



## The Impact of Covid-19 on Domestic Violence: A Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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### ABSTRACT

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This research study focuses on the impact of Covid-19 on domestic violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The target population of this research study was the number of local households of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The data was collected from the local households in six districts including Swat, Mardan, Swabi, Charsadda, Peshawar and Nowshera. From six districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 300 samples were collected. From each district 50 samples were collected including 25 females and 25 males. All the samples were randomly selected. The data was manually collected in the form of a pre-tested questionnaire. Domestic violence was measured by Conflict Tactics Scale. The results revealed that Covid-19 lock down was a painful situation that increased frustration among the people when coupled with economic uncertainty resulted in domestic violence. Factors that highly contributed to domestic violence during Covid-19 lock down included social isolation, frustration, stress and anxiety. The results did not support the null hypothesis; hence, the alternative hypothesis was accepted. From the findings it was identified that human stress caused by restrictions on social mobility and social engagements resulted in domestic violence and this factor was comparatively stronger.

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## 1. Introduction

The pandemic of Covid-19 affected the entire world very negatively. The direct and indirect impact of Covid-19 on the world in general and Asia in specific was very adverse (United Nations Children Emergency Fund, 2021). The global economy was near to collapse, educational institutions ceased to operate, businesses shut down, peoples' movement was restricted, and social distancing was imposed which brought a huge emergency in daily activities (World Health Organization 2021). Going out or meeting other people in the crowd was a high-risk factor, therefore, every state country opted to stay-at-home policy (Armbruster & Klotzbücher, 2020; Dawn News, 2021). Although preventive measures were very effective in controlling the spread of the virus, these preventive measures especially the adoption of stay-at-home policy had some adverse consequences such as increased stress and domestic violence. Every individual was confined to his house for a longer time period which resulted in the outbreak of domestic violence. Spending too much time together within the four walls of a house increased the risk factor of violence outbreak particularly for women and other households including siblings. Such violent circumstances were more dangerous because during Covid-19 incidences of domestic violence were completely hidden. Domestic violence is known as the most common form of human rights violation that damages both the physical and mental health and well-being of the victim (Owens et al., 2022). It is defined as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or

threatening behavior including violence or abuse committed by a family member or intimate partner regardless of gender or sexuality. The aim of this research study is to investigate the impact of Covid-19 lock down on domestic violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This research study is highly significant on the ground that it investigates one of the primary human rights violations that causes huge health problems for the victims. It explores the impact of stay-at-home policy on domestic violence. In the following passage, a brief literature review on the impact of Covid-19 on domestic violence is given, followed by research methodology, results and discussion and a brief conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review**

There is evidence that shows that domestic violence substantially increases after a catastrophic event. Many research studies revealed that interpersonal violence increased during epidemics, like the Ebola virus in West Africa (S. E. Davies & Bennett, 2016; Onyango, Resnick, Davis, & Shah, 2019). Similarly, recent literature in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic suggested an increase in domestic violence during the pandemic. Many countries like China, Italy, Spain United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, India, and Arab countries have reported an increase in the rate of domestic violence (Boserup, McKenney, & Elkbuli, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Das, Das, & Mandal, 2020; Donato, 2020). This situation is described as a "double epidemic" and is considered a new crisis (Bettinger-Lopez & Bro, 2020).

Some individuals experienced domestic violence for the first time in their life during the Covid-19 lockdown. Boxall, Morgan, and Brown (2020) in their study on 15000 women in Australia found that more than 60 percent of the women have experienced intimate partner violence for the first time in their life during the pandemic. Many of them observed escalation in the frequency and intensity of violence relative to previous experiences. Zhang (2022) argued that domestic violence increased in China during Covid-19 lockdown while premising his stance on data from newspapers, government sources and criminal justice sources. The primary reason behind this increase in domestic violence is the nationwide prolonged lockdown. It aggravated conflict among family members. In addition, economic distress, loss of work, economic stress and psychological distress have the potential to increase opportunities for relational conflict leading to domestic violence (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012). Furthermore, existing literature suggests that an increase in domestic violence during a crisis is usually associated with resource constraints, change in role and responsibilities among the family members, and increase in domestic workload (Rubenstein, Lu, MacFarlane, & Stark, 2020). Similarly, Sweden, despite having no strict lockdown or stay-at-home policy, showed a rise in domestic abuse and intimate partner violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. This rise in domestic violence is caused by the socioeconomic changes produced because of the pandemic (Perrotta Berlin, 2021).

