes established during analysis and available literature.

Results

Increase in Domestic Violence during Covid-19 Pandemic

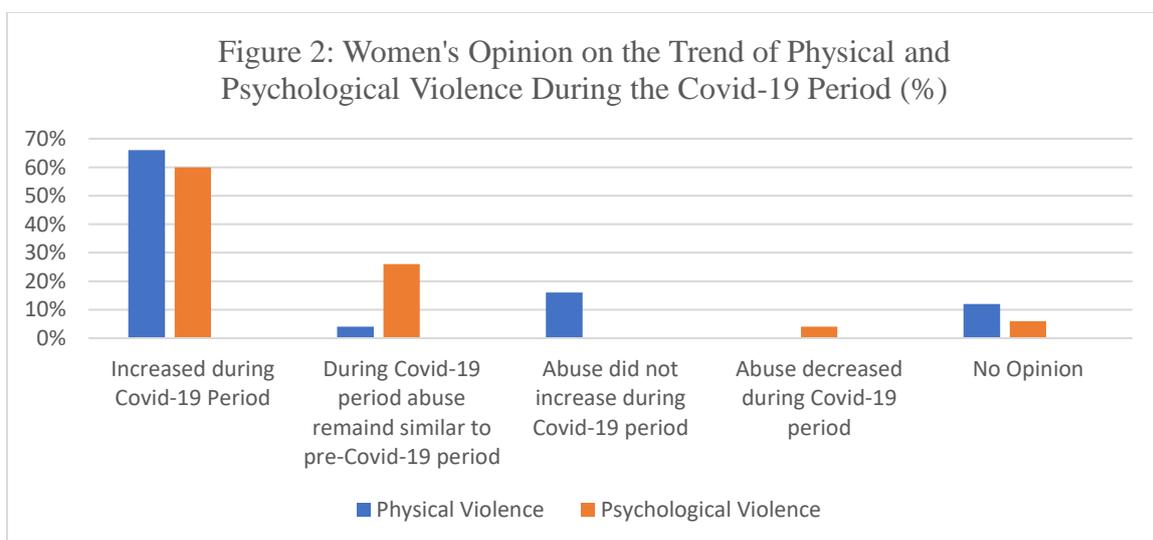
Figure 1 presents different types of domestic abuse experienced by married women in the Bihar state. The responses exhibit that approximately 48% of all women respondents have faced physical violence at home and claimed their spouses beat them up. Nearly 12% of women encountered just physical abuse, and about 32% of women suffered physical violence along with psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. During the interview, those women victims who encountered physical abuse said they were beaten up by their spouses and did not classify physical violence as pushing, punching, slapping, etc. While nearly 4% of women encountered sexual abuse, about 2% of respondents suffered from all types of domestic violence. This percentage becomes significant due to the nature of violence, as sexual abuse in the traditional family setup of Bihar is not frequent. The physical and mental abuses are rampant in households that face domestic violence.

Further, around 62% of all women respondents have gone through emotional/psychological abuse, including about 26% of women who faced only psychological abuse, and almost 4% of them also suffered from economic abuse. The findings in figure 1 portray that most women have been through psychological abuse, and nearly half of the respondents endured physical abuse. The trends in figure 1 depict that around 22% of all women respondents claimed to have encountered economic abuse during the Covid-19 period, out of which 10% of women have just faced economic abuse. However, merely 8% of women claimed that they did not face domestic abuse of any form during the Covid-19 period until September 2021. These findings present that women who suffer from one type of abuse are more likely to encounter other types of abuse.



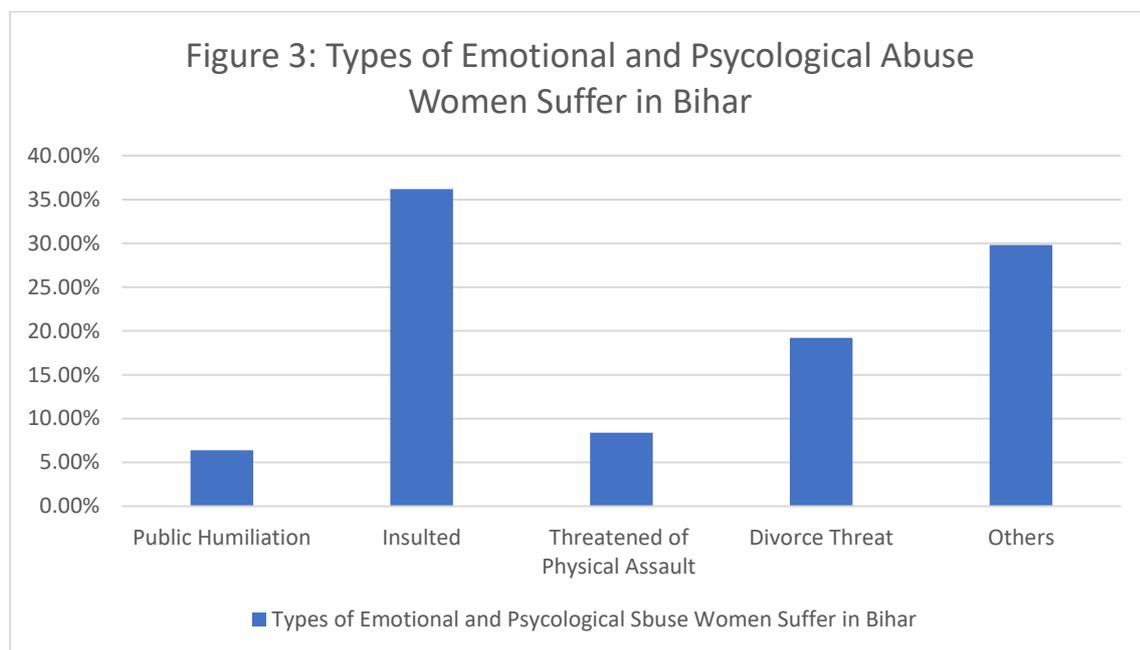
Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Figure 2 represents the trend of women who were the victim of domestic abuse during the pandemic. It presents a substantial increase in physical violence than psychological violence during the Covid-19 period among the women who encountered domestic abuse during the pandemic. Significant respondents, i.e., 26% of victim women, claimed that psychological violence remained like before the Covid-19 period. At the same time, merely 4% of victim women indicated that physical abuse remained like the pre-Covid-19 period. Further, 16% of victim women stated that physical violence did not increase during the Covid-19 period, and nearly 4% of victim respondents said that psychological violence decreased during the pandemic. The findings suggest that there has been a significant increase in both physical and psychological abuse against women. There is a high correlation between physical and emotional abuse (Karakurt & Silver, 2013), as usually, chronic verbal abuse leads to physical abuse (Calleja, 2008). It is also evident in the case of Bihar, where a significant increase in physical violence has been noted in our research during the fieldwork and data analysis.



