

**ANALYSING A PANDEMIC WITHIN A PANDEMIC: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN THE SOUTH ASIAN REGION**



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Abstract

Amid the turmoil of the ticking coronavirus bomb, humankind is in the utmost state of danger, and curbing the spread of the coronavirus has become a hazardous peril, especially in the south Asian region due to its continuous misgoverning outlook on all the fronts. In this complex condition, the gender-based violence against women is on an upsurge due to an environment that sparks diverse forms of violence effectuated against women. This paper reviews the gender-based violence against women in the South Asian region during this pandemic. Moreover, it traces down comparative progress in the current conditions of women in these countries. The paper covers the understanding behind the perspectives, root causes, and direct-indirect factors that lead to the formation of a perpetrator's mind-set in the present scenario. It then identifies the dire impacts on women that result in the hindrance in the collective fight against the pandemic. In the concluding stages, the research work critically examines the loopholes in domestic governance while posing the significance and requirement of steps at the national and the international levels to combat this menace. The research has been guided by the collection of both primary and secondary data sources.

Keywords: Gender based Violence, women, Covid-19 pandemic, South Asia.

What is a Shadow Pandemic of gender-based violence?

In the wake of this reality, Simone de Beauvoir's warning continuously comes in the forefront: 'Never forget that a political, economic or religious crisis will be enough to cast doubts on women's rights. These rights will never be vested'. Barring the omission of 'pandemic' from de Beauvoir's list of crises, her words unfortunately could not be truer, even a half a century since they were written. GBV is any harmful act that is perpetrated against someone's will and based on socially ascribed gender differences and can include acts of physical, sexual or mental harm, and threats or acts of coercion in public or private. In the case of COVID-19, the difficult irony is that the very measures meant to protect the vast majority of the population – shelter-in-place and lockdown orders – are the same that endanger women and girls at the hands of perpetrators. So globally universal is the increased risk of GBV during COVID-19 that UN Women has called it the 'shadow pandemic'.¹ A silent and fatal 'shadow pandemic' is currently unfolding across the globe as millions of survivors and victims of GBV are witnessing the loss of their basic human rights under lockdown.

¹ Brianna Guidorzi, "the 'Shadow Pandemic': Addressing Gender-based Violence (GBV) During COVID-19", in COVID-19 in the Global South, Impacts and Responses, ed. Pádraig Carmody, Gerard McCann, Clodagh Colleran and Ciara O'Halloran, (Bristol University Press.,2020), URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18gfz7c.18>, accessed on Sun, 06 Dec 2020

(WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March and public health officials around the world responded with stay-at-home orders. The UN reports that 1 in 3 women will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Due to COVID-19, domestic violence cases have increased by 30 percent in some countries. Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, recently stated, “As more countries report infection and lockdown, more domestic violence helplines and shelters across the world are reporting rising call lines for help.”² The United Nations Population Fund estimates that the Covid-19 pandemic has the potential to cause 15 million additional GBV cases worldwide for every additional three months of lockdown. Even with limited data, it is clear that the compounding effects of lockdowns and broader pandemic conditions facilitate violence and reduce victims’ ability to report incidents or seek help.³ Nearly a fifth (18 per cent) of women and girls aged 15 to 49 who have ever been in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Globally 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.⁴ UN Women has described gender-based violence (GBV) as a “shadow pandemic” coinciding with COVID-19 across the world.

A study on South Asia shows concerning statistics⁵: the highest levels of excess female child mortality among world regions along with the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 46% of girls married by age 18. One-third in India and one-quarter or more in Nepal and Pakistan report physical spousal violence.⁶ The gendered impacts of Covid-19 in South Asia and Southeast Asia can be defined as “multi-layered and multidimensional, created as a result of

² Lucero Flores, “Addressing the Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence”, THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW, Nov 25 2020, accessed on 07 Dec 2020, <https://iar-gwu.org/blog/addressing-the-shadow-pandemic-of-domestic-violence>

³ UNESCAP, The Covid-19 Pandemic and Violence Against Women in Asia and the Pacific Policy Paper, Social Development Plan, Srinivas Tata, Cai Cai, Lauren Clark, Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan, Farzana Sharmin, and Raphaëlle Berliat, No. 2020/12, 2020, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/20201123_SDD_Policy_Paper%20Covid-19-VAW.pdf, Accessed on 06 Dec 2020.

⁴ Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence: Expressions and Strategies, (SIDA,2015), Accessed on 07 Dec 2020, <https://publikationer.sida.se/contentassets/18786cc0bfae45a58b07bebf0aa634e3/preventing-and-responding-to-gender-based-violence.pdf>

⁵ Solotaroff J, Pande R. (2014) Violence against women and girls: lessons from South Asia. South Asia Development Forum; World Bank Group, Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20153>, Accessed on 07 Dec 2020.

⁶ Dlamini, Judy. “Gender-Based Violence, Twin Pandemic to COVID-19.” Critical Sociology, (December 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520975465>. accessed on 07 Dec 2020

cultural, economic and political norms found in specific places and at specific times”, vulnerability can be understood to be not only artificial, but context-specific.⁷ Furthermore, the pandemic poses a high threat toward the achievement of the gender related SDGs and even risks the previously attained improvements since 2015 in the aspects of gender equality. It has put a hold to the gender transformative policies and action plans by diverting the resources away.

