

Mapping Geographies of Domestic Violence During Covid-19 Lockdown: A Case Study of Chandigarh City, India

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Abstract

World celebrated the 2023 International Women's Day intending to bridge the gap in digital access by guiding women to digital equality. However, while the world marched on to secure the digital space for women, neo-patriarchal agents remain intact bringing women back to their traditional roles and augmenting forms of gender violence. The study examines the rise of domestic violence during the first four phases of the Covid-19 lockdown by analysing news clippings and a case study on filed complaints of domestic violence in Chandigarh, India. The high surge in domestic violence complaints during the lockdown shifted the world's attention towards women trapped with their violent partners. Issues labelled responsible for this chaos ranged from the government's inefficient approach to the policing system of the nation. The study locates women trying to adjust amidst a crisis never experienced before and explores the crisis from various dimensions that triggered man's violent nature.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Covid-19, Unsafe-Homes, Abuse, Gender-Equality

Introduction

The country witnessed a high surge in the reporting of domestic violence complaints from the second week onwards when a nationwide impromptu lockdown was imposed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Impromptu, as the absence of a concrete plan to battle the pandemic led to chaos. The lockdown initiated a wave of *Ghar-Vapasi* (people returning to homes). However, the pandemic changed the notion of returning back to home as it turned out to be different from its prior experiences. Now, the question arises if family gatherings or spending time with family resembles the bond, love, and strength, then what causes the double/triple rise in domestic violence complaints? What power control dynamics worked behind these four walls during the first four phases of the lockdown? Is it possible that the lockdown triggered the dormant violent nature of man? If yes, how and if not, how people behaved while trying to adjust amidst a crisis never experienced before? More importantly, in this

epitome of safety called home, what kinds of acts, practices, and state of mind gave such a high surge to violence called 'domestic'? Family and marriage institutions are the domestic sphere's two most vital organs. A majority of domestic conflicts have family and marriage institutions as their epicentre. Like the domestic sphere, the concept of gender equality is also seen as a concept associated with women or in relation to women. However, gender equality is rarely understood in terms of the relational aspect (i.e., social, production and power) of how it intersects, interacts and manifests. Lorber (cited by Moghadam 2005) defines gender very aptly as '*a process of social construction, a system of social stratification and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, workplace, state as well as in sexuality, language and culture*'. It is in this context that domestic violence is understood as subjugation and oppression faced by women and other family members at the hands of men (mostly) and other family members. United Nations (2023) define domestic violence or intimate partner violence as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. It includes any behaviour that frighten, intimidate, terrorise, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

This surge in domestic violence complaints during the Covid-19 lockdown was witnessed globally. To map this surge, an analysis of the news articles on domestic violence published from the beginning of the lockdown covering all four phases has been taken into consideration (Table 1). However, governments and organisations around the globe claim to be taking necessary steps to curb this menace, but the existing structural loopholes left victims of domestic violence at the mercy of their violent partners. The analysis also found the considered strategies and interventions by the responsible authorities inadequate and ineffective in mitigating the crisis. Moreover, there were stances where the agents to protect the victims of domestic violence themselves became the perpetrator. As per analysis-based findings, the reasons for the increased number of domestic violence reporting vary from the government's inefficient approach to poor policing, from opening liquor shops to restrictions imposed on women visiting parental homes. The analysis-based findings also suggest how media (digital and print) failed to address the core issues and the right approach to tackle the crisis

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effectively and efficiently. Rather they followed and promoted a stereotypical approach to accommodate the '*just wrong*' for the time being.

Phases	Name	Date	Source	Region
Phase-I (Mar-23 to Apr-14)	Godin	Mar-18	TIME	Global
	Gottman	Mar-26	The Washington Post	Global
	Mittra	Mar-30	The Indian Express	India
	Middleton	Apr-01	Metro News	Malaysia
	Sullivan	Apr-01	NPR 24 Hour Program Stream	Malaysia
	Chowdhury	Apr-02	shethepeople	India
	Roy	Apr-07	Outlook	India
	Mahar	Apr-07	Modern Diplomacy	Global
	Rodrigues	Apr-07	Hindustan Times	India
	Shah	Apr-11	Modern Diplomacy	Global
	Henriques	Apr-13	BBC	Global
	Natarajan	Apr-13	The Hindu	India
Phase-II (Apr-15 to May-04)	Park	Apr-15	BBC	Global
	Kataki	Apr-17	Times of India	India
	Kumar et al.	Apr-17	India Development Review	India
	Rukmini	Apr-18	India News & Al Jazeera	India
	Kingsley	Apr-22	The Telegraph	UK
	Villagran	Apr-22	Modern Diplomacy	Global
	Banerjee	Apr-23	Times of India	India
	Goel	Apr-23	The Week	India
	Bhushan	Apr-25	Deccan Herald	India
	Ratnam	Apr-26	Hindustan Times	India
	Joy	Apr-26	Deccan Herald	India
	Roy	Apr-26	Modern Diplomacy	Global
	Kasarla	May-02	The Wire	India
Sharma	May-03	The Hindu	India	
Phase-III (May-05 to May-17)	Werber	May-08	Yahoo!Finance	Global
	Mukherjee	May-10	NEWS18	India
	Srivastava & Harrisberg	May-10	Thomson Reuters Foundation	India
	Agnihotri	May-16	The Indian Express	India
	Shah	May-17	The Wire	India
	Iyer	May-17	The Indian Express	India
Phase-IV (May-18 to May-31)	Times of India Staff	May-18	Times of India	India
	Siwach	May-18	The Indian Express	India
	Swarajya Staff	May-19	SWARAJYA	India
	Nandan	May-21	Times of India	India
	Thompson	May-22	Equal Times	India
	Naik	May-23	The Print	India
	Thakur	May-23	The Tribune	India
	Kottasová	May-24	CNN	Global