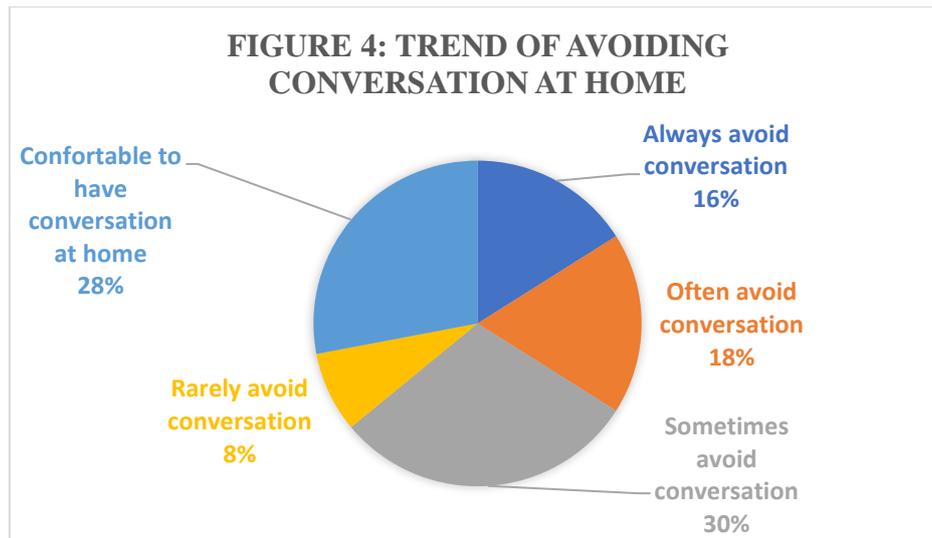
Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Figure 3 depicts that among all the women respondents who encountered psychological abuse, around 36% of married women feel insulted by their husbands and in-laws at home. At the same time, 29% of women who encountered psychological violence stated that they encountered another type of psychological abuse, such as not having any conversation at home, feeling isolated, having suicidal thoughts, etc., due to the husband and in-laws. During the Covid-19 period, almost 19% of women who encountered psychological abuse received divorce threats during disagreements between the partners when they failed to comply with their traditionally defined gender role of loving and obedient wife, caring mother and daughter-in-law, and performing household chores. About 8% of the victims who faced psychological abuse stated that they often receive threats of inflicting physical violence. Nearly 6% of psychologically abused women claimed their partners and in-laws publicly humiliated them. It indicates how the gender role is a potential moderator of the relationship between power usage and marital satisfaction (Schwarzwald, Koslowsky, & Izhak-Nir, 2008).



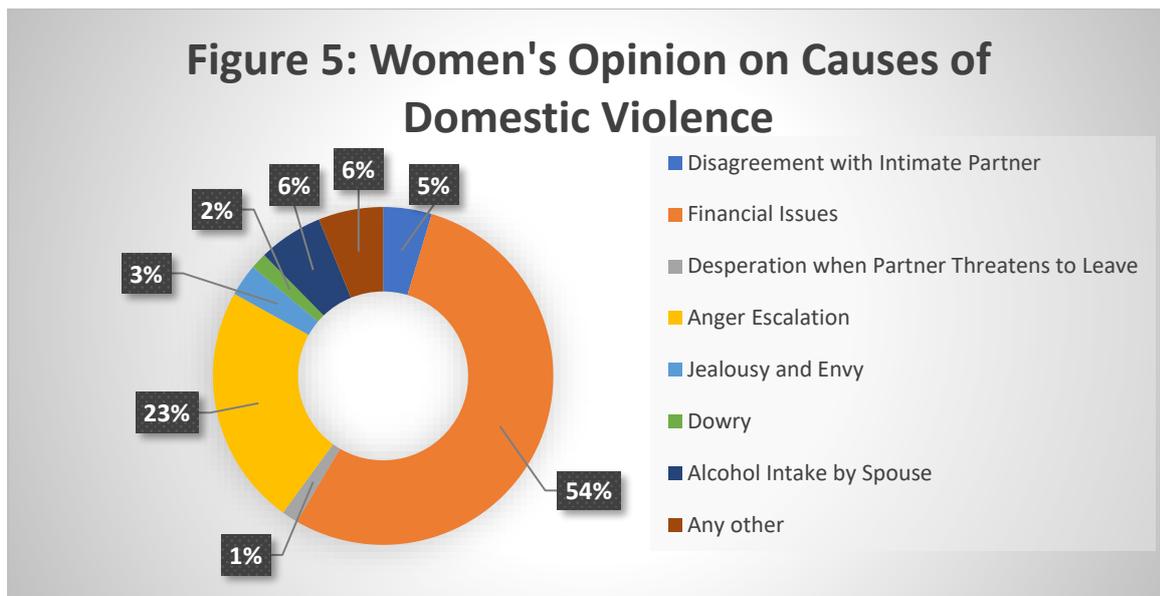
Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Figure 4 represents interviewed women tend to avoid discussing specific issues at home due to the fear of conflict, resulting in domestic violence. Around 16% of all respondents expressed that they always avoid any conversation with the perpetrators, whether the spouse or in-laws. While approximately 18% of all interviewed women said they often avoid conversation, about 30% of all respondents stated that sometimes they avoid specific topics of discussion that may lead to quarrels in the family. About 8% of all respondents claimed to avoid conversation rarely, and nearly 28% of respondents asserted that they could comfortably discuss their thoughts at home. It indicates that a high percentage of women avoid speaking their minds and opinion in front of their family members for fear of violence and arguments with husbands and in-laws.

