

India Government Policies in Handling Gender-Based Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract. India's entrenched patriarchal culture and practices result in gender inequalities that are detrimental to women. The view that women are inferior to men results in women not having the same opportunities as men, and the normalization of violence against women in the Indian society. The Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 required India to implement quarantine and lock down to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. These quarantines and lockdowns lock women in the home with perpetrators of violence and make it difficult to access assistance, leading to an increase in the number of domestic violence in India. The government's role is vital, especially at critical times like this, to overcome gender-based violence, especially domestic violence against women. This study aims to analyze, through the lens of feminism theory in international relations, how the Indian government deals with gender-based violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic. To answer this question, the author will use a qualitative method by analyzing data and information obtained from the mass media, journal articles, and various official documents. The findings of this study are, the Indian government did not consider the issue of gender-based violence as essential at that time. Even though the Indian government continues to run and open women-specific schemes during the pandemic, but there are no new initiatives on a national scale; initiatives are only carried out by a few states, which of course, only have an impact in specific areas. Funding for women's support schemes is also reduced so that the amount of assistance and the quality that can be provided is limited and not maximized. This is due to the lack of participation of women in governance and policy making, so that the resulting policies do not target the needs of women.

Keywords: India, Women, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Violence, Government Policies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Gender is defined as a social construct of roles, behaviors, traits, activities, and attributes of a woman or a man. Gender refers to women's and men's social and cultural roles in a particular society (WHO, 2022). Perceptions of specific gender also often cause gender bias in various areas of life. Gender bias, a condition biased and detrimental to one gender, leads to gender inequality and discrimination. In India, The patriarchal culture that is inseparable from the hierarchical system and class division in caste causes inequality and even prejudice against women. It is widespread and deeply rooted in the community. Patriarchal culture in India is embedded in religion, law, politics, and economics, and even when it is not explicitly embodied in the constitution and law, most contemporary societies are, in practice, patriarchal. These cultural values and traditions frequently influence the roles and behaviors of men and women in society. The culture of society is more concerned with men, while women are usually considered second-class citizens. This situation has led to gender-based violence over time.

The outbreak of the corona virus pandemic or Covid-19 has caused an unprecedented disaster. During this Covid-19 pandemic, all pressures arise, and many people are disadvantaged in health, social and economic, and various aspects. The increasing number of violence, especially gender-based violence, is one of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in a country with a deeply rooted patriarchal culture like India. So far, the impact raised by the media and government is primarily about health and economic issues. However, almost no one raises the issue of how women are most significantly impacted by this crisis.

According to UNHCR, gender-based violence is a dangerous act directed at individuals based on gender (UNHCR, 2022). Gender-based violence has its roots in gender inequality, abuse of power, and harmful norms. There are various forms of gender-based violence, namely sexual violence, physical violence, socio-economic violence, mental or psychological violence, and harmful social/cultural practices (Redline Indonesia, 2021). Gender-based violence in India often occurs as domestic violence perpetrated by spouses, fathers, or family members of the same household. The victims who usually experience it are women,

children, and people from lower castes; women from lower castes are doubly disadvantaged as the caste system, hierarchy, and patriarchal culture place women in a low and disadvantaged position.

One of the well-known cultural practices resulting in gender-based violence is the dowry system, wherein the woman or woman's family has to give dowry or property or goods to the groom or groom's family (Britannica, 2019). This tradition does have an impact on discrimination against girls, even before they are born. Thousands of baby girls are aborted yearly, especially if daughters are already in the family. Many families object to or cannot afford to pay dowries to other families. Because of this, they will perform abortions on baby girls or even kill the baby girls that are born. Women who cannot provide the dowry as requested by the groom are very likely to experience violence. It is not uncommon for women to be killed by reason of suicide so that the groom can remarry and get more wealth or dowry.

According to a media report, India has the highest suicide rate globally. As many as 36% of all global suicides in the 15-to-39-year age group are committed by Indian women. Domestic violence, according to mental health professionals, is the primary cause. Indeed, in a recent government survey, 30% of all respondents stated they had experienced violence from their partners in daily life activity, which can make them oppressed in domestic and marital life (Pandey, 2021). Women were very often physically abused even before the pandemic. Even though in some geographic areas and parts of Indian society, women are often prohibited from leaving the house anywhere other than to work or school, this case of violence is exacerbated by the strict lockdown regulations during the pandemic. Usually, they can avoid their abusive partner when their partner is away, but even their partner must stay home during the lockdown. The lockdown and work from home policies worsen the condition of women in terms of health, psychology, physic, social, and economy. Countless women, forced to stay at home due to lockdown policies, were unable to obtain services and support, stayed at home due to fear of infection, or were unable to call out for help because their abusers stay at the same location, monitoring their use of phones and the Internet. According to UN Women research, cases of domestic violence increased worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic. In India, domestic violence, child marriage, cyber violence, and women trafficking

were all on the rise during the first few months of the pandemic. Between February and May 2020, the number of domestic abuse cases in India increased 2.5 fold (UN Women, 2021).

An essential step for the government to address gender-based violence is to declare domestic violence shelters and support services as essential. During the first and second waves of the pandemic, more than 300,000 women who suffered from abuse and needed shelter, legal assistance, and medical attention were served by 700 One-Stop-Crisis centers (UN Women, 2021). But in 2020-2021, budget allocations to women's assistance schemes such as the One-Stop Center and the SwadharGreh Scheme (to provide shelter, food and necessities for women in distress) made up less than 0.07% of India's total budget. The budget allocation to tackle violence against women did not even meet a quarter of the requirements to provide an appropriate level of response services. The four primary ministries involved in providing response services, i.e. the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice, and Ministry of Women and Children Empowerment have a shortfall of 85-88% in the budget for special schemes for women's protection (Oxfam India, 2021). When gender-based violence increased, the government's budget allocation should have been increased but what happened was that the government lowered its budget allocation for schemes that protect women.

This topic shows the importance of feminism in eradicating the injustices received or experienced by women. Feminism in International Relations emphasizes the participation of women in all aspects of life, including social, economic, and global politics. Feminism's emergence aims to fix an unequal power balance by challenging institutions to be equal and just. Feminism is mainly a struggle for emancipation to eradicate the stereotype that women are inferior (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2010). The advent of feminism in IR aims to correct the imbalance of power and to push institutions toward greater equality and justice. Eventually, for this equality to be achieved, the role of the government is needed. Regulations or policies that protect women's rights or even equality will be of great help. However, government regulations are often detrimental to women and exacerbate gender inequalities and gender-based violence. This research hopes to increase awareness of the importance of fighting for women's rights and gender equality.

In this thesis, the author will analyze more deeply the policies of the Indian government and their significance in dealing with gender-based violence during the Covid-19 pandemic from a feminism perspective. The author uses a qualitative method to complete this thesis, collecting data from websites, online mass media, journals, survey results from various research institutions, and official documents. The data is then organized, inductively analyzed, and classified into units before being ordered into a pattern and developed into a hypothesis. Based on the formulated hypothesis, the authors add other data so that it can strengthen the hypothesis test.

1.2 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this research is to analyze the Indian government policies in handling gender-based violence against women in India during the Covid-19 pandemic from a feminism perspective. The deep-rooted patriarchal culture, hierarchy, and caste system not only affect Indian society, triggering the rise of gender-based violence but also influence the government in making decisions and making policies. This research will also analyze using the feminism perspective whether the government's efforts to respond to this problem, especially during the pandemic, have been adequate and whether they are improving or slowing down to tackle gender-based violence in India.

Methodologically, this feminist approach is characterized by a genuine interest in women's lives and the injustices they face. Additionally, it is politically aligned with the emancipatory goal of social change and gender equality for women. Promote equality in everyday life and in international politics, where the presence and participation of women are significant. Researchers have the aim that this study can explain the inequality experienced by women in India, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, by efforts to increase public and government awareness of the critical role of government in eliminating gender-based violence. This research is also expected to provide new insights and knowledge for readers, especially about the critical role of government in eradicating gender-based violence and achieving gender equality and lead to further research on this topic.

