



# INCIDENCE AND CAUSES FOR UNDER-REPORTING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG MARRIED WOMEN OF HINDU COMMUNITY DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN KERALA.

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## ABSTRACT

*The covid 19 pandemic induced lockdown has resulted in the increase of registered domestic violence cases in Kerala. It is believed that the number of unreported cases are higher than the reported. Even though there are studies on effects of lockdown on violence against women and their mental health consequences, the research for evaluating the causes of violence and the stigma to seek support by victims are less. This study analyzes the rate of domestic violence against married women of Hindu community during covid 19 pandemic. The survey includes the causes of domestic violence and the reasons for under-reporting. The study was conducted among 200 married Hindu women in the rural outskirts of Thrissur using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was modified to include questions about causes and support seeking. The result depicted that the rate of domestic violence against Hindu women has increased after the covid 19 lockdown. The main causes are controlling behaviors of abusers, stress due to unemployment and unavailability of alcohol. The issue is more seen in low socio-economic families and 21.5% of the victims have never sought help from authorities. The main causes of under-reporting are economic dependency to abusers, unemployment and lack of economic support for victims, unawareness about women rights and fear towards offenders. Providing behavioral therapy or counselling sessions to perpetrators, rehabilitating alcoholic abusing offenders, educating about gender equality and empowering women through education and training skills like handicraft for self employment will help to reduce the issues.*

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## 2. INTRODUCTION

To prevent the spread of covid 19 the government imposed lockdown and other restrictions encouraging individuals to stay at home. However this had an impact on violence against women in households. Domestic violence is the violent or aggressive behaviors including physical, sexual, emotional and economical abuse mainly by an intimate partner. It can have a negative effect on the health of women causing anxiety, stress and depression along with the risk of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and even leading to self harm and death.

Domestic violence has always been an issue for women and children. According to WHO (2021), globally 1 out of 3 women have encountered physical or sexual violence and in majority of the cases the abuser is the intimate partner. As per the report of National Commission for Women (NCW) India (2020) the total number of cases reported for 'Protection of Women against Domestic Violence' is 5297, 'Harassment of married women/Dowry harassment' is 3788 and 'Dowry death' is 330. In some parts of India like Tamil Nadu and Bangalore the number of cases of domestic violence reported at police stations during covid 19 lockdown has increased, on the other hand the non governmental organisations functioning against domestic violence have observed a fall in the number of calls received from victims for help (Krishnakumar & Verma, 2021). The lockdown restrictions and living with the perpetrators all the time may have led to the decreased access to services for women making them vulnerable to abusive behaviors of intimate partners and family members. Even after the government declared relaxations to the restriction, the surge in domestic violence is continuing.

The domestic violent cases in Kerala have also increased after Covid 19 pandemic. According to National Family Health Survey - 5 (NFHS - 5) 2019-2020, 9.9% of married women in Kerala of age 18-49 years has experienced either physical or sexual violence from their partners. Under Kerala Police's 'Crime against women', the number of registered cases in 'Cruelty by Husband or Relative' was 2707 in the year 2020 whereas 3252 cases in 2021 till september and 8 'Dowry deaths in 2021 (till september) compared to 6 in 2020. Though Kerala is one of the top literate states in India, the victims are reluctant to report the crime to authorities.

The Hindu community is the major religious community in India. According to the India census 2011 the Hindus constitute 79.80% of the Indian population and 54.73% of Kerala's population. With wide subdivision the communities lifestyle and cultural practices vary across regions. Unlike other communities in India, Hindus



don't have specific religious authorities or cultural laws which make them independent to follow any type of social behaviors. This may have both positive and negative impact on the life of individuals and their family. This Study investigates the rate, causes and the reason for hesitancy to report domestic violence in married women of Hindu communities in rural parts of Thrissur during covid 19 pandemic.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS HEALTH EFFECTS

According to Protection of Women From Domestic Violence Act, 2005 domestic violence is defined as “*harms or injures or endangers the health, safety, life, limb or well-being, whether mental or physical, of the aggrieved person or tends to do so and includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse or harasses, harms, injures or endangers the aggrieved person with a view to coerce her or any other person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any dowry or other property or valuable security*”. This has an impact on the physical, mental and sexual and reproductive health of the victim. Study in women within one year after childbirth who experienced physical and emotional violence from an intimate partner reported to have poor general health, increased depressive symptoms and self reported anxiety, painful intercourse along with body dissatisfaction compared to women with no history of violence (FitzPatrick et al, 2020). It is observed that domestic violence is an indicator of depression, anxiety and perceived stress in married women (Indu et al, 2021).