Types of gender-based violence against women prevalent in the South Asian region during the pandemic

Intimate Partner Violence/ Domestic Violence (battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, femicide)-

Domestic violence, synonymous with interpersonal violence (IPV). Although men are also victims of IPV, primarily, girls, women and boys are thought to be the only victims. This can also involve physical violence, sexual violence, economic control, and psychological violence. In some societies, such as in South Asia, extreme cases of domestic violence include acid attacks, resulting in burns that can be fatal. According to U.N. Women, even before the pandemic began, 1 in 3 women worldwide experienced physical or sexual violence mostly from an intimate partner. The World Health Organization defines IPV as the “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm or deprivation.” It has increased at such a rate since the outbreak of COVID-19 that as early as April 2020, UN Secretary General António Guterres referred to the dramatic rise as “a horrifying surge.”⁸

Sexual Violence and Harassment (rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber-harassment)-

Sexual violence is a hidden consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic considered as a strategy, used to assert power over the victim and to cause long-term suffering. Sexual violence is a broad term used to define violence of a sexual nature in all areas of life-- in the home, workplace and in the public sphere. It includes marital rape, ‘corrective rape’ aimed at ‘converting’ lesbian women, sexual harassment, commercial sexual exploitation, and sexual assault. Sexual violence is often

⁷ S. Nanthini and Tamara Nair S. Rajaratnam, COVID-19 and the Impacts on Women, School of International Studies (2020), Accessed on 06-12-2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26875>

⁸ Devon Cone, “Exacerbating the Other Epidemic: How COVID-19 is Increasing Violence against Displaced Women and Girls”, Refugee International, August 4, 2020. accessed on 07 Dec 2020

<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/31/exacerbating-the-other-epidemic-how-covid-19-is-increasing-violence-against-displaced-women-and-girls>

part of the strategy in violent conflicts, as acknowledged by the UNSCR 1325. The consequences for victims include undermined confidence, physical disabilities, stigma and shame.⁹

Cyber Violence

In Asia Pacific region, the percentage of men using the Internet is 54.6 per cent while the percentage of women is just 41.3 per cent. The digital divide may shield some women from digital violence but may also put those who come online during the pandemic at greater risk. Users who are less experienced with ICT, who tend to be women due to the digital gender gap, are more vulnerable to harassment.¹⁰ Nearly three out of every four women worldwide who go online have experienced some form of cyber violence. “Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV)” — a term conceptualized by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in 2017, is also known as cyber or online violence. It people of all gender identities and social status — as a result of an abusive relationship or in response to expressions on topics like LGBTQIAP+ rights or feminism.¹¹

Female Genital Mutilation

FGM is the practice of deliberately cutting the genitals of women and girls. 200 million women and girls alive today are affected by it. “FGM is grounded in misguided beliefs that it improves fertility, enhances sexual pleasure for men, suppresses female sexuality, leads to better hygiene, prevents infidelity.- UNFPA, 2020.¹² Emergency situations and humanitarian crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated existing structural gender inequalities, which lie at the heart of the practice of female genital cutting. According to Orchid Project, a lack of FGC integration within COVID-19 response efforts leaves girls with no recourse to essential prevention, protection, and support services.¹³

Forced and Early Marriage

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it are heightening the risks of forced and early marriage for girls. The breakdown of social norms and traditions can heighten families’ and communities’ desire to control girls’ sexuality and “protect their honor” through marriage that are

⁹ Kangas, A., Haider, H., and Fraser, E. (2014). Gender: Topic Guide. Revised edition with E. Browne. Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, UK, <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/gender.pdf> accessed on 08 Dec 2020

¹⁰ Ibid (3)

¹¹ Jori Fortson, Laura Hinson, Biva Rajbhandari, Piya Bhalla, TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19, ICRW, 08 December 2020, <https://www.icrw.org/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-in-the-time-of-covid-19/> accessed on 09 Dec 2020

¹² UNWOMEN, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

¹³ Miranda Dobson, Impacts of COVID-19 on Female Genital Cutting, the communication initiative network, November 4 2020, <https://www.comminit.com/global/content/impacts-covid-19-female-genital-cutting> accessed on 06 Dec 2020

also more common in conflict zones and displaced communities. Tens of thousands of girls in Asia have been subjected to early and forced marriage since the beginning of the pandemic, according to UNICEF.¹⁴ COVID-19 has hampered the previously made efforts, potentially resulting in an additional 13 million child marriage cases worldwide between 2020 and 2030, as per UNFPA predictions.¹⁵

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used for the paper is qualitative and relies upon both secondary and primary sources. A qualitative methodology is chosen due to the fact that experiences of women vary across time and are determined by factors such as class, religion, class, geography, etc.

The research was guided-out by conducting and accumulating interviews of feminist scholars, data on gender-based violence from national and international agencies, and gathering a selected group of archival data involving journals and publications that were further opinionated and critically analyzed to develop the assessments. The primary source comprises the interviews of feminist scholars- Dr. Lindsey Churchill. Emphasis on the notions and terms of gender-based violence, gender-based roles, economic exploitation, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, cultural and societal norms had laid out this comprehensive study. Thus, staging a broad understanding of the patterns in which gender-based violence is escalating in numbers during the pandemic in the South Asian region. Through these concepts, the research analysis enables the tracking down the plight of the victims by forcing a critical layout of approaches filled with loopholes taken up by the governments of the South Asian nations as a whole.