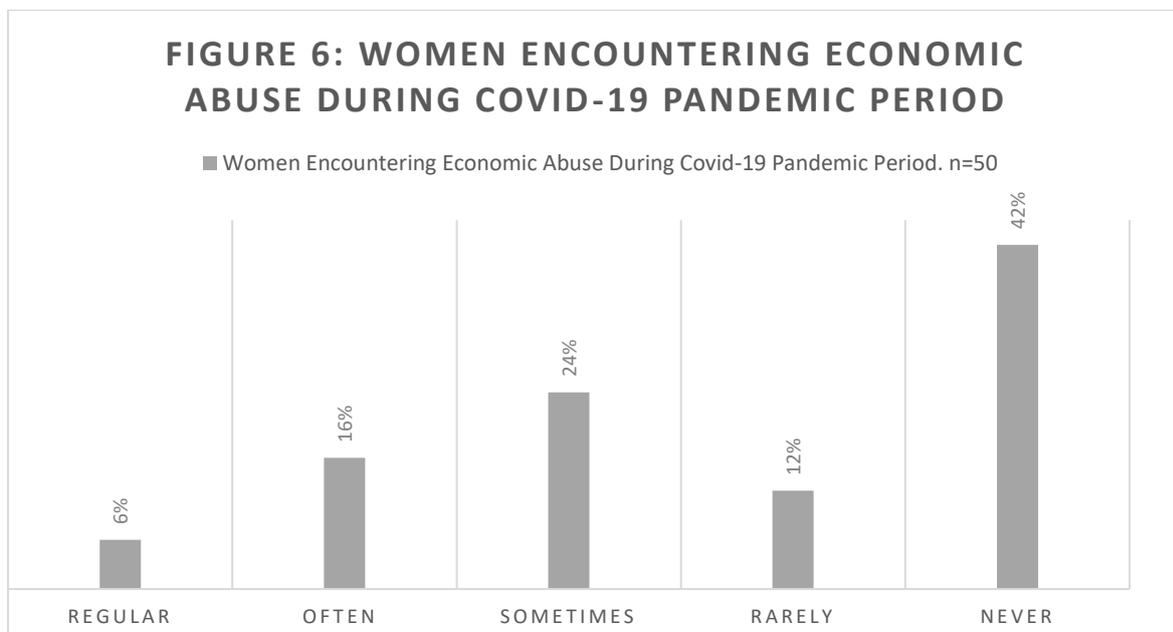


Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Figure 5 depicts the reasons for the increase in domestic violence during the Covid-19 period. Approximately 54% of women who suffer from domestic violence expressed that violence against them is due to financial problems arising from job loss, exhaustion of savings, and lack of loan possibilities. Around 23% of DV victims explained anger escalation as the reason for the rise in domestic violence during the pandemic. During that period, most victims' husbands lost their occupations, leading to frustration, mental suffering, and economic abuse. Around 32% of participants that husbands who were the breadwinner in the family lost their employment, leading to a debt burden. Private loans and borrowing became a big issue during the tough times of the pandemic in respondents' lives, ensuing physical, emotional, and economic abuse of women within the homes. Often, respondents faced domestic violence, either as the frustration of poverty or were asked to bring money from their family or apply for women's loans from the banks. Such regular forcing to arrange money combined physical threats, coercive threats, and insults. Respondents also admitted that confinement and disagreements escalated anger between the couples, family members, and relatives. These emotional factors elevated the violence against women. In figure 6, the percentage of women who never faced economic violence is high because unemployed and poverty-stricken women do not have any economic resources. The majority, 58% of all women, admitted suffering from economic abuse during the Covid-19 period; 6% encountered financial abuse regularly, 16% often, 24% sometimes, whereas 12% rarely experienced economic abuse. Economic abuse not only means controlling women from accessing economic resources. However, it also means forcing them to bring/arrange economic resources. Many respondents pointed out that they were asked to bring money from their maternal families, take loans, borrow money, and search for work during the lockdown.



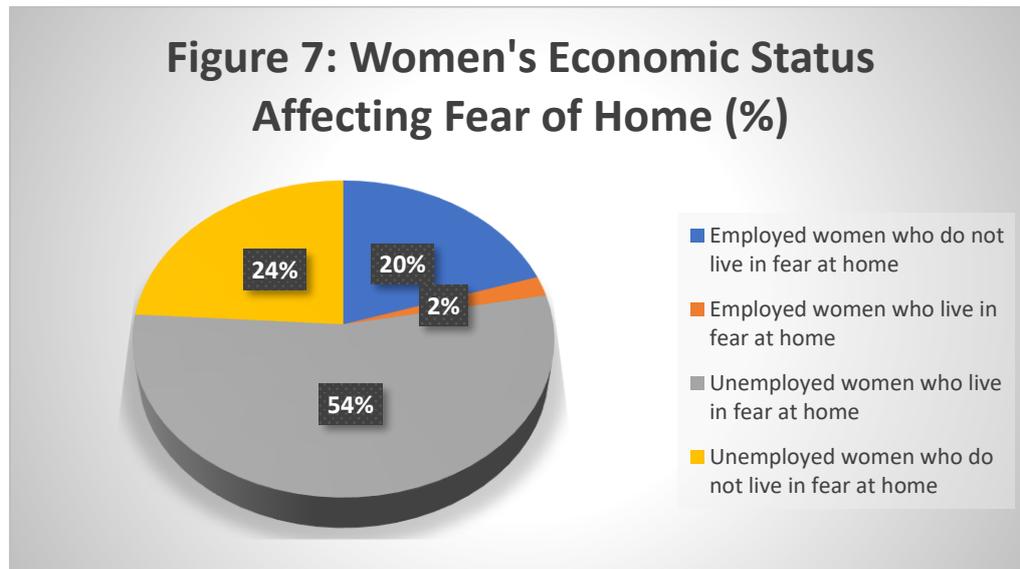
Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.



