

Impact of COVID-19 and Corresponding Risk Factors on Gender-Based Violence in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The global scene was drastically changed by the COVID-19 outbreak, causing enormous upheaval in our social, cultural, political, economic and other arenas. Despite their prevalence, pandemics have historically failed to alleviate the plight of gender-based violence. The primary goal of this research was to investigate how the COVID-19 influenced the prevalence of gender-based violence in Bangladesh. Ultimately, the underlying causes and potential hazards contributing to violent behavior were determined. The research utilized a methodology of qualitative content analysis. The COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated the preexisting problem of gender-based violence in Bangladesh. The study examined various reasons and factors contributing to the issue. These included limitations on mobility, a rise in unemployment rates, decreased social interaction and community networks, financial dependence of women on men, low income and concerns about the future, a shift in priorities towards the medical sector, an increase in domestic workload for women, reduced legal and mental support for women, child marriage, and excessive use of the internet and social media, either through direct or indirect means.

Keywords: COVID-19, gender-based violence, women, domestic violence, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There have been substantial global changes due to the COVID-19 outbreak, which brought by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, linked to the initial case in the province of Wuhan, China (Pfitzner et al., 2020). These changes have a profound impact on many facets of life. This has resulted in significant disparities in the global landscape. The COVID-19 outbreak has made women more susceptible to sexual assault and other forms of abuse. With the escalation of the pandemic, scholars have increasingly focused on its gendered implications (Pfitzner et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the 2019 coronavirus infection, commonly known as COVID-19, as a worldwide public health crisis on January 30, 2020. The governmental bodies of the impacted nations implemented measures to enforce social isolation, including the closure of educational institutions and the provision of remote work options for employees. Additionally, they curtailed individuals' capacity to engage in personal communication. Ebert and Steiner's (2020) research found that social distance policies, although perceived as essential, exacerbated the problem of assault toward women and children. Everyone needed residing within the house to prevent the spread of that virus. As a consequence, there were higher chances that women would be assaulted. The "Stay home, stay safe" campaign has brought attention to the fact that domestic violence is more prevalent against

women.

The UN reports (UNODC, 2018) provide undeniable evidence for the claim. According to UN Women (2020) and UN News (2020), the chief executive of UN Women has dubbed this issue “The Shadow Pandemic.” According to UNFPA’s (2020) projections, implementing and persisting a three-month lockdown period would result in an estimated 15 million more domestic violence cases globally. Aggression towards women and girls is more common during times of crisis, as reported by UN Women (2015). According to the BRAC assessment, since the statewide lockdown, spouses have been the foremost perpetrators of sexual, emotional, and physical assault against women in Bangladesh. According to data compiled by BRAC, occurrences of assault against women raised by around 70% between March and April of the previous year (BRAC, 2020). Human Rights Watch states that the COVID-19 epidemic has increased domestic violence related cases in Bangladesh. According to available data, gender-based violence has increased by 24% throughout this period (Dhaka Tribune, 2020). An estimated 20% upheaval in domestic and sexually abusive incidents during the COVID-19 outbreak which was predicted by the United Nations Population Fund (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

According to Relief Web (2017), it is well-recognized that aggression towards women and children is the most extensive and systematic types of human rights violations and abuse. In 2016, the United Nations (UN) explained assault against women as any kind act of violence against women which results in any bodily, mental, or sexual injury or suffering, or the threat of any harm or suffering, in addition to force or unjustified constraints of freedom. The term “violent act of women” (VAW) encompasses the actual commission of such an act and the threat of such an act, whether physical, sexual, or mental pain, suffering, or coercion. Violence against women is defined more extensively by Crowell and Burgess (1996) as aggressive behaviour that has disproportionately detrimental impact on women. According to Hossain, Imam, and Khair (2001), the patriarchal laws and the associated distribution of power, wealth, status, and prestige between genders are responsible for perpetuating violence against women. Furthermore, these factors are conducive to the continuation of patriarchal norms. “Sexual violence” encompasses various acts, including sexual harassment, rape, murder, physical assault, forced pornographic content, sex trafficking, and more. In Bangladesh, women are often victims of physical and sexual assault, harassment, acid attacks, rape, eve teasing, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, and forced prostitution. Other forms of violence against women include forced prostitution and trafficking (Wahed & Bhuiya, 2017). However, during the period encompassing COVID-19, when there were movement constraints and social isolation, the types of violence that were reported the most frequently were domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, and online-based harassment (UN Women, 2020). UN Women reported in 2021 that 35% women and girls throughout the globe have experienced some bodily or sexual assault, either by a spouse or someone else. In a new research, the World Health Organization analyzed statistics on gender-based violence in 61 nations between 2000 and 2018. The report revealed that approximately one-third of women experience bodily or sexual violence at some point (Prothom Alo, 2021). Gebremenkel et al. (2020) cite a United Nations report from 2016 finding that one-third of women and girls suffer bodily or sexual abuse regularly by an intimate partner. About one-third of women worldwide face sexual or physical abuse by an intimate partner. This type of aggression seems more widespread in humanitarian crises, such as armed conflicts or natural calamities (Roesch & Gupta, 2020).

