

INCREASE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING LOCKDOWN OF COVID-19 IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Corona Virus Pandemic, also known as the COVID-19 Pandemic, infected millions of people and thousands of people died from it. Lockdowns were imposed worldwide to restrict mobility and lessen the interactions among people. As the world has shut down due to an unexpected pandemic, people were forced to live inside their homes with their families. People did not have much to do at home, and the pressure of running a household, working from home, and fulfilling the demands of family members caused an increase in intolerance, stress, and anxiety that resulted in problems like domestic violence. The objective of this study is to highlight the fact that the lockdown imposed had directly caused the increase in domestic violence in Pakistan. The methodology of examining different newspapers to find cases related to domestic violence and comparing the number of cases reported before and after the lockdown is used. The findings of the study show that domestic violence cases reported have doubled during lockdown in Pakistan. Hence, we can conclude that a rise in domestic violence occurred directly due to the lockdown imposed throughout the world, especially in Pakistan.

Keywords: COVID-19, Domestic violence, Increase, Lockdown, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Novel Coronavirus was confirmed as the cause of respiratory disorder in many people in Wuhan City, China, on 12th January 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), which was reported to WHO on 31st December 2019. The COVID-19 Pandemic in Pakistan, part of the Pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019, was caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Coronavirus was confirmed to have reached Pakistan on 26 February 2020, when a student in Karachi tested positive upon his return from Iran. Cases were registered in all four provinces, by 18 March, two autonomous territories, and the federal territory of Islamabad. Pakistan was put under a nationwide lockdown until 9 May, which was initiated on 1st April and

extended later twice. Upon its end, the lockdown was eased in phases.

As a lockdown was imposed globally to prevent the spread of coronavirus, people around the globe sat at home tightly to avoid contracting coronavirus. Due to the lockdown, people were not allowed to leave their houses without any emergency, hence they became sick of being surrounded by the same people; probably their family members all the time. Furthermore, the shutting down of businesses caused severe financial restraint in families, which contributed to psychological and mental tensions. Thus, people became so frustrated that they resorted to inflicting violence on their family members. An increase in domestic violence was reported all around the

world. Pakistan, the sixth most populous country was also impacted negatively by this evil, and domestic violence increased during the lockdown of COVID-19.

During the lockdown, many women and children in Pakistan were not safe within their own houses. They were forced to be locked in with their abusers, with little or no hope of intervention from authorities and the outside world, because everyone was engaged in fighting this virus.¹ So the lockdown measures created extra stress for many people from lost income to the tensions arising from residing in close quarters with relatives for the whole time.² The main purpose of conducting this research is to discuss the increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown imposed in Pakistan. This paper will examine how domestic violence cases have grown in the months of lockdown. The research will focus on how the lockdown affected the vulnerable segments of society, which are children and women.

Problem Statement

The global lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 epidemic severely disturbed daily life and confined people for extended periods with their families. This abrupt change in living circumstances, together with the strains of managing family responsibilities, remote work, and domestic duties, led to increased stress and anxiety levels in Pakistan. As a result of these psychological and emotional strains, domestic violence significantly increased. Although the pandemic's effects on health and the economy are widely recognised, the increase in domestic violence during that time is still a serious but frequently undocumented problem that needs more research.

Research Questions

1. What was the impact of Pakistan's COVID-19 lockdown on the rate of domestic violence?

2. What were the main causes of the rise in domestic violence that occurred in Pakistan during the lockdown?

Research Objectives

- To examine how COVID-19 lockdowns have affected Pakistan's rates of domestic violence.
- To comprehend the fundamental causes of the increase in domestic violence in Pakistan during the pandemic lockdowns.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research article was qualitative analysis and the data was collected by surveying different newspapers. This research is based on events in various cities of Pakistan during the lockdown of COVID-19. A comparative analysis of the number of cases reported two months before observing lockdown and two months after imposing lockdown is conducted in this research work. These include the reported cases of domestic violence which mostly resulted in the death of any family member. Secondary sources were used to conduct this research for the data collected through the articles and cases reported in newspapers.

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence not only includes physical abuse but also includes any sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, economic or legal abuse. The lockdown imposed in Pakistan directly increased domestic violence cases across the whole country. According to *The Domestic violence Protection Bill 2008*, family members include current or former intimate partners who are or were married, between parents or step-parents and children, between siblings, between grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces and cousins.³ This mostly affected women and children as they were physically weaker than men. According to WHO, 38% of women's murders

¹ 'Lockdown Not the Same for the Vulnerable in Pakistan', Eureka Street, 1 May 2020, <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/lockdown-not-the-same-for-the-vulnerable-in-pakistan>.