Analysis of the root causes and the indirect-direct factors influencing the issue of Gender-based violence

Lockdown orders and changes in ‘the concept of home’ and ‘private space’

Structural gender-based violence is being reiterated during the lockdown where women who are already considered at a lowest rung within the family hierarchy and are now being economically and social disempowered. Caged in violent homes, with restricted mobility, limited privacy, no contact with the outside world, and locked with abuser, the victims are constantly facing grave dangers. During the mandatory lockdown being imposed during pandemic, homes no longer

¹⁴ Jenelle Babb and Natalie Buchanan, “COVID-19 Leaves Millions of Girls at Risk of School Dropout in Asia-Pacific”, the diplomat, November 05, 2020, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/11/covid-19-leaves-millions-of-girls-at-risk-of-school-dropout-in-asia-pacific/> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

¹⁵ Save the Children, Plan International, 21 July 2020, Addressing COVID-19 and Violence Against Girls in Asia-Pacific, Because we Matter, accessed on 10 Dec 2020 https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17928/pdf/pi_stc_becausewematterpolicybrief-final.pdf

remain as mere comfort zones but are being evolved as institutions which are reproducing and reiterating patriarchy.¹⁶ Home, in lockdown is therefore becoming a place to reiterate power manifestation, violence and reproduction of patriarchy. A loss of private space was acutely felt among women in Afghanistan during the pandemic as many men remained confined to the homes due to the restrictions thus, resulting in the free, feminine space being lost.¹⁷

Digital gender divide

Due to Covid-19, existing gender discrimination at home make it difficult to access household digital resources. This digital divide has significant implications for access to resources for survivors of gender-based violence during the Covid-19 crisis. As women may not be able to physically access shelters and other services, here the internet can facilitate the access to survivor support groups, counselling, health information, and other online resources that can be critical lifelines to women experiencing gender-based violence. Digital privacy and security are essential for survivors, as without its insurance, survivors may not be able to communicate openly with police. online gender-based violence is a key factor influencing, preventing, or inhibiting women's access and use of the internet.¹⁸

Economical strain

The Covid-19 pandemic is straining the world's economy as unemployment figures rise worldwide. Dr. Lindsey Churchill also suggested this very evident phenomenon that accompanied reduction in household incomes too and thus, will be creating financial stress that may further increase the incidence of GBV in both the short and long term by introducing uncertainty and shifting power imbalances within the household. The World Bank estimates that between 88 million and 115 million people globally could slip into extreme poverty in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, with almost half of them living in South Asia.¹⁹ According to Alon, the increased economic dependence not only increases their risk of gender-based violence but also makes it difficult to leave their perpetrators and has poor coping strategies that are inclusive of substance abuse.²⁰

¹⁶ Shalu Nigam, "COVID-19, LOCKDOWN AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN HOMES", PsyArXiv, ORCID ID: ORCID 0000-0002-9518-4804

¹⁷ Girls not brides, Afghanistan, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/afghanistan/> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/03/submission-un-special-rapporteur-violence-against-women-its-causes-and-consequences> accessed on 08 Dec 2020

¹⁹ UNESCAP, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/20201119_SDD_Policy_Paper_Covid-19.pdf accessed on 07 Dec 2020

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/14/gender-alert-covid-19-afghanistan> accessed on 09 Dec 2020

Increased alcohol consumption

It is often cited as an originator to abusive behavior and particularly to IPV. Reasons on why the pandemic may increase alcohol consumption is because it is used as a coping method in stressful situations. As the pandemic adds stress and also increases the likelihood that women will experience violence at home. Closed bars and restaurants may force more people to drink at home, adding to the danger.²¹ Dr. Churchill also supports the factors of economic uncertainty, poverty and stress as the reasons behind the poor coping strategies like alcohol. These negative connotations could trigger relapse or intensify the existing substance usage.

Level of education

Some more of the total of 430 million children in South Asia may face difficulties in continuing their education. Whether existing internet platforms can provide enough opportunities for online education is still an open question and more likely a serious challenge.²² Afghanistan government data indicates that girls who do not study are three times more likely to marry before the age of 18 than girls who have completed secondary education or higher.²³ The World Bank advocates that “one of the best ways to end child marriage is to keep girls in school.” Low educational attainment is a main predictor of whether a woman will experience GBV in her lifetime.²⁴ A further gender difference lies in the different opportunities and encouragement for continuing with their learning programs.

Media

Many feminist writers (e.g., Brown miller; Dworkin, Russell), laboratory research studies have suggested that pornography encourages the objectification of women and endorses sexual aggression toward women. A number of studies of television point to the deleterious effects of viewing media portrayals of violence. Eron found that children who watched many hours of violence on television during elementary school tended to exhibit more aggressive behavior as teenagers and were more likely to be arrested for criminal acts as adults. A meta-analysis of 188

²¹ Ibid (19)

²² Raghendra Jha, Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Children in South Asia, INTERPRESS SERVICE, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/07/impact-covid-19-women-children-south-asia/> accessed on 10 Dec 2020

²³ Ibid (17)

²⁴ Ibid (19)

studies found a strong positive association between exposure to television violence and antisocial and aggressive behavior.²⁵

Under Reporting

The importance of keeping family consistency, avoiding disputes by preserving the image of the happy, healthy, successful family is considered to be the most important by the victims of IPV and so reporting it is not incentivized, discouraging reporting.²⁶ This has made data gathering a challenge, with less than 40 per cent of women who experience violence seeking help of any sort or reporting the crime. Less than 10 per cent of those women seeking help go to the police. The current circumstances make reporting even harder, including limitations on women's and girls' access to phones and helplines and disrupted public services like police, justice and social services.²⁷

Patriarchy and Gendered Upbringing

The history of domestic violence is littered with highly gendered victim-blaming attitudes and responses to it, regardless of national context. The problem is in the assumptions about victimhood and systems of patriarchy and cis-heteronormativity which ignore the deep-seated norms that continue to drive gender-based violence.²⁸ Family, Schools, and Religion are where all socialization begins, even the socialization for all types of violent behavior. One-third of children who have been abused or exposed to parental violence become violent adults.²⁹ Social learning theory posits that humans learn social behavior by observing others' behavior and the consequences of that behavior, forming ideas about what behaviors are appropriate, trying, and continuing them. From this perspective, male violence against women endures in human societies because it is modeled both in individual families and in the society.³⁰