1.3 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

India's caste system, which is closely tied to the Hindu religion, is one of the oldest surviving forms of social stratification system. The caste system categorizes adherents of the Hindu religion at birth, defining their place in society, their jobs, and who they can marry. The existence of a patriarchal culture also keeps women from accessing their rights, thus causing much violence against women. Being a woman is already highly disadvantageous, let alone being a woman from the lowest caste. Although the caste system was abolished in 1950 (Fadhilah, 2022), due to India's strong cultural and religious beliefs, it is not easy to remove behavior that discriminates against people based on caste, status, and gender. Several cultural practices and beliefs that benefit men and harm women can still be found in India.

A deeply rooted patriarchal culture results in women in India not having rights similar to those of men, causing gender bias in various fields. Gender bias which has long occurred in India has led to gender inequality and has had an increasing impact on women during the Covid-19 pandemic because all pressures arise. Many people are disadvantaged in health, social, and economic aspects. Feminism in International Relations highlights the underlying inequalities between men and women and their consequences in global politics. Before the rise of Feminism, issues in international relations were more often associated with issues of war and violence. Feminism exists as an awareness of the significance of gender issues in International Relations.

Additionally, feminism emphasizes that every crisis, such as a pandemic, in this case, has a different impact on women than men due to pre-existing gender norms and inequalities. The increasing number of violence, especially gender-based violence, is one of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in a country with a deeply rooted patriarchal culture like India. This deep-rooted patriarchal culture certainly influences the government in making policies, and its policies dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic are no exception. Referring to problem identification as explained above, thus the research question is; How are the Indian government policies in dealing with gender-based violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic from a feminism perspective?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 EXISTING STUDIES

The background for this research is drawn from various feminist, gender inequality, and gender-based violence-related topics. Thus, several significant studies will be cited as having the same scope as this research.

The first journal article, *Bentuk-bentuk Perilaku Bias Gender* journal by Agus Afandi, explained the misconceptions of society about sex and gender, which causes social structures with gender-biased behavior. As a result, the social structure disadvantages women compared to men, resulting in gender bias and inequality. Then it also explained the various kinds of gender inequality that manifest itself in various ways, including marginalization, subordination, double burden, stereotypes, and violence at multiple levels, including the state, workplace, organization, community, and household customs. This journal also explained how gender bias is caused by several factors such as religious teachings, history, and methods of interpretation by experts/writers. Polygamy and patriarchal tradition are strongly intertwined with gender inequality

The second journal article, *Mencermati Permasalahan Gender dan Pengarusutamaan Gender (PUG)* by Ni Made Wiasti discuss about issues related to gender. Such as the misconception about sex and gender. It is explained that gender is related to the society's division of roles, positions, and responsibilities between men and women based on the traits deemed proper for men and women according to the society's norms, practices, beliefs, and habits. The differences between men and women, particularly gender differences, have resulted in gender inequality, disproportionately impacting women. This journal also explained the forms of manifestation of injustice due to gender discrimination, including marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, violence, and workload. Therefore, government intervention is needed to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and justice by forming a policy called the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy. Gender Mainstreaming is a strategy to create gender justice and equality through programs and policies that put into consideration the experiences, aspirations, needs, and problems of both women and men in the processes of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all policies and programs in various fields of life and development.

The third journal article, *Gender-Based Violence in India: A Never-ending Phenomenon*, by B. R. Sharma and Manisha Gupta, discusses how gender-based violence can occur in India. Religion, customs, and ancient biases have forced Indian women into a submissive position, which can be exploited in various areas of life. Indian women's poor educational participation, lack of economic independence, and gender bias against them, among other factors, have resulted in women becoming dependent on men and other authoritative institutions such as family, culture, and society. There are also data related to gender-based violence that occurs in India. The last explanation is that if the government itself does not have strong regulations and enforcement, then the efforts of non-governmental organizations and the community to overcome gender-based violence in India will be in vain. The journal also provides recommendations for actions that the Indian government can take.

The fourth article, *Virus, Violence and (In)Visible Women: #LockDownMeinLockUp and Embodied Resistance During COVID-19* by Ishani Mukherjee, discuss how the media and social system failed to represent how women are oppressed during the Covid-19 pandemic and it takes an alternative platform and a more courageous public to voice the voices of women in India. Domestic violence's forms, strengths, and occurrences are rooted in power relations and distinctive cultural practices, and thus require context specific interventions and representations. In addition to explaining the gender-based violence that occurred in India during the Covid-19 pandemic, this article also explains the emergence of Instagram activism, hashtivism, and campaigns on social media that support and encourage affected women. The #LockDownMeinLockUp visual campaign against domestic violence conceptualizes the politics of visibility to examine how digital media frames gender, body, power, influence, celebrity, performance, and injustice in an unprecedented global health issue. The short-term impact is the success of internet campaigns in raising funds for domestic violence interventions and care and safety measures for the many abused women during and after the pandemic. However, the long-term impact depends on how much structural work is required to address India's systemic gender inequality, the ambiguity of victims, origins, and cross-cutting indicators that exacerbate the endemic of violence against women.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1. FEMINISM

The concept of gender refers to social behavior and expectations between what is “masculine” and “feminine”, as well as the differences in roles, responsibilities, and functions between men and women as socially constructed. This starts when masculinity is considered to have a higher quality than femininity, and femininity tends to be judged to be weaker and passive. In addition, gender is also closely related to the expectations and identities attached to men and women. This gender identity is socially constructed and determines the distribution of power that influences global politics (Smith, 2018).

International Relations tend to focus on how men are influenced by and participate in violence and war. Feminist theory has questioned the absence of women from traditional International Relations theory and practice. Feminists want to undermine International Relations' traditional gender-neutral assumption, specifically that gender and International Relations are two different areas that do not interact. This absence is seen in how women are excluded from decision-making, and the neglect of the realities of women's lives as having no impact on or significance to International Relations. Traditional perspectives ignore women's contributions and the impact of global politics on them and continue to justify their exclusion (Smith, 2018). Women will be justified in being excluded from huge global politics and small spheres such as everyday life.

Feminism emphasizes women's absence in decision-making processes and governance structures. For instance, in 2015, women only made up 22.9 percent of members of national parliaments globally (World Bank). Then according to Statista, in India alone in 2020, only around 19 percent of women are in the entire Indian workforce (Kanwal, 2022). The data shows that women seem to be marginalized. In the influence of patriarchal culture and gender hierarchy, the fact that men are dominant in holding power that dominates the area of decision-making structures is often ignored. Sometimes things that are feared happen, for example, violence against women in the private sphere such as domestic violence and violence in the public sphere. In essence, women are not involved and do not have the same economic, political, and social rights as men, so this often causes and justifies violence against women.

Feminists in International Relations have defined the following acts: domestic violence, rapes, underdevelopment, gender subordination, environmental destruction, and war as threats to security. Hence one can see a broadened definition of security, as is the concept of who is guaranteed security. The vast majority of feminist security analyses begin at the individual level at the very bottom, rather than the mainstream state or the international system as a whole. International relations feminists have revealed how the security of individuals is closely tied with national and international politics, and vice versa (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 2010).

Feminists in International Relations call for the participation of women in all aspects of human life, including social, economic, and global politics. It addresses the basic inequalities between the sexes and their implications in global politics. Feminism's emergence aims to fix an unequal power balance by challenging institutions to be equal and just (Smith, 2018). Feminism observe how women are found in the institutions and practices of global politics, and noted how the presence (or non-presence) of women results in impacts, and is impacted by, international policy-making. Therefore, in order to ensure the proper function of international politics, the presence and involvement of women are significant. The feminist approach can be distinguished into three main components: first, epistemologically, feminism opposes traditional thinking regarding International Relations theories. Second, the feminist approach is methodologically characterized by a genuine and serious curiosity about women's lives. Third, politically, it is in line with the emancipatory goal of creating social change.

2.2.2. GENDER AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of the different sexes, namely norms, roles, and relationships between groups that differentiate each other. Gender can change over time and varies depending on the culture of the community that constructs it. Gender correlates with but is not the same as sex; they are linked, but not the same. Gender identity refers to how a person feels, internalizes and experiences gender individually, and does not necessarily correlate to

the person's physiology or identified sex at birth. (WHO, 2021).