Confined in the four walls called home, all the family members (a panicking Ghar-vapasi) who returned back home burdened the lives of women and young girls with

increased household chores and expected demands based on sex roles. The concept of work-from-home further degraded their mental and physical lifestyle as they had to take charge of the family's health, the matter, and the order. A kind of triple shift role was witnessed. Additionally, the analysis based on the news articles concerning the rise of domestic violence complaints and cases during the lockdown identified a twofold trend shaping all four phases, i.e., romanticism, nostalgia, followed revivalism on the one hand, whereas, on the other hand, it augmented frustration, violence and sexism (Figure 1).

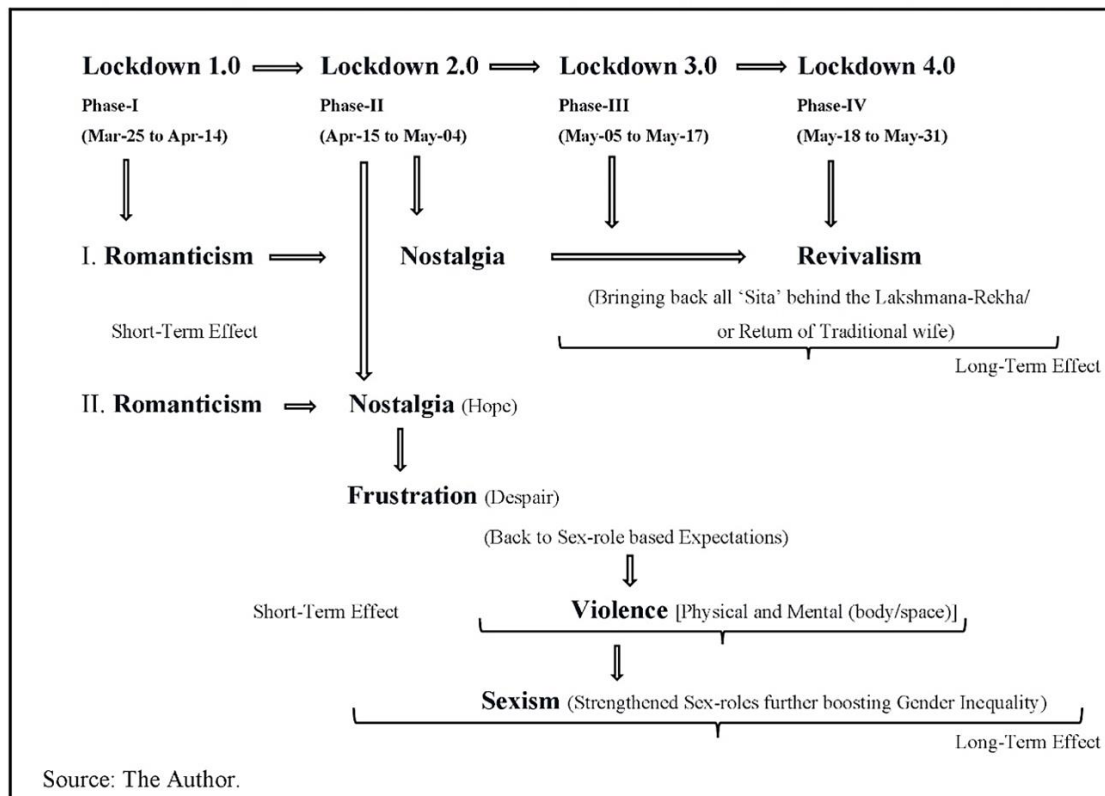


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Household space during Covid Epidemic (Hope & Despair)

The Phase of Romanticism and Nostalgia

The first phase of the lockdown romanticised the family gathering and the importance of home, family members, and elders. Not only the people but the entertainment industry also promoted these values through various advertisements glorifying the bond. For instance, prominent personalities and celebrities tweeted about practising self-control, promoting a need-based lifestyle by fighting consumerism, spending valuable time with family and appealing to people to stay home and follow

orders (Sushmetha, 2020). Moreover, as the lockdown was imposed to battle the disease outbreak, people became vocal with local strategies and stereotypes to fight Covid-19, for instance, claims of curing Coronavirus through Dalgona coffee, herbal tea, enchanting mantras and burning the effigy of Coronavirus. Simultaneously, a trend of romanticising the relationship between married couples was highly eulogised through sharing responsibilities, a man providing domestic help to his wife and helping her with all the household chores.

The first week of the lockdown was all about bursting videos on social media portraying the gender-equality in a household, male celebrities posing selfies with broomsticks, a wiper in hand, and females reacting to the same with expressions of love for partners, learning new skills (online), work from home desired as a life-long routine etc. Amidst all, Mother's Day further boosted such notions to a different level. The news-article analysis describes how the first phase of the lockdown remained dominated by this feeling of romanticism. As most of the news articles during this phase covering domestic spheres emphasised maintaining or rekindling the relationship with a partner or family in isolation, how to avoid conflicts, advising women to adjust with all the family members, justifying the facts that this outbreak is different for men and women, and how a healthy couple could survive in such times. Nevertheless, all these acts of romanticism were practised without considering the extension of the lockdown. Several articles mentioned how people are excited to spend this limited opportunity of quality time with family, and suggestions are given to build healthy relations, also clearly mentioned for 21 days. For example, "These 21 days can change your relationship status quo with your family." However, after a few days, performing repetitive activities beyond sex roles becomes tedious, giving space to a nostalgic feeling or dreaming about one's old self.

