



Covid-19 Riddle Exacerbating Gender (in) Equalities

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ABSTRACT

There are clusters of evidence of gender-based violence (GBV) have been happening across the world for more than a year or so due to the effects of restricted movement of people due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It turns out that women specially Health Care Workers (HCWs) per se are being victimised owing to 'paradoxical effects' on account of intermittent lockdown culminated into encountering Intimate Partner violence (IPV). In this article, the authors elucidate a comprehensive picture of both GBV and IPV of countries irrespective of Global North and South through a medical sociological analysis of woman HCWs and other innocents women in the household domain by evidenced based interpreting the publication history, retrieved from the PUBMED, and Google search engine between 1930 and early 2021, covering a large number of developed and developing countries. The article also critically analyses the pattern of violence-specific digitised rescue system including building temporary shelters for rescued victims with the support of the respective government agents and NGOs. This present comprehensive picture of both GBV and IPV in workstation and household level can assist restructuring the fruitful dialogue amongst the policy makers around the world to re-programme the gender norms for the benefit of women.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic intensifies social, economic and health stress coupled with strict quarantine and social isolation measures that aggravates pre-existing 'inequitable gender norms' (IISD, 1995) vis-à-vis a plethora of inequalities across the globe (UN Policy Brief, 2020). Gender based violence (GBV) is a manifestation of such inequality's resultant of the imposition of patriarchal hegemony (ILO and UN, 2020), which has been further exacerbated by the current pandemic that has swayed the world economy with a cumulative loss of about US\$9 trillion to the global GDP in 2020 (IMF, 2020). It is even bigger than the combined economies of Germany and Japan (Barbosa *et al.*, 2020). This pandemic morphs into a social (inequalities), political (fragile empowerment), economic crisis (threat to women's employment and livelihoods) and intersecting forms (e.g., ethnicity, population, disability, class, age and socio-economic status) of discrimination (Dlamini, 2020; Roseboom, 2020) faced by adolescent girls and puerperal women (Tang *et al.*, 2020; UN Women, 2020; Ray *et al.*, 2021).

Under such circumstances, several state-nations and nation-states, despite being provided with guidelines from UN-Women and UNFPA (UNFPA, 2020), have failed to conform to the numerous policies addressing the issue of GBV – which, for a handful of decades, has been regarded as a hidden

phenomenon. This is but a direct reflection of male authority over women in the distribution of power notwithstanding a sundry of resolutions to prevent GBV (Beijing Declaration, 2020). Outraged labor continued to wreak vengeance on the traitors.

Gender Based Violence -Pandemic-Quarantine: Axis of Fear

In response to combat GBV, governments across the globe have brought about gender mainstreaming into policy for the well-being of women - conceptually formalized at the Beijing International Women's Conference (IISD, 1995; UNDOC, 2020). The same is being implemented to tone down the emotional and sexual sufferings of women (e.g., 15-49 years) against potential violence from an intimate partner (OIA, 2020) – a figure that amounts to nearly 243 million (UN WOMEN, 2020). Besides, relegating women into the realm of frontline healthcare work in terms of “motherhood penalty” (UN WOMEN, 2020) imposes a severe jolt against disproportional “double burden” (Lange *et al.*, 2015) of less paid (in workstation) and unpaid-labour (in family) being contributed to care-economy, which estimates to 5% of the global GDP (ILO, 2020).

The situation is further aggravated due to the prolonged Télétravail (working-from-home) and closure of schools (Cottingham *et al.*, 2019). In the name of politically empowering domestic and working women, their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are virtually ignored (Hall *et al.*, 2020). Onyango *et al.* (2019) have demonstrated that women and girls have succumbed to intersecting injustices, against colour, stigma, and discrimination. Rose (2020) demonstrates how the outbreak of Ebola (2014-2016) has victimized women to experience unrecognized, albeit de-prioritized, sexual violence during strict quarantine and school closures in West Africa.

UNFPA (2020) puts forward that the occurrence of gender inequality in an array of ‘social classes and cultural groups’ of all societies often lead to the collapse of basic social infrastructures. This before long, not only augments conflicts, weaknesses, but also is worsened by pandemic driven unpredictable setbacks. World Health Organization's (WHO) estimation of pre-Covid-19 GBV in eighty countries is 1 in 3 (35%) - a number that has been increased further during lockdown (Roseboom, 2020). Li's (2020) hypothesis on the erosion of social norms (e.g., social distance), which is inversely proportional to domestic violence, what is termed as a “hidden pandemic” (Donato, 2020) is consistent with the effect of Covid-19 attributed to widespread IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) (Cheng *et al.*, 2006). This ensuing “hidden pandemic” propels victimized women and girls into a vicious cycle, where both mental and physical tortures and very low levels of self-esteem reinforce each other (Bradbury-Jones and Ishamm, 2020). This is further consistent with Bradbury-Jones and Isham's (2020) hypothesis of the paradoxical effects on the current pandemic, that shows how, despite the honest efforts of governments to reduce horizontal transmission by imposing a stay-at-home dictum, authorities have, surreptitiously, potentially triggered GBV inside the house, particularly within the framework of dyadic relationship (Benson and Fox, 2001).