Gender difference occurs through a very long process and is shaped by various reasons such as religious conditions, social and cultural conditions, and state conditions (Marzuki, 2007). Because of this strong and established socialization process, it seems as if it is natural, even though it is a social construction. Therefore, this gender difference is often regarded as a nature that has become God's provision. Gender is a very important thing that can determine a person's life path. In the end, gender can determine a person's access to their needs, such as health, education, employment, and other public sectors. Gender can also determine a person's freedom and ability to make decisions and act autonomously. Perceptions and perspectives that certain sexes have certain characteristics raise expectations of gender. These expectations are burdensome for someone to behave, make decisions, and behave towards other genders. Often it greatly affects a person's attitude in making decisions and behaving towards others. It is this gender perception that creates a gender bias.

Gender bias is a condition that is biased and detrimental to one gender, leading to gender inequality and discrimination. The mentioned social construction turns out to be disadvantaging for one gender, and usually, women because it is generally carried out by men and from men's perspective, so the experiences, needs, and issues of women are often neglected and not taken into account. Gender bias is common to happen to women and is detrimental to women, and the view of gender influences the decision-making process and action. This, in particular, raises concerns of gender inequality (Wiasti, Mencermati Permasalahan Gender dan Pengarusutamaan Gender (PUG), 2017). Gender inequalities are created, socialized, reinforced, and even built socially and culturally through the state and religious teachings over a long period. This occurs in an evolved and gradual manner, resulting in the formation of established behavior and mindsets within the social structure. Gender inequality consists of marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, violence, and a longer and double burden of work (Afandi, Bentuk-Bentuk Perilaku Bias Gender, 2019).

UNHCR defines, gender-based violence as "harmful acts directed at individuals based on gender and is rooted in gender inequality, abuse of

power, and harmful norms, including threats of violence, coercion, and manipulation” (UNHCR, 2022). The forms of gender-based violence are varied: physical violence, verbal violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and socio-economic violence. Additionally, there are two other categories of violence: domestic violence and (sexual) harassment, which may encompass a combination of the types of violence mentioned above. Various forms of violence indeed exist simultaneously, most notably in abusive relationships. Such violence can be committed by a domestic partner, a family member, a coworker, to unknown individuals, or individuals acting on behalf of cultural, religious, state, or intra-state institutions. As with all forms of violence, gender-based violence refers to the unequal power relations between the perpetrator and the victim. It is created by a sense of superiority, and the attempt to assert such superiority in various levels of the society (Council of Europe, n.d.).

By far, the most frequently occurring form of gender-based violence is domestic violence. The Istanbul Convention defines domestic violence as "acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim." (Council of Europe, n.d.). Domestic violence often results in suffering, injuries, and quite often death. Worse, victims often found nowhere to run as legal mechanisms are frequently insensitive, hostile, or absent to gender issues.

Gender bias occurs in all parts of the world with different factors, and in India, social, cultural, and religious factors have a very strong influence. However, it is a serious issue in India. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), about a third of women in India have suffered from domestic violence perpetrated by their partners at some point in their life. Almost three-quarters of domestic violence victims did not seek help (Chattopadhyay & Jacob, 2019). The strong patriarchal culture and low awareness of gender equality have resulted in victims choosing to remain silent and perceive gender-based violence as normal. Thus, the Gender and Gender-based violence theory must be understood in order to understand that gender bias is the root of gender inequality that causes gender-based violence. Then it will be used by the author to understand and identify the forms of gender-based violence that

occur in India, especially in the form of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic, and analyze the Indian government policies in handling gender-based violence during the Covid-19 pandemic in feminism perspective.

2.3 PROPOSITIONS

The existence of gender-based violence caused by various aspects such as the patriarchal system, caste system, and hierarchy causes inequality to occur. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of gender-based violence that occurs throughout the world and even in India has increased. It is not only the role of society and organizations that is crucial, but the government has an instrumental role in tackling gender-based violence in India. With this formulated the following proposition: The government's role in dealing with gender-based violence is very crucial; with the implementation of lockdown policies, the number of victims of violence has greatly increased, but the government has provided assistance such as the Women Helpline, One-Stop Center scheme, Mahila Police Volunteers and the Swadhar Greh scheme. But that alone is not enough; with the reduced budget allocation from The Union for the help/protection scheme for women, the assistance provided will not be maximum and will not meet the requirements to provide the appropriate level of response services despite the increasing number of violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is because patriarchy in the society results in the absence of women in politics and policy making, resulting in policies issued by the government not being targeted and not contextual to what women need. Thus, significant efforts to tackle gender-based violence have been initiated by non-governmental organizations and the public. From a feminist perspective, the government's lack of participation and attention in tackling private issues such as gender-based violence is detrimental to the lives of women in India and the quality of government and the security of the country.

3. METHODOLOGY

During the data collection process, qualitative researchers participated in several practices (Creswell, 2013). First, the authors collected both primary and secondary data. Due to the constraints of time, distance, and the Covid-19 pandemic, the authors performed a secondary data collection with literature study by looking for references and theories relevant to the issues, and tracing the sources of writings that have been made previously. Secondary data collection will be done by

collecting data from journal articles, mass media, relevant and necessary data obtained from other researchers to answer research questions, and the internet as a source of information. This method is widely used because it is considered more efficient and makes it easier for researchers to access and collect large amounts of data with limited time and material. The data for this article will be gathered in the form of reports, articles, journals, news, and others related to the Indian government's policies in handling gender-based violence in India during the Covid-19 pandemic. To obtain primary data, the authors also conducted an in-depth interview with relevant individuals with expertise in the issue to gather secondary and supporting data. The opinions, experiences, and perspectives of informants or source persons will be supporting data from the data obtained from the literature study.

The authors conducted several steps of data processing and analysis in this thesis, following the steps provided by previous researchers for qualitative data analysis, which are as follows (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014):

1. Data Condensation, in this stage, the authors scanned a large amount of qualitative data to pick and arrange the data and assess whether the material is appropriate and relevant for the study. The authors analyzed if the gathered data is connected to the research topic regularly; in this stage, it strengthens the data. In this stage, the authors completed several tasks, including taking field notes, coding, creating categories, and creating summaries and analytic notes based on the literature collected. A compact word or a catchphrase used to identify and signify a data segment is called coding.
2. Data Display, in this stage, the findings of the process of analyzing and classifying all of the appropriate and relevant data for the study will then be presented in the form of descriptive and analytical prose, followed by tables and figures, to build a powerful analysis that answers the research question.
3. Drawing or verifying conclusions, the analysis based on processed qualitative data related to relevant theories gives a deeper understanding as a tool for developing conclusions about the selected topic.

The main subject of this research is the Indian government as the institution that issues policies related to gender-based violence, which will be

analyzed. Due to the limitations of time and distance, data related to this subject will be obtained through literature studies such as journals, articles, reports, and news. To complement this research, the authors interviewed Luxy Nabela Farez, a Feminist and founder and CEO of 'Women Studies Center of Solo 'or 'Pusat Kajian Perempuan Solo. 'Her feminist perspective and knowledge could provide insight into the analysis of this research topic.

The object of this research is Indian government policies in handling gender-based violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic from a feminism perspective. This study wants to examine, through the perspective of feminism, first gender-based violence in India against women during the Covid-19 pandemic and then the effectiveness of the Indian government in dealing with gender-based violence against women, especially during the covid-19 pandemic. This research also aims to study the importance of efforts and actions from the government in dealing with gender-based violence from the perspective of feminism.

This research used the qualitative research methods. Researchers used qualitative methods to explain the Indian Government's policies in handling gender-based violence against women from a feminism perspective. The qualitative method in research has 3 stages: the data collection stage by filtering data in the form of documents, interviews, and observations, then the data analysis stage, namely understanding the data as a whole, placing it according to the theoretical framework and explaining the related case studies and the last one is conducting interpretation of data through self-understanding associated with information or theory.