² Linda A. Thompson, 'With the World in Lockdown, for Some, Being at Home Is as Dangerous as Being Outside', Equal

Times, 22 May 2020, <https://www.equaltimes.org/with-the-world-in-lockdown-for>.

³ Department of Health & Human Services, 'What Is Domestic violence' (Department of Health & Human Services), accessed 20 November 2024, <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/What-is-family-violence>.

worldwide are committed by their partners and one of the highest rates of domestic violence is reported in Pakistan. Cases of different types of violence like murder, setting ablaze, shooting with a gun, and torture with any harmful thing like an axe have been reported. Many cases of suicide have also been reported due to mental torture or psychological stress.

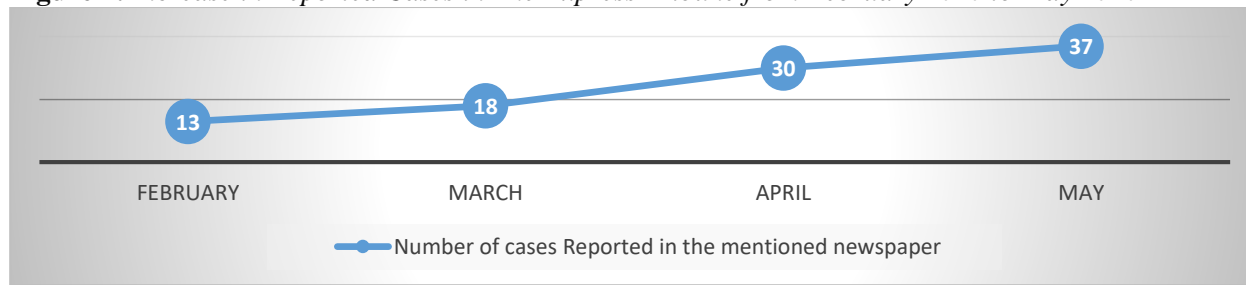
In this article, data collected from different newspapers highlights the increase in domestic violence in Pakistan by comparing the cases reported before and after observing the lockdown. Statistical data from four months has been

Figure 1 shows domestic violence cases reported in “The Express Tribune” over the months with and without lockdown, we can see a rise in such cases,

collected from the newspaper “The Express Tribune” by examining domestic violence cases. The first two months were February and March 2020 before the lockdown, and the next two months were April and May 2020 during which lockdown was observed all over Pakistan. The data gathered from the research highlights that 13 cases were reported in February, 18 in March, 30 in April and 37 in May respectively in *The Express Tribune*. Thus, we can see an increase in cases before and after the lockdown.

which underscores the increase in domestic violence during the lockdown of COVID-19 in Pakistan.

Figure 1: Increase in Reported Cases in The Express Tribune from February 2020 to May 2020



According to the *Tracking Numbers State of Violence Against Women and Children*, a 2020 bi-annual report from the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO), 158 cases of domestic violence were reported in the first few months of 2020, with Punjab being the most affected region, followed by Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In June 2020, there were 165 instances of violence against women, up from nine in January. According to a different SSDO study published between January and June 2021, 325 incidents of violence against women were reported in Punjab during the first half of 2021; however, the media only highlighted 158 of these cases. In Sindh, the media reported 58 out of 346

incidents, which creates a significant discrepancy between official and media figures.⁴

Furthermore, in the January to March 2020 report of the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO), it was said that the cases of violence against women increased by more than 200 per cent in March compared to January. The SSDO collected the data from three English newspapers -- The Nation, The Dawn and The News -- and three Urdu newspapers -- Jang, Duniya and Express -- as part of the study *Tracking Crimes against Humans in Pakistan*. The crimes were then segregated into eight categories -- child marriage, child abuse, child labour, (family) abuse, kidnapping, rape, violence against women and murder.⁵

⁴ SSDO, ‘Tracking Numbers State of Violence Against Women and Children’, Bi-Annual Tracking report (Pakistan, June 2020), chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://8b2ac21e-f1fb-46be-8c9d-

42e6c0abf449.filesusr.com/ugd/5668b5_8341106bb07e4aba907fc214c18da6f7.pdf. ⁵ SSDO, ‘Tracking Crimes Against Humans In Pakistan’ (Pakistan: SSDO, March 2020), chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://res.c

Also, it was reported that over 500 cases of domestic violence were reported only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) during the lockdown. The report also mentioned that almost 399 cases were of violence against women.⁶ In this regard, a member of the KPK provincial assembly wrote a letter to the chief of police of KP to protect kids and women. The violence against children and women also increased by up to 200% during March when the lockdown was imposed in different areas of Pakistan according to an Indian newspaper.⁷ Similarly, an Islamabad-based NGO reported that the cases of child abuse, domestic violence, kidnapping and rape registered a marked increase during the lockdown of COVID-19.

