

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE : An Increasing bitter TRUTH of the Pandemic

Violence is not limited to the battlefield and the greatest danger for many women and girls is when they should be safe in their homes.

As part of efforts to control the worldwide epidemic covid-19, lockdown has been implemented in many countries of the world, a large part of the world population has been confined to their homes.

Some days ago , United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Gutarares has called for concrete action from the governments, expressing concern over the 'horrific increase' in domestic violence cases against women and girls in these circumstances.

In its message, the UN Secretary-General has noted that violence is not limited to the battlefield and the greatest danger for many women and girls is when they should be safe in their homes.

It is worth noting that recently the UN chief issued an appeal for a global ceasefire so that common efforts could be focused on tackling the challenge of the corona virus.

Due to the economic and social challenges and restrictions on movement due to the epidemic, there has been a huge increase in the number of cases of mistreatment of women and girls in almost all countries.

However, even before the spread of the corona virus, data has been clearly describing this problem. Around one-third of women around the world experience violence in some form or the other in their lives. This issue affects both developed and poor economies.

Nearly one-fourth of college-going female students in the US have faced sexual assault or misconduct, while violence by acquaintances in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa is a fact for 65 percent of women.

Analysis by the World Health Organization shows that violence has a profound impact on women's physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health. The risk of women experiencing physical or sexual violence doubling in miscarriage or in their mental depression doubles. In some areas, the risk of violence from women infected by HIV is 1.5 times higher. Facts indicate that women suffering from sexual violence are 2.3 times more likely to become addicted to alcohol.

In the year 2017, more than 87 thousand women were willfully murdered, in which more than half their women or their family members were responsible for the deaths.

Like many other countries, the long-running lockdown in India has proved to be overwhelming for the victims of domestic violence.

On 18 April, people started searching about an online helpline number on which victims of domestic violence help. The lockdown was then a little over three weeks away. The lockdown started in India from 25 .

According to an article of TOI, a Indian woman said that her husband has been fighting and abusing her for 15 years. But since she used to work, she stayed outside the house most of the time. Her husband was also often on a journey, due to which both of them did not stay together much time ,But the lockdown has changed a lot between them.

Her husband and mother-in-law do not listen, so she says in a low voice from the closed room on the phone, "I always live in the shadow of a fear that my husband might feel bad."

She says that both taunt and torture them."I am always told that I am not a good mother, nor a good wife. They keep in front of me a wide range of food items and treat me like servants."

In 2018, the police had registered 103,272 such cases in India .

According to the National Health Survey of India, during 2015-16, 33% of women have suffered violence of their husbands in some form, whether it is on physical, sexual or emotional level. But only 14 percent of these women came forward to help.

The National Commission for Women has also registered an increase in complaints during the lockdown. Its chairman Rekha Sharma told this to the news channel in a conversation. For this, the Women's Commission has started a WhatsApp helpline number.

Between March 23 and April 16, in the first three weeks of close lockdown, 239 cases of domestic violence were registered in the Women's Commission. This is more than the 123 cases that came in that month before the lockdown began.

Ashwini Deshpande, Professor of Economics at Ashoka University in the capital Delhi, says, "It seems that these abusers are feeling frustrated and frustrated due to the lockdown and they are removing this frustration in the form of violence against their partner or children."

Professor Deshpande compares these two months of 2019 to the months of March and April of this year, stating that during the last year, on an average five cases have come daily, while this year nine cases have been reported on an average during this year.

It is not that this is only in India. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the beginning of April that "during the lockdown, there has been a catastrophic increase in domestic violence worldwide."

According to the United Nations, the number of calls to the helpline in Lebanon and Malaysia has doubled in the same months of the year as compared to last year, while China has tripled.

Often, the police get first information about these cases and it is believed that they adopt a non-sympathetic attitude towards women in such cases. Even now, there is an additional burden due to the lockdown on the police force.

But Professor Deshpande says that these women should get help under any circumstances. The government should bring aid to the victims under essential needs so that they can be transported to safe places.

NCW President Rekha Sharma said that in the first week of March (March 2-8), the Commission had received a total of 116 complaints from across the country. At the same time, during the lockdown period, within 10 days (from 23–31 March) this figure has reached 257. Sharma said that 'between March 24 and April 1, 69 complaints of domestic violence have come and are increasing with each day. I am receiving direct emails of complaints. One or two complaints are being received daily.

According to NCW data, 69 cases of domestic violence during the lockdown period, 77 complaints of right to live respectfully, 15 cases of harassing a married woman in the house, 2 complaints of dowry beating, 13 complaints of rape and attempted rape. Have received till a week before the lockdown, there were 30 cases of domestic violence, 13 cases of harassment to a married woman, 35 cases of respectful living.

According to the report 'Crime 2018 in India' released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cases of domestic violence are increasing at a very fast pace, mostly with spouses or close relatives. According to the report, the highest number of domestic violence cases were reported during 2018. Even after the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in 2005, there has been no significant improvement in this situation.

The roots of domestic violence are deeply rooted in our society and family. The family can be called the first nursery of mindset against women. Patriarchal thinking and behavior develops in the family itself and in a way it is entwined with our family structure.

The problem with domestic violence is that its roots are so deep and widespread that it is very difficult to guess its true position.

It is a crime that is often ignored or hidden, very few cases are formally reported, and sometimes even denied. Most women tolerate it quietly under pressure to save marriage. In our society and families too, it has got silence or open acceptance in the name of saving marriage and family. The same mindset is seen at the state and administration levels.

According to the 'Quest for Justice' study report released by the Tata School of Social Science in 2014, domestic violence is often seen as a family matter by the police and the courts and this also

discourages women from proceeding with legal measures. While doing this, it is often suggested to settle the matter together.

Government is already working very hard in this pandemic , so they are not able to work so much on any other issue in this current situation but it also can not forget that there is also an urgent need of government attention on this critical issue which is rising everyday in this pandemic.

Himani Sharma

