

## “New Bully” in Town or More Opportunities: The Rise in Domestic Violence amidst COVID-19 Outbreak

Mir Ibrahim Sajid<sup>1</sup>, Samira Shabbir Balouch<sup>2</sup>, Sajid Abaidullah<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The only job which never gets a break is ‘house service’ and with more people living at home the work just adds on. There was a sudden rise of ‘reported’ domestic violence in many countries of the world. Media, social and print hold the key in disseminating awareness of household abuse and call upon neighbors, families and friends to report violence.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, Lockdown, Domestic violence.

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It is generally believed that a person is only a saint if he does not get the opportunity to sin. Does this imply; keeping a man busy will ameliorate his chances of being his true self? The recent observations clearly point in this direction. With the COVID-19 outbreak, many governments have retorted to the implementation of ‘lockdown’ policies to prevent overcrowding and reduce the burden of disease transmission. For an effective lockdown to take place, all businesses particularly those operating in the services’ sector, offices, educational institutes and factories have been shut down and ‘staying at home’ has become the key player flattening the curve. Ideally, this should be perceived as a golden opportunity, to interact with family and make up for the lost time amongst the happenings of life however this did not sit well with

the masses.

Perhaps the only job which never gets a break is ‘house service’ and with more people living at home the work just adds on. Women are continuously monitored and prevented from making telephone calls to family and friends. They are also judged and critiqued for the slightest of mistakes and mistreated when ask for ‘sharing the burden’. It has been stated that “the prospect of loss of male power directly harms the figure of the male provider serving as a trigger for violent behavior” and comment on the stereotypes associated with female gender such as ‘family love’ and ‘maternal care’, preventing fair distribution of domestic responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

Usher et al,<sup>2</sup> mention how COVID-19 can be used as a ‘coercive control mechanism’ for the abusers to exert control in abusive relationships especially in a confined setting, feeding of the vulnerability of the victim. With the lockdown imposed, charities providing support to people facing domestic violence cannot actively participate in helping out and retort to police help as the only option. However, police can only do so little. Vieira et al,<sup>3</sup> reported (18%) increase in domestic violence in Brazil alone since the lockdown. While there was (20%) increase in domestic and sexual abuse in Spain and (30%) in Cyprus.<sup>4</sup> United

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1. Mir Ibrahim Sajid  
Aga Khan University, Karachi–Pakistan.
  2. Samira Shabbir Balouch  
Section of Maxillofacial Trauma Surgery  
King Edward Medical University, Lahore–Pakistan.
  3. Sajid Abaidullah  
Professor, Department of Medicine  
King Edward Medical University, Lahore–Pakistan.

Correspondence to:  
Mir Ibrahim Sajid  
Medical College, Aga Khan University, Karachi–Pakistan  
Email: ibisajid@gmail.com

Kingdom's domestic help hotline blinked (25%) more than usual in just seven days of strict lockdown with a (150% ) increase in visits to Refugee websites.<sup>4</sup>

The sudden rise of 'reported' domestic violence was met seriously by the United Nations who called upon countries to extend support to the affected groups and make contingency plans to help people affected by familial violence.<sup>5</sup> Measures have been taken by certain governments in providing relief to the victims. France has installed emergency warning systems in pharmacies and grocery stores, whereby victims can communicate to the staff through special code words, in order to seek police help.<sup>6</sup> Jones and colleague call upon governments to allow functioning of protecting and supporting services that provide 'crisis and therapeutic support to victim-survivors'.<sup>4</sup> Formation and training of specialized healthcare worker teams, who can identify risk situations and provide social support to the affected families is underway in Brazil.<sup>3</sup>

State institutions need to play an instrumental role in preventing the escalation of domestic violence during the lockdown which may suggest its association with an increased domestic homicide rate.<sup>4</sup> In countries where domestic abuse reporting helpline are not set up efforts should be made in installing the facility as soon as possible. Where installed, responsiveness and alertness of the staff should be ensured by manning more responders and volunteers. Media, social and print hold the key in disseminating awareness of household abuse and call upon neighbors, families and friends to report violence. Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

*Professor Sajid Abaidullah (MBBS, FCPS) is the Head of North Medicine at Mayo Hospital Lahore and senior faculty member at King Edward Medical University. He is a lifetime fellow and Vice President of Pakistan Society of Internal Medicine's Punjab Chapter. His basic research interests include Cardio-metabolic Health, Gastrointestinal and Hepatobiliary diseases. He has authored over 80 peer-reviewed publications in indexed journal and supervised numerous research projects in a career spanning over three decades.*

### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None to disclose.

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### Author's Contribution

**SMI:** Acquisition of published data.

**BSS:** Drafting of manuscript with critical revision.

**AS:** Critical review and approval of the final version.