

A LEDGER OF SUBLIMATED HOPES

A Factsheet on Social & Economic Impact
of Lockdown on Adolescent Girls in
West Bengal





FACT SHEET Impact of COVID on Adolescents: Violence and Abuse

Context

On April 6 2020, in her statement Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women said, “with 90 countries in lockdown, four billion people are now sheltering at home from the global contagion of COVID-19. It’s a protective measure, but it brings another deadly danger. We see a **shadow pandemic** growing, of violence against women.”¹

There are reports from across the world of increase in gender-based violence, especially violence against women. India too has seen such an increase in gender-based violence.

The World Health Organization, in its attempt to explain the spike in violence, made use of the ecological model that delineates the symbiotic role played by individual, community and social dimensions during the COVID19 pandemic, both in escalating the social-crisis and combating it. This model shows how the three actors potentially can increase the risk of violence against women in these present times.

For many women, the necessary emergency and preventive measures in the fight against COVID-19 increase their load of housework and care work for children, the elderly, and ill family members. Restrictions on movement, financial constraints, and widespread insecurity also encourage abusers, giving them additional power and control.²

National Commission of Women (NCW) registered an increase of 2.5 times in cases of domestic violence. Reporting of different Civil Society Organizations, from their respective field areas, has seconded the facts presented by the NCW.³ The Union Minister of Women and Child Development, Smriti Irani, has presented a contradictory stance to the above reporting denying an increase of cases as well as considering the acts of shedding light on this ‘Shadow Pandemic’ as ‘scaremongering’. While claiming that the situation with respect

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>.

² https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0102-311X2020000400505&script=sci_arttext&tIng=en.

³ <https://www.theleaflet.in/pandemic-triggers-domestic-violence/#> ;
<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/locked-what-covid-19-pandemic-spells-survivors>;
<http://indiatogether.org/domestic-violence-women>.

to scope to domestic violence remains under control, the minister added “scaremongering done especially with some development partners who are in the NGO sector that 80% of women who are now at homes in India or across the world will be getting beaten up.”⁴

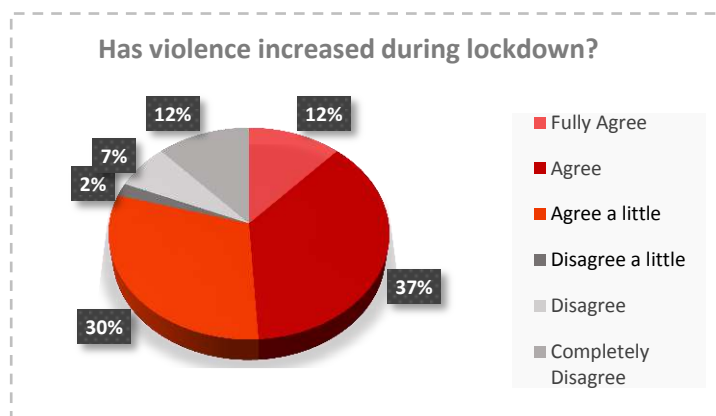
As per the study by Child Rights and You (CRY), more than 50 percent of the parents reported that their child has become more agitated or anxious during this period. Only 27 percent stated that their child has become more playful and happier during the lockdown.⁵

This study is based on data collected from 102 respondents between the age of 10-25 years from 30 villages in Districts of Alipurduar, Birbhum, Kolkata, Margram and Murshidabad. This fact sheet only addresses their experiences and perception of violence during the lockdown due to COVID -19 and after.

Despite the restrictions on movement due to COVID-19, the Jabala field team went out and administered the survey and collected the responses. The data was collected between July 2020 and September 2020. These were then uploaded on to a google sheet. The data computation and analysis has been done by the HAQ team.

Perception and Recall of Violence

A noteworthy 82.6% (84 respondents) adolescents agreed that the Lockdown period was responsible in seeing a spike in incidences of violence amongst women and children in their localities. Amongst them 12.2% completely agreed, 38.8% agreed while 31.6% agreed to little extent about the increase in violence.



Amongst 102 adolescents reached out by the survey, 10% (11 respondents) had heard or seen incident of violence during the Lockdown. The respondents could recall 18 such incidents of violence on women and children during the period. It is important to note that

Incidences of violence have increase drastically within the red-light areas of Kolkata as shared by respondents. A significant dent on socio-economic resources has led venting out violence on children by the guardians and their partners.

majority of the respondents who were witnesses to such incidents came from the rural areas of the state (7 respondents). The remaining 4 respondents were residents of Kalighat area, a red-light locality in Calcutta, which, like other red-light areas, has seen a spike in incidences of violence during the

⁴ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/irani-denies-domestic-violence-increase-during-lockdown/article31776591.ece>

*Throughout the Factsheet, the names of respondents in narratives has been substituted by a pseudo-name to protect the identity of the individual.