In 2011, 87 percent of Bangladeshi women and girls were the sufferer of domestic violence, in accordance to the report Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (Dhaka Tribune, 2017). Sixty-six percent of women in Bangladesh have experienced bodily injuries and physical assault, according to a study by the Jatio Nari Nirjaton Protirodh Forum and Action Aid Bangladesh (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). Odhikar (2020) reports that between 2015 and 2019, 1050 women, including 4044 girls, experienced sexual harassment or stalking. Additionally, 1163 girls were reported to have been subjected to gang rape, while 217 individuals lost their lives as a consequence of being raped. Furthermore, 26 girls and women resorted to suicide after being

raped. Four hundred sixty-three people were killed due to dowry-related violence, and 467 girls and women were physically abused. Twenty-four girls and women committed suicide as a result of the dowry-related conflict. The majority of married women (54%) have experienced bodily and sexual intimate partner abuse by their spouses, according to data collected by the Bureau of Statistics. There is mounting evidence that the current COVID-19 epidemic has dramatically escalated violence against women.

The first fatality related to domestic violence since the lockdown began occurred on April 15th across the country. The individual known as Obaidul Haque Tutul was accountable for the heinous homicide of his spouse, Tahmina Akter, at their residence. During this occurrence, he initiated a live broadcast on his Facebook profile, allowing millions of individuals to witness the chaotic events. Even though he turned himself in at the Feni Model Police Station, there was not the slightest indication that he was anxious. There were many more instances of such horrible acts taking place. However, the majority of them were never reported, or it is possible that we ignored them because of the pandemic scenario. History teaches us that regardless of the nature of the pandemic, women have always been targeted for violence while receiving no attention whatsoever (Pfitzner et al., 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this study was to ascertain how the COVID-19 outbreak affected the situation of gender-based violence in Bangladesh and to investigate the root causes that contributed to increase such type of violence in the context of Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study include the following:

1. To evaluate the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on gender-based in Bangladesh considering its first wave.
2. To uncover the causes and events that contributed to that violence.

With these questions in mind, we set out to conduct our study:

1. How has the global spread of the COVID-19 virus influenced assaults against women in Bangladesh?
2. What are the reasons and underlying factors contributing to increasing such violence?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This research employs a qualitative methodology, with a content analysis approach as its overarching methodological framework. The majority of the data has been sourced from secondary sources. The present study has relied on various published sources, including books, scholarly articles, newspapers, reports from organizations, periodicals, online portals, and other relevant materials. The present study draws upon multiple sources to establish a correlation between COVID-19 and gender based violence, examining the issue from diverse angles. The present investigation involves an analysis of data pertaining to the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

COVID-19's Effect on Gender-based Violence in Bangladesh

According to the UN Women's Report from 2020, there were cases of domestic abuse, cyber assault, and violence helped by ICT during the period of COVID-19 outbreak. The rise in domestic violence across the globe has been entitled a "Shadow Pandemic" by the United Nations. According to Jones and Isham's (2020) research, the prevalence of domestic violence cases has increased compared to previous pandemics due to COVID-19. The lockdown measures have resulted in more individuals being compelled to stay

indoors with their abusive partners, thereby causing a notable surge of 20% in domestic violence incidents. According to an article published in the Daily Star, there has been a threefold increase in gender-based incidents in China. Brazil, Australia, Singapore, and India experienced notable increases in their respective figures, with Brazil and Australia exhibiting a 40% increase, Singapore a 33% increase, and India a substantial 100% increase. Domestic violence perpetrated against women in Europe has increased due to pandemic-related circumstances. There has been an increase in percentages in Italy (13.6%), Spain (18%), France (30%), and Cyprus (30%). The United Kingdom asserted a 25% surge, whereas the United States of America documented a 35% escalation (The Daily Star, 2020)