Didactic Sociativity

A dyad or pair is a certain kind of sociative relation that consists of attraction (*live-birth-suckling-syndromic mother-infant pair*) and repulsion (*shifting of husband-wife pair into unpair due to GBV and IPV*) between two biological units of individuals. A dyad is a purpose-specific sociological configuration that is only relevant in a complementary sense. This circumscribes small “sociativity” - that further develops into a dyadic pattern by the entry of multifold elements over a period of time. To become a dyad unit, it has to be a patterned mutual action, violation of which turns into a covert situation, where one individual is repulsed at the cost of sheer unawareness of the other. This actually happens

in the evolving incidence of age-old domestic violence of different patterns with a pretext of shifting obligations, responsibilities, commitments, and even victim-blaming - particularly during long-standing lockdown driven economic sufferings, and a loss of hope of social solidarity from the intimate partner (Becker and Useem, 1942).

The greater the husband-wife dyad intimacy, the wider the possibility of conflicts exacerbated by 'paradoxical effects' due to the home-quarantine derived insanity against the backdrop of Covid-19 driven invalidism (Waller, 1930). This posits heavily on the horizontal or the vertical mobility of one or both members that generates deep frustrations, highly confusing bafflements, and problematic disappointments, which in turn, have generated a huge pilling of dissociative process that makes an ample precondition of pair into an unpair, which is once again consistent with the remarks of masculine exploitation in case of the affinal dyad (Waller, 1938).

It by all means, breaks the subjective bond between husband and wife making the latter more prone to IPV, ultimately constituting a heavy damage on the parent-child dyad and the family as a whole, which are the main preconditions of generating diversified forms of domestic violence with a negative feeling - allegiance to "if you are not on my side you are against me" (Mahase, 2020). Hence, any hairpin crack in conjugal interdependence complex could alter the fundamental configuration of marital dyad that provokes the incidence of GBV, what is exactly happening in COVID-19 outbreak worldwide.

This is validated by the report of UNFPA (2020), which mentioned about the 20% increase in GBV cases beyond the predictable range in all UN member countries. The WHO has separately registered more than 60% emergency telecommunications from IPV victims from European Union states alone (Bradley *et al.*, 2020). In addition, Canada has registered 30% -50% (Agüero, 2020), Peru reports 48% (Vora *et al.*, 2020), National Commission for Women of India (Wanqing, 2020), Tunisia (OIA, 2020), and China (Bourdieu, 2001) reported twofold, fivefold, and threefold increase, respectively. This is further augmented by male dominance, the kind that exercises authority without even challenging the paradoxical character of the doxa (Graham-Harrison *et al.*, 2020).

Both UNDOC (2020) and Graham-Harrison *et al.* (2020) have reported 60%, 30%, 12.5%, 33%, and 40-50% spiking calls in Great Britain (UNSG, 2018), Cyprus, Spain, Singapore and Brazil respectively in GBV in the midst of the 'global pandemic' (New York Times, 2020) that has resulted in the enactment of lockdown, compulsory social-distancing and home quarantine. Since the lockdown, France (BBC News, 2020) and Argentina have registered 30% and 25% GBV victims, respectively (OIA, 2020). In UK, women belonging to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) face a double burden due to Windrush conflict (Boserup *et al.* 2020) and ethnicity/population (Dlamini, 2020). That is to say, they experience violence both at home and in public places. Boserup *et al.*, (2020) report 27% and 10% increase in GBV in Jefferson County Alabama and New York City respectively. They further explain that with a report of 22% arrests in Portland, the penny drops, and the United States Homeland Security becomes the virtual savior (Outlook, 2020).

There is a twofold rise in GBV in the peninsular Indian as reported by Outlook (WIEGO, 2020), including police harassment on women farmers (Feroz, 2020). Data from South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries have revealed the preponderance of escalated GBV on women, including children. The figures shoot upto about 90% in Pakistan (Phakathi, 2020), 26% in Sri Lanka (WEPS, 2020), and 61% in Nepal (Islam, 2020). After having accumulated the report of 27 out of 64 Upa-jilas, in April, 2020, Bangladesh has estimated more than 4000 women and 400 children

subject to this “hidden pandemic” (Godin, 2020).

Combating Gender Based Violence

John *et al.* (2020) has showed that the purpose-built US based organization is a suitable alternative to promptly reduce domestic violence through keeping online texting services for victims for sending emergency message for immediate rescue. Besides, counseling over telephone in Ecuador (Higgins, 2020), Skype support systems in Italy (Higgins, 2020), and using code ‘Mask-19’ by Spanish women in the Canary Islands for alerting local pharmacist for informing police assistants (Fraser, 2020) are hitherto mitigating strategies to combat this social menace. However, authorities in some parts of the globe become proactive in making shelters for incoming clients (Davies and Bennett, 2016), who are highly exposed to Covid-19 (Bijl, 2020; Wenham *et al.*, 2020), but subject to the approval of negative Covid-19 dépitage – (testing).

