# **The growing concern around violence against women in India – Where do we stand?**



Global Statistics on Violence against Women (VAW) shows that one in three women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual violence in their lifetime by an intimate partner ([WHO, 2017](https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women)). As per United Nations, 18% of women and girls aged 15 to 49 years who have ever been in a relationship have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months ([UNDOCS, 2019](https://undocs.org/en/E/2019/68)), while in India this number increases to 29.5% ([NFHS 4, 2015-16](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-4Reports/India.pdf)). Furthermore, 38% of all murders of women are committed by male intimate partners ([WHO, 2017](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women)). This figure does not even account for all the other forms of violence against women i.e. sexual harassment, kidnapping & abduction.

VAW like COVID-19 is a global pandemic which is deep-rooted in unjust and unequal power and gender relations ([CARE International, 2018](https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/publications/counting-the-cost-the-price-society-pays-for-violence-against-women#:~:text=violence%20against%20women-,Counting%20the%20cost%3A%20The%20price%20society%20pays%20for%20violence%20against,and%20high%20income%20countries%20alike.)) and can’t distinguish social or economic boundaries and affects women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds. This is a human rights violation with great impact on victims, their families, and communities and is a growing concern both for India and the World. VAW entails significant social and economic costs. In some countries, VAW is estimated to cost up to 3.7% of their GDP – more than double than some countries spend on education ([World Bank, 2019](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls)) and creates barriers for women and girls to have an equal participation in the economy and society which affects the overall socio-economic development ([The LANCET, 2015](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61830-4/fulltext#articleInformation)).

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, people throughout the world have been affected all ways of their life – in terms of access to health, education, financial resources etc. In this pandemic, protecting people’s lives as well as the frontline facilities is now the current priority for Government of India (GOI). The GOI have rolled-up their sleeves for getting into actions to tackle this health disaster which led to impose a nation-wide lockdown from March 24th – May 31st, 2020 that created massive disruption in service delivery and access to services. These effects are more distinct for [women and girls](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/04/hq_covid-19_photos.pdf?la=en&vs=902) due to pre-existing gendered cultural biases and social norms that make them particularly vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated pre-existing conditions of VAW and [worsened](https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10-year-high-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31885001.ece) gender inequalities.

COVID-19 has already posed challenges to women and children. Since the mandatory lockdown has been imposed, the [early data](http://164.100.58.238/frmReportNature.aspx?Year=2020) showed that VAW is exponentially rising throughout India. Data from National Commission of Women (NCW) shows that in India, women filed more domestic violence complaints during the lockdown than recorded in a similar period in the last 10 years. Between March 25 and May 31, 1,477 complaints of domestic violence have been registered. This 68-day period recorded more complaints than those received between March and May in the previous 10 years ([The Hindu, 2020](https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10-year-high-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31885001.ece)).

The [early evidence](https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/covid-19-shadow-pandemic-and-violence-against-women.html) suggested that domestic violence complaints have increased by 131% in May 2020, in districts with the strictest lockdown rules and rape and sexual assault complaints have decreased by 119% during the same period in the same districts, consistent with decreased female mobility in public spaces, public transport, and workplaces ([Ravindran and Shah, 2020](https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/covid-19-shadow-pandemic-and-violence-against-women.html)). The pandemic already has placed an enormous burden on health systems and with COVID-19, an increased reporting of domestic violence or shadow pandemic exposes the fault lines of gender equality which needs urgent attention and failures to address the issue will require a significant cost for the future ([UN Women 2020](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006)).

It becomes all the more important to create a space for having the necessary dialogues around the issue in India. To stimulate thoughts on this important issue within the context of India, International Growth Centre of London School of Economics, Asian Development Research Institute will organise a Webinar on “Growing Concern Around Violence Against Women and Girls” to build an understanding over a range of targeted initiatives for tackling VAW during the pandemic from health, safety, and governance perspectives on **November 25th 2020** from **16.00 – 17.30 (IST)**.