The following is a discussion of the pattern, causes, and implications of the lockdown which is evident from examining the reported cases.

Homicides Reported in Domestic Violence

Many domestic fights turned into deadly killings during the COVID-19 lockdown. Many homes experienced a turbulent atmosphere due to people being isolated and becoming closer to one another under difficult circumstances. Conflicts over family decisions, marital responsibilities, and financial difficulties frequently descended into violence. For example, murderous acts, especially against women, often result from arguments over perceived neglect or family dynamics. These instances highlight the larger problem of gender-based violence in patriarchal cultures, where women frequently lack access to resources for support. Their susceptibility was increased by the fact that victims were often unable to leave abusive homes because of mobility limitations and social stigmas. This tragic pattern emphasises how urgently intervention mechanisms—like safe spaces for women, confidential reporting systems, and community-driven conflict resolution programs—are needed during emergencies.

Financial Constraints as Catalysts for Violence

loudinary.com/dct4km8qs/image/upload/v1676374241/tracking_crimes_against_humans_0adc345839.pdf.

⁶ '(PDF) Domestic Violence Amid COVID-19 Pandemic: Pakistan's Perspective', *ResearchGate*, 22 October 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1010539520962965>.

Domestic tensions were also heightened by the financial burden brought on by the lockdown. Numerous families experienced job loss or income reductions, which increased household stress. The offenders mentioned financial difficulties as a major contributing reason to their violent actions in multiple cases. Their incapacity to support their families or pay for everyday expenses caused them to feel inadequate and frustrated, which they frequently vented to spouses or other family members. For instance, when economic instability reached an intolerable level, offenders not only committed violent crimes but also took their own lives. Such occurrences highlight the connection between mental health crises and economic strains. This highlights that during emergencies, governments and NGOs must provide priority to economic assistance programs, making sure that families in need have access to essential supplies and mental health care.

Patriarchy and Honor Killings

A long-standing problem in patriarchal society, honour-based violence was also made worse by the pandemic. Several stories of women being murdered by male relatives for allegedly shameful behaviour surfaced during the lockdown. Because of the strict control that patriarchal norms impose, these acts are frequently excused under the pretext of defending family or social ideals. The primary cause of honour-related violence is deeply ingrained cultural beliefs that disproportionately burden women with maintaining the family's reputation. Because the lockdown restricted people to their houses, it increased monitoring and control over women's behaviour, which made them more likely to commit acts of violence. In addition to legislative changes, this problem calls for extensive general awareness to question and undermine harmful gender stereotypes.

Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence

During the pandemic, substance misuse was identified as another factor that contributed to

⁷ From our online archive, 'Crimes against Women, Children in Pakistan See 200 per Cent Spike in March: Study', *The New Indian Express*, 12 May 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2020/May/12/crimes-against-women-children-in-pakistan-see-200-per-cent-spike-in-march-study-2142429.html>.

domestic violence. Confinement and limited access to social outlets led to increasing alcohol and drug consumption in certain households. This increased hostilities because people with substance abuse disorders were more inclined to act violently or aggressively. The significance of treating addiction in domestic violence prevention efforts is highlighted by reports of assaults relating to substance use. Programs for rehabilitation and mental health assistance should be essential parts of larger initiatives to address domestic violence, especially when stress levels are high, such as during pandemics or recessions.

Impact on Women and Children

The victims of the lockdown were not limited to women; children were also abused. There have been documented cases of serious child abuse, including situations in which parents' arguments have resulted in violence or neglect toward youngsters. Parental psychological stress and financial insecurity frequently resulted in inappropriate aggressiveness toward kids. This reflects the general lack of awareness about non-violent parenting techniques and the disregard for child protection measures in society.

Psychological Impact

The pandemic had a severe negative impact on both victims and offenders' mental health. An rise in impulsive aggressive acts was caused by the stress of uncertainty, dread of disease, and extended seclusion. Severe psychological distress brought on by the lockdown is demonstrated by cases when victims turned to suicide after experiencing protracted mistreatment. The problem was exacerbated by a lack of mental health resources and knowledge, which prevented many people from getting help.