Furthermore, a multitude of studies conducted in the United Kingdom indicates that there has been a surge in domestic violence cases ranging from 21% to 35% (Wagers, 2020). Domestic homicides have also increased in the United Kingdom. There was a momentous surge of 25% domestic violence-related urgent calls after the lockdown measures were implemented in Argentina (Morgan & Kelly, 2020). An increasing number of domestic abuse victims in the USA are contacting the National Domestic Abuse Helpline through phone calls and text messages. According to UN Women (2020), there has been a 40% surge in requests for aid from frontline employees in Australia to curb violence. While crime rates fell in Australia, Kagi found that domestic violence cases rose by 5% (Kagi, 2020). An alarming spike in assaults on female medical staff and migrant/domestic workers has been linked to the COVID-19 epidemic. According to Peterman et al. (2020), there has been an increase in occurrences of hate speech, harassment, physical assault, and sexual assault threats, both in online and public settings.

An estimated 11,025 women experienced domestic abuse during the period of first lockdown in the nation due to the COVID-19 epidemic, according to a survey research implemented by the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). In the meeting held on June 10th, 2020, it was demonstrated that 13,494 children and women across 53 districts of Bangladesh had experienced violent incidents during May. According to a survey by the Manusher Jonno Foundation in 2020, MJF found that 4,160 people have experienced violence for the first time. Human Rights Watch reports that as the COVID-19 epidemic has spread across Bangladesh, there has been a raise in gender-based violence. In 2020, the Dhaka Tribune reported evidence of a 24% raise in gender-based aggression and assault. According to a BRAC study, the number of incidents of women being abused increased in 2020 compared 2019. This phenomenon was observed in both the years 2019 and 2020. As reported by BRAC in 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic contributed to a 70% rise in occurrences of assault against women between 2019 and 2020. In 2020, the Dhaka Tribune reported that the Legal Aid and Human Rights Service had received 25,607 reports of gender-based violent incidences, per the results of that study conducted by BRAC. Child marriage is an aspect of gender-based abuse towards girls, and COVID-19 outbreak has been proven to be a major contributor to its occurrence. The research conducted by Polli Shomaj (2020) revealed that in the year 2019, a total of 371 child weddings were prevented, while from January to September 2020, 646 child marriages were averted. According to Ain O Salish Kendra's report in 2020, 1,546 female individuals experienced sexual assault from January to November. Among them, 303 individuals were subjected to gang sexual assault. Furthermore, the incidence of 51 homicides and 14 suicides were reported after the occurrence of rape. According to the ASK (2020) study presented in a webinar, 583 women were subjected to sexual assault between January and October 2020. According to a study by Dhaka Tribune (2020), 198 of these women were survivors of gang sexual assault.

According to Sifat (2020), the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh has led to a raise in gender-based violence in both sexual violence and domestic violence related cases against women, as well as suicide, mental problems, and anxiety. As a consequence of the outbreak, the number of cases of domestic violence in Bangladesh has increased dramatically. Based on the ASK (2020) survey findings, it was determined that 554 individuals had experienced domestic violence. Among the examined cases, 240 women were murdered by their husbands, members of their husbands' families murdered 71 wives, members of their own families

murdered 56 wives, members of their own families tormented 35 wives, and 90 wives committed suicide. Their husbands assassinated two hundred forty spouses, while 71 husbands' relatives carried out the murders. According to Ain O Salish Kendra (2020), 45 women assault victims were abused by their spouses, and their husbands' relatives exploited 17. According to a telephone survey conducted by the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) in 2020, over one million women and girls were surveyed. During the first six-month period of the COVID-19 epidemic, it was discovered that 40 thousand people had been victims of domestic abuse.