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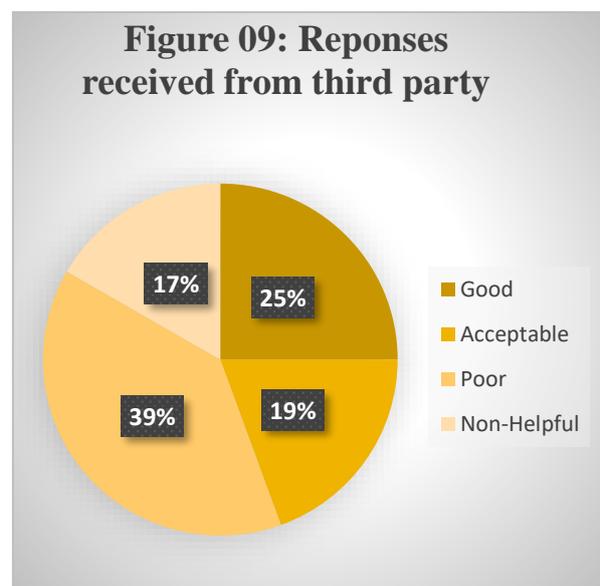
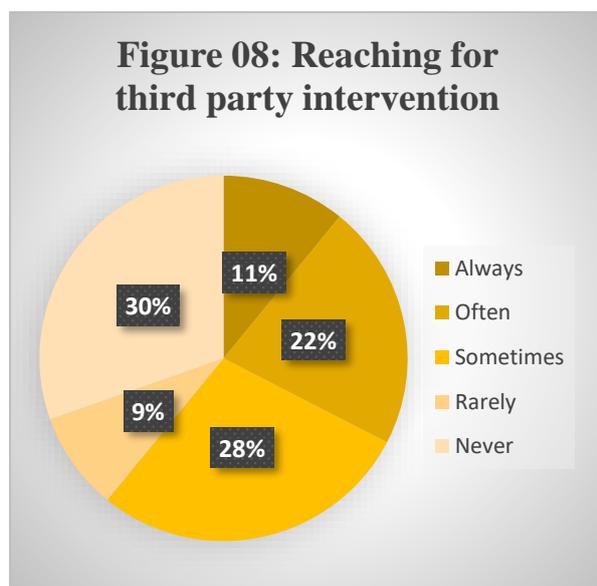
Figure 7 depicts that women's employment status is associated with their feelings of insecurity at home. Among the total number of unemployed women, around 24% of respondents stated that they do not feel threatened in their homes. While among the total population of employed women, about 98% emphasized that they do not feel fear at home. Most women asserted that working outside the house boundaries enabled them to speak their thoughts at home and gave a sense of empowerment. The findings suggest that working women can be an equal part of the family discussions and decisions as they also contribute to the family expenses. However, unemployed women may feel insecure due to fear of the consequences of disagreement that could lead to conflict, violence, divorce threats, etc. It depicts those working women are more empowered and have some agency at home than unemployed women. The

unemployed women also encounter domestic violence due to their incapability to support their families financially. It is more common in economically backward families.



Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Figure 8 shows that 70% of DV victims seek help from relatives, neighbors, family members, friends, and sometimes police after being abused. However, reaching out for help is not an easy task in Indian society. Around 30% of DV victims never sought help from anyone. As shown in figure 9, among the women who sought help against domestic abuse, around 17% of them did not receive any help from family members and friends, and about 39% of women admitted that they received an unsatisfactory response from family and authorities when they reached out for help. Whereas 25% of women respondents mentioned receiving a positive response from the person they sought help and support, primarily maternal family members. These findings indicate cultural and social contexts in help-seeking behavior (Leonardsson & Sebastian, 2017). The lack of positive response and necessary support to the victim demonstrates the persisting orthodox views, patriarchal nature, and lack of awareness regarding the repercussions of domestic violence.



Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

As per the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) 2015-16, the total lifetime prevalence of domestic and sexual violence against women 15–49 years of age has been 33.5% and 8.5%, respectively. Though NFHS (2019-20) data showed a decline in the percentage of women facing domestic violence compared to the previous survey (2015-16) data, from 43.7% to 40%, many women rights activists were quite sure that the number is going to increase during the lockdown, and so it did.

The data in Table 1 shows the high number of cases registered with *Mahila Thana*, as it deals with women's grievances in Patna. The *Kankarbagh Thana* and *Kotwal Thana* received fewer domestic violence cases than Mahila Thana. Table 1 depicts a significant decrease in registered cases during the Covid-19 pandemic period (i.e., 2020 and 2021). *Kotwal thana* received fewer cases in 2019; the reason for this is that in pre-covid times, police stations used to deal with the cases from just their jurisdiction.

However, during the pandemic, police stations had to take the cases of different jurisdictions for counseling through WhatsApp and phones. Therefore, the number of complaints registered with *Kotwal thana* increased during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

Table 1: Number of Registered Cases in Police Station

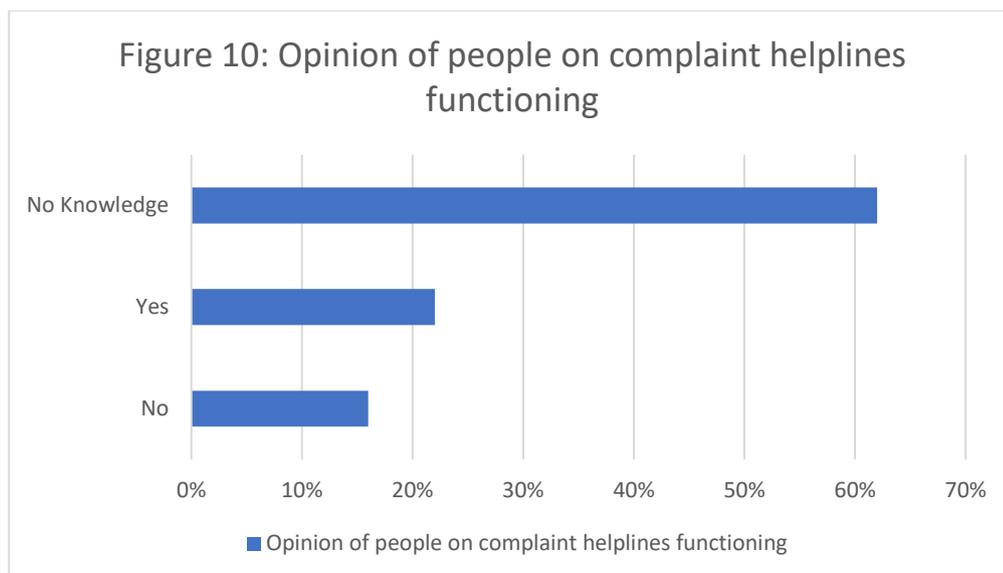
Thana	Number of Cases registered in 2019	Number of Cases registered in 2020	Number of Cases registered in 2021 (till September)
Kankarbagh Thana	41	30	26
Mahila Thana	396	290	192
Kotwali Thana	35	46	42

Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women Counsellors at Kankarbagh Thana, Mahila Thana, and Kotwal Thana of Bihar in 2021.

Several efforts were made to provide police help to the victims of domestic violence during the pandemic. However, most respondents (62% of the DV victims shown in figure 10) stated that they did not have information on how to access police help if they faced domestic abuse. Therefore, they could not receive any help from the authorities. It depicts a lack of awareness regarding complaint registration and is one of the reasons for the decline in registered cases during the pandemic.

Figure 10 shows that approximately 22% of women respondents stated that helplines function appropriately, allowing them to report a complaint against their perpetrators and save them at the time of violence. However, around 16% of women emphasized that police helplines do not provide the required assistance. This situation reveals that the actions taken by the Indian authorities are insufficient to deal with the domestic violence during Covid-19. Several NGOs have requested publicizing the phone numbers of the protection officers to make them more accessible (Mittal & Singh, 2020). The phone numbers of counselors (protection officers) are on the police station's walls and available online.

