

3

Domestic Violence against Women in Sri Lanka During COVID-19 Lockdown Period and Social Work Intervention

Manjula Wijesekara

Senior Lecturer, School of Social Work, National Institute of Social Development, Sri Lanka.

Abstract: During the last two years over 1.6 million people across the globe have lost their lives because of COVID- pandemic. The negative impacts of the disease have not only been limited to the loss of life but also have severe psycho-social impacts on people. Lockdowns have resulted fears, anxiety, and sadness among people and which has led to an alarming increase in suicides and other mental conditions. However, the impact of this pandemic on women has been worth exploring. Domestic Violence (DV) against women has been perceived as silent suffering within the family. It is also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) or family violence occurs when one person attempts to control another in an intimate relationship. The destructive impacts of violence on women in domestic sphere are severe. Domestic violence has increased in many covid-19 affected countries and in Sri Lank also a number of domestic violence cases have been reported during the lockdown period as compared to previous years. The main objective of this study is to explore the contextual factors of Domestic Violence against women to identify social work intervention. Qualitative research as a multi-method in focus and involving naturalistic approach to its subject matters in their natural setting adopted here to understand the prevailing situation about the domestic violence incident. Using case studies produced more in-depth and

comprehensive information for the study. The purposive sampling was fit for this sample and reported cases for a counselling officer in the district secretariat during 2020 -2021 were analyzed to explore the causes of Domestic Violence against women to identify social work intervention. Semi structured interviews were mainly used for the data collection. The major findings of the study indicated that several contextual factors, including socio-economic instability, the power imbalance within the marital relationship, lack of access to the justice system, failure of service delivery system caused by the pandemic have led raise of DV cases in the country and as a result of these causes of domestic violence increased the vulnerability to physical, sexual and emotional problems natively impacted on women during the pandemic period. As this is deeply rooted problem, it can be minimized only when the contextual factors are addressed. The study emphasizes the need for socio-cultural appropriate social work intervention to overcome this problem and the study will contribute to ongoing DV prevention research pushed for continued prevention and social adjustment initiatives both in practice and in research.

Key words: COVID -19, lockdown, domestic violence, women, prevention, Sri Lanka

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations defines domestic violence as “any act of gender- based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, harm or suffering to women, including thursts of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations,1993). Domestic Violence (DV) against women has been perceived as silent suffering within the family

The destructive impacts of violence on women in domestic sphere are severe. Most common form of domestic violence is physical and sexual violence of women by their partners in the family (WHO, 2013). Increasing amounts of research have highlighted the health and psychological effects, intergenerational effects, and consequences of such violence (United Nations, 2006). Although women can be violent in a relationship with men, the devastating burden of domestic violence is borne by women (WHO, 2002). The impact of DV on the women survivors are both immediate and long term, with negative health, economic and social outcomes including difficulty working, low self-esteem, depression, poor marital relationships, and broken homes, and so on (Campbell et al., 2002; Ellsberg et.al).

Violence against women within the family is a behavior pattern that has become understands as a type of marital relationship, because of the existing prejudices against prevailing in the privacy of family life. Addressing the issue still remains a problem that is concerned by society’s expectations of the gendered identities, roles and behavior of women or men and of socio-cultural norms. However, due to the “secrecy” of DV and the invisibility of the problem, it has been covered up by the society and by the survivors themselves since they are more vulnerable and may not be able to protect themselves they need external help in making alternative arrangements for the safety and protection of their living.

. Depending on the nature of the issue different disciplines/professions have developed range of explanations for intervention. Psychological analysis realizes the problem within the individual perpetrator or victim. Sociological analysis locates the causes of domestic violence against women within the social structure. Accordingly, it is important to addressing the issue from a psycho-social perspective in both assisting and improving wellbeing and addressing structural issues that may be negatively affecting on women survivors. When examine the nature of the problem it requires most appropriate psycho-social intervention to overcome the problem

According to the Women’s Well-being Survey (2019), In Sri Lanka one in five women have faced violence by an intimate partner and are more than twice as likely to have experienced physical violence by the partner. These statics shows us the dangerous trend of domestic violence against women (DV) and the cases are vast in Sri Lanka. A major increase in domestic violence cases was observed during the COVID-19 period as compared to the previous years. The psycho-social impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns have resulted in many life-threatening concerns for almost everyone. The impact on COVID-19 pandemic on Sri Lankan women was unprecedented and worse than others. Because, COVID-19 pandemic has increased sufferings for women in terms of both from the diseases and increased violence on women in domestic sphere. Therefore, researchers related to family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic have often been called the "shadow pandemic" (UN Women, 2020) "double pandemic" (Bettinger-Lopez &Bro, 2020), "hidden epidemic" (Neil, 2020).