Honest attempts from women through their rights-based organizations seem worth mentioning. Despite the economic fallout, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank Group have provided social safety nets (Peterman *et al.*, 2020) to ensure protective shelter for victims, rescue networks and the like as per the recommendation of Peterman and colleagues (Linde and González, 2020) on GBV-response systems. Further, declarations of G7 and G20 facilitate to negotiate gender-based differences to coherently response to the mandate of *Global Solidarity to fight Covid-19* (Luthans *et al.*, 2006).

Unrelenting effect of Covid-19 crisis acts as a hindrance for victims to use their psychological capitals (e.g., resilience, optimism, self-trained and hope) (Katz and Moore, 2013) as these and the perpetrators’ mischievousness are often cross-talked to make this menace more problematic. Victims have, more often than not, miserably failed to contact rescue teams. This envisages the strong advocacy of ‘messaging’ (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2001), bringing another component, called ‘bystander’s behavior’ (neighbour’s attitude) to play a key role to be a saviour for victims. Altruistic role of bystanders as messengers to inform GBV rescue teams could play an effective role to reasonably nullify unrecognized violence as opposed to the victim’s message.

This, however, has a pertinent limitation of not being able to deploy rescue team in response to urgency despite the altruistically prompt reporting from the side of the bystanders. Nevertheless, the victim’s veiled protest under the pretence of fear of insecurity might remain a deterrence against any legal intervention (Jarnecke and Flanagan, 2020). Here, Luthans and colleagues’ (Luthans *et al.*, 2006) “psychological capital” turns into Jarnecke and Flanagan’s (Neil, 2020) “capital incentives”, that pave the way of working out apps, especially for tracing domestic miscreants by availing the advantage of absentees using particular colour against imminent risk to negotiate the unpredictable inevitable social anomalies as corroborated by Neil (UNPR, 2015).

Gender Equality: Inclusiveness over Reality

WHO, as a wing of United Nation Organization, has set up a Gender Equity Hub (GEH) unit in November 2017 under the formal recommendation of the UN Security Council resolutions No. 2245 (GHRP, 2020). The role of GEH is twofold in monitoring women’s health and providing for the protection of women against imminent violence under the UN umbrella of security landscape (UNDP, 2016). GEH further enables World Bank Group to accommodate women of all UN member countries in leadership role to thereby attain SDG 05 (Heymann *et al.*, 2019).

In every policy decision, attainment of gender equality is indubitably focused, but hardly implemented. Many efforts for streamlining gender norms are supposed to be the inconspicuous (Lau *et al.*, 2020). Notwithstanding enjoyment of equal participation by both the sexes in the United Nation-based projects of reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation (UN REDD), women are almost always considered as a proxy rather than having the right to exercise their authority in working out designs and implementing initiatives with full accountability (Cislaghi and Heise, 2020).

Marsan and Ruddy's (2020) ground breaking work on women empowerment appears to be economically marginalized women in selected countries, has heaved a sigh of relief. Large numbers of women are recruited in women-led enterprises and post-compulsory educational programmes as a part of "inclusive digital economy" in South East Asia (Copley and Decker, 2020), "inclusive economic recovery" across Sub-Saharan Africa (Ragan, 2020), all of which are driving forces for enriching their psychological capital. Hounsokou (2020) has mentioned about "community gate keepers", which has been learned from the Ebola incidence by UNFPA (2020) to make it additionally instrumental in the Covid-19 case in African countries in GBV/IPV mitigating programmes.

Conclusion

Hence, "Covid-19 is feminine" ("la") (as endorsed by Academie Francaise) has earned its confidence from the Beijing Declaration (Rose, 2020). It could be the most appropriate epithet against GBV and IPV that is consistent with the declaration for gender-equality and women's rights (AFP, 2020; Pearson, 2020). This epithet marks the end of referring to the masculine nature of "le Covid-19" under the taxonomical varieties of coronavirus as an umbrella term (Zhu *et al.*, 2020). The WHO has also initially made use of "la" to focus on the Covid-19 – used as a specific nomenclature to identify the disease and its implication on the society (WHO, 2020). Both the Canadian government and the Royal Spanish Academy have issued similar guidance to mention the feminine form of Covid-19 (Surita *et al.*, 2020). The effective voice against SRHR in LMIC and high-income-countries to tone down the masculine exploitation arguably through the global and local strategies consistent with social norms theory is a distinct case in point. Be that as it may, the elusive Covid-19 predominantly exists as an under-current, whose unpredictable characteristics appear to generate another bout, which may cripple the economy that virtually augments the upward trend of GBV. Hence, there is an urgent requirement for combinatorial strategy involving governments, international bodies, supports and self-help groups to jointly act to alter the deleterious impact of family dynamics (Orisadare, 2021) to mark the International Women's Day as a stronger vision towards gender equality symbolising a breaking of the glass ceiling!

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