The qualitative research method is most appropriate to comprehend and evaluate social and political issues in a specific area and interpret non-numerical data. Due to the qualitative method's emphasis on general interviews or observations, it does not limit the perspectives of participants. The reason quantitative data has limits in answering and describing the issues raised by the research questions, the author chose to conduct the research using a case study. This is done to gather relevant data and information in order to conduct an in-depth study of a case. Case studies may be used to comprehend the intricacies of an issue and get an

understanding of the influence the case study has on another aspect of the issue. The case studies that will be used are cases related to the Indian government's policies in handling gender-based violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic. The final report includes researcher voices, reflexivity, complex descriptions and interpretations of the problem, and contribution to literature or calls for change (Creswell, 2013).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Gender-based violence is common in many countries, particularly developing countries. Although the majority of their forms are identical, some habits, which are represented in each society's culture, generate differences. In India, women have been mistreated for ages in the patriarchal society. Gender-based violence against Indian women crosses caste, class, region, and religious boundaries and is found in every society (Sharma & Gupta, 2004). This stems from patriarchal culture and practices which assume that men are superior to women in their social system. Profound beliefs about male superiority allow men to easily exert and effectively legitimize limitless power over women's life. Due to the internalization of patriarchy, legitimization of the use of violence to enforce obedience, and the increasing desire for individual ego affirmation and control, violence is continually used by men to control women (Sharma & Gupta, 2004).

Gender-based violence takes many forms, e.g. sexual, physical, mental, and economic violence, and it can occur in both private and public settings (Afandi, 2019). Gender inequality, power abuse, and dangerous norms are basically the basis of this violence. During this Covid-19 pandemic, the most rapidly increasing violence is domestic violence or violence that occurs at home where the perpetrator is a partner, other family member, in-laws, parent, or another close relative. The government's policy to do self-quarantine and lockdown has caused victims of domestic violence, especially women, to be trapped with their perpetrators in the house, and their access to the outside world was closed.

4.1.1. FACTORS AFFECTING GBV IN INDIA

The causes of gender-based violence against women in India cannot be separated from socio-economic factors. In previous studies by Arifin,

Yudani, and Aziza, it was stated that there are several factors that cause violence against women. And from these several factors, the main root of the cause of violence against women is the patriarchal system that applies in society (Arifin, Yudani, & Aziza, 2022). Thus, the following are the main interrelated factors that influence gender-based violence in India.

1. Social factors

From social factors, the existence of a caste system and patriarchy rooted in Indian society is the main factor causing gender inequality and leading to gender-based violence. The caste system, being an ancient form of social stratification among the Hindu-majority inhabitants of India, categorizes people at birth, defining their place in society, their occupation, and who they can marry. The system has dictated virtually all aspects of Indian religious and social life. The caste system privileges the upper castes, while at the same time does injustice to the lower castes. This caste system gives rise to deep-rooted discrimination in Indian society. Even though the system had been legally abolished in 1950 (Fadhilah, 2022), the customs and views of society cannot simply disappear; many are still affected by the caste system.

It is exacerbated by the existence of a Patriarchal system or a system that considers men to be superior to women, which is also rooted in the beliefs, culture, and daily life of Indian society. You can imagine the discriminatory treatment received by women from lower castes. This also causes violence against women to be normalized/considered normal. One example of a patriarchal system in India is the Dowry culture. Dowry itself is a dowry given by the bride to the groom if he wants to hold a wedding. Dowry must be paid by the bride as a condition for marriage (Britannica, 2019). Nowadays, the form of dowry requested by the groom is usually in the form of money or other valuable possessions. If a groom has a high social status, the more his demand for the bride will be. Even after getting married, the groom and his family keep demanding for dowry, which forces the bride and her family to do whatever it takes to fulfill it. If the bride cannot fulfill the dowry request from the groom, the bride will experience violence from her husband and other family members, such as her in-laws, until his dowry request is fulfilled.

Indian society believes that divorce is a taboo and a disgrace to the family, so many women will do whatever it takes to get the dowry their husband

asks for to avoid divorce. This Dowry causes women to suffer even before or from birth; many parents in India abort/kill their baby girls for fear that they will not be able to pay the dowry to their potential partner (Dhillon, 2021). Many women are also killed by their husbands with the excuse of committing suicide so that the man can remarry and get a dowry or wealth again. Even though Dowry has been abolished by the Indian government and has been illegal in India for 60 years, culture and customs certainly cannot disappear instantly (Dhillon, 2021).

2. Economic factors

The economic factor is the poverty that hit India, which also causes gender inequality for women. Poverty prevents minority women in India from getting access to education, health, and other public services. Given the lack of services and the provision of free services from the government. Women in India rely solely on their husbands or family for their lives. They do not have the ability to be financially independent because of the lack of employment opportunities for women, and if they work, there is a difference in the salary that women get.

According to a 2019 survey on sexism and patriarchy, society, and women empowerment, just 25% of women in India are employed (Trust, 2022). The report also indicates that working women experience mental harassment, harassment, job discrimination, unsafe transport conditions, and, to top it all off, a lack of family support for the given and even beyond. Furthermore, the majority of female respondents claimed that they must involve a male partner, such as their father/husband, in making the decision to work or seek their consent before even considering working. This study also shows that male characters, such as dads and spouses, make the majority of household decisions. As a result, this permission culture has emerged as a significant barrier to women's mobility and future employment, as most families do not favor women working outside the household (Trust, 2022). Women in India are generally only given household tasks such as cleaning the house, taking care of the children, and cooking. They are very rarely given the opportunity to work in business sectors. This financial dependence is one of the factors that make women unable to escape domestic violence.

3. Health factor

In India, the health of boys takes precedence over girls. The infant mortality rate for female infants is higher than that of male infants. The gender disparity in child survival is reportedly 11%. This means more baby boys are born in India and continue their lives. It can also be seen from the free care offered by the government for newborns in more than 700 hospitals in India, and around 60% of babies treated at these facilities are boys, indicating that parents often pay less attention to their baby girl (Unicef India, 2022).

In addition, the poor level of health for baby girls in India can be seen in the prevalence of selective abortion. Not a few parents abort their babies when they find out the baby that they are carrying is a girl. And if they don't find out until the baby is born, many baby girls are killed by their parents. Because women are considered as having a low status in Indian society, having a daughter is seen as a burden for the family, and they feel burdened if they have to give a dowry to the prospective partner of their child in the future. Just being born a female child is considered a curse by certain parts of society (Sharma & Gupta, 2004). Even if they are allowed to live, the girl is usually neglected or ostracized and often receives torture and physical violence. Not only the physical violence these girls receive, but the feeling of being unwanted, experiencing verbal and nonverbal violence, and other injustices certainly affect their mental health and cause physical and psychological trauma. The physical and mental trauma these women experience can have an impact on their future, impacting the way they socialize and deteriorating their health and well-being.

4. Educational factor

Men considered superior to women in Indian society cause parents to prioritize the education of their sons. Access to education for girls in India has been made easier, but permission and access from parents are difficult to obtain. Parents do not think their daughters have the right and need for education. In 2017, about a third (32%) of girls were not provided with formal education, compared to 28% of boys. As stated before, male education is highly valued in India, and it is frequently considered not a necessity to provide the financial support for girl's education, due to these gender stereotypes (Abhinanda, 2019). The lack of knowledge and education these girls possess can make them easily influenced and controlled and ultimately dependent on the male figure in their family because it is also difficult to get a job to

support themselves. This can also make gender-based violence difficult to eliminate because these women think that they must always follow the patriarchal cultural system that has been embraced by Indian society for hundreds of years. Whereas with the basic education that girls have, they can know which things are good and bad. The education sector is important to release women from the patriarchal culture that harms them. With education, women can be independent and no longer depend on others, especially men. This independence can increase the awareness of the importance of gender equality in all aspects of life

4.1.2. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On the last day of 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) received official information about a pneumonia case in Wuhan City, China. The severe acute respiratory syndrome, later known as Covid-19, is caused by the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The Covid-19 pandemic that has occurred in the last 2 years has had many negative impacts on many aspects of the social and economic life of the world. The impact of the pandemic can almost be felt by all levels of society, not limited by economic status, social status, citizenship status, and not to mention gender. In addition to health problems, this pandemic also has a negative impact on the lives of women, including women in India. According to a UN Women report, globally, a third of women have experienced physical or sexual violence, with their partner being the most frequent perpetrator (Roy, 2021). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the National Commission for Women (NCW) found that the incidence of domestic violence cases against women has rise sharply, as found from the number of emergency telephone calls made by women. In 2020, the first year of the pandemic, women made 112,292 reports to the police, approximately equal to one every five minutes.

Governments of various countries have implemented lockdown regulations to prevent the spread of Covid-19, and India is no exception. India's 733 districts were classified into Red, Orange, and Green Zones depending on the severity of the local outbreak, according to an order issued by India's Ministry of Home Affairs on May 1, 2020 (India Today, 2020). The red zone indicates that the corona virus infection rate in the region is high, orange indicates the moderate infection rate,

while green is given to areas without Covid-19 infection.