²⁵ Causes and Consequences of Violence Against Women." National Research Council. 1996. Understanding Violence Against Women. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/5127

²⁶ Husain, Humza. "Why Are South Asian Immigrant Women Vulnerable to Domestic Violence?" Inquiries Journal 11.12 (2019), accessed on 07 Dec 2020, <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1777>

²⁷ UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

²⁸ Gopika Bakshi, Violence against women and collective guilt in India, Al Jazeera, Dec 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/12/14/violence-against-women-and-collective-guilt-in-india> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

²⁹ Ibid (27)

³⁰ Ibid (27)

Toxic Masculinity

Among the factors driving, preconceived male behavior is the macho image of the male as strong, active, invulnerable, who has no need to take the simple steps that could lessen his vulnerability to COVID-19. Perceived masculine role discrepancy, that is, the perception of being less masculine than the typical ‘man’, can also cause significant strains and tensions which in turn may be associated with harmful social practices such as binge drinking.³¹ This claim is further supported by Dr. Churchill. Bina Aggarwal and Govind Kelkar have written extensively about these issues with regard to India and south Asia.³² In certain south Asian communities, violence is closely linked to honor and the assertion of masculine status.

Weak legal framework and lack of proper Infrastructure

The combined reduction of support, security and legal services during the pandemic has reduced the survivor’s ability to escape dangerous situations.³³ Reports have also suggested the insensitivity of the criminal justice system. In addition, violence may be also inflicted at the State level through direct acts of commission and omission, or through militaristic acts and postures effected by assorted apparatus of repression.³⁴ Dr. Churchill has also supported the very fact that the unavailability of medical services not only limit women’s options while seeking help, but it may also impact them critically. The poor qualities of the shelters and women support centres have been the cause of more stress and worry especially for women and girls, it could not be safe places as rape cases are reported from some centres.³⁵

Cultural intolerance

Cultural intolerances like racist remarks, intense disliking and stereotyping against a particular community or group within society (e.g. nationalities, ethnicities, homosexuals) can contribute to violent or aggressive behavior towards others (e.g. xenophobic or racist violence and homophobic violence), even in the form of gender-based violence.³⁶

³¹ Michael J. Kelly, Gender Based Inequalities Amplified by COVID-19 Pandemic, Iris global health network, May, 2020, <https://globalhealth.ie/gender-based-inequalities-amplified-by-covid-19-pandemic/> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

³² Radhika Coomaraswamy, Human Security and Gender Violence, EPW, Vol. 40, No. 44/45 (Oct. 29 - Nov. 4, 2005), pp. 4729-4736 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4417359>, accessed on 16 Dec 2020

³³ Ibid (3)

³⁴ UN Chronicle, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/confronting-violence-against-women-what-has-worked-well-and-why> accessed on 12 Dec 2020

³⁵ World Bank Blogs, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/nepal-helpline-serves-lifeline-survivors-during-covid-19-lockdown> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

³⁶ WHO, https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/norms.pdf accessed on 11 Dec 2020

Case study: Gender-Based Violence among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar**Data**

On May 14, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed inside the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, home to nearly 900,000 Rohingya refugees, stoking fears of a rapid spread through the densely populated settlements and surrounding neighbourhoods. Amidst this precarious scenario, many Rohingya and Bangladeshi women and girls are exposed to the danger of an increased risk of gender-based violence.³⁷ Between July and December 2019, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 21,517 women and girls were screened at IRC women's center and programme sites in 19 camps in Cox's Bazar. The trends found within this dataset demonstrate widespread violence against women and girls, and gaps in support for survivors. Currently, with over 50 percent of GBV survivors reporting incidents, reflects the ongoing dangers of deeply embedded patriarchal norms in Rohingya society, and the dangers women and girls face in the home – dangers that are significantly increased under COVID-19 lockdown.³⁸

Current scenario

Amidst this, the refugee, stateless and displaced population have faced major setbacks. Women and girls comprise 51 percent of the said population. Not only are they susceptible to the health risks; but also, the existing danger of Gender Based Violence (GBV) now being referred to as the Shadow Pandemic which is on an increase.³⁹ Due to this, the interruption of critical and life-saving sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence (GBV) services are clearly visible without the suitable government response.⁴⁰ Misinformation is compounded by the current restrictions on refugee access to telephone and internet networks, which severely restrict information provision and communication with refugees. Government of Bangladesh policy forbids Rohingya refugees from working, forcing many men and women into a limited number of informal sector jobs where women face risks of harassment and exploitation. A recent assessment carried out by the IRC in Cox's Bazar shows that the loss of status and unfulfilled expectations over traditional domestic roles can exacerbate the already known risk of male

³⁷ UNICEF, <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/rohingya-face-higher-risk-gender-based-violence-during-lockdown/37321> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

³⁸ Laurence Gerhardt, S. Katende and M. Skinner, The Shadow Pandemic: Gender-Based Violence among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, International Rescue Committee, May 2020, <https://www.rescue-uk.org/sites/default/files/document/2247/theshadowpandemicbangladesh.pdf> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

³⁹ Sreeparna Banerjee, Shadow pandemic within the garb of Covid19 in Rohingya camps, ORF, Oct, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/shadow-pandemic-within-the-garb-of-covid19-in-rohingya-camps/> accessed on 09 Dec 2020