Nevertheless, many women in India are illiterate, do not have phones, or do not know how to access information online. These hinder women's access to protection and officers' help.

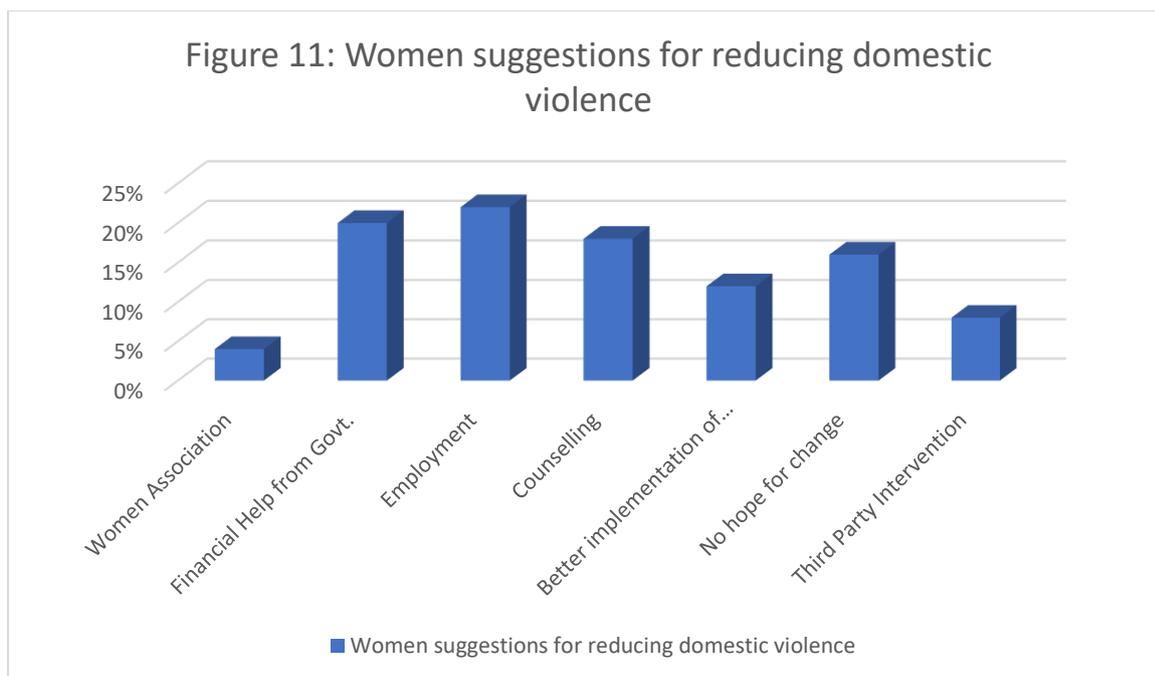


Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women from three districts of Bihar in 2021.

Suggestions from Victims' Perspective

During the interviews, victims were asked for suggestions on what they thought would help reduce domestic violence. Figure 11 shows that approximately 22% of women explained that getting employment would reduce the violence because domestic abuse increased due to the loss of occupation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, around 20% of women stated that financial assistance from the government during the Covid-19 period could provide immediate relief against conflicts on financial issues. A significant number of women, i.e., about 18%, expressed that counseling would be a more effective way to reduce violence against them in the long run. Nearly 4% of victims prefer to approach local women's associations, and almost 8% of women prefer third-party intervention from someone known to resolve the conflict. A significant proportion of women, i.e., 12% of respondents, want a better implementation of state policies. Victims and counselors, in their interviews, highlighted that Alcohol is still one of the reasons for domestic violence against women even after the alcohol ban in Bihar. Approximately 50% of victims expressed that their husbands inflict violence on them after alcohol consumption at home, which increased during the pandemic. As men were at home and unemployed during the period, an erratic pattern of alcohol consumption was observed. While about 14% of the victim said that sometimes they have been through domestic violence after their husband has consumed Alcohol, and 36% of women said that their husbands do not consume Alcohol or inflict violence after the consumption.

However, a significant number of victims (16%) have become hopeless about the change in domestic violence against them, as it has become a 'normal' activity within the family. There are several reasons for this hopelessness among victims. First, many women grew up in a domestic violence environment, making it a regular activity within a family. Second, there is a psychological entrapment of the victim in a violent marriage- due to children, unemployment, no financial help, social stigma, etc. Therefore, stringent measures for change are required, and the issue of domestic violence should be regarded as a threat to society, the economy, and the development process.



Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Discussion

The Gender Role, Power Struggle, and Domestic Violence Against Women

The term domestic violence gives an impression of physical abuse. However, various types of domestic abuse are equally nefarious as physical abuse. A study by Mullen et al. (1988) highlights that those women who had encountered physical or sexual abuse in their childhood or adulthood suffer from psychiatric disorders, predominantly depressive type of disorders, which contribute to psychiatric morbidity for many years. Psychological abuse is often known as emotional abuse. It involves trauma caused by verbal abuse, threats of acts, or coercive tactics. Perpetrators use psychological abuse to terrorize, control, and make their victims feel disparaged (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2015). The other form of domestic abuse is economic abuse, also known as financial abuse. Economic abuse occurs when one intimate partner controls another partner's access to economic resources, leading to a decline in victims' capacity to support themselves and increasing their financial dependency on the violator (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2008). These abuses occur frequently but silently and often do not receive adequate attention, as they have been normalized within society. The issue of domestic abuse is not restricted to a particular state and country; instead, it is present worldwide with similar causes and effects.

Glover & Kaplan (2009) explain the term 'Gender' as one of the busiest and most restless terms of the English language, which is present everywhere and is forever changing. The term unveils several questions on gender roles, differentiation, gaps, biases, etc. Gender theorists argue that the status of men and women in an espousal relationship is not gender-neutral; instead, it is influenced by cultural views about femininity and masculinity. Age, unemployment, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics of social structure also play a significant role in the infliction of domestic violence. The findings of this study highlight how gender interacts and influences power within relationships and propensities for domestic violence (Anderson, 1997; Parihar, 2019). Domestic violence, in this sense, is the establishment of fear and control over the other through physical assault, social abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and financial abuse (Kaur & Garg, 2008). Various gender theories have discussed

the relationship between gender roles and power struggles. Theorists have pointed out that violence is a resource for constructing masculinity (Jewkes et al., 2015).