The red zone saw the strictest lockdowns, with all modes of transportation stopped with only four-wheeled vehicles with one driver and two passengers permitted, and also two-wheeled vehicles without pillion riders. All government offices, as well as those in the commercial, industrial, hotel, and private sectors, have been shut down. As well as the education sector, religious activities, sports, entertainment, and culture are all closed for the time being. Offices were permitted to open with only one-third of their staff. However, exceptions for banking, insurance, ATMs, and important services for the community, such as sanitation, clean water, electricity, hospitals, and other medical-related matters, are still allowed to open along with transportation carrying basic needs and medical teams such as nurses or other hospital supporters. Basically, shops that are allowed to open are shops that sell food or basic human needs and medicines. Comparatively, there were fewer restrictions in the orange and green zone districts. The green zone districts allowed all activities, excluding those prohibited on a national level (India Today, 2020). The impact of tighter restrictions severely affects women's space and opportunity to escape, which forces them to stay with their abusive partners, families, or in-laws. In districts with the strictest lockdown restrictions, according to preliminary data, domestic violence complaints surged by 131% in May 2020 (Radhakrishnan & Singaravelu, 2020). This data was supported by The Hindu, a prominent Indian newspaper. The graphic below shows that complaints about domestic violence are increasing rapidly in states categorized as red zone districts with stricter restrictions. The highest number of reports was found in the state of Uttar Pradesh, followed by the states of Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Haryana.

Residents were advised not to leave home, unless for urgent purposes such as hospital visits or buying household necessities. In some geographic areas and parts of Indian society anyway, women are often prohibited from leaving the house other than for work or school. This lockdown policy had greatly increased the number of domestic violence cases, as it left many women stuck with the perpetrator in their house, with nowhere to run. Although these lockdown restrictions provide more freedom for perpetrators of domestic violence, they can easily cut off women's access to the outside

world, cellphones, and other people to complain and ask for help, as well as to limit the support they can get from family or relatives. The number of women fired from their jobs also increases their economic dependence on men. One woman who experienced daily verbal and emotional violence from her partner claimed that her employment saved her from his abuse. Her husband was likewise away from her due to his job. She was forced to live in constant fear due to the lockdown and self-isolation restrictions imposed by the government (Deshpande, 2020). They have no choice but to stay in the house even when they experience domestic violence. The graphic below shows a rapid increase in domestic violence complaints compared to other complaints.

According to Rekha Sharma, chairwoman of the National Commission for Women (NCW), "The number has increased. Men are frustrated at home and take it out on women. This is especially visible in Punjab, where we have received lots of complaints." (Wani, 2020). Violence against women is often considered normal in most of Indian society because of its deep-rooted patriarchal culture and system. Data from the National Commission of Women (NCW) also shows that in India, during the lockdown, Indian women filed more domestic violence complaints compared to the same calendar months over the past decade. Tamil Nadu Police also claimed a rise in reports of domestic violence. During the lockdown, they police received around 25 calls each day, and recorded 40 cases of domestic violence (Kannan, 2020). Even this extraordinary spike might only reflect a minority of the cases, as the large majority (86%) of women victimized by domestic violence did not ask for help, and of the remaining who did report, only a small percentage were able to contact relevant authorities (Radhakrishnan & Singaravelu, 2020).

There are several causes for this underreporting, ranging from shame and family honor to a lack of finances to thrive outside marriage. The lockdown situation, on the other hand, made reporting even more difficult because the chances of a perpetrator constantly monitoring the victim rose tenfold, especially in rural India, where no reporting mechanism is available. The reduced capacity of influential organizations or social organizations was another reason why survivors who did report received little to no assistance. Due to their limited capabilities, it was incredibly difficult for such facilities to provide the necessary assistance for

violence survivors. During the pandemic, the machinery and structures in place to protect women (the Domestic Violence Act) were not considered critical. Services that are usually utilized in cases of domestic violence, like the police, were overworked, helplines were not completely operational, and the infrastructure to support survivors was neglected. As a result, the government was unable to manage this shadow pandemic that spread rapidly and simultaneously since shelters were overloaded or at capacity (Collective, 2021).

As the Covid-19 pandemic enters its second year, the number of women reporting violence to the National Commission for Women increased. In 2021, the commission received a total of 30,865 complaints, of which 72.5% or 22,379 complaints of total complaints divided into 3 categories, namely securing their right to live with dignity, protection from domestic violence, and harassment of married women, including for dowry. And 36% of the 22,379 complaints were complaints about domestic violence (Pandit, Domestic violence complaints to NCW rose 26% last year, 2022). Chairwoman of the National Commission for Women, Reka Sharma, said that since 2020 the NCW had opened a helpline that serves 24 hours a day. They get 400 calls every day, including those asking for information related to the NCW, and get about 10 emergency calls that need emergency help in a week. In 2021, as in 2020, with 6.682 complaints, the major reason women went to the commission was to get help with domestic violence resulting in a 26% increase (Pandit, Domestic violence complaints to NCW rose 26% last year, 2022). In addition, Uttar Pradesh remains the highest reporting for domestic violence with 2508 cases registered, followed by Delhi (1037), then Maharashtra (511), Haryana (370), and lastly Bihar (327) (National Commission for Women, 2021). In 2022, as of the time this article was written, there were 2081 reports on domestic violence received by the NCW. This year too, Uttar Pradesh is still leading with 862 cases reported, followed by Delhi (252) cases, Maharashtra (159), Haryana (117), and in Bihar (103) (VP, 2022). These numbers were predicted to continue to rise but there is hope of less than significant one, given the situation that has improved compared to previous years.

4.2 INDIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN HANDLING GBV

In response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government is primarily responsible

to maintain law and order, protect citizens' lives and property, and handle and prevent domestic violence against women. In prioritizing women's safety, the Government has also taken initiatives such as the One-Stop Centers (OSCs), universalization of Women Help Line (WHL), SwadharGreh, invoking authorities under women-centered laws such as 'The Protection of Women from the Domestic Violence Act, 2005' and the 'Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961', and so on are still operational and available to provide assistance to women (Press Information Bureau Delhi, 2020).

4.2.1. INDIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES

4.2.1.1 THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) consists of a preamble and 30 articles, explains what is defined by discrimination against women and establishes a national action agenda to eliminate such discrimination. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are required by law to execute its provisions. Such countries must also submit national reports on the efforts they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations on a four-yearly basis (UN Women, 2022). Participating countries are obligated to promote gender equality and end all forms of discrimination against women. On December 19, 1979, the UN General Assembly ratified the CEDAW Convention. It became a treaty on December 3, 1981; as of now, 189 of the world's 195 countries have ratified it (UN Women, 2022).

As a participant, the Indian government has committed to upholding its legal commitments to respect, protect, and fulfill women's human rights by ratifying the international agreement CEDAW on July 9, 1993. Regarding domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape, as well as anti-trafficking, new laws have been passed in India, or existing ones have been amended. Moreover, India is dedicated to embracing gender equality perspectives in national, economic, and social planning and has set aside funds to create a national action plan that emphasizes women's empowerment and anti-discrimination.

4.2.1.2 THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT, 2005

“An Act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the

Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”

(Protection of Women From Domestic Violence Act, 2005, 2005)

In 2005, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was passed to protect women from domestic violence. The law had many unique characteristics; it broadened the definition of domestic violence and included any woman in a domestic relationship, including mother, sister, and daughter, within its protection. Under this law, domestic violence can include various forms of abuse and violence. It includes harassing or inflicting harm on women or families in exchange for dowry, money, or properties. Domestic violence also includes the threat to harass or harm someone. It also encompasses any act that creates physical or emotional pain. Violence here can also include physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and financial abuse. It does not have to be an actual action; simply not doing anything can also be considered domestic violence. For instance, not paying for or neglecting the family can also be categorized as economic abuse. This law guarantees every woman in any relationship can be protected from domestic violence. Victims or anyone such as family or friends who know of an act of domestic violence experienced by a person can complain to the security officer or service provider, who will later report it to the security officer.