According to the United Nations Women Report on violence against women and girls revealed that domestic violence increased globally during the Covid-19 pandemic. The report highlighted that women were the chief sufferers of domestic violence during the pandemic due to financial stress and health risk during the lockdown, including loss of livelihoods, restricted access to basic needs, failure to escape from circumstances of partner abuse. Munir, Munir, and Rubaca (2021) found that violent behavior and controlling attitudes of men resulted in violence during Covid-19 pandemic. Violence against women was highly prevalent among the households during Covid-19 pandemic due to unemployment and low income/no income earning opportunities. Stay-at-home policy added more fuel to the fire of domestic violence due to constant social proximity which remained an opportunity for the victimizer to be more violent and exercise more power against women. Social proximity was a cause of domestic violence, but this cause was basically underpinned by the prevailing stress of Covid-19 lock down. Constant attachment in families increased the number of reports of domestic violence. Leslie and Wilson (2020) found an increase in police reports on domestic violence. They conducted their study on the impact of social distancing practices and shelter at home during the pandemic on police reports of domestic violence in the UK which showed a positive impact of stay-at-home policy on domestic violence. This increase was about 7.5 per cent in domestic violence during the initial stage of lockdown. Their study also confirmed that households without a previous history of domestic violence also reported incidents of domestic violence during the pandemic. Similarly, the comparison between before-and-after Covid-19 lock-down, police reports from Altana, Georgia also showed a rise in cumulative counts of domestic crimes (Evans, Hawk, & Ripkey, 2021).

Public health emergency of Covid-19 pandemic brought to the surface the close link between crises and the potential increase in risk for domestic violence in Pakistan. Though, the social structure in Pakistan is patriarchal and the country has a high rate of domestic violence, where usually about 70 to 90 percent of women are subject to domestic violence (Ali, Asad, Mogren, & Krantz, 2011). However, a large number of domestic crimes are not reported, as such incidents are labeled as private in Pakistan (Hadi, 2017; Naz & Malik, 2018). In Pakistan, other factors like social status, financial status, dowry, religion, culture, ethnicity, and lack of education also contribute to domestic violence. Jan (2021) identified an increase in domestic violence in Pakistan due to Covid-19 lock-down. It was an empirical research study on the contributory factors responsible for the prevalence of domestic violence.

In Pakistan, usually domestic violence cases are not reported because of the prevailing patriarchal social structure, however, in extreme cases, domestic violence results in murder and suicide which are reported. In domestic violence, women are emotionally forced to commit suicide or constantly suffer domestic abuse (Fair, 2011). About 399 murder cases of women were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province during the first lockdown of Covid-19 in March 2020, however, only 25 cases received positive responses from the local police department (Baig, Ali, & Tunio, 2020). Prompt response from the police department can highly reduce the risk factor, however, in Pakistan this response often lacks.

Covid-19 pandemic was an event of high emergency which resulted in many adverse impacts on human health. Though, the risk factor for further spread of Covid-19 decreased up to some extent by adopting stay-at-home policy, however, the consequences of social restrictions aggravated many domestic issues. Domestic violence, among the rest of the issues, highly increased during Covid-19 stay-at-home policy. In Pakistan, the problem of domestic violence even worsened during Covid-19 but quite less cases of domestic violence were reported. Not only in Pakistan, rather the domestic violence situation aggravated globally due to Covid-19. In the light of the above literature review, it was founded that covid-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in domestic violence across the globe, however, no research study was conducted on this issue in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This research study is a novel study that specifically focuses on the impact of Covid-19 on domestic violence in Pakistan, which would be highly significant to the point of view that the findings would bring some significant information forward for further research and scholarly repository.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research study applied a quantitative research method as a strategy of enquiry. The target population for this research study was the local households and the target area was Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A pre-tested questionnaire was developed on the main variables and all the samples were randomly selected to fill in the questionnaires manually. To get more accurate information usually the questionnaire is pre-tested (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Neuman Lawrence, 2014). Gender-balanced approach was adopted in the data collection process. A total of 300 samples were taken from the population. Of these samples 150 were women and 150 were men. All the respondents in this data were married. The data was collected from six districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including district Swat, Mardan, Swabi, Charsadda, Peshawar and Nowshera. From each district 50 samples were collected. The following tabulated data shows details of samples collected for this research study, their location, gender, educational background and employment.