According to gender theorists, domestic abuse against women is more due to social support and encouragement for men's societal dominance and greater power in decision-making and resources (Zegenhagen, Ranganathan, & Bullerb, 2019; Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Feminist scholars conceptualize physical violence as a tactic to secure power, control, and dominance within an abusive relationship (Lawson, 2012). Such control is maintained through non-violent means and strategies through the threat of violence causing mental abuse (Mennicke & Kulkarni, 2016). The Covid-19 pandemic and the preventive measures to curb infection led to unintended negative consequences on women by bringing them near their potential violators. The significant increase in domestic abuse against women in times of crisis indicates a subordinate status of women in society, who still bear the brunt of their husbands' frustration (Silva et al., 2020). The social practices maintain the difference between men and women and promote male dominance, paving the path for domestic violence. Expectations of male and female roles in the conjugal relationship are based on the relative statuses guided by the norms of the society, and deviation from the set norms results in conflicts and mental and physical abuse. Femininity and masculinity are socially constructed model that affects the division of labor inside and outside the household. Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the risk of power strife between the husband and the wife, resulting in marital conflict and an increase in the shadow pandemic of domestic abuse and violence that affects women's health (UN Women, 2020).

Domestic Violence—Danger to Physical and Mental Health

The health impacts of violence are severe for domestic violence victims. Intimate partner violence against women can result in serious physical, sexual, reproductive, and mental health issues such as unplanned pregnancies, STDs, bone fractures, etc. Due to the restrictions during the Covid-19 lockdown, accessing medical help for injuries became difficult for the women. Difficulty in commutation and social isolation became major hurdles to seeking medical help. Perpetrators used various restrictions during the pandemic to exercise control and power over their partners so that they have either no or limited access to services, help, and counseling support from informal (NGOs, local women associations) and formal networks (protection officers, guards, police, doctors) (World Health Organisation, 2020). Due to the lockdown, the spread of infection was reduced. However, domestic violence cases against women increased in many countries, including India, which emerged as a significant mental health threat to society. Mental health awareness is less among the Indian population; similarly, there is less awareness of emotional/ psychological abuse as one form of domestic abuse. In Indian society, the women's gendered role and patriarchal structure cause harm to the mental health of women. However, it gets less recognition.

Women are isolated from family matters because of the traditional family system, dominated by the socially constructed gender role and patriarchal structure, which does not allow women to present their views. This implicit form of control through psychological abuse is regarded as 'normal'. However, a broader negotiation of masculinity continues to marginalize women and affects their mental health. The primary objective of coercive control is to instill a condition of entrapment that adversely impacts an individual's dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood, and physical and psychological integrity (Schwarzwald, Koslowsky, & Izhak-Nir, 2008). Further, one of the significant reasons for negligence towards psychological abuse is the assumption that physical abuse has a tremendous psychological toll on victims than emotional abuse. Nevertheless, continuous emotional abuse for an extended period has as severe effects as physical abuse. Various retrospective reports, treatment dropout research, and

longitudinal research demonstrate that psychological abuse can inflict negative consequences on the relationship that could be as severe as physical abuse (O’Leary, 1999).

Economic Factors and Domestic Violence

Economic factors are closely related to domestic violence incidences. Either it appears as one of the reasons behind violence against women or emerges as an outcome. Economic abuse means illegal or unauthorized use of an individual's money, property, assets, fraudulently acquiring power of attorney, eviction from home, or forcing for dowry and loan. In developing countries, the rate of domestic violence is high because of the higher level of poverty and the presence of a patriarchal setup, thus, promoting socially constructed gender roles and simultaneously increasing women's economic dependency on male family members. Further, the concomitant low employment opportunities for the poor population coupled with caste and social hierarchy structure culminates in financial, social, and psychological stress, resulting in marital conflicts (Gillum, 2019). No state of India has been free from domestic violence against women. Kalokhe et al. (2017), in their study, evaluated that around four in every ten women in India face some form of domestic violence, which is more than the world average. The traditional cultural and religious norms existing in society are some of the causes responsible for domestic violence.

The rise in unemployment in India from 7.87% to 23.48% between June 2019 and May 2020 (CMIE monthly data) is one of the factors responsible for the increase in incidences of domestic violence during the lockdown period. The women turn out to be the victims of domestic violence due to their roles as homemakers who make the demands of household items for their spouses who are suffering job losses. The husbands take out the brunt of job loss on their wives, making them victims of domestic violence. The changes during Covid-19 led to economic anxiety, depression, anger, fear, quick escalation of tension, and lack of help to victims are significant causes of the rise in intimate-partner violence (Eisner & Nivette, 2020). The National Commission for Women (NCW) reported an exponential rise in the cases of domestic violence during the lockdown period, with a more than twofold rise in the cases of gender-based violence attributed to financial distress and confinement. The NCW reported 476 domestic violence cases online in the first three weeks of lockdown (Wallen, 2020). The data is undoubtedly an underestimate of the actual number, as not all women have the opportunity or access to file a complaint against their perpetrator, especially during the lockdown period when everybody stays at home.

A study by Matjasko, Nolon & Valle (2013) highlights that the perpetrators use the tactics of establishing complete economic control over the victims by malicious interference in their employment prospects, credit control, etc., that restricts the victim from leaving the abusive relationship, as visible in the case study of Bihar. Another instance that underlines the importance of financial matters behind domestic violence is the fact that explains the implicit reason behind the decision of a woman to stay with her violators. Most women never report their abusive partners. Staying in an abusive relationship with their perpetrators is primarily due to financial dependency and social stigmas. According to Pagliuca, Patricia, and Guirkingner (2018), there is a high probability of a woman leaving her abusive marital house if she perceives that she could manage her economic affairs without any economic aid from her violators. However, if she perceives that she would not survive on her own, she might choose to stay. The pandemic-induced poverty surge is widening the gender poverty gap and pushing more and more women into lives of extreme poverty. Such conditions will make women more dependent upon men for their livelihood, resulting in continuous subjugation of women by the males through enforcing their decisions, and disobedience in complying may lead to physical, emotional, and economic abuses. It has also been observed that working women who bring money to the family suffer less domestic violence compared to unemployed women.

Furthermore, poverty and paucity of economic resources make escaping abusive relationships more difficult for unemployed women (Krishnan et al., 2010). It is also evident in the above findings of domestic abuse in Bihar.

The social construction of femineity and structural conditions are significantly responsible for the lack of assistance and support to the victims of domestic violence (Anderson, 1997; Schwarzwald, Koslowsky, & Izhak-Nir, 2008). The notion of femininity is based on socially constructed characteristics such as understanding, empathy, nurturance, loving, patience, etc. Women are expected to abide by their duties as dutiful wives and mothers and sacrifice themselves for their families based on socially constructed characteristics. Often women are expected not to disclose their family matters and not to bring harm to their spouse and his family's reputation, making women choose silence and experience violence (Pinnewala, 2009). The results also indicate that women stay in abusive relationships because of their children, as they cannot support them economically. Hence, women's silence is an outcome of economic dependency on the male members of their house (Andersson et al., 2010; Pinnewala, 2009).