4.2.1.3 DOWRY PROHIBITION ACT, 1961

The Indian Dowry Prohibition Act, enacted on May 1, 1961, prohibited the giving or receiving of dowry, defined as “property, goods, or money provided by either party to the marriage, by either party's parents, or by anybody in relation to the marriage” (Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961). This law prohibits a person from giving, asking for, or demanding a dowry from the prospective partner. Except for the state of Jammu & Kashmir, this act applies to the entire state of India. This act applies to all citizens of all religions. However, it does not cover dower or meher in the case of those bound to Muslim private law. This law also states that the dowry should benefit the wife or heir. If someone other than the bride or woman receives the dowry, that person must give it to the woman if it was earned before the wedding, at the time, or within three months of the marriage. If the girl is under the age of 18 at the time of marriage, it can be given to her once she turns 18. If the person fails to send the

dowry to the wife, they could face a jail term of at least 6 years, which can be prolonged to 2 years, or a fine of at least 5000 rupees. And if a woman is entitled to dowry property and dies before receiving it, her heirs or her children are entitled to the dowry. But if the woman does not have children, her parents are entitled to the dowry. (Ministry of Women and Child Development, n.d.)

4.2.1.4 NIRBHAYA FUND

As the government's responsibility to maintain the security and welfare of women's lives by working to oppose violence against women, the government of India issued the Nirbhaya Fund. Following the December 2012 tragedy, the government established a special fund that can be utilized for programs targeted directly at improving women's safety and security. The Nirbhaya Fund is managed by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, where unspent funds can be carried forward to be used in the following fiscal year. Furthermore, according to Ministry of Finance guidelines, the Ministry of Women and Child Development assesses and recommends proposals to be funded through the Nirbhaya Fund. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is also responsible for reviewing and monitoring the progress of the sanction scheme in collaboration with the relevant Ministries and or departments. The Nirbhaya Fund is responsible for funding several programs aimed at protecting and empowering women. Within this framework, the Ministry of Women and Child Development launched programs such as the Women Helpline, Mahila Police Volunteers, and One- Stop Center for women impacted by violence. This Nirbhaya fund, for example, was also used to install 500 CCTV in vulnerable areas and public areas. The installation of CCTV is expected to make women feel safe because perpetrators may think twice about committing violence. After all, with CCTV, the evidence to complain is stronger. (Ministry of Women and Child Development)

4.2.2. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

4.2.2.1 UNIVERSALIZATION OF WOMEN HELP LINE SCHEME (WHL)

In realizing its commitment to include realize equality between the sexes and genders in every law and to give access to women to a violence-free life, the Indian government implemented the Universalization of Women Helpline scheme (WHL). The scheme, according to the Ministry of

Women and Child Development, has the following objectives:

1. "To provide toll-free 24-hours telecom service to women affected by violence seeking support and information.
2. To facilitate crisis and non-crisis intervention through referral to the appropriate agencies such as police/Hospitals/Ambulance services/District Legal Service Authority (DLSA)/Protection Officer (PO)/OSC.
3. To provide information about the appropriate support services, government schemes, and programs available to the woman affected by violence, in her particular situation within the local area in which she resides or is employed." (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016)

The scheme provides 24-hour emergency and immediate response to victims through referrals such as connecting with police authorities, One-Stop Centers, and hospitals, as well as providing information on government scheme programs related to women throughout the country through one uniform number. WHL also provides information on existing laws on the empowerment and protection of women. WHL can be contacted by women in need of this information, or someone working on their behalf, and will provide it, or direct the women to the appropriate department. WHL will also guide women on the procedures to be followed in order to take full advantage of such schemes and programs (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016).

The Government of India's Department of Telecommunication has created the short code 181, which has to be adopted by states or union territories as Women's Helpline (WHL) numbers. All telecommunication lines will also be compatible with this number, which will make it easier for every woman to ask for help. Under this scheme, the Women Helpline (WHL) would be integrated with the One-Stop Center Scheme (OSC). In each state one OSC will be established, with the objective of providing integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence. Such women in need of protection and recovery services will be able to access the OSC through the Women Helpline (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016).

According to data from the department of social welfare and the nutritional meal program, the helpline received over 5,700 distress calls in 2020

- 2021. The number of calls reporting harassment, abuse, and domestic violence increased to 1,540 from 1,231 the year before. Additionally, the number of calls about marriage or relationship issues rose from 1,110 to 1,510, and calls from women seeking psychological support rose by nearly 200 to 925 (R, 2021). The increase in complaints should not only be linked to the pandemic's effects but also the widespread national attention and official advertisements for the 181 WHL for women in need. The assumption is that as awareness grows, more women will come out and report incidents of violence and discrimination.

4.2.2.2 ONE-STOP CENTERS (OSCS)

The One-Stop Center scheme was established to provide support for women who experience and suffer from violence. The One-Stop Center scheme has been approved for execution from April 1, 2015. This scheme is funded by the Nirbhaya Fund and aims to provide access to women affected by violence to various integrated services such as medical support, police support, legal assistance, psychological treatment, and temporary support services. All women from all backgrounds who have experienced any form of violence can seek help at the One-Stop Centre. In addition, institutions and agencies created under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act of 2012 will be integrated with the OSC for girls under the age of 18 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2017). The scheme, according to its guideline, has the following objectives:

1. "To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces, under one roof.
2. To facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counseling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women." (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2017)

There are 7 types of services facilitated by OSC (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2017):

1. Emergency Response and Rescue Services

The OSC will facilitate rescue and referral services for women victims of violence. The National Health Mission (NHM), the 108 services, and the police will all be linked for this purpose so that the

victim can be extricated and directed to the closest health care facility or shelter home.

2. Medical assistance

Women victims of violence will be directed to the closest hospital for treatment or examination in accordance with the guidelines and procedures created by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

3. Assistance to women in lodging FIR/NCR/DIR
The OSC will facilitate and assist victims in submitting First Information Reports, Non-Conformance Reports, and Domestic Incident Reports.

4. Psycho-social support/counseling

The OSC will provide counseling services for victims who have experienced psychological violence or mental problems. Also, provide moral support and enthusiasm for seeking justice.

5. Legal aid and counseling

The OSC will facilitate access to justice for women victims of violence and provide legal assistance and counseling through Lawyers or the National/State/County Legal Services Authority. The victim will be given a lawyer of her choice if she wishes to report and try her case.

6. Shelter

For women victims of violence, the OSC will support temporary shelter facilities. This is only a temporary solution, though, as plans will be made to work with SwadharGreh/Short Stay Houses run by the government or NGOs for long-term housing needs. For a maximum of five days, the OSC offers temporary shelters for women along with their children (girls of all ages and boys up to the age of 8).

7. Video Conferencing Facility

The OSC will provide video conferencing through various platforms such as Skype, Google Meet, and others, with the aim of facilitating fast and hassle-free police and court processes. Through this facility, a victim can record her statement for the police and court from the OSC using electronic audio or video. This facility will be provided upon consultation with the Superintendent of Police, District and Sessions Judge of the district at the scene or concerned. (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2017)

Throughout the pandemic, 700 One-Stop-Crisis centers continued to operate, assisting more than 300,000 women who had been abused and required shelter, legal assistance, and medical attention (UN Women, 2021).

4.2.2.3 MAHILA POLICE VOLUNTEERS SCHEME (MPV)

The Ministry of Women and Child Development established the Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme in cooperation with the Department of Home Affairs to enroll MPVs for the States and UTs. As a public-policy interface, it is a central sector program designed to assist women in need. In order to enhance police outreach on gender issues such as domestic violence, child marriage, harassment about dowry and public violence against women, this program calls for creating a connection between the police and the communities. In 13 states, MPVs have been permitted. There were 9,531 MPVs in five states as of March 2020 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016). The objectives of the Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme are:

1. "An MPV will serve as a public police interface in order to fight crime against women. The broad mandate of MPVs is to report incidences of violence against women, such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry harassment, and violence faced by women in public spaces. She will act as a role model for the community.

2. An MPV is an honorary position."
(Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016)

An MPV is a woman who has professional and voluntary commitment to the empowerment of women and girls, willingness to speak out against gender-based violence, and willingness to work with the police to build a society free from violence. MPVs serve as a helpful link between the public and the police. Their main responsibility will be to monitor situations in which women in the community are harassed, denied their rights and entitlements, or whose development is impeded. MPV is also tasked with creating awareness of services provided for women and children, such as One-Stop Centers, short-term shelters, SwadharGreh, police helpline 100, and women's helpline 181 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016)

However, the Mahila Police Volunteer Scheme has been stopped due to the state government's lack of encouraging response. Unfortunately, Mahila Police Volunteers operate in only 5 of the 13 approved states (Pandit, 2021). Nevertheless, this scheme is very helpful for women, especially in the village, where volunteers stationed at the police station help spread awareness about violence

against women and help facilitate women reluctant to approach the police.