⁴⁰ CCHN, Protection Risks During COVID-19: Negotiating Safe Access to Gender-Based Violence Services in The Rohingya Refugee Response in Cox's Bazar, Frontline negotiations, July 2020, <https://frontline-negotiations.org/2020/07/protection-risks-during-covid-19-negotiating-safe-access-to-gender-based-violence-services-in-the-rohingya-refugee-response-in-coxs-bazar-bangladesh/> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

violence in the home – both because men are at home more, and because their traditional roles are changing.⁴¹

Suggestions for Government Intervention

- a gender transformative approach in programming to enable women to engage in economic opportunities without fear of harassment and violence.
- Access to justice services for the survivors by reviewing and updating GBV reporting policies in collaboration with NGOs.
- must also focus on involving humanitarian agencies and establishing an inclusive and representative camp with an emphasis on equal representation to replace the current majhi system.
- restoring the access to telephone and internet networks, enabling the victims of GBV to receive information and different service provisions on prevention and response to COVID-19.
- capacity building of the victims at both national and international level, including local women rights in Cox bazar through mentoring, training and technical support.

Behavioral analysis of the mindset of the perpetrators

The perpetrator's threats of violence may be directed against the victim or others important to the victim or they may be suicide threats in the form of words or with actions. Emotional abuse is also seen as a tactic of control, consisting a wide variety of verbal attacks and humiliations. In domestic violence, verbal attacks and other tactics of control are intertwined with the threat of harm to maintain the perpetrator's dominance through fear. Perpetrators may even repeatedly claim that victims are crazy, incompetent, and unable "to do anything right."⁴²

Through incremental isolation, perpetrators' use disinformation tactics such as distorting the reality, providing contradictory information, or withholding information. Some abusive acts are directed against or involve children in order to control or punish the adult victim (e.g., physical attacks against a child, sexual use of children, forcing children to watch the abuse, engaging children in the abuse).⁴³ Statistics illustrates that sexual entitlement was still the most common motivation for non-partner and partner rape, however entertainment seeking was a more common motivation among men who perpetrated non-partner rape. Men experienced high rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse as children across the region, with serious health and psychosocial consequences. Men who had experienced sexual violence, including rape, were 3.5 times more likely to perpetrate rape against a man and men who had experienced homophobic

⁴¹ Ibid (38)

⁴² Thompson, Cody and Deka, PhD, Ankita (2020) "Exploring Community Supports for South Asian Women Experiencing Domestic Violence: Narratives from Survivors," The Macksey Journal: Vol. 1 , Article 96, <https://www.mackseyjournal.org/publications/vol1/iss1/96>

⁴³ Ibid (44)

violence or taunts were more than 5.5 times likely to have raped a man. Researchers have argued that these behaviors stem from ideas of masculinity that emphasize heterosexual performance and dominance and are also closely linked to performance of emphasized masculine strength and toughness within the context of antisocial subcultures.⁴⁴

Comparison of South Asian nations with a special emphasis on the condition of victims and the Domestic Government Intervention

India

Despite the well laid out human rights instruments, policies and laws at both national and international level to prevent Gender Based Violence, India was ranked as one of the world's most dangerous countries for women by Thomson Reuters Foundation.⁴⁵

The National Commission for Women (NCW) received 310 grievances of domestic violence and 885 complaints for other forms of violence against women. Moreover, women living with disabilities, Muslim women, LGBT+ individuals, women living with HIV-AIDS or sex workers, have been drastically impacted too. The NFHS-4 data shows that married women who have ever experienced spousal violence constitute around 31.1% in India, with the proportion being 25.3% in urban areas and 34.1% in rural areas.⁴⁶ Among some other initiatives taken by state commissions include the tele-counselling facility started by the State Commission for Women in Kerala is working to provide counselling services through phones and helplines. According to the International Disability Alliance report, there has been an increase in violence from partners and personal attendants as stress levels within the household have increased.⁴⁷ Moreover, India is not good at providing second trimester abortion even though it's legal; even in normal times.⁴⁸ Protection officers under the domestic violence Act, 2005, should be asked to perform their duty and relaxation should be granted to them to make perform their duty. The UN in India is supporting action and advocacy across all pillars of the Secretary-General's Strategy for

⁴⁴ Fulu, E., Warner, X., Miedema, S., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T. and Lang, J. (2013). Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV

⁴⁵ Neha Chauhan, How gender-based violence in India continues to rise, Your story, Sep 2019, <https://yourstory.com/socialstory/2019/09/gender-violence-india> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

⁴⁶ NITI Aayog, <https://niti.gov.in/making-homes-safer-women-during-covid-19> accessed on 07 Dec 2020

⁴⁷ Rukmini Sen, Stay Home, Stay Safe: Interrogating Violence in the Domestic Sphere, EPW Engage, April 2020, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/stay-home-stay-safe-interrogating-violence> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁴⁸ Sophie Cousins, COVID-19 has “devastating” effect on women and girls, World Report, vol. 396, issue-10247, P301-302, August, 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31679-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31679-2)

addressing GBV and has reprogrammed resources to contribute to the national response. However, it can only support existing mechanisms or suggest innovations.⁴⁹