#### 3.2. CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Age of women, duration of marriage, education, family income, employment, substance abuse are the determinants of domestic abuse (Battacharya et al 2020). Additionally during covid 19 pandemic the stress due to restrictions, unemployment, unavailability of alcohol and availability after a long time has increased the frequency of violence (Singh et al, 2020). A study conducted on the basis of National Family Health Survey - 4 (NFHS-4) observed that unequal distribution of power among partners and controlling behavior of husbands is associated with the occurrence of domestic violence and highlighted that women have lower possibility of experiencing abuse in households having equality in decision making (Mondal & Paul, 2021). The controlling behavior of husbands is a predictor of domestic violence.

According to The Duluth Model of Power and Control Wheel abusers use tactics like intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying and blaming, using children, using male privilege, economic abuse, coercion and threats. In an abusive relationship, the offender uses physical and sexual violence with these approaches to attain control over the victim.

#### 3.3. CULTURE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A study based on the cultural factors in domestic violence has noticed that the cultural backgrounds have an influence on victims to consider violence from intimate partners as acceptable. The majority of the participants of this survey were from Hindu community (Stephens & Eaton, 2020). As per Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, a married Hindu woman who experiences violence from an intimate partner has rights to attain a legal divorce and to claim for maintenance while living separately from her spouse.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among 200 married women of Hindu community aged 18 - 60 years from rural parts of Thrissur in October 2021. A questionnaire regarding domestic violence was distributed to participants who gave consent for study. The study was conducted confidentially without involving the family members. The questions were adapted from NFHS - 5 questionnaire, Section 11 on 'Household relations' and was modified to include questions regarding cause of violence and hesitation to report to authority. The question was translated to malayalam for the convenience of participants. The first part of the questionnaire includes Socio - demographic data of the participants and the second part has questions regarding domestic violence.



		Never	Rarely	Often	Always
1	Emotional violence				
	a. Embarrass you in a social setting	0	1	2	3
	b. Threaten to harm you or children or other family members	0	1	2	3
	c. Blame you or hurt your self esteem	0	1	2	3
2	Physical violence				
	a. Pushing, shaking, Slapping or throwing something at you	0	1	2	3
	b. Kicking, Dragging, Beating or Punching with fist or object	0	1	2	3
	c. Try to choke, burn or attack you with a weapon	0	1	2	3
	d. Have any of these happened to you when you were pregnant	0	1	2	3
3	Sexual violence				
	a. Force or Threaten you to have sexual intercourse without your consent	0	1	2	3
	b. Force or Threaten you to perform sexual acts without your consent	0	1	2	3
4	Do the frequency of these behaviors changed after covid 19 lockdown	No change	Increased	Decreased	

5	Does the violent or aggressive behavior of your partner related to any of the following issues:  1. Unavailability of alcohol 2. Stress due to unemployment 3. Extra marital relationship 4. Dowry 5. Work stress 6. Controlling behavior 7. Economic loss	Yes = 1	No = 2
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6	Have you ever reported about the violence to authorities	Yes	No
7	What were the reasons for not reporting the violence to authorities: a. Unemployment or Lack of financial support b. Lack of support from family and friends c. Economic dependency to abusers d. Unawareness about laws and privileges for women e. Fear towards offender f. Other :		

### 5. RESULTS

As per the data collected from 200 participants, on an average of 51(25.5%) married Hindu women have encountered at least one form of domestic violence. The socio - demographic data states that the rate of violence is more in women who are below poverty line (17.5%) compared to women above poverty line(8.5%) (this category was based on the type of ration card). In total, 36.5% have Higher secondary education and 24% have college education. On the contrary 74% of the women were unemployed.

	Socio-Demographic data	
1	Age	
	a. < 20 years	15
	b. 20 - 30 years	37
	c. 30 - 40 years	65
	d. 40 - 50 years	61
	e. 50 - 60 years	22
2	Type of ration card	
	a. BPL card	139
	b. APL card	61
3	Education:	
	a. No education	0
	b. Primary	20
	c. Secondary	59
	d. Higher Secondary	73
	e. College	48
4	Employment status:	
	a. Employed	52
	b. Unemployed	148
5	Duration of marriage:	
	a. < 5 years	42
	b. 5 - 10 years	67
	c. 10 - 20 years	65
	d. > 20 years	26