4.2.2.4 SWADHARGREH SCHEME

The Swadhar Greh Scheme focuses on women with disadvantages who have a need for institutional support for rehabilitation so they can live their lives with dignity, and is set up by the Ministry of Women's and Child Development. This program guarantees access to shelter, food, healthcare, and economic and social security. The scheme also encompasses the specific needs of women and takes the necessary precautions to ensure that no woman is left behind, which could result in exploitation and destruction. The SwadharGreh, which can accommodate 30 women, will be set up in each district as part of the Scheme. The objectives of the scheme are as follows (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015):

1. "To cater to the primary need of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment, and care of the women in distress and who are without any social and economic support.

2. To enable them to regain their emotional strength that gets hampered due to their encounter with unfortunate circumstances.

3. To provide them with legal aid and guidance to enable them to take steps for their readjustment in family/society.

4. To rehabilitate them economically and emotionally.

5. To act as a support system that understands and meets various requirements of women in distress.

6. To enable them to start their life afresh with dignity and conviction."

(Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015)

More than one SwadharGreh could be established for large cities, other districts with a population of more than 4 million persons, or areas where there should be more additional support for women. Depending on the need evaluation and other important parameters, SwadharGreh's capacity could be upgraded to serve 5 to 10 million persons (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015).

SwadharGreh provides temporary housing and providing food, clothing, medical facilities, and more for women who need them. It also provides vocational gradation training and skills improvement for the economic rehabilitation of these women so that later they can live independently of others. SwadharGreh will also

facilitate counseling in person and by telephone, awareness-raising, and behavioral training for women, as well as providing legal assistance and guidance for women who wish to report their cases and seek justice (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015). Women who have experienced domestic violence may stay for one year at the longest. The longest stay allowed for other categories of women is 3 years, and women over the age of 55 may be accommodated for a maximum of 5 years before being relocated to nursing homes or other such institutions. Women with children are allowed to stay on the condition the girls reach the age limit of 18 years and boys reaching 8 years. Above that age, the boy must be transferred to a Children's Home, which is managed under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015).

4.3 DISCUSSION

India puts men in the first position and women in the second position with a patriarchal system that has been rooted in all aspects of people's lives. This social system encourages men to think that power and violence enable them to dominate and control other people and that it is men who own women and have the right to their lives. This patriarchal system is rooted not only in religion but also in its culture, thus forming a very patriarchal society. The concept of gender differences, as passed through generations, is considered as natural, and because of this, a character that demands attitudes, behavior, and thoughts in accordance with the patterns that have been created in society is born. Such as that, men are required to highlight their masculine side by leading, dominating, being considered stronger, and having more authority than women who have a gentle nature, must be obedient, and may not display the side of masculinity. Therefore, it is not surprising that many women are victimized by gender-based violence as they are required to show their feminine side, which must be gentle and obedient, and it is men who have more authority over themselves, and thus violence against women is considered natural. Men also believed that they express their masculinity by committing violence against women. The patriarchal system that exists in Indian society is the main factor in the existence of gender-based violence and the justification for it. This gender-based violence is considered normal and very difficult to eliminate because even though this patriarchal thinking is rooted in men, women also consider themselves inferior to men, and that

violence against themselves is normal. It is evident from data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), which shows that more than 40% of women and 38% of men say that it is allowed for a man to beat his wife if she mistreats her in-laws, disobeys her husband's orders, neglects her home or children, goes out without telling and asking for husband's permission, refuses to have sex, or not cook properly (The CSR Journal, 2022).

According to Luxy Nabela Farez, a feminist, what makes this patriarchal system and gender-based violence last is the lack of public awareness and understanding about this patriarchal system itself, gender, violence, gender-based violence, and the importance of gender equality so that all forms of gender-based violence are normalized. The patriarchal system makes women not have the same opportunities as men, which greatly contributes to and is even the main cause of gender inequality (Farez, 2022). This gender inequality causes Indian women to experience injustice in various forms in various aspects of their lives. Indian women's lack of education access is one of the contributing factors. Parents in India consider that their sons are more deserving of education due to the patriarchal social construction, which assumes that men are the ones who lead and have to work to earn a living while women should be able to do only housework that does not require education. Given that the majority of India's population is in poverty, it is normal for their daughters' education to be sacrificed. Maybe access to education has been made easy, but access and permission from parents for their daughters to get an education are difficult. This lack of education and knowledge also makes women in India or, in general, easy to be influenced, controlled, and dependent on men because they are not aware of their rights and privileges. Lack of education also results in difficulties for women to find work or make a living independently, so they choose not to leave their partners even if they experience violence. The prevailing caste system also exacerbates this patriarchal system; although it has been abolished by the government, of course, it will not be easily removed from Indian society and culture, resulting in greater and more detrimental consequences for women: the caste system, hierarchy, and patriarchal culture place women in a low and disadvantaged position.

Under normal circumstances, domestic violence in India is already high, especially in a pandemic where there is chaos in health, economic

uncertainty, and many other pressures. During the Covid-19 pandemic, governments across the world, including India, implemented regulations for self-quarantine and lockdown. In essence, people are asked to stay at home and do all work activities at home. So, of course, it is not surprising if the number of domestic violence increases even in circumstances where reporting is already difficult. According to Urvashi Butalia, Director of Zubaan, women in India have suffered due to the pandemic. The rate of domestic violence in India increased as people are locked in their homes 24/7, and they don't have any possible channels to release pressure, such as by going out and interacting with friends, and also to work. In addition, because India is generally a developing country, houses tend to be cramped, which led to increased domestic violence and difficulties faced by women. There is also a technological gap making it almost impossible to report domestic violence, as fewer women have phones compared to men (Butalia, 2020). The perpetrators have full control and monitoring of women in their homes, preventing them from accessing telephones, families, support systems, and help centers. The unstable economic situation has also made many women who previously worked, fired, and lost their jobs, so their dependence on men for survival makes them inevitably survive in households with domestic violence.

The steps taken by the Indian government in combating gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, need to be appreciated. By ratifying CEDAW in 1993, the Indian government is certainly committed to paying attention to women's rights and promoting gender equality. Then, as a result, the Indian government began to come up with various laws that guaranteed women's rights or protected women from violence, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961. The government also launched a special fund aimed at funding schemes such as the One-Stop Centre, Women Helpline, and Mahila Police Volunteers aimed at helping and supporting women victims of violence called the Nirbhaya Fund. It can be seen that the Indian government has taken the initiative and is willing to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against women and strive for women's rights and gender equality. The state has tried to be present in private issues and the private affairs of its people, as in this case, gender-based violence, by ensuring that their rights are protected by law and providing programs and schemes

related to the issue. In addition, the state has made efforts to facilitate and cater to the needs of women victims of violence.

In times of pandemic crisis, and with the increasing number of gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, the government's role is instrumental to ensure the security and safety of women in a violence-free environment. The state governments stipulate that women's protection schemes, especially from domestic violence as described above, remain open and operational during the pandemic to ensure that women affected by the pandemic and experiencing violence have a place to complain and a place of refuge. Moreover, a number of states are putting plans in place to assist affected women. For example, the Delhi Police installed 11 "Pink Booths" in northwest Delhi to ensure that women are safe in public and private areas. The booths have been set up in places like marketplaces, schools, colleges, and coaching facilities that are frequently visited by women and children (Phutela, 2022). With the help of this booth, women will be provided with facilities, security, and assistance. For women, this booth will serve as a one-stop center where they can go to report any issues or crimes against them to the police. It was also highlighted that these are provided as safe places for women, and as a way to report problems without physically going to the police station, although some booths have also been set up at the police station (Phutela, 2022). Then, in Tamil Nadu, women are allowed to leave their houses even during the peak of the pandemic when it is deemed that they are in a life-threatening situation. Protection Officers are also considered an essential workforce and given the freedom to move around.

