

AN INCREASE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NEPAL DURING COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and to prevent further transmission, a lockdown had become a necessity. Nepal enforced a lockdown at the beginning of the pandemic, much before many other countries. However, when we look at this lockdown from a social aspect, a red flag is being raised as the vulnerable are put in a risky situation. During this pandemic, various countries there has been an increase in the number of domestic violence cases. The lockdown further worsened the situation. Nepal has always faced the problem of domestic violence but various surveys have shown that with the onset of the lockdown the cases of domestic violence have spiked in Nepal.

Analysis

In the Nepalese society violence against women has [always been prevalent](#) due to deep-rooted patriarchy and gender roles. There exists a social structure in Nepal which is focused on patriarchy - women are not given any power to make decisions be it legal, economic, or social, which makes them vulnerable. The pre-existing condition of domestic violence in Nepal has worsened due to this pandemic. The workload of women has increased in the lockdown and as a result they have become further vulnerable to violence. During this pandemic, which has forced the entire world to go into lockdown, there has been a psychological and physical exploitation of women as they are forced to be isolated with their abusers. Women have started to enter the male-dominated society and become independent, but the pandemic has taken away the opportunities and they are forced to go back to their homes which in most cases is where their abusers are. This has made them economically insecure and this situation is used by their perpetrators as a tool for controlling the women, thus these conditions have given the perpetrators an opportunity to further abuse the women.

In Nepal, domestic violence cases are already very high. The National Women Commission published a report which [showed](#) that there were 604 cases in total of domestic violence in the two-month lockdown, out of which the cases of domestic violence and abuse against women were 139. This is a 77 percent increase from the number of cases before the lockdown. When it was further researched the preparators in most of the cases were in-laws and husbands. WOREC Nepal [discloses](#) through its data that in Nepal, women of all age groups are a victim of domestic violence and the offenders are someone close to them, such as parents, spouse, in-laws or any other family member.

Another reason is that the victims are not able to get the support and even if they are able to get support it is not enough. The perpetrators know that during COVID-19 it is tough to reach the police and also the victims do not have the resources to seek help or they are scared of their abusers because they are stuck at home with them, which increases the chances of domestic violence. Since, people were not allowed to go outside of their homes, the conflicts have increased, which in turn has increased the aggression and abuse of men towards the women. There is more opportunity to abuse the women and less opportunity for someone to intervene and protect her.

The uncertainty of COVID-19 has caused a fear being created in the society, which has intensified inequality against the women and increased domestic violence. Based on the IMF data in 2019, Nepal was at [161st place](#) in the world poverty rank, and with an increase in the unemployment rate due to the pandemic has increased frustration and anxiety. People are becoming jobless and have very less job security, they are taking debts, using substances and engaging in [various](#) types of risky behavior which triggers conflicts and domestic violence due to the men losing their jobs which is making them feel out of control and this failure has led to more aggression and violence.

Due to the schools being closed during the pandemic, young girls are at a [risk](#) of violence and abuse. As per anecdotal [records](#), there have been 48 complaints of child sexual assaults in the first six weeks of lockdown, which is alarming compared to a total of 211 cases in the last Nepali fiscal year. Nepal comes in the [top 10 countries](#) where child marriage is prevalent. With no or less income due to the pandemic, young girls are being married at an early age and then being exploited by the in-laws or husband.

There is a stigma of gender-based violence and women fear of what the repercussions will be if they go to the concerned authorities, as they are stuck at home. There is very restricted mobility due to COVID 19 and since the society in Nepal is male-dominated, which shows that not many have a way to get out of the house, they are trapped and thus, unable to file a complaint. They are socially and economically disempowered. There is very less scrutiny. This gives the preparator more confidence and he abuses the victim time and again.

Conclusion

The life at the home of a victim of domestic violence has become a nightmare as they have no escape from the abuser and the cases are increasing day by day. There is a concern for the local Government, institution, society and individuals. As it is tough to reach the police during the

pandemic, police of Nepal have provided a platform called [Nepal Police](#) App where online complaints about domestic violence can be filed. The authorities are providing various hotline numbers, but all these will not be helpful unless the women can go outside or have resources to get these assistance services. All the data which is being collected is a wakeup call for the Government to take necessary steps otherwise due to the pandemic, the country will not only face a setback financially but also socially.

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