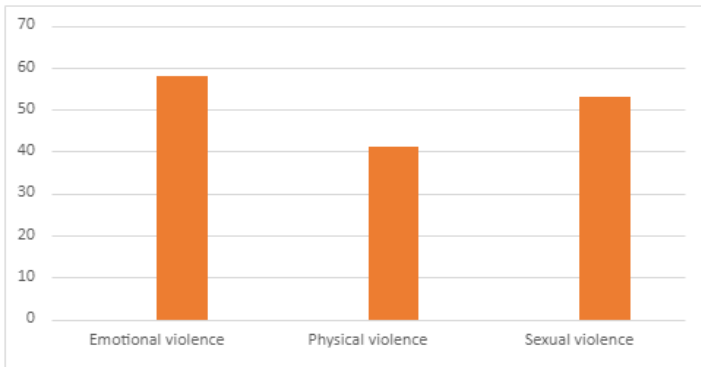


Figure 1

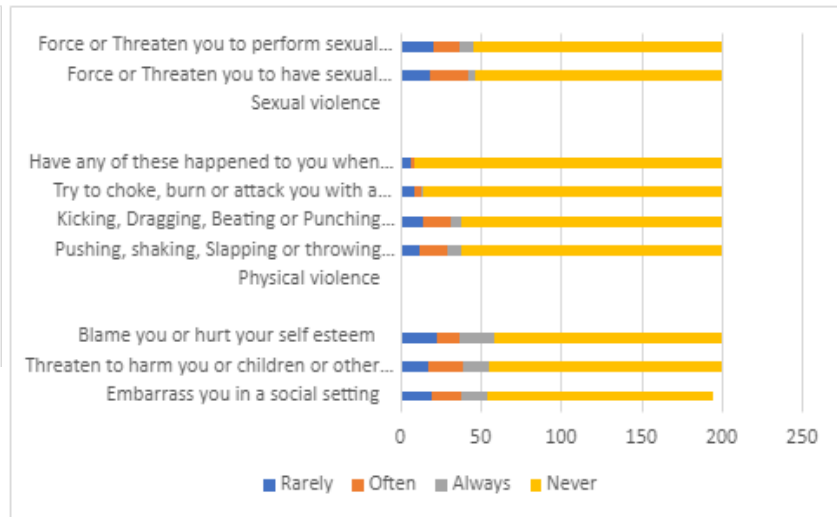


Figure 2

The most common form of violence is emotional violence (29%) followed by sexual (26.5%) and physical (20.5%) violence (Figure 1). Humiliating in a social setting and hurting victims self esteem are the common types of emotional violence. Forcing or threatening to perform sexual intercourse and actions like pushing, slapping, kicking and dragging are predominant in sexual and physical violence respectively (Figure 2 ). It is noted that during pregnancy the rate of physical violence is low(4.5%). According to the data obtained, 13.5% of victims claims that the frequency of domestic violence has increased after the covid 19 lockdown whereas 10.5% has no change and 2% had a decreased exposure to violence (Figure 3).

Figure 3

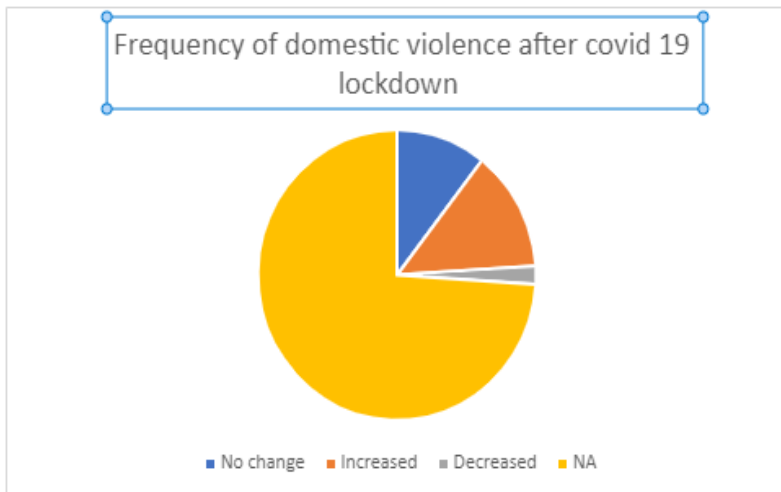
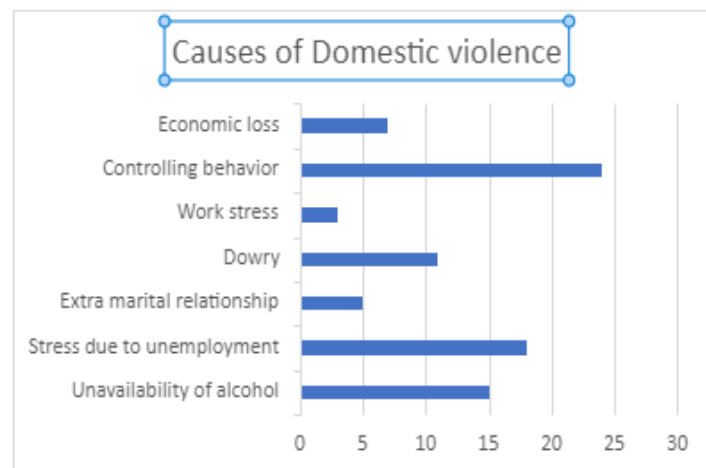


Figure 4



The most prevailing factors of domestic violence are controlling behavior of offenders(12%), stress due to unemployment(9%) and unavailability of alcohol(7.5%) along with dowry issues, economic loss, extramarital affairs and work stress (Figure 4). It is observed that only 4.5% of the victims have reported the violence and 21.5% have never sought help from authorities. In the concerns regarding under-reporting of domestic violence, the economic dependency to abusers (13.5%) is the major issue that causes hesitancy in victims (Figure 5). In addition, unemployment or lack of financial support (11%), unawareness about women rights (9.5%), fear towards offenders and lack of social support have an effect on victims' decision to complain to authorities and in some cases it is due to the feeling of responsibility towards children.