Additionally, 111 counselors received specific authorization to serve as protection officers so that victims would receive the assistance that's more empathetic and trauma-informed (One Future Collective, 2021). In addition, the Uttar Pradesh government set up a special helpline for victims of domestic abuse under the tagline "Suppress Corona, not your voice." It can be accessed online, along with a picture of a woman in a mask. The implied message is that speaking out against domestic violence is still possible even if you wear a mask to stop the virus from spreading. Furthermore, the police ensured that if a woman has filed a complaint, a female police officer would come immediately (Panicker, 2020). Moreover, with the increasing number of violence, the

Karnataka High Court posed many hard questions to the State Government regarding the resources provided for survivors as well as the sorts of funding that were available (One Future Collective, 2021).

However, these individual state government actions are only beneficial or helpful to victims and survivors within the specific state. It is certain that these steps, apparently and in fact, are inadequate. Considering India's diversity with various limitations, national level initiatives and solutions are needed to address the serious situation of domestic violence against women and deprivation of their rights. Nevertheless, in India, there has been no national statement to declare a state of emergency pertaining to domestic violence, or to declare domestic violence services as essential during the lockdown. The Indian central government issued no new initiatives or programs during the Covid-19 pandemic; instead, the machinery and structures provided under the Domestic Violence Act 2005 to protect women were not classified as essential. Consequently, the personnel with the qualifications to provide assistance during volatile situations, such as Protection Officers and those working with civil society organizations, could not reach victims. Domestic violence services, such as the police, were also overloaded with work, and the need for responsive infrastructure that supports survivors of gender-based violence took a back seat due to various circumstances of pressure and the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown (One Future Collective, 2021).

India has issued a specific gender budget alongside its Union budget since 2001. However, this budget remains less than 5% of total Union budget expenditure, and by 2021, the gender budget has dropped by a remarkable 26% (One Future Collective, 2021). The report by Oxfam India estimates that an annual budget of INR 100 billion to 110 billion would be needed only for a program directed to address violence against women and girls in India if the Indian government's dedication to assisting victims and survivors of violence against women is translated into an intervention program aimed at reaching around 60% of women affected in the next five years (Oxfam India, 2021). Unfortunately, the current budget allocation is not even a quarter (25%) of what is required to reach even that number. Women's specific allocation for violence against women and girl program,

including schemes such as the 181 women's helpline, One Stop Centre, and SwadharGreh, which are targeted at women and girls and where the funds benefit them in its entirety, make up for less than 0.07% of the union's total budget allocation in 2020-2021 (Oxfam India, 2021). This funding allocation is needed to implement and develop women-specific programs for victims of violence. If the government does not consider services against domestic violence as essential, it is not surprising that the funds spent are less than what is needed. As a consequence, the number of victims and survivors who can be helped is limited, and the quality of service is not optimal.

Although the government takes a willingness and action to deal with violence, the implementation of each has not been carried out and executed properly. Seeing the absence of special initiatives by the Indian government as a response to the increasing number of violence, especially domestic violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic, feminism sees the inaction of the state in the private issues of its citizens. Patriarchal thinking affects not only people's views and ways of thinking but also government and policy making. The role of managing household activities traditionally assigned to women makes it difficult for women to move beyond their stereotypical roles and participate in politics and the country's decision-making processes. In addition, lack of attention to education of women results in few of them obtaining the proper education to enter politics. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), women make up about 10.5% of Parliament members as of October 2021, and women's representation in Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's bicameral parliament). This has not even increased by 10% in the last 75 years of independence, which according to data by the Inter-Parliamentary Union only 14.44% of the Lok Sabha's total members are women (Drishti IAS, 2021).

The lack of women's participation and representation in Indian politics greatly affects the policies issued by the government. With the lack of political participation from women in policy-making, there are fewer parties who can voice women's rights which have been forgotten or neglected, so the policies made will not be contextual and do not target the needs of women (Farez, 2022). Good governance requires active participation from all parties, such as men and

women, so that the government can issue a policy able to fulfill the community's needs; thus, the community will also get their rights. The government's lack of role in dealing with issues of gender-based violence, especially domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic, has finally made NGOs, CSOs, activists, celebrities, and even the public themselves take action. One of them is the emergence of hashtivism or campaigns using hashtags with taglines on social media. For example, the emergence of the hashtag #LockDownMeinLockUp is to support the action against increasing domestic violence during India's COVID-19 lockdown. Women and even celebrities who have experienced domestic violence flocked to upload their selfies (with various evidence of violence) and tell their stories as a form of solidarity and as a picture of their resistance to domestic violence. The short-term impact obtained is undoubtedly a material benefit as this digital campaign has also succeeded in raising funds for domestic violence interventions and care and safety measures for many women who have experienced abuse or violence during and after the pandemic (Mukherjee, 2021). But what is enduring, in a global-local crisis situation or not, remains a matter of policy and much work needs to be done at a structural level to tackle gender-based violence against women and India's widespread gender inequality. Without the government's leading role in overcoming gender-based violence by ensuring inclusiveness and adequate facilities, the government is the same as perpetuating inequality and creating a snowball effect that is endless but gets worse every time.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in negative impacts to the lives of almost everyone in the world, including women. To deal with this crisis, various countries, including India, have implemented a number of health protocols, including lockdown and self-quarantine policies. Although there have been a number of positive results in suppressing the transmission of the virus, these policies cannot be separated from various derivative impacts, such as the impact on increasing gender-based violence against women, especially domestic violence, due to lack of access to the outside world, access to help, and they are trapped in their homes, with perpetrators who can monitor them even more. India has a strongly patriarchal culture and practice, so it is not surprising that domestic violence in this country often occurs and is considered normal by society.

The Indian government does not make new policies and initiatives nationally, but they continue to open services for women victims of violence that have existed for a long time, such as Women Helpline, One Stop Centres, SwadharGreh, and Mahila Police Volunteers. The new initiatives were only enacted by a few states and had an impact on those specific areas. In addition, funding for these schemes from the Union Budget has decreased. As a result, the service and quality that can be provided to victims and survivors are not optimal. The Indian government does not consider this increase in the number of domestic violence against women as essential during the Covid-19 pandemic. Feminism sees this, undoubtedly, because of the influence of patriarchy which is rooted not only in society but also in government. The assumption that women are inferior causes the government to not be present optimally in the private affairs of society, such as gender-based violence and the lack of women's political representation in India, so the policies issued by the government are certainly not targeted and contextual towards women. This has resulted in many actions and initiatives being carried out by activists, non-governmental organizations (NGO), civil society organizations (CSO), and the public. Of course, they are moving in the interests of women and targeting more women because of the government's lack of effort in dealing with gender-based violence against women. Therefore, an emancipatory movement is needed by the government to encourage policies that are sensitive to gender issues and maximize their application, especially in crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a short-term recommendation, the Government of India could launch more emergency women's protection programs during the pandemic on a national scale. In addition, the Indian government should allocate more funds to build special emergency shelters for domestic violence victims and survivors during the pandemic in proportion to the increase in violence rates. This shelter must also be equipped with the needs that victims need during the pandemic, considering the condition of victims who cannot return to their homes because they will get the same or even more violent acts; meanwhile, victims are still given legal advocacy to follow up their cases.

The long-term recommendation is for the Government of India to identify the factors that trigger violence, mitigate it and formulate it into a policy framework that can change people's behavior and perceptions of violence that is

considered normal. In its formulation, a gender perspective is included as an element that can be the foundation so that it can touch the needs of all communities, regardless of gender. Therefore, internalizing the values of gender equality & human rights is important so that the community and policymakers are aware of the importance of equal rights for all individuals regardless of gender. In addition, women should also be more involved in the process of policy formulation and decision-making to represent women's perspectives and avoid policy products that are biased or based on men's viewpoints.

Finally, the government's efforts to conduct campaigns and increase awareness of gender equality are also very important so that the community can be more participatory in tackling acts of domestic violence. The community-based approach is a solution for victims to seek protection if they experience limitations in reporting to the authorities. Of course, the role of NGOs and community protection institutions is needed in this case, so the government can maximize its cooperation with institutions that reach out to the community at the grassroots level. With the increasing awareness of the community, the community can be more sensitive and motivated to eliminate the violence that occurs in their environment while at the same time being morally motivated to help victims. Last but not least, there are fewer people who commit violence and more people who can be helped.

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