About 40% of women face domestic abuse for the first time, while 30% suffer physical assault, based on the Manusher Jonno Foundation (2020). Violence rates in 2019 and 2020 are compared in reports by BRAC and Ain O Salish Kendra. The research published by BRAC indicates that women across Bangladesh have reported increased incidents of physical, emotional, and sexual violence since the statewide lockdown, with their spouses being the most common perpetrators. This phenomenon has been observed in the majority of instances. According to BRAC's findings, the number of gender-based violence related cases rose by approximately 70% throughout March and April of 2020 compared to the previous year. According to BRAC report of 2020, the number of violent incidents in March and April 2019 amounted to 259, with 93 incidents occurring in March and 162 in April. In contrast, the corresponding months in 2020 witnessed more violent episodes, with 431 incidents reported. Specifically, March 2020 recorded 172 incidents, while April 2020 saw 259 incidents. Ain O Salish Kendra reported in 2020 that there was a sharp rise in the number of rape incidents between January and June of that year.

Reasons and contributing factors behind gender-based violence in Bangladesh during Covid-19 Outbreak

In accordance with radical feminist theories, male-dominated framework of our social construct is the primary reason for the problem of violence in our society. The oppression of women is inevitable due to the pervasiveness of male domination throughout all cultural systems. The radical feminist perspective is centered on patriarchy, which denotes men's systematic oppression of women. Moreover, liberal feminism stresses the need to recognize prejudice and inequalities as the fundamental drivers of violence. The liberal feminist viewpoint holds that women would flourish if given the same access to education, work, and political representation as men. This would make them less vulnerable to male dominance and other types of gender-based abuse. The male-dominated social order, gender inequity, financial reliance, a lack of becoming independent, a culture of tolerance, a meek feminine mindset, and enforced societal norms and standards all play a role in the perpetuation of such type of abuse towards women. The present COVID-19 epidemic is no exception to the general trend of increased aggression against women and girls during times of crisis (Fraser, 2020; Patermo & Peterman, 2011). Factors such as the disruption of victim support services, constrained mobility due to living conditions, a rising unemployment rate, financial instability, and an increased workload within the home have identified as significant contributors to violence against women in Bangladesh. The female gender finds itself vulnerable, characterized by limited mobility, financial dependence on men, and the responsibility of caring for children, the elderly, and sick family members. Moreover, the increased domestic workload has further empowered men, enhancing their control over women (Marques et al., 2020).

Living with a mobility constraint

During the initial COVID-19 epidemic, the infected individual was obliged to remain in isolation until their test results returned negative. In numerous cases, individuals were compelled to remain within their residences with a domestically violent partner due to adherence to lockdown protocols aimed at limiting the transmission of COVID-19. The findings of research conducted in South Asia unambiguously indicate a rise in occurrences of domestic violence either during or in the immediate aftermath of the lockdown period, as reported by UN Women (2020) and UNFPA (2021). According to a report published by UN Women in

2020, it was evident that violence against women escalated after the enforcement of the lockdown measures (UN Women, 2020). After the national lockdown in 2020, the number of reports of gender-based assault received by India's National Commission for Women (NCW) increased dramatically, as reported by Chandra (2020). According to Gebrewahd et al. (2020), violence against women in Australia experienced a 75% increase after implementing a stay-at-home order. According to Allen and Ebrahimian's study, three more incidences of domestic violence were documented after China instituted lockdown procedures (Allen and Ebrahimian, 2020). It's common knowledge that many abusive partners may resort to lockdown tactics to gain control over their partners.

The United Nations has mentioned that home is considered as the riskiest place in the world for women and adolescents. In 2018, the UNODC reported that around 2.4 million people worldwide used illicit drugs. According to Roesch and Gupta's (2020) research, evidence suggests that remaining at home may heighten the probability of violence against women in or susceptible to abusive relationships. In addition, the implementation of lockdown procedures due to the COVID-19 epidemic has given individuals who engage in abusive behavior the chance to assert their control further (Jones and Isham, 2020). According to their testimony, the spouses in question reportedly encountered recurrent feelings of dissatisfaction stemming from unemployment resulting from the lockdown, social isolation, and depressive symptoms.