Third-Party Intervention

The frequency of domestic violence can be on and off, occasional, or chronic, requiring a different form of intervention (Kaur & Garg, 2008). Victims of domestic violence prefer to reach out to family and friends for help and support. Third-party intervention and help-seeking are pivotal to saving the victims of domestic violence. However, to what extent victims received aid from the third party in reporting domestic violence incidents to law enforcement is highly debatable. It has been observed that much less voluntarily third persons select these resources as their choice of avenue for the victim's protection (Hollenshead, Dai, Ragsdale, Massey, & Scott, 2006).

In 2008, India launched "Bell Bajao," an anti-domestic violence campaign in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, UNIFEM, and the UN Trust Fund, which urges residents to stand against physical abuse through interrupting domestic violence (UN Women, 2011). The global campaign is known as "Ring the Bell," launched at the Clinton Global Initiative, where UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon joined the campaign as the inaugural global "champion." It was a breakthrough initiative that attempted to create awareness regarding domestic violence third-party intervention. However, with time "Bell Bajao" advertisement stopped airing on television. There is a vital need to acknowledge the importance of third-party intervention and promote it to sensitize society against domestic abuse.

Registering Complaints against Perpetrators

The number of registered cases of domestic violence flooded after the lockdown. Non-accessibility of police helps during the lockdown due to the pandemic was the most crucial reason for the decrease in registering domestic violence cases. According to the NFHS-5 survey, conducted in 2019-20, around 40% of the ever-married women of the age group 18-49 years had faced spousal violence. All the three counselors from *Mahila Thana*, *Kotwal Thana*, and *Kankarbagh Thana* stated that during the Covid-19 lockdown, they could neither assist women. There was a restriction on a physical visit to the victim's place, and victims could not visit the police station to register their complaints as there was neither reporting facility available nearby nor was it possible to get public transportation. The decline in the registered cases during the pandemic is evident in the reported domestic violence cases at *Thanas* (Table 1). However, the number of complaints increased drastically once the lockdown was over. During the Covid-19 lockdown, the National Commission for Women (NCW) launched a

WhatsApp helpline to ensure women access to help, due to which a 2.5 times increase was recorded in domestic violence complaints nationwide (Chandra, 2020).

Similarly, this trend was observed in Bihar counselors explaining that during the lockdown, WhatsApp messaging became an effective and efficient source of seeking help to file complaints and counseling regarding domestic violence. However, the helplines' effectiveness was reduced due to the lockdown, as there were restrictions in taking necessary actions, i.e., limited visiting victim's homes, not providing a safe house, etc. Therefore, making the helpline barely a procedure to record data with the authorities (Mittal & Singh, 2020).

Moreover, regional differences in the implementation of legal provisions regarding domestic violence are also responsible for the lack of reporting in Bihar (Leonardsson & Sebastian, 2017). Women should feel secure while contacting authorities for help and not intimidated. Therefore, many scholars advocated sensitization of domestic violence, increased advocacy of women's rights, laws, and cultural changes. Such steps can encourage women to talk openly about violence (Kaye, Mirembe, Ekstrom, Bantebya, & Johansson, 2005). Also, several studies highlight that victims wish to be more informed on judicial processes and the availability of community services (Hollenshead, Dai, Ragsdale, Massey, & Scott, 2006).

Conclusion

Demographic details of women participants

	Percentage	Number of Participants
Occupation Status		
Employed	14%	7
Self Employed	6%	3
Unemployed	80%	40
Educational Qualification		
Illiterate	56%	28
School Level Education	40%	20
Graduate	04%	2
Household Monthly Income		
No Income	30%	15
₹5000	52%	26
₹10000	14%	7
Above ₹10000	4%	2

Source: Data collected from the Personal Interviews of Women of Bihar in 2021.

Discussion

Worldwide, the pandemic has raised the unemployment of women, which negatively affects their bargaining power at home and makes them insecure (ILO-OECD, 2020). The findings of this research stress that during the Covid-19 period, economic conditions, social distancing, and proximity with the perpetrator accentuated psychological and physical abuse. One of the significant factors that caused the spike in domestic violence was the deteriorating economic conditions of the workers and self-employed people who encountered financial problems and unemployment during the pandemic. Therefore, to curb domestic violence against women, it is necessary to empower women economically. Also, focusing on the overall economic betterment to reduce the frustration caused by unemployment and job uncertainties for both men and women may lessen household conflicts and, consequently, a decline in domestic violence cases. The first step towards empowering women can be the guarantee of the right to property in paternal wealth by the State. Second, gender-based welfare programs

targeting women could be instrumental in empowering women and reducing violence against them. Third, gender-based educational and economic policies empower women by enabling them to achieve independence. These steps will place women at a lesser risk of domestic violence because access to economic resources will increase their bargaining power.

Further, the government should play an active role in mitigating the risks of domestic violence. The observation made from table 1 uncovers an essential fact, i.e., women prefer to visit *Mahila Thana* more than any other police station. It is because it deals explicitly with women's issues and the Officer in charge of the *thana* is also a woman. It provides a sense of security and empathy that allows women to disclose the violent facts and report them to the police station against the perpetrator. Therefore, *Mahila Thanas* should be established in every district of Bihar so that more women could feel secure and untroubled to register their complaints against domestic violence. The government should also focus on forming targeted welfare programs for women, establishing Instant Response Units, enforcing strict punishments for the perpetrators, establishing safe shelter homes, and advertising safety measures against domestic violence on television and radios.

Most developing countries are socially rooted in traditions and have patriarchal societies. The change in the social atmosphere is necessary for the decline in domestic abuse against women. It requires collective actions to bring change for the future generation's safer environment irrespective of their gender by unlearning the patriarchal, misogynist, sexist, socially constructed norms of gender role and gender differentiation. Hence, to create a safer society and future generations, it is imperative to have speedy trials with utmost urgency regarding domestic violence cases, especially during crises. Moreover, for the holistic approach to tackling domestic abuse, a team of health professionals, media, and community leaders, should be formed to deal with the issue of violence within society. Campaigns like “Bell Bajo” should be used again to imbue social responsibility among people and create awareness, especially in times of crisis, for the collective action against domestic violence.

