

## Spousal Violence among Moroccan Women and Lockdown

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

The incidents of violence against women have increased worldwide since the lockdowns were implemented (UN Women, 2020). As per the statistics released by the National Commission for Women (NCW) in early April 2020, there has been 100 % increase in complaints related to violence against women after the nationwide lockdown was imposed in March 2020. The aim of this study is to compare the frequency and type of violence against Moroccan women, during this critical period when the aggressor and the victim are under the same roof. This is a descriptive study, established via a questionnaire that was published online to all women living in a couple and exploring the sociodemographic characteristics and the types of violence suffered. 431 results were collected. The results objectify that acts of violence in the conjugal context have increased considerably. In our sample, they are due to first physical violence, then psychological violence followed by economic violence. The prevalence did not change in our sample, unlike the frequency which increased considerably. Therefore, we need a global collective effort to stop it and everyone has a role to play to prevent domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, lockdown, covid 19.

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## INTRODUCTION

Confinement turns out to be a double-edged sword. While, on the one hand, it helps curb the spread of the coronavirus, on the other, it is causing an increase in domestic violence all over the world. Undoubtedly, being locked up with your attacker is a risk factor.

One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence mostly by an intimate partner. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation [ONU Women].

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified.

### INTEREST

The aim of this work is to compare the frequency and type of violence against women, among the Moroccan population, during this critical period when the aggressor and the victim are under the same roof.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study, established via a questionnaire that was published online to all women

living in a couple and exploring the sociodemographic characteristics and the types of violence suffered.

## RESULTS

### 1- Female

431 responses were collected

- 89% of women were aged between 20 and 40 years old, with age extremes ranging from 17 to 63 years old.
- About 70% live in the regions of Rabat, Salé, Kénitra and Casablanca, Settat.
- 76% had children, no more than 4.
- 81.6% are working or have already worked.
- 96.1% have a higher level of education.
- 67.5% have an average socio-economic level and 32.3% have an affluent socio-economic level.
- 21.3% are or have already been followed in psychiatry.

### 2- Her spouse

As for the spouse, 93% work. 88.6% have a higher level of education unlike women who are at 96.1%.

Regarding the medical history, the spouses never had psychiatric follow-up in 92.1% of cases, without a criminal record in 99.8% of cases. On the

other hand, more than 33.7% are having problematic substance use.

During confinement, 14.4% have stopped work because of the pandemic, 37.1% have changed their work habits and are teleworking. As a consequence, 58.2% saw their monthly income decrease.

### 3- Types of violence

Regarding physical violence, several parameters were requested, including insults, blackmail, death threats, shoving, beatings, injuries and strangulation.

More than half of our sample say they have never been a victim of violence. However, less than 1% of the sample said they had suffered it.

We note a low percentage of this violence in the population studied but what attracts our attention is especially the increase in the frequency of physical abuse during confinement, in all aspects studied. For example, pushing, beating and blackmailing, go from 1x per month to 1x per week or 1x per day, even though the prevalence is the same. Regarding sexuality, there was no change between before and after confinement in our sample.

The frequency of verbal abuse has also increased, as women experience more contemptuous behavior about their beliefs and / or opinions, and their actions during lockdown.

Behavioral violence is also accentuated during confinement, as the frequency of criticism, oppression of opinion and family rejection are also on the rise.

Women during confinement have less and less access to their bank accounts with greater control over their personal expenses and a reduced participation, from the spouse, in the expenses of the family home.

## DISCUSSION

The incidents of violence against women have increased worldwide since the lockdowns were implemented (UN Women, 2020) [2]. The hashtag #antidomesticviolenceduringepidemic was searched more than 3000 times in Chinese social media [3]. As per the statistics released by the National Commission for Women (NCW) in early April 2020, there has been 100 % increase in complaints related to violence against women after the nationwide lockdown was imposed in March 2020. This twofold increase has pushed NCW to announce Mental Health Helplines for those witnessing any form of domestic violence (DV) [4].