Frustration Phase

The nostalgic stage symbolised hope. In other words, dreaming of the past to relive it or returning to the previous order of things and situations. The financial insecurity, the work-from-home culture, the unavailability of work, unfulfilled demands at home, and unexpected behaviour of the spouse or any family member created the spaces for frustration, which ultimately results in men's violent behaviour towards women and any other family member those were vulnerable to such behaviour

(elders/children). The news-reports-based analysis suggests how normal arguments initially accelerated to verbal abuse, followed by frequent physical, mental and ultimately domestic conflicts.

The frustration stage became one of the most contributing factors to justifying and adjusting to the unjust actions of violent partners for the time being and legitimised the forms of domestic violence. On the one hand, the stage of frustration led people straight back to biased gender roles through revivalism (as a long-term effect) and, on the other side, to violence (a short-term effect) followed by sexism (as a long-term effect). The short-term effects are the instant action and reaction of the violent partners (mostly violent acts like abusing, slapping, and pushing). In contrast, the long-term effects are the forms of discrimination and prejudices legitimised by frequent acts of violence, such as revivalism of gender-biased, stereotypical, and orthodox socio-cultural practices.

The Phase of Revivalism

History has witnessed several social crises that have led society straight back to the path of revivalism. Whether it was the extremist movement (militancy period) of the 1980s to 1990s in Punjab that attempted to re-institutionalise the orthodox social conduct for women, girls, and even men or take any incident for reference that involves a gender-specific or community-specific tragedy, ultimately, people tend to resort to revivalist strategies rather than intervene through progressive negotiations. Like any other social crisis, the Covid-19 lockdown also witnessed revivalism, such as historic glorification of Hindu civilisational values and practices. For instance, to battle the COVID-19 disease, cow urine and dung were promoted as a medicinal remedy, and casteism and untouchability were justified by observing quarantine and self-isolation. The form of greetings like Namaste was highly eulogised over shaking hands along with paramount of the Hindu civilisational values above all. For instance, enchanting mantras, singing devotional songs, lighting lamps and drumming plates (as cymbals) as symbols were taken as means to fight this demonic virus.

The attempts of revivalism were also seen in the domestic sphere, especially in promoting the character of traditional-wife, i.e., Sita (an epitome of patience, purity, and forgiveness) through rebroadcasting of the Ramayana. In other words, to bring all Sitas [all those women who have transgressed the Lakshmana-Rekha (boundary) of their

homes or working women] back to the confined circle of household chores as more women lost their jobs during lockdown than men. The broadcasting of religious TV soaps like Ramayana not only promoted the image of Sita but also of Mandodari (Ravana's wife). However, Mandodari symbolises a woman who remains devoted to her husband despite his aggressive nature and wrongful deeds (like kidnapping someone else' woman).

Violence and Sexism

On a rational aspect, it is illogical to consider that an individual with non-violent history will suddenly transform into a violent, toxic or aggressive being. The triggering factors can undeniably accelerate the violent behaviour of individuals prone to anger, but they cannot transform a calm disposition for quick-tempered nature. However, the exponentially increased reporting of domestic violence can be attributed to multiple and frequent complaints from households with a prior history of domestic violence, as confined spaces like the Covid-19 lockdown might have provided an opportunity or allowed the abuser to act again. Therefore, it will be a colossal error to suggest that increased domestic violence complaints during the lockdown period consisted of new cases.

Most complaints were recorded through electronic media such as emails, helpline numbers, and social media websites. There were also occasions when the family members of women filed the complaint as the woman (the victim) was not in a position to do so. The news-reports-based analysis states that an early news report cited the National Commission of Women (NCW), India, which mention that "domestic violence cases have doubled from the second week onwards". The data collected from Women Police Station, UT Police Chandigarh for 2018, 2019, and 2020 showed a different trend, i.e., the number of filed complaints shows a declining rate. However, it can be attributed to the helplessness of the victim being stuck with the offender or limited factors available for the perpetrator to assert his aggressive behaviour. In other words, it was the low reporting of domestic violence cases that explains the declining trend and not the reduced acts of violence itself.

Years/Phases	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV	Total
2018	114	163	53	107	437
2019	142	162	118	105	527
2020	19	27	35	96	177

Source: Calculated from the data on the domestic violence complaints filed. Data retrieved from Women Police Station, Union Territory Police Headquarter Chandigarh, India. 2018-2020.