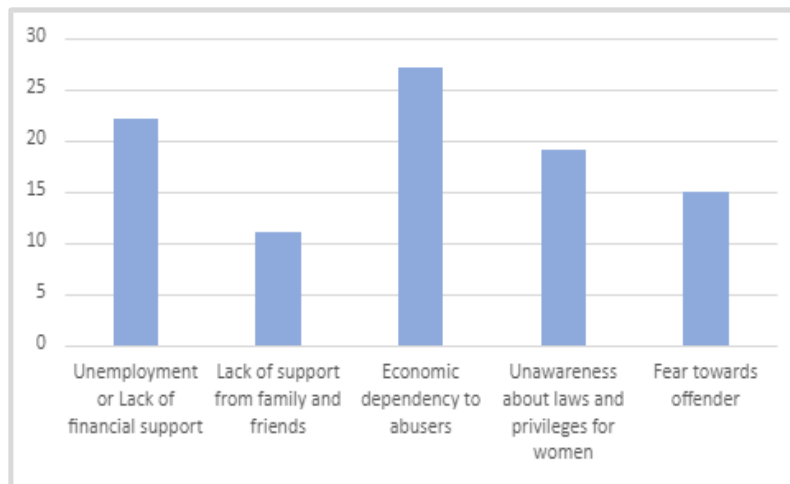


Figure 5

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the study on married Hindu women, it is concluded that Covid 19 pandemic has increased the rate of domestic violence compared to previous years. It was observed that socio-economic status has an effect on domestic violence and is more seen in lower class families whereas the duration of marriage has no influence. The main causes are controlling behavior in husbands, stress due to unemployment, unavailability of alcohol, dowry and extra marital relationships. Most of the causes are related to behavioral issues of perpetrators. In majority of the cases the victims has never reported to authorities and the hesitancy was mainly due to economic dependency to abusers, unemployment and lack of other economic support, unawareness about the laws and privileges for women in India, fear towards offenders, lack of social support from family and friends and commitment towards children. The victims only report abuse when the violent behaviors are directed towards children or the act becomes life threatening or with social support. To address these issues appropriate measures should be taken to educate men and women about equality in the relationship and to empower women through education and employment.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce the rate of domestic violence in the society, measures should be taken by Kerala State Government to prevent violence, to empower women and rehabilitate offenders.

**SCHOOL LEVEL PREVENTION PROGRAM:** Along with educating about gender equality and mutual respect to students, teachers should be trained to avoid gender disparities in school. Behavioral health programs and psychological support should be provided to children and adolescents to prevent alcoholism, substance abuse and behavioral issues like conduct disorders and narcissistic personality disorder in the future. This can prevent the major cause of domestic violence (alcoholism and controlling behavior).

**COMMUNITY LEVEL PREVENTION PROGRAM:** Premarital counselling should be made compulsory to Hindu couples like Christian and other communities in Kerala before legal registration of marriage. This can promote a healthy relationship and prevent personal conflicts among partners. Conducting education sessions for families to advocate gender equality practices in households, to prevent giving and receiving any forms of dowry, even in the form of gifts and to ensure economic independence in women before marriage.

**EMPOWERING WOMEN:** Empowering women is not limited to educating but also providing equal opportunity in employment and decision making. In addition to school education, training on skills such as tailoring, plumbing, beautician and driving can help women in being economically independent. Advertisements about programmes and plans implemented by government to prevent violence against women and the relevant helpline numbers should be exhibited on local television channels and social media on a regular basis. The outreach of these services to rural parts can be increased with the help of automated calls and messages. For women having no access to technologies, the services can be made available by ASHA workers.

**REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS:** For perpetrators having controlling behavior, yogic meditation can be used with counselling sessions. While meditating use of religious chanting or self control mantras will be



useful for emotional stability. Rehabilitation of alcoholic offenders through spiritual centers will be helpful. Ayurvedic treatment for Alcoholism is effective as the procedure focuses on both mind and body. In many Ayurvedic centers this treatment is merged with spiritual beliefs of patients. However there are only a few Ayurvedic centres that provide quality treatment for alcoholism. Increasing the number of ayurvedic rehabilitation centres or integrating Ayurvedic therapy with Allopathic procedures will produce a better result.

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