⁵ https://www.cry.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Report-CRY_COVID-19-Study.pdf

Lockdown. The respondents pointed out about the economic crisis faced by sex-workers during the restrictions imposed during the Lockdown which was, according to one respondent, responsible for causing a sense of helplessness and frustration in equal measures and lead to venting it out violently on children in these places. Another respondent shared that both herself and her sister were abused and brutally beaten up by their mother and her partner due to economic crisis in the Lockdown. These few narratives reinforce to an extent the general concerns about severe impacts of the Lockdown in red-light areas across the country.

‘They are starving’: women in India’s sex industry struggle for survival
Reshmi Chakraborty and Hema Ramaprasad

Rasheeda Bibi has five rupees to her name. A worker in India’s sex industry, she lives in the narrow lanes of Kolkata’s Kalighat red light area with her three children in a room she rents for 620 rupees (£6) a month. As a thunderstorm rages through the city, Bibi worries about the leaky roof of her small room. It is now a month since India went into total lockdown on 26 March to contain the spread of Covid-19. With no clients, Bibi’s savings have dwindled. She has no money left for food, or sanitary towels for herself and her daughters, let alone for fixing the roof.

As non-essential economic activity has ground to a halt, the lockdown has hit millions of people working in the informal sector. The government has announced relief schemes for the poor, but women working in the sex industry are outside their ambit. In India sex work is not illegal, but several supporting activities are; maintaining brothels and soliciting customers are criminal offences.

Social workers say financial distress has increased instances of domestic violence and conflict. Priti Patkar, founder of Prerana, an anti-trafficking charity in Mumbai, believes this puts children at risk. “When adults are in strife, they pass it on to children,” she says.

[Url:https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/29/they-are-starving-women-in-indias-sex-industry-struggle-for-survival.](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/29/they-are-starving-women-in-indias-sex-industry-struggle-for-survival)

Violence and Its Vicinity to Adolescents



Being confined to their homes during Lockdown, respondents acknowledged that majority of cases they witnessed were the ones which happened within their households. Out of the total 18 incidents reported by the adolescents, a maximum of 7 incidents had happened with either the respondents or their sisters. An equal number of incidents reported (4 incidents) had happened with relatives of the adolescent and in their

neighbourhood.

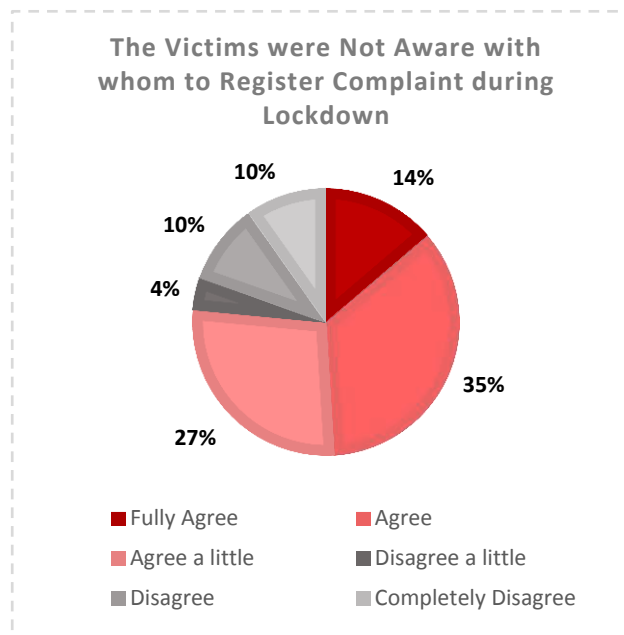
Many respondents shared that these incidents of violence had gone un-reported as majority of individuals were not aware about with whom they could register the complaint with the state authorities. A significant and worrying 66% (65 individuals) respondent agreed with the fact that most victims were not able to report incident as they were not aware whom to reach out in the Lockdown period.