As mentioned previously, financial insecurity created panic, and all other factors accountable for the frustrated state of mind acted as agents leading to men's violent behaviour. For instance, the findings from news-report-based analysis suggested that in Haryana, the cases of dowry deaths increased during the lockdown, which explains how crimes can be accelerated when things go unchecked. Additionally, other factors like alcohol or other drug consumption also remain a larger factor responsible for the increased intensity of the violent act between couples. However, one cannot say that drinking alone remained responsible for the increased crime rate, and opening and closing liquor stores changed the status quo. As previously mentioned, the act of violence remains a short-term effect as it only occurs momentarily, but it strengthens the roots of sexism as a long-term effect which should be targeted.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 shows the distribution of domestic violence complaints across the sector and class-wise divisions for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020, in which each dot represents a complaint. The period considered for mapping the geographic extent of domestic violence complaints argues that lockdown alone cannot be attributed as a factor responsible for the increased reporting of domestic violence. And the analysis of these complaints manifested as hypothesised that the number of domestic violence complaints followed a situational approach. For instance, the reporting of domestic violence in the year 2018 and 2019 followed a normal increasing trend with sectoral variation, whereas it sharply declined during the Covid-19 lockdown period. In other words, not only individuals with prior history of domestic violence held themselves back from reporting, but individuals facing minor forms of domestic violence such as verbal abuse or conflict caused by argument or liquor consumption also chose not to report and adjust, as the virus-born disease shadowed other minor issues.

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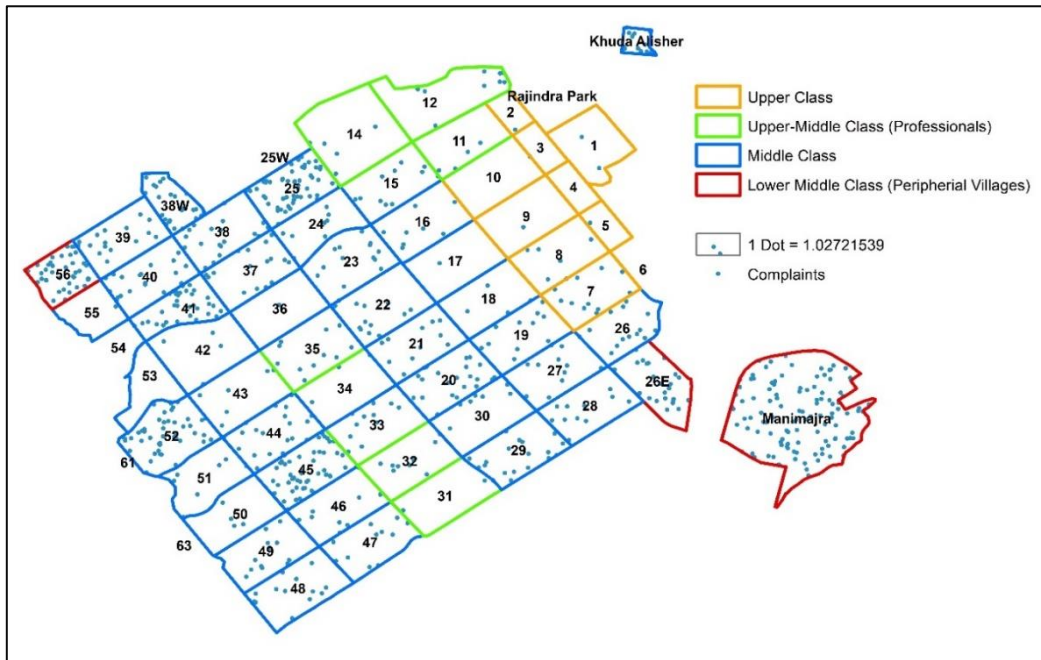


Figure 2. Sector and Class-wise Distribution of Domestic Violence Complaints in Chandigarh, India. January to December 2018

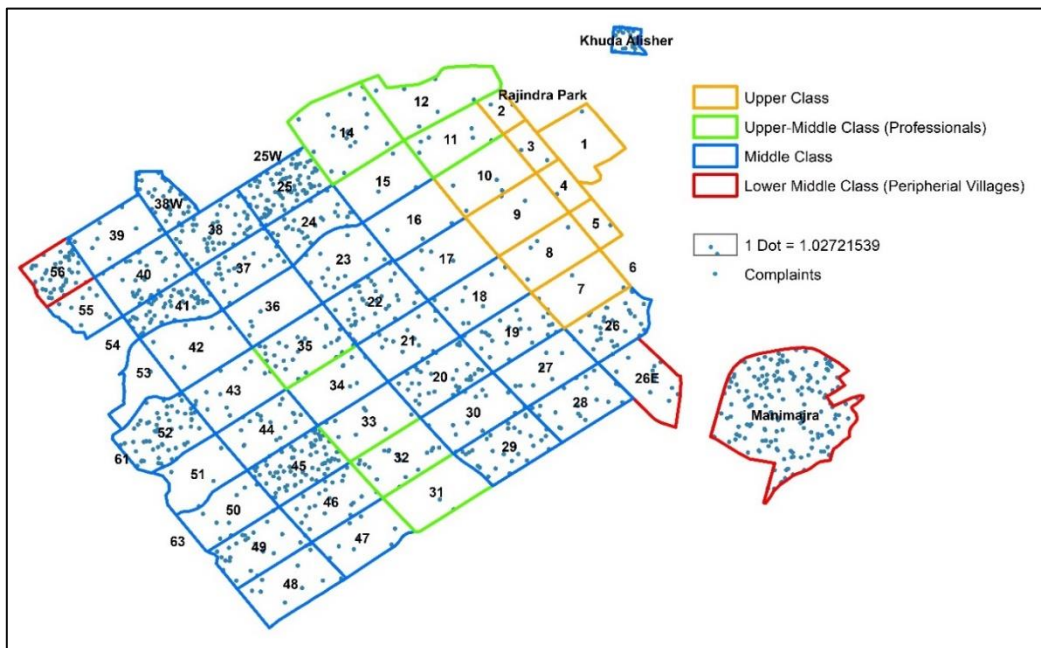


Figure 3. Sector and Class-wise Distribution of Domestic Violence Complaints in Chandigarh, India. January to December 2019