Nepal

In Nepal, 23 percent of women experience physical or sexual violence. During the pandemic, a 24-hour toll-free helpline run by Nepal's National Women Commission (NWC) received 885 calls related to domestic violence from April to June, twice compared to previous years. With parents unable to work due to the pandemic, adolescent girls also face an increased risk of early marriages, child abuse, and human trafficking.⁵⁰ Under international human rights law, Nepal has an obligation to protect the rights of women and girls but the domestic laws do not sufficiently protect the rights of women and does not even address online gender-based violence. The government plans to replace the Electronic Transaction Act with a new Information Technology Bill, which is also problematic in the grounds of free expression.⁵¹ The girls and women with disabilities who are with poor health conditions from Dalit, indigenous and Madhesi communities have been adversely affected too. Nepal Government lacks adequate psychosocial support mechanism for supporting people's mental health wellbeing, must be tackled. Getting real data on GBV is a major challenge in a country like Nepal, as few victims report the abuse. The core cause for this being the stigma associated with being a GBV victim, and the importance of family honor.⁵² The employment program led by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has also failed to address these important issues.⁵³ The Nepal government also needs a comprehensive approach to deal with gender-based violence, including aiding victims through providing legal assistance, counselling, assistance and developing rights-respecting practices for law enforcement.⁵⁴

Sri Lanka

⁴⁹ Argentina Piccin and Susan Ferguson, Curbing gender violence must find place in govts' larger Covid strategy, The Print, Dec, 2020, <https://theprint.in/opinion/curbing-gender-violence-must-find-place-in-govts-larger-covid-strategy-unfpa-india-head/562346/> accessed on 15 Dec 2020

⁵⁰ World Bank Blogs, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/responding-gender-based-violence-maldives-nepal-and-sri-lanka> accessed on 15 Dec 2020

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/18/nepal-failing-protect-women-online-abuse> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁵² Luna K.C., How COVID-19 Worsens Gender Inequality in Nepal, the diplomat, June 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/how-covid-19-worsens-gender-inequality-in-nepal/> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁵³ Ibid (35)

⁵⁴ Ibid (51)

Although domestic violence has always been seen as a regular occurrence in society, women speaking out or seeking justice in connection with violence, encounter police department focusing more on curfew-related arrests or refusing to register complaints of domestic violence. The magistrate courts and Quazi courts have been inaccessible too, making the victims suffer in a very precarious situation, relying on allowances provided by their estranged husbands. Plainly, the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 has failed to learn from our past disaster management experiences.⁵⁵ The deeply ingrained sexism, internalized misogyny, and patriarchal views governs the Sri Lankan society, making the condition grimmer. Anecdotal evidence shows that the number of cases being reported is much smaller than the number of actual cases of violence, clearly showing underreporting.⁵⁶ A range of forms of domestic violence still remains outside the scope of the Penal Code, and women's groups in Sri Lanka have been advocating for reforms to address these gaps in the law. It is therefore important that some of the practices identified as intra-family violence such as marital rape, forced pregnancy due to incest or rape and female genital mutilation are specifically brought within the category of criminal offences in the Penal Code.⁵⁷ Except issuing a few guidelines on provision of maternity care at the hospitals by the GMOA, there have not been any guidelines issued for the police, courts or hospitals on considering GBV a priority issue and an essential service, therefore, making it the need of the hour.⁵⁸

Bangladesh

Whilst there are laws to criminalize violence, including the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection Act), the perpetration of physical, psychological or sexual abuse against women is still somewhat normalized throughout Bangladesh society.⁵⁹ By observing the lockdown situation through the gendered lens in Bangladesh, the need for gender-sensitive intersectional approaches

⁵⁵ Vasuki Jeyasankar, Disproportionate Effects of Covid-19 on Sri Lankan Women, ground views, april 2020, <https://groundviews.org/2020/08/04/disproportionate-effects-of-covid-19-on-sri-lankan-women/> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁵⁶ Shihara Maduwage, Sri Lanka's violence against women is a shadow pandemic, Dec 2020, Economy Next, <https://economynext.com/sri-lankas-violence-against-women-is-a-shadow-pandemic-76550/> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁵⁷ UNESCAP, Series No. 21 Harmful Traditional Practices in Three Countries of South Asia: culture, human rights and violence against women, accessed on 12 Dec 2020 https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_pub_2530.pdf

⁵⁸ Avanthi Kalansooriya, Gendered Impact of Covid-19 outbreak: From a Sri Lankan Perspective, May 2020, <https://www.ssc-globalthinkers.org/node/289> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁵⁹ UNDP Bangladesh, <https://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/08/31/covid-19--a-step-back-for-womens-empowerment-in-bangladesh--.html> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

is evidently visible. According to the recent report, published by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) (May 2020), suggested that 4,249 women and 456 children were subjected to domestic violence in 27 districts of Bangladesh amid the lockdown implemented by the government to combat the corona virus pandemic. Most of the reports of Bangladesh on lockdown period states that as financial pressure is getting higher due to unemployment, massive economic fallout, the earning members lashing out their frustrations over the women and children. Due to the lockdown, people who work on daily need basis, from different ethnic community like Garo, Chakma etc. and indigenous communities as the Bede, Munda, etc. are jobless and worst impacted. The “Stay-at-home” orders and the suspension of economic activities are impacting women who are engaged in different informal job sectors e.g. domestic work, sex-work, microbusiness, street-cleaning etc. and also for the socially marginalized people such as the differently abled people, migrated people, as well as transgender community due to the pre-existing severe discrimination in the society towards them. To fight against the pandemic crisis, cooperation between government, legal and development agencies, NGOs, social welfare organizations, and community based organizations must effectively respond to the crisis. It is clear that we need a blend of strategies, policies and effective interventions to combat gender-sensitive issues.⁶⁰