Reduction of social cohesion and access to public service

The enforcement of the lockdown measures has led to the cessation or curtailment of operations in various establishments, such as religious institutions, childcare centers, educational institutions, and social welfare services. According to Marques et al. (2020), pursuing aid, safeguarding, and alternative pathways is vulnerable. During the lockdowns in Bangladesh, individuals were advised to remain indoors to mitigate their susceptibility to infection. Various institutions such as educational institutions, recreational amenities, parks, and community centers were situated close to each other. As a result, women who have experienced violence could not engage in discourse with the broader social community regarding their experiences. In addition, the victim was unreachable to those providing social services and NGOs. The social interaction of the victims with a community network may facilitate the formation of a social support network, which can aid victims in extricating themselves from violent circumstances. According to Roesch and Gupta (2020), women encountered hindrances in accessing crucial resources such as crisis hotlines, shelters, legal aid, crisis centers, counselling, and support services, which could have increased their susceptibility to victimization. Females who encounter limited availability to healthcare and other social amenities are at an elevated susceptibility to being subjected to harm. Sharifi et al. (2020) report that during times of crisis, there is a raise in the number of total phone calls made to domestic violence hotlines, 911, and also shelters. However, the response rate to these calls was reportedly inadequate.

Lack of income and stress about the future

Financial Express claims that poverty rates have increased by 25.13 percent because of the COVID-19 epidemic. The lockdown and its aftermath posed significant economic challenges due to the limitations imposed on individuals' capacity to engage in gainful employment. A considerable proportion of individuals experienced job displacement, which posed difficulties in securing alternative employment opportunities. The prevailing economic recession and the uncertain future have created an environment in which individuals who engage in abusive behaviour are more prone to the frequent outbursts of anger and violent actions towards their victims. It has been shown that domestic violence is more common in homes where members are stressed due to issues like poverty, poor health, a lack of freedom in their living arrangements, or the need to take extra precautions to protect themselves. This phenomenon can be attributed to the higher probability of an assault occurring within the confines of one's residence. Governments, women's rights related organizations, and civil society associates from different countries have all reported an upsurge in the need for emergency help and shelter due to the COVID-19 epidemic (UN Women, 2020). According to

Roesch and Gupta (2020), the cessation of abusers' means of livelihood and subsequent reduction in their access to essential goods and services can lead to increased stress levels. Increased stress due to fear of becoming sick and uncertainty about future occurrences likely hurt the perpetrator's propensity to commit violent acts towards women.

Increased unemployment rates

The COVID-19 outbreak has significantly impacted the labor market and various industries, resulting in significant adverse consequences. In Bangladesh, a significant number of individuals encountered unemployment and disillusionment. Most victims hailed from the working-class demographic and were gainfully employed within the private sector. Manufacturing and commercial establishments reduced their workforce as a direct response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to the lockdown, the limited availability of transportation, clothing, and manufacturing opportunities resulted in their infrequent work opportunities. Individuals who operate small businesses, those employed in the private sector, and individuals engaged in day labor experienced significant hardships. The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies' report found that family and individual income levels have dropped significantly in recent months because of the continuing epidemic. According to a report by the Financial Express in 2020, there was an increase in the unemployment rate to more than 13% and the poverty rate to 25.13%. The Centre for Global Development produced research in 2020 stating that the rising unemployment rate is a factor in increased violence against women. According to Bourgault et al. (2020), individuals often exhibit aggressive behaviour toward women after experiencing job loss and subsequent frustration. The findings of a study conducted on Jordanian women indicate that the sole factor that could potentially predict violence against women is their unemployment status. Research by Abdullah (2020) shows that women who are jobless have a greater chance of becoming victims of violence.

Interruption of informal social control in community network

The informal social control mechanism in Bangladesh has been disrupted due to the COVID-19 shutdown. Victims encountered more significant challenges in seeking assistance and escaping from their situation. Roesch and Gupta (2020) posit that the potential breakdown of social and protective networks may exacerbate violence between spouse. The victims of such violence may withdraw from their support system, including friends and family members who might provide help and safety. Violence towards women and children results from restrictions that is imposed on women's and children's easily access to education, employment, and other social opportunities (UN Women, 2020). Victims of abuse may face further obstacles in accessing resources, help, and emotional nourishment from institutional and informal support networks if the abusers themselves impose these restrictions. As a result, women who have encountered physical or sexual violence may be unable to communicate about the abuse incident. It seems that women often seek to avoid involvement with the formal legal system due to its perceived complexity. According to Ebert and Steinert (2020), an informal community network offers a relaxed environment for individuals to exchange information about various phenomena.