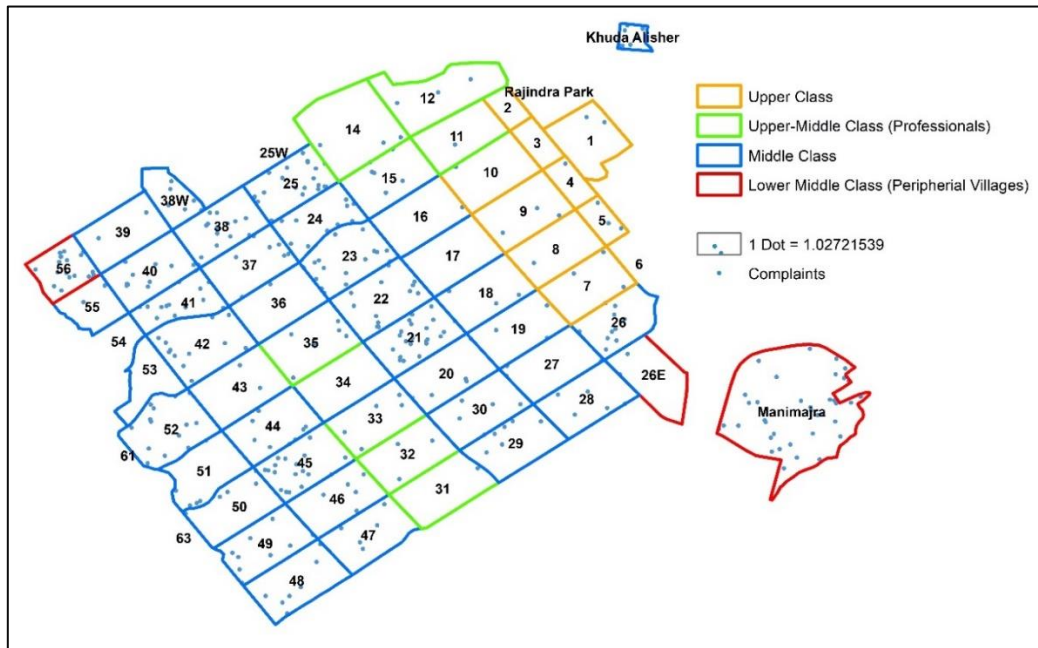


Figure 4. Sector and Class-wise Distribution of Domestic Violence Complaints in Chandigarh, India. January to June 2020

(Source: Calculated from the data on the domestic violence complaints filed. Data retrieved from Women Police Station, Union Territory Police Headquarter Chandigarh, India. 2018-2020)

On the other hand, data also reflect that most complaints were from the city's lower and middle-class areas (Figures 2, 3 and 4). These areas were the most affected by the financial

Filed by	Against	Reason
Husband	Wife	Adultery, Abortion due to illicit relations with other
Husband	Wife	Assault, Criminal trespass and misappropriation of dowry articles
Wife	Husband	Attempt to Suicide/Murder/Assault
Wife	Husband	Beating (Partner and Child abuse)
Wife	Husband	Bigamy
Wife/Husband	Husband/Wife	Blackmailing
Wife	Husband	Cheating
Wife	Husband/In-Laws	Cruelty and Physical Violence
Wife	Husband	Defamation
Wife	Husband/Sister-in-Law	Demand of Dowry
Husband	Wife/In-laws	Extortion
Wife	Husband	Forgery
Wife	Husband	Fraud
Wife/Mother-in-law/Husband	Wife/Husband/Ex-husband/In-Laws/Brother-in-Law/Daughter-in-law and her Parents/Son-in-law/Sister-in-law	Harassment

Wife	Husband	Harassment through Fake Social Media Texts and Calls
Daughter-in-law	In-laws' Family Members	Holding the Documents/Passport/Mobile Phone
Wife/Husband	Husband/Wife	Implicate in False Complaint (Domestic Violence and Dowry Case)/Wrongly Lodged FIR
Wife	Husband	Kidnapping and Rape Threat
Wife	Husband	Marital Rape
Wife	Husband/In-laws	Matrimonial Dispute
Wife	Husband	Misbehave
Wife	Husband	Misconducted Behaviour after Liquor Consumption
Parents	NA	Missing Children
Wife	NA	Missing Husband
Wife	Husband	Misuse of Power
Wife/Husband	Husband/Wife	Money Theft and Elopement
Wife	Husband	Negligence, Maltreated and Abused
Wife/Mother-in-law	Husband/Wife/Mother-in-law	Quarrel
Wife	Husband	Request for Protection
Husband	Wife	Request for Protection from Wife
Wife/Daughter-in-law	Husband/In-Laws	Suicide Threats
Wife/Mother-in-law/Husband	Wife/Husband/Daughter-in-law and her Parents	Threat/Threat to Life and Liberty/Threatening Calls/Threatening her Daughter/Murder Threat
Wife	Husband	Torture
Wife	Husband	Verbal Abuse
Other		Re-open/Transfer/Withdrawal of Complaints
Source: Calculated from the data on the domestic violence complaints filed. Data retrieved from Women Police Station, Union Territory Police Headquarters Chandigarh, India. 2018-2020.		

insecurity-induced threat to livelihood. Undoubtedly, financial insecurity and unequal resource accumulation remained a dominating factor in augmenting domestic violence. Therefore, one must also consider the economic categories to understand how the pandemic had varied repercussions for women from different social classes. In other words, the lockdown experience differed for women from different socio-economic backgrounds. The first phase of romanticism and nostalgia was perceived differently among these socio-economic classes.