Bhutan

With the current COVID-19 health emergency exacerbating structural gender inequalities, efforts in Bhutan were made to ensure essential maternal and reproductive health needs for women. The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) organized a campaign to increase awareness of domestic violence and was also supported by counselling services that focused on emotional support and safety planning. They encouraged men to take a greater role to support a more equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities.⁶¹ The RENEW Livelihoods Project supported by UNDP seeks to do for the wellbeing of vulnerable women in Bhutan. Various vocational skills, including weaving, tailoring and food production, will be provided to cushion the impact on these vulnerable women.⁶² Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, RENEW Patron, endorsed that the pandemic response must address gender- based violence,

⁶⁰ Nigam Shalu (2020) COVID-19: India's Response to Domestic Violence Needs Rethinking, South Asia Journal, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3598999>

⁶¹ Jasmeen Chandi, Bhutan's gender-sensitive COVID-19 response: celebrating Gender Equality Week, Bhutan Canada Foundation, Sept 2020, <https://bhutancanada.org/bhutans-gender-sensitive-covid-19-response/> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁶² UNDP Bhutan, <https://www.bt.undp.org/content/bhutan/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/increasing-resilience-vulnerable-women-to-covid19-impacts.html> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls.⁶³ Evidence from helplines and media reports in Bhutan shows economic stress and uncertainty as factors to heightening tensions at home leading to increased alcohol consumption and substance abuse. Dissemination of advocacy messages through mass and social media have helped raise awareness. Training of front liners on the GBV SOP is expected to contribute to better preparedness on dealing with GBV cases in the Dzongkhags and Thromdes. There is as much a need to collect and update data to better understand the differentiated experiences of COVID-19 as to develop tailored and targeted responses.⁶⁴

Maldives

The increasing number of women subjected to gender-based violence in the Maldives are being pushed into a precarious position of increased fear, tension, and stress-related confinement with the perpetrators, as well as stress due to loss of household incomes, affects food availability and leads to malnutrition, especially for children, pregnant, and breastfeeding women. According to UN Women's survey in Maldives, women work disproportionately in the social, health, and education sectors, and are more exposed as frontline workers. According to UNFPA report, in the worst-case scenario, there will be a total of 8,975 unintended pregnancies over two years, of which 1,533 are additional due to COVID-19 and the reduction in contraceptive access.⁶⁵ In Maldives, one in four women has experienced some form of violence during her lifetime. During the pandemic, hospitals observed an increase in female patients with domestic violence-related injuries, and hotlines reported an increase in GBV calls. Civil society organizations also report that lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people, who already faced stigma and discrimination before the pandemic, are now even more vulnerable to violence at home, including honor killings, "corrective" rape, conversion therapy, and forced marriages. In Maldives, the World Bank supported the Ministry of Health, and its implementing agencies, to increase GBV psychosocial support and emergency medical services. The agencies set up protocols and guidelines to screen and reduce risks in health centers, quarantine facilities, and women's shelters. Communication campaigns were also developed to appeal to abusers to stop and encourage survivors to reach out to online services.⁶⁶

⁶³ Gender based violence the Shadow Pandemic within Pandemic, International Planned Parenthood Federation (South Asia Region), June 2020,
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South%20Asia%20Covid19%20update%20v.4%20%28GBV%29.pdf>

⁶⁴ UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/bhutan/press-releases/responding-shadow-pandemic> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁶⁵ UN in Maldives, COVID-19 Socio Economic response and recovery framework, 2020,
https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/MDV_Socioeconomic-Response-Plan_2020.pdf

⁶⁶ Ibid (50)

Pakistan

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, a non-governmental organization, launched a helpline for the victims but activists decline its effectiveness. One of the biggest challenges for the government-run institutions is to effectively train their staff and streamline complaints. In Pakistan, on average, every one in four women experiences emotional, physical or sexual violence, accounting approximately eight million women every year, further increased amid the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁷ The Government of Pakistan is actively trying to ensure the security of wages and financial needs by earmarking PKR 200 billion for daily wagers of formal industries, but no specific quota has been allocated for female daily wagers. At the national level, no programme except ‘Ehsaas’ cash support addresses the gender issue where women are the direct beneficiaries, however, the distribution measures are not effective and pose risks of exploitation. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has also established a “Gender and Child Cell” for the emergency protection of the marginalized community to tackle the worsening condition. The government should map out a plan of action to counter the short and long-term effects of the pandemic on women keeping in view their health, livelihoods and domestic violence. All policy related material should be translated into Urdu and other regional languages to disseminate among women and create awareness at all levels.⁶⁸

Afghanistan

Amidst COVID-19, violence on the battlefield has only intensified as the Taliban relentlessly and steadily pound Afghan forces. Both Western observers and Afghan civil society representatives have repeatedly highlighted the absence of women’s representation in the Taliban’s governing structures, political offices, and the negotiating team-- but the Taliban have remained rigid and unresponsive to suggestions—reflecting the Taliban’s continual marginalization of women. The women appointed to the two government bodies are urban, educated women, however, rural Afghan women do not feel connected to such elite urban women. The Women Peace and Security Index, a global measure of 167 countries, ranks Afghanistan as the second worst performing country in 2019-2020. Rates of gender-based violence are also alarming, with studies suggesting that 87 percent of Afghan women experience at least one form of physical, sexual or psychological violence in their lifetimes. The Women’s Protection Centers (WPCs), supported by IDLO, have seen a surge in admissions, with rates doubling in some cities while also

⁶⁷ UNFPA Asia Pacific, <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/connecting-women-safety-pakistan-time-covid-19-%E2%80%93-and-beyond> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁶⁸ Sana Malik and Khansa Naeem, Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women: Health, livelihoods & domestic violence, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (2020), <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep24350>

experiencing challenges of overcrowding.⁶⁹ Afghanistan adopted its first National Action Plan on 1325 (2015-2022), details the impacts of armed conflict on women in Afghanistan. Overall, the existing gender inequalities in Afghanistan that are caused or compounded by the ongoing intersection of armed conflict and humanitarian crisis only threaten to worsen amidst COVID-19, leaving out a lot to be done in the area of gender equality.⁷⁰