Unfortunately, most social welfare helplines in Pakistan have been shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Police Helpline 15 and the Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR) helpline 1099 provided services but these helplines were not under extensive usage. According to the MOHR, the helpline 1099 received 40,000 calls per month

on average but only 13 calls on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during March 2020, and only 25 calls were received at the 15 police helpline during March 2020. On the other hand, according to the police record and reports 399 cases of assignation against women have been registered at the same time, only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, in Sindh, some ten cases of karo-kari had been registered only in March, related to violence against women, according to police.⁸

Mental Health Workers also reported a rise in family abuse cases during this pandemic. They are providing free online sessions to help such patients. The CEO of *ReliveNow*, an online counselling platform, said that the bigger challenge faced during this pandemic was that their clients were leaving their sessions unfinished due to the fear that the whole family was at home and someone might see them. She related this to a case in which a woman diagnosed with depression, was slapped twice by her husband but she couldn't do anything due to privacy issues as her husband is home all day. Her husband justified himself by saying that he did this due to the depression of financial crises during lockdown. They further said that this pandemic is a time of mental depression and anxiety for all.

The former Chief of the *Human Rights Commission of Pakistan*, Zohra Yousuf said that not only women were the victims of violence, but also the condition of children became vulnerable and the sole cause of this was not financial crises. Police data and media have reported that restricted mobility also aided in the rise in domestic violence.⁹ Moreover, the usefulness of the MOHR helpline (1099) is questionable for legal consultants for victims of rights violations during the COVID-19 pandemic. As per the statement of a lawyer, Sara Malkani, "*When I called it on two occasions on behalf of clients, I received nothing more than an automated response asking me to record a message, which I did. I was never contacted by anyone in the ministry in response to my message.*"¹⁰ The *Women Action Forum* also published a statement urging the concerned

⁸ '(PDF) Domestic Violence Amid COVID-19 Pandemic'.

⁹ 'Mental Health Professionals Report Rise in Domestic Abuse Cases', accessed 20 November 2024,

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/637936-mental-health-professionals-report-rise-in-domestic-abuse-cases>.

¹⁰ Sara Malkani, 'The Shadow Pandemic', DAWN.COM, 06:59:16+05:00, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1552551>.

authorities to take action against the violence committed against women which has risen during lockdown. The statement includes that *'women suffer an increase in their burden of household chores and childcare responsibilities and, in many cases, physical constraints and proximity leads to an increase in domestic violence and its intensity putting lives of women and children at risk'*.¹¹

The lockdown of COVID-19 not only affected Pakistan, but it also affected other states of the world as family cases have increased there too. The police stations and family abuse helplines received 35% more calls during lockdown.¹² In the Hubei, province of China, the reports of domestic violence tripled in police stations during the outbreak of Corona Virus. In Italy, the first fatality caused by domestic violence resulted only after five days of imposing lockdown. A 40% increase in cases of state-run drop-in-centres attributing to the COVID-19 isolation was reported in Brazil. The abuse cases in France during the lockdown also increased and its government stated that it would pay for the hotel rooms for victims of domestic violence and pop-up counselling centres would also be opened.¹³

Due to the global increase in domestic violence cases, the *'World Health Organization'* (WHO) took notice of it. The WHO's Regional Office stated that in Europe, a sharp rise in family abuse calls had been reported by Emergency services. The Technical officer for Gender and Health at WHO stated *"We have an increase in reporting from almost all countries"*. WHO also reported that women and children were facing more violence as compared to men during lockdown. The Regional Director of WHO for Europe said that countries have reported a 60% increase in emergency calls by women due to domestic violence committed by their intimate partners during April. The Secretary-General of the UN has also said that governments should put women's security first during this pandemic.¹⁴

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening the Accessibility of Helplines

Despite their availability, the low usage of the helplines during the lockdown suggests that more outreach and better accessibility are required. Although the police helpline and the Ministry of Human Rights helpline (1099) are essential services, they were not utilised as often during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government should start focused awareness initiatives, especially in rural regions, to inform people about how to use these helplines and increase their efficacy. For people who are unwilling to communicate openly in the presence of abusers, additional channels like WhatsApp or text messaging should be introduced. Additionally, it is important to shorten the response time and follow-up procedures to guarantee that reported cases—especially those involving gender-based violence—are handled promptly.

Expanding Legal Protection and Enforcement Mechanisms

The implementation of existing legal protections is still insufficient, despite the concerning increase in domestic abuse instances during the COVID-19 lockdown. Police statistics from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces show that a large number of women and children suffered in silence as a result of insufficient security. The government must act to improve legal frameworks and guarantee prompt enforcement to address this. First and foremost, obligatory reporting of all events is necessary to strengthen laws against domestic abuse and guarantee that they are thoroughly investigated and followed up on. To ensure that victims may obtain emergency shelter and legal assistance, when necessary, law enforcement organisations should also collaborate closely with non-governmental organisations and social professionals. The implementation of temporary protection orders, which can be obtained quickly,

¹¹ 'Steps Sought to Stop Possible Rise in Domestic Violence during Lockdown - Newspaper - DAWN.COM', accessed 20 November 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1546756>.