- **Women in the Above Middle Class:** This section consists of mostly high-salaried regular Jobs (Govt. or Corporate), celebrities or people from any other business class, and homemakers. The range of increased burdens for women in the above-middle class varied from mental stress to the well-being of their family members.
- **Women in the Middle Class:** Women in this section are largely associated with average wages, salaried jobs (regular or non-regular, govt. or corporate, self-employed) and homemakers. Their issue of concern was limited to mental stress, anxiety due to confinement, concern for their children not getting any domestic help, worrying about their partners, low sales due to lockdown, or working family members (working as a health or social worker).

- **Women in the Below-Middle Class:** A majority of this section is characterised by meagre wages, and most of them are labourers and homemakers. However, women belonging to this stratum were not in a position to afford such worries except for the financial crisis as the lockdown put a halt to every outdoor means of earning.

Nature of Complaints and Role of the Complainant and Defendant

The study categorically analysed the nature of complaints along with the role of the complainant and defendant in the complaint lodged (Table 3).

- **Nature of the Complaint:** The analysis found that the nature of complaints lodged largely varies from restricting the autonomy of women within the household through various forms of gender-based violence such as demand of dowry, cruelty by husband and in-laws, matrimonial disputes, mental and physical abuse, harassment, misconduct, threats, defamation, adultery, negligence to extortion from husbands by their wives (fraud complaints, cheating, blackmailing) and abuse of family members by daughters-in-law and children. (Table 3).
- **Complainant:** The complainant's identity ranged from the wife (victim of domestic violence at large), followed by the husband as a victim, and family members of the victim.
- **Defendant:** Husband remained the largest entity against whom the complaint was lodged, followed by wife, in-laws, sisters-in-law and brother-in-law.

Safe and Unsafe Homes: A Case Study-based Analysis from Chandigarh City

The study divides residential sectors into two broad categories, i.e., safe and unsafe homes. Unsafe homes are homes where one or more than one complaint or incidence of domestic violence has been registered in the records of respective authorities such as Panchayat, community council, police station, NGOs or any other authority with the power to take effective actions. However, the notion of safe homes is the antithesis of unsafe homes- a house where no incidence of domestic violence has occurred.

Based on the data collected from the Women Police Station, Union Territory Police Headquarters, Chandigarh, regarding the filed complaints of domestic violence, the victims and perpetrators were approached for the case studies under the category of unsafe homes. In contrast, for safe homes, respondents were selected on a random basis.

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However, it was intended to capture the sample from all three categories, i.e., upper, middle and lower class.

The case study-based findings suggested that the education and financial independence-based empowerment of women has significantly improved the status of women in society. The respondents from the safe-homes category deemed communication-based negotiation and mutual understanding regarding household responsibilities as the most vital pillars for congenial domestic life. However, the respondents from the unsafe-homes category highlighted that despite their education and financial independence, men still control the wheels of power in public spheres and enjoy hegemony over women.

The respondents belonging to the lower class of unsafe-homes category suggested that male partners often restrict a woman by limiting her social connections by taking away the means such as mobile. At the same time, other means of harassment, such as mental torture or depriving the partner of financial help and autonomy, are also employed frequently. In this stratum, the many forms of domestic violence are normalised and not even considered an act of violence. Sex-based roles are highly practised and promoted.

On the other hand, the respondent from the upper and middle-class unsafe-homes category suggested that undeniably advancement in technological upgradation and available helpline services has benefitted women, but loopholes exist at the disposal level. Violent partners are only violent towards their partners, not everyone else. Therefore, beyond the boundaries of home, a man remains dominant and has a larger support base in both social and economic terms.

Box 1. Case Studies: Safe Homes

- **Case Study I. Male Respondent (37-year-old / Police Employee / Upper-Middle-Class)**

The respondent is a *Police employee* who lives with his wife (also a Police employee) and belongs to the *Upper-Middle-Class (Professionals)* strata of Chandigarh City. He asserted that tensions between married couples are inevitable; therefore, a safe home mandate shared responsibilities to establish a harmonious relationship between the married couple living in a household. He further mentioned that the differential value given to male and female roles and family members' associated expectations often leads to conflicts between household members. As the respondent suggested:

"Everything that a man does in a household has more value than every task a woman does. A man's engagement in household activities is often appreciated, but the same activities being done by a woman daily basis are rarely recognised."

Therefore, in safe homes, understanding between the couples and family members regarding allocated roles and preferences of communication rather than delaying/avoiding the issues predominates. Alternatively, in unsafe homes, verbal abuse is normalized, and means of conflict resolution are only sought when tensions have crossed the extremity at the physical level—however, most violent acts, such as slapping, hitting, or restraining someone forcefully. The respondent affirmed that consumption of substance abuse or drinking liquor often increases the chances of domestic violence as the partner often considers substance abuse a means to escape from the conflict.