Since the lockdown has been imposed homes are no longer seen as comfort zones because during the lockdown homes are changing as spaces where people are working from home therefore homes are being turned in to offices and workstations to earn something for their day today survival. Children are attending online class or other activities and therefore homes have been turned in to schools, market activities are being coordinated from home, services are being taken by the members of the family, therefore the family and the concept of homes are turning as providers of all such services. Every house became an isolated institution that is taking care of multiple needs during the COVID-19 breakdown. To carry out of all such activities women had to depend on men hardly help in any household task reinforcing patriarchal power relations (Nigam, 2020). Because of a number of factors such as strain created by lengthy shelter, socio-economic uncertainty and hardship women had live in abusive behavior during the COVID-19 breakdown. Lockdown may be controlling the spread of virus but it could not prevent men dominating and controlling women within the house hold. It can be mentioned as an originator of violent behavior, has led to a major point in violent cases in many parts of the country.

When examining the existing prevention and intervention mechanism in Sri Lanka, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was enacted in 2005, as a civil remedy to prevent domestic violence and a Plan of Action for its implementation was developed. However, the women survivors are still not getting the full benefit of this legislation and studies to show that there is much space for improvements (Wijethilaka, 2009). While legal intervention in Sri Lanka has been firmly established, 1% of women survivors have the courage to take their case to the court in protection order proceeding. Legal and policy reforms have little effect on this problem and there is some other socio - cultural factors connected to domestic violence against women in Sri Lanka. Therefore, addressing the DV issue is remaining a problem that is concerned with a number of factors and it cannot be changed at once. To effectively inform appropriate social work intervention, it is crucial to identify factors associate with domestic violence against women. Therefore, the study investigates" what kind of contextual factors are important for intervenes domestic violence against women in Sri Lanka".

2. METHODS

In order to explore domestic violence against women with in the family during the COVID 19 pandemic, researcher used qualitative approach as it allowed in-depth collection of data to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's point of view. The study enables the researcher to explore the perceptions of women survivors because they are the experts in their experiential world. Case study approach applied here as qualitative strategy in which the researcher explores in depth an event. According to purposive sampling ten (10) Semi structured interviews were done with 08women survivors and 02 perpetrators. The study setting was Gampaha DS division, which is reported high rate of domestic violence cases and all the cases were reported to the counseling officer in the office. Interviews were conducted using open ended questions with the consent of the survivors. Highlighted themes were Key socio demographic features, types, extent, severity and frequency of violence, events leading to occurrence, the impact and adjustment and coping were explored.

3. POWER AND CONTROL: USING THE DULUTH WHEEL IN INTERVENTION/PRACTICE

The theoretical foundation of this study was based on the Duluth model rooted in feminist theory introduced by Dr. Evan Stark (1980). This is a classic model of behavior described by the misuse of power and control by one person over another. The Power and Control Wheel (See Figure 1) recognizes that men utilized violence and other means of abuses to exercise power and control over women and that because of their unequal social, economic and other status in the society. Power and control wheel represent the lived experience of women and it provide precise explanation of causes behind the incidents and beats them. The context of the violence against women covered through many social, cultural and institutional avenues that reflects power imbalance in the society. By naming the power differences social workers can provide support for victims and provide opportunities for change for perpetrators and advocacy for system and societal changes that ends violence against women.