Financial Dependency of Women during a pandemic situation

The cultural norm of Bangladesh indicates, women being economically reliant on men. Following the advent of modern civilization and technological advancements, there has been a noticeable transformation in this particular culture. In urban areas, women typically commence employment in the garment industry, factories, and various other informal sectors. They also commenced assisting their kin. The quick spread of the COVID-19 outbreak drastically altered the situation overnight. Multiple garment factories were closed due to the government's shutdown, costing many women their jobs. The limitations of opportunities in the informal economy, such as working in households or as day laborers, were attributed to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19. The restricted employment opportunities available to women resulted in

their reversion to financial dependence on men. According to a study conducted by the Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra on domestic migrant workers, a significant proportion of female workers in Dhaka, approximately 94%, reportedly encountered instances of domestic abuse. As a consequence of COVID-19 outbreak in period of March-April 2020, many people lost their jobs and could not provide for their families (Nari Shamik Kendra Bangladesh, 2020). The research findings indicate that in cases where women discontinued their financial contributions, their spouses resorted to abusive behaviour due to their expenditure on drug abuse and other unlawful pursuits.

Shifting priorities in health service

During COVID-19 front-liners' primary responsibilities included enforcing social distancing measures across all sectors, raising public awareness about new lifestyles, and providing crucial support for healthcare and nutrition. Furthermore, they were accountable for segregating individuals who were unwell and conveying them to designated medical facilities that catered to COVID-19 patients. The COVID-19 outbreak may have led to prioritizing specific sectors of society, resulting in the neglect of others. In most cases, law enforcement and other legal entities demonstrated an apparent disregard for allegations of violence against women, except those involving fatalities or severe physical injury. The problem that violence poses against women may be affected differently if people prioritize healthcare differently. According to Pfitzner et al. (2020), humanitarian crises can intensify existing violence and instigate new occurrences of violence against women. According to Fielding's (2020) study, abuse victims may have been reluctant to seek medical assistance for their physical injury at healthcare institutions out of fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

Excessive domestic workload on women

The level of domestic labor required increased significantly when individuals opted to stay within their households. Families compelled to undergo quarantine, isolation, and physical distancing from one another, while also bearing increased domestic and caregiving duties may encounter heightened levels of strain, pressure, apprehension, and psychological distress. According to UN Women (2020), such circumstances can escalate discord and contention, ultimately resulting in abusive conduct. According to Marques et al. (2020), the household's augmented workload, encompassing the extended care of unwell, elderly, or young family members, led to an intolerable situation. The execution of such a task can significantly influence the violence they may encounter. A study conducted in India during the lockdown period supports the hypothesis. Insufficient domestic assistance, coupled with an increasing workload, exacerbates the persistent interpersonal strife among individuals, ultimately culminating in domestic violence incidents (EPW Engage, 2020). Ebert and Steinert (2020) posit that heightened domestic responsibilities and the absence of daycare and educational facilities contribute to heightened inter-parental conflict.

Lessening of women's access to legal and psychological support

Unfortunately, a network of women's support services was disrupted in Bangladesh as an outcome of the implementation of lockdown mechanism to refrain spreading of the COVID-19 virus. Victims encountered more significant challenges in seeking assistance and achieving liberation. According to studies by Ebert and Steinert (2020), victims of domestic violence who cannot leave their homes may have difficulty exiting violent relationships and finding help from friends and professionals. People that abuse their victims usually keep tabs on them and try to scare them into not reporting the abuse. The presence of spatial constraints and a densely populated setting in residential accommodations can pose challenges for individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds seeking to register grievances or report incidents of aggression. The COVID-19 epidemic has encouraged the use of control measures by people in positions of power, such as limiting victims' access to interpersonal tools and social networks (Gelder et al. 2020). It is conceivable that government and non-government organizations failed to provide sufficient aid to abused women during

a pandemic. In Bangladesh, it's common practice for law enforcement to provide a haven to victims of domestic abuse before conclusive proof of physical injury or violence connected to dowry issues can be gathered.