- **Case Study II. Female Respondent (33-year-old / Government Employee / Middle Class)**

The respondent is a *Government employee* who lives with her husband (a Police employee) and belongs to the *Middle-Class* strata of Chandigarh City. Respondent believes that safe homes have the environment of understanding the value of an individual, his/her roles and treating everyone equally. Most domestic violence cases arise due to household role-based conflicts, and if managed appropriately, household conflicts between married couples or family members can be reduced. As the respondent explained:

"My husband and I try to share our responsibilities as much as possible. Whenever I am on duty, he takes care of the house and vice versa. Undoubtedly, the lockdown increased the work pressure and consequently these tensions, but keeping patience and establishing an understanding through communication helped us."

She further suggested that most people are impatient and rarely seek the way of dialogue. They often lash out at each other and later justify their anger and violent behaviour as the heat of the moment.

- **Case Study III. Male Respondent (27-year-old / Self-employed / Lower-middle Class)**

The respondent is *self-employed* (runs a small shop), lives with his wife (housewife) and belongs to the *Lower-Middle-Class* strata of Chandigarh City. As per the respondent, a safe home environment allows women to be self-dependent, own some property/resources, and treat every household member respectfully. As the respondent further suggested:

"Domestic violence cases often arise out of dowry-related expectations, financial crisis, or partner spending money irresponsibly. Therefore, men and women must be responsible for utilizing resources carefully and consider all aspects while spending them."

The Covid-19 lockdown has undeniably increased the tensions in the homes. It not only brought people together, but it also aggravated the forms that are socially considered violent and unlawful. For some time, it is okay to live in a crowd, but most people are not habitually tolerating other people for too long. On the other hand, the excessive use of mobile phones further intensified these tensions at home. He mentioned that many of his friends complained about their wives using mobile phones all day and arguing over petty things, men lashing out their frustration on them or family members, or cases of people getting divorced increased during the lockdown.

*Note: The identity of the respondents are kept in anonymity due to sensitive and personal information shared to protect their privacy and prevent any potential harm by adhering to the legal and ethical guidelines.

Box 2. Case Studies: Unsafe Homes

• Case Study I. Male Respondent (35-year-old / Government Employee / Upper Class)

The respondent is a *Government employee* (Perpetrator and Victim of Verbal Abuse) who lives with his wife (a housewife) and belongs to the *Upper-Middle-Class (Professionals)* strata of Chandigarh City. The respondent said that the tensions between him and his wife intensified during the lockdown and often led to verbal abuse. Initially, the reasons behind these verbal fights were increased work pressure, but later on, every other petty issue turned into a big fight. At times, they consulted their friends and family to sort out their issues. As the respondent said:

"Verbal abuse is a form of domestic violence, no matter how one justifies it. Our home became unsafe during the Covid-19 lockdown, and we both were victims and perpetrators. However, we sorted out this before it could have led to the physical injuries."

The respondents mentioned that most domestic violence cases are rarely reported, and if reported, they often merge into matrimonial disputes. It not only strengthens the various other ways of perpetrating domestic violence. A very safe home can become unsafe under such circumstances, and consuming substances like liquor further accelerates these things.

• Case Study II. Female Respondent (38-year-old / Government Employee / Upper-Middle Class)

The respondent (Victim of Domestic Violence) is a *Government employee* who lives with her husband (Perpetrator) and belongs to the *Upper-Class* strata of Chandigarh City. The respondent said that every home is potentially unsafe where a woman is not treated well. The respondent is a victim of physical abuse perpetrated by her husband. As the respondent said:

"Undoubtedly, education and awareness have made an impact, empowering women, but men still control everything from the domestic to the public sphere. Even if a woman registered a complaint against her husband, everyone favours the husband. At times, the husband pays off the constables or police officials and settles in his favour. Technology has provided the means to empower women digitally, but in social reality, women are still the foremost victim of domestic violence. Even empowered and financially independent women are not able to speak up for themselves."

The respondent asserted that male still enjoys the privileges of the patriarchal social system. Women have reached higher positions in society, but women are still inferior and weak to men. Men even use women and their resources to subordinate them. She further mentioned that despite having hotlines/helplines, separate police stations for women and other digital means to report domestic violence cases, women rarely get justice as technology is also a slave of human beings, and men are largely in control.

• Case Study III. Male Respondent (32-year-old / Daily-wage Labourer / Lower-Middle-Class)

The respondent is a *Daily-wage Labourer* (Perpetrator), lives with his wife (a housewife and Victim of Domestic Violence) and belongs to the *Lower-Middle-Class (Peripheral Villages)* strata of Chandigarh City. During the Covid-19 lockdown, the respondent's wife registered a complaint for brutally beating her. However, when questioned about the same, the respondent termed it a minor fight between husband and wife. As the respondent said:

"Such fights are common between married couples. Sometimes women do not listen to men or men stressed due to their daily struggles. Moreover, they exert their stress on each other, sometimes resulting in violent fights."

However, the registered complaint mentioned his wife's hospitalisation for injuries she endured. The respondent has now taken away his wife's mobile phone as it is the same phone she registered the complaint. On the other hand, the respondent asserted that every home is safe, where men do their duties, and wife obeys their husbands. He further mentioned that things are fine with his spouse, and they live happily together.

*Note: The identity of the respondents are kept in anonymity due to sensitive and personal information shared to protect their privacy and prevent any potential harm by adhering to the legal and ethical guidelines.

What Went Wrong?