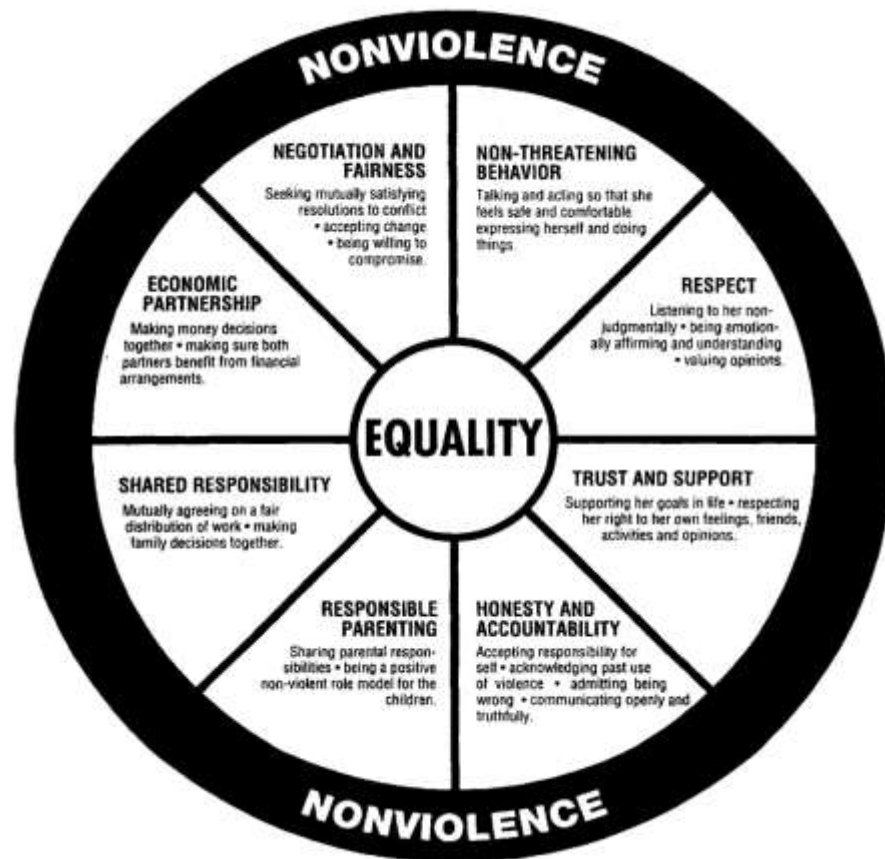
Figure 01: Power and Control Wheel



Power and Control Wheel shows the primary abusive behaviors experienced by women living with men who batter. It demonstrates that violence is part of a pattern of behavior rather than isolated incident or explosion of anger, frustration or painful feeling. They intentionally control or dominate his intimate partner and systematically use threats and coercion to inculcate fear. In many cases women victims are unaware that the controlling behaviors used against them are abusive. Therefore, the wheel can be used to point out the behaviors that have been used against women and factors behind them. It will help them to understand that they are not alone in their experience and support available for them. The Power and Control wheel can be used for perpetrators to

explore their abusive behavior and factors associate with them. The Equality Wheel (See Annexure 2) can be used as a tool to hold a discussion about the alternate ways of being in a relationship with women, free of violence and controlling.

Figure 02: The Equality Wheel



This can be used in Domestic Violence setting to describe abuse and factors associate with them Particularly in Social Work. Even though, The Power and Control Wheel does not attempt to give broad understanding of all violence in the home it suggests a more precise exploration of the tactic’s men use to women survivors based on contextual factors.

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The findings of the study revealed that there has been an alarming increase in domestic violence cases in Sri Lanka during lockdown period. This might be created by many factors. The lockdown in Sri Lanka has unintended and negative impacts in its economic loss of employment and economic distress have resulted in heightened the domestic violence occurrence within Sri Lankan families. As World Report on Violence & Health (2002) emphasis, Poverty is the greatest risk factor for domestic violence. Over 85% of the sample mentioned economic instability and challenges that directly impacted domestic violence. In particular, they were mentioned regarding a lockdown to further reduce their income prior to COVID-19. Poverty involves not only deprivation, but also hunger and additional stress and burdens with other problems. Economic distress and financially dependent on the perpetrator increased a women risk of violence and specially, highest rate of

violence found with men who had high level of job instability. According to self-reported data the reasons behind this were women lacks certain skills, passive attitudes to earn money for the family and so on. Failure of service delivery system caused by the pandemic have led raise of DV cases in the country. Especially medical services,

In addition, this suppression could control the spread of the virus, but it could not prevent males from dominating and controlling females. The lockdown may not have restricted the violent behavior of men and the women victims are being placed in the situation where it is difficult to seek help from outside. More than 90% of respondent who are affected due to power imbalance, abuse of power within marital relationship and lack of access to justice because of the failure of the system caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. Therefore, home in lockdown became a place of power expression and feminization of unpaid work. It has prevented the women victim from reaching out the law and immediate help.