School closure and child marriage

The closure of educational institutions and the practice of early marriage are two factors that have the potential to affect the incidence of violence against females in Bangladesh significantly. Research in Nepal found that when schools were closed during the period of lockdowns, female children were more likely to be abused by their relatives at home. The majority of abusers were members of the victim's own family, as reported by Dahal et al. (2020). There has been a significant raise in the amount of marriages between minors as a direct impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. In Bangladesh, specifically in rural regions, it was observed that parents perceived their female offspring as a liability and experienced persistent feelings of apprehension. Polli Samaj reports that there had been a 68% increase in the number of underage weddings in the first 10 months of 2020 comparing to 2019. Simultaneously, there was about 72% increase in child marriages that women's organizations averted. Polli Shomaj (2020) reports that in the first quarter of 2020, the rate of child marriage was 219 percent greater than in the same timeframe in 2019. Child brides are vulnerable to severe physical and sexual abuse, which may lead to serious health consequences. There is a considerable increase in the risk of assault, either sexual or physical, for girls who are being married usually before the age of 15 compared to those who marry after eighteen (BRAC, 2020).

Excessive use of the internet and social media

The COVID-19 virus is a significant pandemic in the social media era. Implementing quarantine and self-isolation regulations has been attributed to increases of up to 50-70% in Internet usage. UN Women stated in 2020 that gender-based violence took several forms amidst the COVID-19 epidemic, including interpersonal violence, violence enabled by the internet and other technical methods, and violence resulting from gender-based discrimination. There is a much greater rate of sexual assault towards girls and women in the cyber world. The utilization of technology for professional, educational, and social purposes has been on the rise, and recent research suggests a corresponding increase in online violence against women (Peterman et al., 2020). Cohen and Felson's (1979) hypothesis of Routine Activity Theory, may be used to explain such aggressive behaviour. According to the theoretical framework, three key elements must all be present for a crime to be committed. The essential elements of this phenomenon encompass a viable target or potential victim, a perpetrator driven by a specific motive, and a lack of adequate supervision or oversight. It is plausible to regard women and girls as a feasible demographic to be targeted if they engage in a substantial amount of cyberspace-related activities. Individuals who perpetrate abuse against females, specifically girls and women, may encompass both juvenile males and females, as well as adult males. Furthermore, it is plausible that the absence of guardianship could be interpreted as insufficient cyber monitoring. Human rights activists, political figures, journalists, bloggers, online commentators, members of ethnic groups, indigenous women, trans women, lesbians, and women with disabilities are just some of the groups this form of violence has targeted. Upon the advent of women and girls utilizing the internet, they were immediately exposed to egregious gender-oriented mistreatment. Online violence against women and girls includes physical threats, stalking, zoom bombing, sexual harassment, and sex trolling. Data from multiple nations indicated a significant surge in online harassment and intimidation, including those directed towards minors. According to the Commission of the European Union (2018), the data about ICT-related violence indicated that the age group predominantly targeted in Europe comprised individuals aged between 18 and 29.

CONCLUSION

Various data sources indicate a substantial surge in this form of violence amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It

is well-established that throughout various historical pandemics and natural disasters, women have experienced a significantly higher incidence of physical, mental, sexual, and other forms of violence. These issues have consistently overlooked, and the current COVID-19 outbreak is no anomaly. Women are entitled to equal rights as men, given that they contribute equally to the functioning of our society. Self-determination, respect, reverence, and preserving one's dignity and value are inalienable human rights. Urgent action is needed to end all types of gender-based abuse and sexual violence against women. There is an urgent requirement for more attention, compassion, and safety during the epidemic. Due to lockdown measures, domestic abuse and other types of violence have increased dramatically, creating a global shadow epidemic. It is imperative to undertake resolute measures according to amenities such as shelter and support for female survivors and dispensing financial aid and a stimulus package to facilitate economic recuperation. Organizations dedicated to formulating policies, rendering legal assistance, and eradicating violence against women ought to maintain a state of heightened vigilance. Women's empowerment can also be facilitated by informal social control exercised by networks of friends, family, and neighbors.

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