Domestic violence has adversely affected professional and personal lives, most importantly, their individuality, integrity, and confidence. Because in India, the family as an institution is centered on women. This 'shadow pandemic' impacts children, too, as they also become a participant by witnessing the violence in the family. The children who grow up in a violent environment consider violence and abuse an ordinary event, leading to either inflicting violence or becoming a victim once they become adults. Therefore, children's exposure to violence against women was 'normal' and continued the vicious circle of domestic abuse (Yount & Li, 2009; Mukhopadhyay & Singh, 2007). This shadow pandemic has been in society for centuries without any cure, further infecting the whole family, state, and society. Domestic violence has health impacts that affect the whole society at large. It is high time for states to recognize the need to develop a cure for this shadow pandemic which has been otherwise 'normalized' in the Indian context.

Acknowledgement:

Dr Priyanka Tripathi is the awardee of ICSSR Special Call for Studies Focusing on Social Science Dimensions of Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID/266/29/2020-21/ICSSR). This paper is largely an outcome of the Research project sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). However, the responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, and the conclusions drawn is entirely that of the author”.

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Annexure

(Confidential)

(For Research Purposes only)

'Mapping Abuse and Domestic Violence in the times of Covid-19-19: A Case Study from Bihar'

Indian Institute of Technology, Patna

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire No-----

District and village name-----

I. Respondents' Personal Profile

Sr. no.	Questions	Options	Response
1	Name of Respondent		
2	Age (present age in years)		
3	Working status of the respondent	1. Employed 2. Unemployed 3. Self-employed	
4	Working status of Husband and wife	1. Husband working, the wife not working 2. Wife working, husband not working 3. Both working 4. Both not working 5. Other	
5	Educational Qualification	1. Illiterate 2. 1st-10 th 3. 11 th -12 th 4. Graduate 5. Postgraduate 6. Diploma 7. Other (specify)	
6	Monthly Income of family during Covid-19 (Rs. in thousand)		
II. For a victim or a survivor of violence			
7	What types of abuse have you faced during Covid-19?	1. Physical abuse 2. Sexual abuse 3. Emotional/Psychological abuse 4. Economic abuse 5. All of above 6. Any other abuse (specify)	
8	Does your spouse inflict violence under the influence of Alcohol?	1. Yes 2. No 3. Sometimes	
9	Are you being harassed by your in-laws/ husband/family during the Covid-19 pandemic?	1. Always 2. Very often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
10	Has violence increased during the Covid-19?	1. Yes 2. No 3. Can't say	
11	Do you feel afraid of your partner/ family during Covid-19?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
12	Do you avoid specific topics out of fear of	1. Always 2. Very Often	

	angering your partner/family during Covid-19?	3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
13	Have your partner/in-laws treated you so badly that you are embarrassed in front of your friends or family?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
14	According to you, what are the main causes of domestic violence?	1. Disagreement with their intimate partner 2. Financial issues 3. Desperation when partner threatens to leave 4. Anger escalation 5. Jealousy and envy 6. Dowry 7. Alcohol intake of a spouse 8. Any other	
III. Types of abuse experienced:			
If you have suffered from physical abuse, please tick the options that apply: (If questions no. 15 to 17 are not applicable move to question no. 18)			
15	Have you experienced any physical harassment during Covid-19?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
16	What sorts of physical harassment have you experienced during Covid-19?	1. Pushing without any injury 2. Pushing with injury 3. Hitting, and slapping causing no injury 4. Hitting, slapping causing injury 5. Kicking 6. Pulling hair 7. Any other (specify)	
17	What kind of injuries have you sustained due to physical assault during Covid-19?	1. No injuries sustained 2. Bruising or scratching not requiring medical intervention 3. Cuts or injuries requiring medical intervention 4. Broken bone 5. Any other (specify)	
If you ever suffered from emotional abuse, please tick the options that apply: (If questions no. 18 to 23 are not applicable move to question no. 24)			
18	Have you experienced any kind of emotional abuse during Covid-19?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
19	What sorts of emotional abuse have you	1. Offered Alcohol 2. Threatened by using any weapon/related item	

	experienced during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Humiliated in front of others 4. Insulted 5. Threatened to kill you 6. Threatened for divorce (if not obey him) 7. Others 	
20	Have you ever felt that you are discriminated from your family members during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never 	
21	Did your family bully you in different activities during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never 	
22	Has your partner criticized you and put you down during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never 	
23	State trend of emotional assaults during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased 2. Remained the same 3. Decreased 4. Only been assaulted once 5. Cannot Say 	
If you ever suffered from sexual abuse, please tick the options that apply: (If questions no. 24 to 25 are not applicable move to question no. 26)			
24	Have you experienced any kind of sexual abuse during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never 6. Can't Say 	
25	What sorts of sexual abuse have you experienced during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marital Rape 2. Forced sex after a physical assault 3. Forced sex when you are sick, tired, or just not willing 4. Criticizing you Sexually 5. Any other (specify) 6. Had love and respect for you during sex 	
If you ever suffered from economic abuse, please tick the options that apply: (If questions no. 26 to 30 are not applicable move to question no. 31)			
26	Have you suffered from any kind of economic abuse during Covid-19?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never 	
27	Did you face harassment because for Dowry/	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 	

	income/ financial aid during Covid-19?	4. Rarely 5. Never	
28	Has your family ever prevented you from carrying on your employment during Covid-19?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
29	Has your family tried to sell your Stridhan or any other valuables without informing you or without your consent during Covid-19?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
30	Has your family forcibly taken away your salary, Income during Covid-19?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
IV. Other questions related to relationships with the abuser and help received by victims			
31	What is/was your relationship with the abuser at the time of the abuse?	1. Husband and wife 2. In-laws 3. Family member 4. Others (specify)	
32	Have you received any help from your relatives/ friends/police after/during abuse?	1. Always 2. Very Often 3. Sometimes 4. Rarely 5. Never	
33	What was the response of your family members/ relatives/friends/police after/during the abuse?	1. Very good 2. Good 3. Acceptable 4. Poor 5. Very poor	
34	Have you filed any complaints against your abuser during Covid-19?	1. Yes, Many times 2. Yes, Sometimes 3. Yes, Once 4. Never	
35	Has the abuser stopped abuse after complaint during Covid-19?	1. To a great extent 2. Somewhat 3. Little 4. Very Little 5. Not at all	
36	Has your relationship improved with the abuser after the complaint during Covid-19?	1. To a great extent 2. Somewhat 3. Little 4. Very Little 5. Not at all 6. Became worse	
VI. Interventions			

37	Do you approach any agency for help during domestic violence?		
38	Do you get any support to any agency about the domestic violence?		
39	Does your work suffer due to domestic violence?		
40	Do you think that the women helplines are working properly?		
41	Suggestions if any		