International Organization and Civil Society Interventions and Recommendations

In early April, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said that ‘violence is not confined to the battlefield and that for many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes’.⁷¹

Although the Women's Convention was recognized for its unusually broad consideration of women's rights. It was not until 1992 that CEDAW made a recommendation regarding violence against women, known as General Recommendation Number 19. Although the Women's Convention is significantly more enlightened with regard to women's rights than previous human rights documents possesses, CEDAW must be granted more authority and additional resources to foster substantive change effectively.⁷² These international instruments spell out the measures that states should take to eradicate violence against women in their societies. The so-called "responsibilities" of due diligence duty as spelled out in international instruments. All the governments of the SAARC region have responded positively to the challenges posed by GBVAW in their region. Though a great deal may not have changed at the local level, the countries of south Asia have all ratified CEDAW although some of them have done so with reservations. The countries of south Asia have also signed the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women and Children.⁷³ NGOs such as Oxfam, Sahar Education, MenEngage, CARE, Human Rights Watch and many more are committed to a wide range of issues in relation to GBV, starting from empowerment of rural poor, women rights, providing support services to the victims and survivors to engaging men in the capacity building programmes, involving the women and LGBTQ+ people in leadership and decision making programmes and many more in the South Asian region. As outlined in UNHCR's Age, Gender

⁶⁹ IDLO, THE SHADOW PANDEMIC: ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19, Dec 2020, <https://www.idlo.int/news/story/shadow-pandemic-addressing-gender-based-violence-during-covid-19> accessed on 16 Dec 2020

⁷⁰ UN Women Asia Pacific, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/gender-alerts-on-covid-19-in-afghanistan-series> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁷¹ Ibid (1)

⁷² Jennifer L. Ulrich, Confronting Gender-Based Violence with International Instruments: Is a Solution to the Pandemic within Reach?, Indiana University Press, Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring, 2000), pp. 629-654, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20644746>, accessed on 06 Dec 2020

⁷³ Ibid (32)

and Diversity Policy, to the extent possible and appropriate collect and analyse sex, age and disability disaggregated data to monitor and respond to the implications of COVID-19 for women and girls.⁷⁴

- Relevant State authorities (e.g. Ministries of Interior, Justice, Social Welfare) should clearly and publicly indicate that preventing and responding to GBV, even in times of pandemic and lock down, should be a priority.
 - Prioritize resources and efforts to ensure continuity and access to essential services to address GBV, including to prepare for emergency hotlines, shelters and other essential housing options, legal aid and other essential police and justice services.
 - The regional government must invest in awareness campaigns to inform the public. Criminal justice agencies should ensure that perpetrators of violence are removed from the home and develop plans and implement measures by ensuring that victims subjected to violence can leave their house without being subject to any type of limitations.
 - Develop ad hoc, special protocols with relevant health providers (i.e. doctors, nurses and pharmacies) to enable women and girls at immediate risk to report violence,
 - While taking necessary measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in prisons and reduce prison overcrowding through the use of release measures, avoid releases or other alternative measures that may place women and children at greater risk of violence; Ensure the right of victims to be informed of the aggressor's release from detention or imprisonment.⁷⁵
 - Include evidence-based measures to address online and ICT facilitated violence in COVID-19 response and action plans aimed at addressing violence against women and strengthen specialized, clear, and efficient internal and external protocols and codes of conduct for law enforcement officials addressing online violence against women during the emergency.⁷⁶
 - To promote balanced reporting of incidents of GBV, media must focus on providing support service details such as hotlines, shelters and crisis centres and draw attention towards positive stories of resilience and empowerment as survivors often act as agents of change by building awareness, and also consider how a media story could potentially violate any of these core principles.⁷⁷
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⁷⁴ Ibid (43)

⁷⁵ Bishwajit G, Sarker S and Yaya S. Socio-cultural aspects of gender-based violence and its impacts on women's health in South Asia [version 1; peer review: 1 approved with reservations]. *F1000Research* 2016, 5:802 (<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8633.1>)

⁷⁶ UNWOMEN, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/brief-domestic-violence-in-the-world-of-work> accessed on 11 Dec 2020

⁷⁷ Menon, Vikas et al. "Role of media in preventing gender-based violence and crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic." *Asian journal of psychiatry* vol. 54 (2020): 102449. doi: 10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102449

- Through the Spotlight Initiative, UN Country Teams, hand in hand with relevant partners, are shifting programming to the current context: moving services and campaigns online, scaling up support to civil society organizations, ensuring that domestic violence shelters can stay open, and developing online and text based peer support and chat programs.⁷⁸
- Working in partnerships is therefore vital to respond quickly to the challenges. the Leave No One Behind Partnership is one such example, responds to the challenges while delivering on data and evidence at the community level and bringing together international civil society with national NGOs, and community-based organizations to observe the progress made towards the SDGs.

CONCLUSION

2020 was expected to be a year for revising and readdressing achievements whilst accelerating progress on gender equality since the 25 years of adoption of the Beijing Declaration, Platform for Action and UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. But the concern of COVID-19 and its impact will push back the progress on gender equality. With the current pandemic pushing the world order toward the brink of disasters, the time recalls for structural reforms and the highly used phrase of “building back together” and moving towards an equitable and sustainable society.

⁷⁸ UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061132> accessed on 15 Dec 2020