The decision to leave a violence relationship is very difficult for women survivors, because they had to consider their own safety as well as safety of their children (Peterson, 2020) Illiteracy, unemployment and the dependency on their husbands for survival were reasons for staying in the abusive relationship. Brutality, physical and sexual violence were common among half of the respondents 50%, because of the lockdown and women were limited to their domestic space. Some of them connected with suicide risk factors.

Women survivors 90% who have experienced domestic violence did not expose their experience in public and reluctant to go through formal support system. This has led to hidden practice of DV and a culture of tolerance and acceptance of violence against women with negative impacts. Due to this, women survivors experienced violence in silence rather than seeking help. Sri Lanka similar to several parts of the world up to 95% tolerate domestic violence due to cultural obligation and in women and children fail to reach out for help when it is indeed (Wasundara,2000; Dutton,2006, Domestic Violence facts,2007). It that keep women exposed to domestic violence from seeking appropriate social support from formal services. The burden of stigma, social and economic vulnerabilities, the lack of formal protection systems and supportive access to justice, failure of service delivery system caused by the pandemic have led raise of domestic violence are significant factors that prevent women acting on domestic violence against them.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Domestic violence present in every country and there is no single strategy that will work in all situations and it depend on the social contexts such as gender dynamics, culture and economic structure that exist in the countries. Therefore, intervention should be designed with in the integrated framework that addresses structural causes of violence against women. Holistic understanding of each cause, hopes, women's perspectives of the problem and restricted options and her consequent need empowerment and need to work with them to develop capacity to decide their own future. This study therefore provides an insight on the possible intervention strategies to empower women in violence relationship

The study found a strong link between DV and economic distress; therefore, economic practice and employment policies play an important part in DV intervention process. Policy makers' and law

enforcement officials should give attention to prevent and detect DV within vulnerable and disadvantage groups.

6. CONCLUSIONS

There are some barriers that keep women exposed to domestic violence from seeking formal social support in Sri Lanka. A culture of silence surrounds the act of domestic violence and women survivors of domestic violence rarely tell their experience to the persons in formal service due to stigma (Garcia Moreno et al, 2005). Therefore, more knowledge is needed on women's deal with domestic violence to develop intervention programs

Because, the context for domestic violence in Sri Lanka must seek to understand the complexity of women's experience and identities that can act as barriers in terms of how they access support and how professionals relate to women survivors. Therefore, professionals in all sectors need training with South Asian perspective to break the cycle of violence and patriarchal beliefs among partners in the family.

Social work as a multidisciplinary subject it will provide insight to coordinate services offered by the government and non-government organizations and more effective programming, advocacy, and lobbying to minimize domestic violence against women. Through practical approaches of social work has very good strength to overcome the problem by using different strategies such as legal reform, service delivery, policy advocacy and public awareness. Therefore, this study argues comprehensive Social Work Intervention approach is vital if we are to see meaningful sustained change to intervene domestic violence against women.

REFERENCES

- United Nations. Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. New York: UN, 1993.
- Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health impacts of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. WHO: Geneva, 2013.
- Heise L, Garcia Moreno C. Violence by intimate partners. In: Krug EG et al., eds. World report on violence and health. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002
- Campbell JC. Health consequences of intimate partner violence. Lancet, 2002
- Heise L, Ellsberg M, Gottemoeller M. Ending violence against women. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Center for Communications Programs, 1999.
- Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lan October 2020,
- Neil, J. (2020). Domestic violence and COVID-19: Our hidden epidemic. *Australian Journal of General Practice*, 49, 25.
- Heise L, Garcia Moreno C. Violence by intimate partners. In: Krug EG et al., eds. World report on violence and health. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002
- Garcia-Moreno C et al. WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2005.
- Duluth model wheels can be found at - <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>
- Respect guidance for working with domestic abuse perpetrators - <https://www.respect.uk.net/resources/163-guidance-for-domestic-abuse-safeguarding-practitioners-working-with-domestic-abuse-perpetrators>