**Table 1: Shows Gender, Education and Employment Level of the Respondents**

District	No. of Samples	Gender		Education		Employment Level	
		M	F	L	I	E	U
Swat	50	25	25	15	35	27	23
Mardan	50	25	25	32	18	33	17
Swabi	50	25	25	23	27	14	36
Charsadda	50	25	25	13	37	12	38
Peshawar	50	25	25	40	10	42	08
Nowshera	50	25	25	36	14	37	13
Total	300	150	150	159	141	165	135

The table 1 shows details of respondents selected from six districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Each district was given 50 representations in which 25 were females and 25 were male. Factors that highly influence household life, particularly education and employment, were

also investigated. Of 300 samples 159 were literate and 141 were illiterate. Literacy was measured in terms of holding at least a degree or a certificate in any specific discipline from any college or university. The capability of reading or writing one's name or signing one's name was not a criterion for considering an individual as literate or illiterate. In 300 samples 165 were employed and 135 were unemployed. Employment in this research study was measured in terms of holding a public or private job in any organization or department or running his/her own business. In big districts such as Peshawar and Nowshera women's literacy rate was comparatively higher than small districts. It means that in metropolitan cities educational opportunities are more than other areas, especially those areas which are away from the metropolitan cities.

**Table 2: Shows Education of Male and Female Respondents**

District	No. of Samples	Gender		Male Education		Female Education	
		M	F	L	I	L	I
Swat	50	25	25	15	10	12	13
Mardan	50	25	25	20	05	13	12
Swabi	50	25	25	11	14	03	22
Charsadda	50	25	25	12	13	00	25
Peshawar	50	25	25	22	03	20	05
Nowshera	50	25	25	20	05	17	08
Total	300	150	150	100	50	65	85

The table 2 shows gender of the respondents and their educational level. Among the male respondents 100 were literate and 50 were illiterate, while among the female respondents 65 were literate and 85 were illiterate. Among the literate samples all the respondents either possessed a degree or a certificate from a college or a university. In rural parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, female literacy rate is comparatively lower than urban parts. However, the data in this research study was mostly collected from cities, therefore, the difference between male and female literacy rate is not that much wider. Moreover, employed females were mostly literate. Similarly, among the literate male respondents, the majority were either engaged with public or private sector jobs while the majority of illiterate were either self-employed or jobless.

**Table 3: Shows Employment Level of Male and Female Respondents**

District	No. of Samples	Gender		Male Employment Level		Female Employment Level	
		M	F	E	U	E	U
Swat	50	25	25	20	05	09	13
Mardan	50	25	25	22	03	12	12
Swabi	50	25	25	11	14	03	22
Charsadda	50	25	25	12	13	00	25
Peshawar	50	25	25	22	03	15	05
Nowshera	50	25	25	20	05	14	08
Total	300	150	150	107	43	53	97

The table 3 shows details of respondents and their employment. Of 300 samples 150 were male and 150 were females. Among the male respondents 107 were employed and 43 were unemployed while among the females 53 were employed and 97 were unemployed. Each district's educational and employment levels were different and varied according to gender and location.

H<sub>1</sub>: Covid-19 lock down had a significant impact on domestic violence.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In this research study, conflict tactics scale was used to measure domestic violence caused by the stay-at-home policy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Since, the data was collected from the local households, therefore, every respondent had a different background in terms of income level, employment and education, which influenced the data and particularly the results. Domestic violence was founded among those families where neither male nor female was educated. In addition, families where both male and female were literate and employed, they did not reveal any reasons of domestic violence except skirmishes related to daily life activities.

The table 4 shows that 32 percent of the total respondents revealed that the use of abusive language was high during violence while 15 percent revealed that it was average.

Usually, the use of insulting language is positively associated with mental stress. People who are mentally stressed are irritative in their behavior as compared to mentally satisfied people. Stress during Covid-19 lock-down was high because of the prevailing uncertainty related to social and economic engagements. Of 300 samples 35 percent revealed that the state of aggression was high especially when the violence took place during Covid-19, while 32 percent revealed that it was average. Stay-at-home policy restrained people from social engagements which resulted in aggressive behavior. Social seclusion breeds irritation and mood swing among the people, while during Covid-19 social gathering and engagements were highly prohibited. Restraining people from social engagements, activities of recreation, intellectual capacity (Khan & Nouman, 2019) and spiritual development caused mental stress (Coppola, Rania, Parisi, & Lagomarsino, 2021).