Isolated from the rest of the world, people trapped with their violent partners had only limited alternatives and sources to keep themselves aware of their surroundings, i.e., digital media. On top of that, a majority of digital media failed short of their responsibility as their focus remained TRP-oriented rather than offering a helping presence to those in need. Most news articles emphasised a narrow approach to address strategies to cope with the pandemic. For instance, avoiding family conflicts, trying new recipes, learning new skills, having healthy and positive communications with partners, sharing responsibilities, and dividing household chores were mostly suggested. These suggestions might have helped the women in the middle class and the middle-class Indian social setting, but they completely ignored women living below the middle class, where the intensity of domestic violence prevails more than any other category and remains unreported. For instance, most of the news articles highlighted the grave situation of the increased rate of crime, but less than 10% suggested long-term strategies, and most of them just imitated the Western ideas of providing shelters to women, providing helplines and regional centres for women to access the help for the time being. The suggestion and

Table 4. UN Women's International Women's Day Themes, 1996-2023

Year	Themes
1996	Celebrating the Past, Planning for the Future
1997	Women and the Peace Table
1998	Women and Human Rights
1999	World Free of Violence Against Women
2000	Women Uniting for Peace
2001	Women and Peace: Women Managing Conflicts
2002	Afghan Women Today: Realities and Opportunities
2003	Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals
2004	Women and HIV/AIDS
2005	Gender Equality Beyond 2005; Building a More Secure Future
2006	Women in Decision-making
2007	Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women and Girls
2008	Investing in Women and Girls
2009	Women and Men United to End Violence Against Women and Girls
2010	Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All
2011	Equal Access to Education, Training, and Science and Technology: Pathway to Decent Work for Women
2012	Empower Rural Women, End Poverty, and Hunger
2013	A Promise is a Promise: Time for Action to End Violence Against Women
2014	Equality for Women is Progress for All
2015	Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it!
2016	Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality
2017	Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030
2018	Time is Now: Rural and Urban Activists Transforming Women's Lives
2019	Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change
2020	I am Generation Equality': Realising Women's Rights
2021	Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World
2022	Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow
2023	DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality

Source: UN Women. International Women's Day, 8th March. *United Nations*. 1996-2023.

strategies were adopted from the Western experiences neglecting the social setting of Indian society, for example, women gang-raped in a quarantine centre in Rajasthan, a police officer suspended for an attempt to rape in a quarantine centre in Uttarakhand, or reports of minor girls being married in lockdown. To borrow a quote from Kuhn (1996), '*We humans tend to create new puzzles without solving the prior ones.*' In other words, for the sake of advancing the scholarship on forms of gender-based violence, it is okay to address the contemporary issues and issues that can be relevant in future, but it is also imperative to keep working on the issues that have been left behind or remained neglected. The aspect of speed has undoubtedly fastened the lifestyle, but one cannot avoid the issues at hand in order to keep up with the pace of changing lifestyles. One must need to intervene strategically, considering the locational, historical, and situational factors. For instance, the applicability of changing themes of International Women's Day mentioned in Table 4 might differ for a developing nation like India, as it remains still grappling with issues like autonomy, dignity, feminisation of poverty, imbalanced sex ratios, and male-child preference. Undoubtedly, themes like the digital aspect of gender equality are relevant, but it needs more focus on the ground level. One cannot dream of a better tomorrow when struggling with the present. A larger focus on issues like gender equality across gender equality will only cater for a specific elite section privileged to such services, whereas a large number of women will still be grappling with dreaming of accessing basic fundamental rights.

Conclusion

To conclude, the momentary acts of violence between couples (married or unmarried) are often normalised based on their non-frequent occurrence and often non-intervened, considering it as an individual's matter of privacy. In other words, these violent acts are socially normalised and accepted. In the majority of cases, these biased and discriminatory practices are not imposed but socialised and culturally deemed as normative. Ultimately, it is the individual's position based on his self-interests and convenient positioning that keep intact these biased and discriminatory structures like revivalism of orthodox belief and legitimisation of sexism. For instance, Annie Besant devised the *Soul theory of Caste* and eulogised the caste-based division to establish her roots in the Indian political sphere. Though she is widely known for her work on education and fighting for women's rights in the context of India, she actively supported

the rightful place of upper-caste Hindus (Brahmins and Kshatriyas) over lower-castes. Therefore, it will be an error to blindly accept the notion that a revivalist is completely ignorant to renewalism. A revivalist is well aware of his do's and don'ts, and choosing the path of revivalism substantiate that one has prioritised the self at the expense of a larger audience on the stake. In other words, people resorted to the revivalist strategies not out of desperation but with their own free will and choice.

Therefore, as previously mentioned, it would be an analytical error to say that the lockdown alone contributed to the increased number of domestic violence cases. The relational aspects of household power dynamics must be considered while understanding such issues. The nation has seen many disasters but is only aware and capable of short-term pre- and post-disaster phase management strategies. The Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to survive amid a crisis and devise long-term battling strategies. In the context of women and domestic violence, it is also an opportunity to identify all forms of domestic abuse (extreme and subtle) to redefine the power dynamics in a household by targeting the culprit and the roots and structure of the violent act or abuse. Merely targeting the acts of domestic violence might slow down its intensity, but the roots of sexism need to be uprooted to end it. One must not become prey to revivalism. Back to families and people around means bringing change and not reviving the orthodox pathways leading to conservatory practices. One must not expect anyone to change overnight but to keep tagging each other along (by sharing the responsibilities equally by both male and female members). Sex-based roles are part of socialisation and are as fluid as any other social trait. Therefore, the sex-role-based relational exchange between men and women must be addressed and changed. Renewal is the key to bringing that change in by accepting the novelties.

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