¹² 'Amid COVID, a 35% Surge in Calls to Mental Health Helplines | CIDRAP', 18 November 2021, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/amid-covid-35-surge-calls-mental-health-helplines>.

¹³ 'As Domestic Abuse Rises in Lockdown, France to Fund Hotel Rooms | Coronavirus Pandemic News | Al Jazeera', accessed 20 November 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/31/as-domestic-abuse-rises-in-lockdown-france-to-fund-hotel-rooms>.

¹⁴ 'Put Women and Girls at Centre of COVID-19 Recovery: UN Secretary-General | UN News', accessed 20 November 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061452>.

would also enable victims to get help urgently. The government must expedite the legal system, particularly in situations involving minors, to give prompt protection.

Strengthening Mental Health Services

Financial stress was made worse by the COVID-19 lockdown, and this in turn caused a rise in domestic violence. Domestic violence instances increased as families experienced social isolation, elevated fear, and job losses. Enhancing mental health and social welfare services would be a key policy change. For both victims and offenders of domestic abuse, providing freely available internet counselling and treatment services can be quite beneficial. Online treatment services ought to be extended and combined with public health services. The government must also address the underlying causes of domestic violence by providing financial aid to families in need to reduce financial stress. This would involve long-term efforts to combat poverty and short-term financial assistance for families experiencing hardship. By increasing access to mental health services and offering financial assistance, the government can lessen the causes of domestic violence.

Creating Shelter Homes for Victims of Domestic Violence

Many people were forced to stay in abusive situations since there were no physical locations for victims of domestic abuse to escape during the lockdown. To provide victims with urgent help, the government should prioritise the establishment of emergency shelters. To offer individuals in need all-encompassing assistance, these shelters must be furnished with the required amenities, such as social services, legal assistance, and psychological treatment. Furthermore, partnerships with private companies, hotels, or community groups could offer temporary housing for victims of domestic violence. To allow victims to escape abuse, it is crucial to make sure that these shelters are open, secure, and maintained by qualified experts.

Promoting Gender Sensitisation through Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns are a crucial instrument for advancing gender equality and changing public perceptions about domestic abuse. Social traditions and the stigma associated with domestic violence prevented many people, particularly women, from getting help during the lockdown. Government education programs about domestic abuse and its effects should be launched through the media, educational institutions, and community organisations to combat this. These efforts ought to emphasise the value of gender equality and healthy relationships while also educating the public about the resources and support networks accessible to them. Training programs for social workers, medical professionals, and law enforcement personnel should also be put in place to make sure they are prepared to recognise and handle domestic violence incidents. By amplifying victims' voices, disseminating important information about support resources, and inspiring communities to question social norms, social media plays a significant role in increasing public awareness of domestic abuse.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

The purpose of writing this article was to highlight the issue of domestic violence during the time of lockdown imposed to minimise the transmission of COVID-19. After doing a comparative analysis of domestic violence cases before and after the lockdown which includes the data from February 2020, March 2020 and April 2020, May 2020 respectively, it is evident that there was a continuous increase in Family abuse cases. In addition to the provision of data on domestic violence cases from various newspapers especially "The Express Tribunes" as a reference, this article has also guaranteed its validity of increase in domestic violence through the reports of SSDO, WHO, MOHRP, and UNO. Furthermore, it is underscored in the

Figure 1 that domestic violence cases have increased since the lockdown was imposed in

¹⁵ Ali Ahmed Bilal, r. Zeeshan Zaigham, and Werdah Munib, 'View of The Media-Policy Nexus: Analyzing the Media's Role

in Policy Formation in Pakistan', *LIRA Journal* 2, no. 2024 (n.d.): 24–34.

Pakistan. These cases mentioned above were only ones that were published in the newspapers or may be aired on TV channels and were serious i.e. suicide, murder, severe injuries, etc. Hundreds of minor cases of violence which the majority of the women and children, in short family members face in Pakistan are never reported, and such cases have gained a spike in the recent months of lockdown behind which are many reasons like financial crises, mental illness, confusions of "going back to normal" etc. It would be fruitful to pursue further research on this important issue to get the attention of higher authorities so that they can further legislate on it.

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