Mental stress is positively associated with physical abuse/violence. The consequences are long term mental problems and traumatic stress disorder. Chronic state of constant violence results in depression and suicidal ideation. While measuring the degree of skirmishes or reasoning, 68 percent of the total respondents revealed that the degree of reasoning was high and only 9.3 percent revealed that it was average. Reasoning is the preface of skirmishes which leads to violence. Of 300 respondents, 16 percent agreed that battering was unusual/more in domestic violence while 67 percent revealed that battering took place as usual during Covid-19 domestic violence. The p-value approaches 0 or less than .05 which does not support the null hypothesis that Covid-19 did not have any significant impact on domestic violence. Here the data supports the alternative hypothesis that Covid-19 lock down had a significant impact on domestic violence.

The results of this research study showed that coping with painful circumstances usually increases frustration among people and this frustration leads to violence. Frustration-aggression theory is highly adaptable to the findings of this research study. Since, Covid-19 lockdown was a highly painful and uncertain situation that increased frustration among people and this increased frustration resulted in domestic violence. In this research study conflict tactics scale was used to identify the impact of Covid-19 stay-at-home policy on domestic violence which included all kinds of abusive language, aggression, skirmishes and physical violence. Therefore, the results showed that based on conflict tactics scale domestic violence increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to Covid-19 lock down.

**Table 4: Results of the data collected from the local households on DV**

Variables	Categories	Conflict Tactics Scale		Chi-Square Statistics
		Yes	No	
Use of Abusive Language	High	98	30	12.857 (0.004)
	Average	45	35	
	Below Average	25	38	
State of Aggression	Not	12	17	8.907 (0.000)
	High	107	09	
	Average	97	14	
Degree of Reasoning/Skirmishes	Below Average	10	11	12.571 (0.000)
	Not	14	21	
	High	205	22	
Battering	Average	28	07	9.758 (0.000)
	Below Average	10	15	
	Not	08	05	
	High	49	15	
	Average	202	03	
	Below Average	18	03	
	Not	10	00	

There had been a positive relationship between Covid-19 lock down and domestic violence (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; S. Davies & Batha, 2020; Kelly & Morgan, 2020; Kofman & Garfin, 2020; Piquero et al., 2020; Usher, Bhullar, Durkin, Gyamfi, & Jackson, 2020). Similar other studies also found a positive association between Covid-19 lock down and domestic violence. Similarly, it is also found an increase in domestic violence during Covid-19 lock down in Pakistan. They carried out their research study on cases of domestic violence portrayed in the media. Since, the key informants of domestic violence were local households, therefore, in this research study the common households were investigated, and it was found that domestic violence increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during Covid-19 lock down.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this research study, it was found that Covid-19 lock down had a positive impact on domestic violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Based on the conflict tactics scale of measuring domestic violence, the results showed that domestic violence increased during Covid-19 lock down in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main reason responsible for this increase in domestic violence was continued stay at home along with other family members without going out or carrying out any other activities caused huge stress among the people which ultimately resulted in domestic violence. Stay-at-home policy highly restricted people's movement and compelled them to remain at home which resulted in daily life skirmishes, use of abusive language, reasoning and even battering. People usually needed social engagements in activities that released their stress, however, these opportunities were not available during Covid-19 which resulted in violence. Since, Covid-19 lockdown was a painful situation to cope with which increased frustration among the people. This increased frustration led to aggression and violence. Restraining people from social engagements increased stress among them that resulted in violence. It means that frustration, stress, social seclusion and economic uncertainties were few among those factors that highly contributed to domestic violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during Covid-19 lock down. Factors such as recreational activities or freedom of movement or expression and work usually help people release their stress and remain calm, however, such factors were completely lacking during Covid-19 lock down. One very important aspect to overcome this issue is to enhance the spiritual wellbeing and intellectual capacity of the society which was found to be low during the lockdown. The results of this research study revealed that domestic violence increased during stay-at-home policy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

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