Status of Complaints

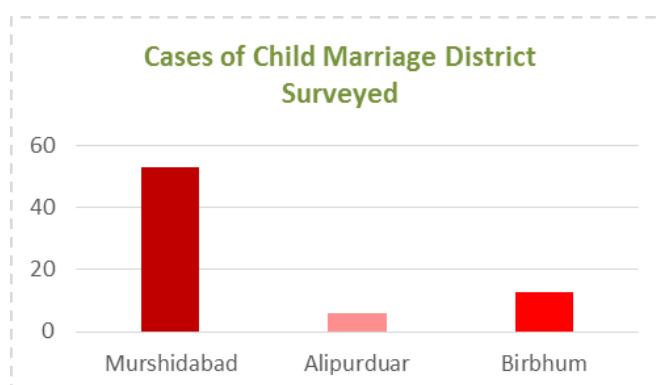
In the light of not being aware about the possibility of registering a formal complaint, majority of these were resolved by the help of local interventions. A total of 9 complaints

were resolved through the intervention of community members amongst which 3 cases were resolved by the family members of the accused. Such interventions were clear in narratives of few respondents such as one case where the adolescent shared that her sister was continuously harassed by the neighbouring boys whenever the respondent and her sister went out to play during the Lockdown. The adolescent further shared that it became easy for the boys to do so as there was hardly any adult outside of their homes in the locality. The girls raised their complaint with their mother to which

their mother gathered all members of the SHG and went to the boy's house and discussed the issue with boy's parents demanding them to keep a check on the boys. The narrative was demonstrative in highlighting the importance of local support-groups in times of Lockdown for seeking remedy to acts of violence. To this an important point needs to be added that majority of the cases where such interventions were made possible were incidence of violence that happened outside the households, while for the cases of violence which unfolded within the confinements of household similar measures were not to be found.



Increased Vulnerability to Child Marriage



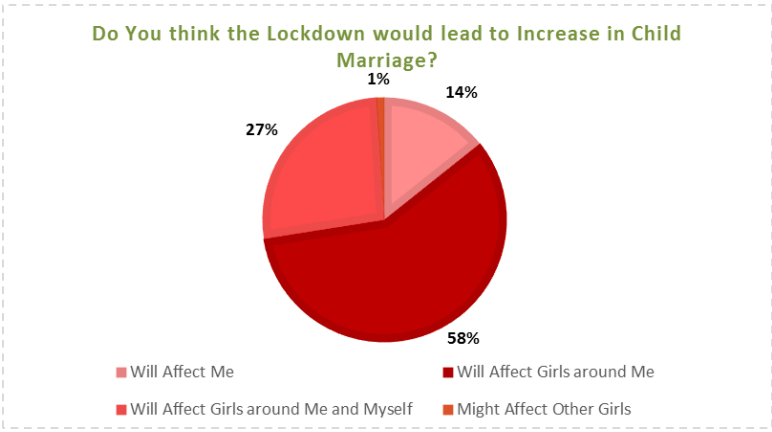
As was noted in the case of Rajasthan, adolescent's vulnerability to being married-off has increased during the Lockdown period. The same pattern repeats itself with much greater intensity in case of survey conducted in West Bengal. Out of 102 respondents, a

total of 25% respondents shared occurrences of child-marriage during the Lockdown. The detail on number of cases that each adolescent had witnessed gave a greater sign to worry about. The 24 respondents, affirming to sharp increase in cases of child-marriage, shared 73 incidents of child-marriage that have taken place in their neighbourhood. A majority of these cases, like Rajasthan, came from the rural areas of the State with Murshidabad recording a total of 53 cases in which 15 cases were from the village of Malopara. Also critical to note here are cases of child-marriage in tea-estates

An increase in incidence of child marriage was shared by the respondents in the tea-gardens of Alipurduar. The respondents shared that 6 cases of child-marriage had happened within 4 months of lockdown implementation.

of the State considering that in the district of Alipurduar, 6 cases of child-marriage were shared from adolescents in tea-gardens.

Adolescents who participated in the survey were mostly unmarried women and the heightened incidences of child-marriage in their vicinity



is bound to become a cause of worry in short-run where these signs of Lockdown are left to linger for a while. It was clear from the engagement with the adolescents that a majority of them felt that lockdown is bound to increase the pressure of forced child-marriage on themselves as well as girls around them.

Confronting the Perils of Lockdown

The survey brought the speculations about increase in violence on adolescents and women during Lockdown in broad daylight. It was therefore imperative to gather from respondents about their first-contact in cases of violence and abuse. Amongst the respondents, 48 adolescents looked up to Civil Society Organizations, such as JABALA, while seeking interventions in case of violence while 41 adolescents looked up to the Police as their first point of contact.

Respondent's Intended First Point of Contact

Sources to Curb Violence on Women	Respondents
JABALA and Other CSOs	48
Police	41
Panchayati Raj Institutions	32
Asha and Anganwadi	12