Loss of income, especially for males leads to lesser control over economic security and there by

making them exert more control on their partners, this scenario is worse if female spouse is employed and male is unemployed. Whereas For females, it acts in different pathway. Employment and income source for females acts as a buffer against violence since their income supports the family to be financially better, unemployment of females takes off this buffer and makes them vulnerable to violence at the hands of spouses. Unemployment for female also mean being dependent on male spouse, loss of social ties and being locked up with perpetrator 24 by 7, which again makes them vulnerable to violence [5].

Rise in DV could also be attributed to household work related disparity. In fact, domestic work is primarily considered women's job. Absence of domestic help and people thrown into close quarters, increases workload and cabin fever ensues, adding fuel to the ongoing friction between the couple and results in increased chances of DV [6].

In addition to above, among the families affected by substance use disorder, COVID 19 has worsened the DV. Thus, 33.7% of partners are having problematic substance use. The stress of economic instability itself has resulted in increased consumption of alcohol, thereby increasing DV independently. During lockdown, the perpetrator might inflict violence on the spouse demanding to fulfil his alcohol consumption needs or might consume alcohol at home, in presence of his family members, as the liquor outlets are closed. In both above scenarios, domestic violence worsens.

Sexual violence is also likely to increase during lockdown. Unlike our study, where there was no change between before and after confinement in our sample. India, for example, noted a surge of porn usage and sale of condoms and sex toys, reflecting increase in sexual activity thereby indirectly indicating increase in chances of sexual rights violation [7].

In Morocco, according to the national survey by the Ministry of the Family, 54.4% of Moroccan women suffered violence (physical, sexual, psychological, economic, electronic) in 2018. Domestic violence in Morocco concerns the less educated, the youngest and those most affected by unemployment. [High Commission for Planning (HCP) 2019] in a communication published on the occasion of the national and international mobilization campaign for elimination of violence against women. "In 2019, with a prevalence rate of 46% in the marital area (5.3 million women), women aged 15 to 74, victims of violence perpetrated by a husband or ex-husband, fiancé or an intimate partner, are mainly married women with a prevalence of 52%, young women aged 15 to 24 (59%), women with an average level of education (54%) and women in unemployment (56%)", indicates the HCP in

a press release, citing the results of a survey carried out between February and July 2019.

In seven out of ten cases (69%), acts of violence in the conjugal context are due to psychological violence, 12% of cases to economic violence, 11% to physical violence and almost 8% to sexual violence, according to the HCP, adding that in the workplace, 15% of working women are victims of violence in all its forms. The majority of these acts of violence (83%) are due either to psychologically violent behavior (49%) or to economic discrimination (34%).

The results of our study join the international and national data. In our sample, 100% are women are of wealthy and middle socio-economic level. 96.1% are of higher education.

This could explain the difference in prevalence between the HCP and our sample. As for the partner profile, the prevalence is particularly high among women whose partner is young between 15 and 40 years old, with a rate of 61%, and those with a high school level, problematic substance use and a change in monthly income. In our sample, the increase in the frequency of physical abuse during confinement, in all aspects, is remarkable. For example, pushing, beating and blackmailing, go from 1x per month to 1x per week or 1x per day, even though the prevalence is the same. The frequency of verbal abuse and behavioral violence has also increased, even if the partner is the same. Thus, A larger sample is needed to confirm the link between socio-economic level, level of education and domestic violence, during lockdown.

## CONCLUSION

This is the shadow of the COVID-19 crisis: Acts of violence in the conjugal context have increased considerably. In our sample, they are due to first physical violence, then psychological violence followed by economic violence. The prevalence did not change in our sample, unlike the frequency which increased considerably. Therefore, we need a global collective effort to stop it. As COVID-19 cases continue to strain health services, essential services, such as domestic violence shelters and helplines, have reached capacity. More needs to be done to prioritize addressing violence against women in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

Everyone has a role to play. In some countries, resources and efforts have been diverted from violence against women response to immediate COVID-19 relief. The above Act mandates wide publicity through different medias (print and broadcast) to create awareness in general public, which can include information about Interpersonal Violence Cycle, measures of de-escalating a situation at home, helplines,

shelter homes and legal assistance available for women. A makeshift arrangement of safe spaces (space away from the abuser) by creation of temporary shelter homes should also be considered. Educating and using available human resources and other health workers, who are currently conducting door to door surveys about covid-19, in identifying subtle signs of domestic violence would be prudent.

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