

COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence against women

1. To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

In India, National Commission for Women (NCW) is the statutory body that has the mandate of protecting and promoting the interests of women. This includes investigating into complaints under all women related laws and taking up *suo motu* cognizance, where required. NCW receives and examines most of the complaints on domestic violence. According to data released by NCW in March, the number of complaints had increased from 30 in first week of March to 69 between 23rd March to 1st April, 2020.¹ India went into lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic on 25th March. The monthly statistics published by NCW show that while the total number of cases on domestic violence in March, 2020 were 298, the number increased to 315 in April, 2020 and to 393 cases in May, 2020. In 2019, the number of complaints received by NCW on domestic violence in the months of March, April and May were 148, 193 and 266, respectively. Hence, it can clearly be said that there has been an increase in domestic violence against women in the context of the pandemic.

2. Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

NCW released a Whatsapp number for victims of domestic violence to send alerts to during the pandemic due to the rise in the number of cases and because offices are still

not working at full capacity. The police and civil society organisation helpline numbers for women in distress continue to help during the pandemic.

3. Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

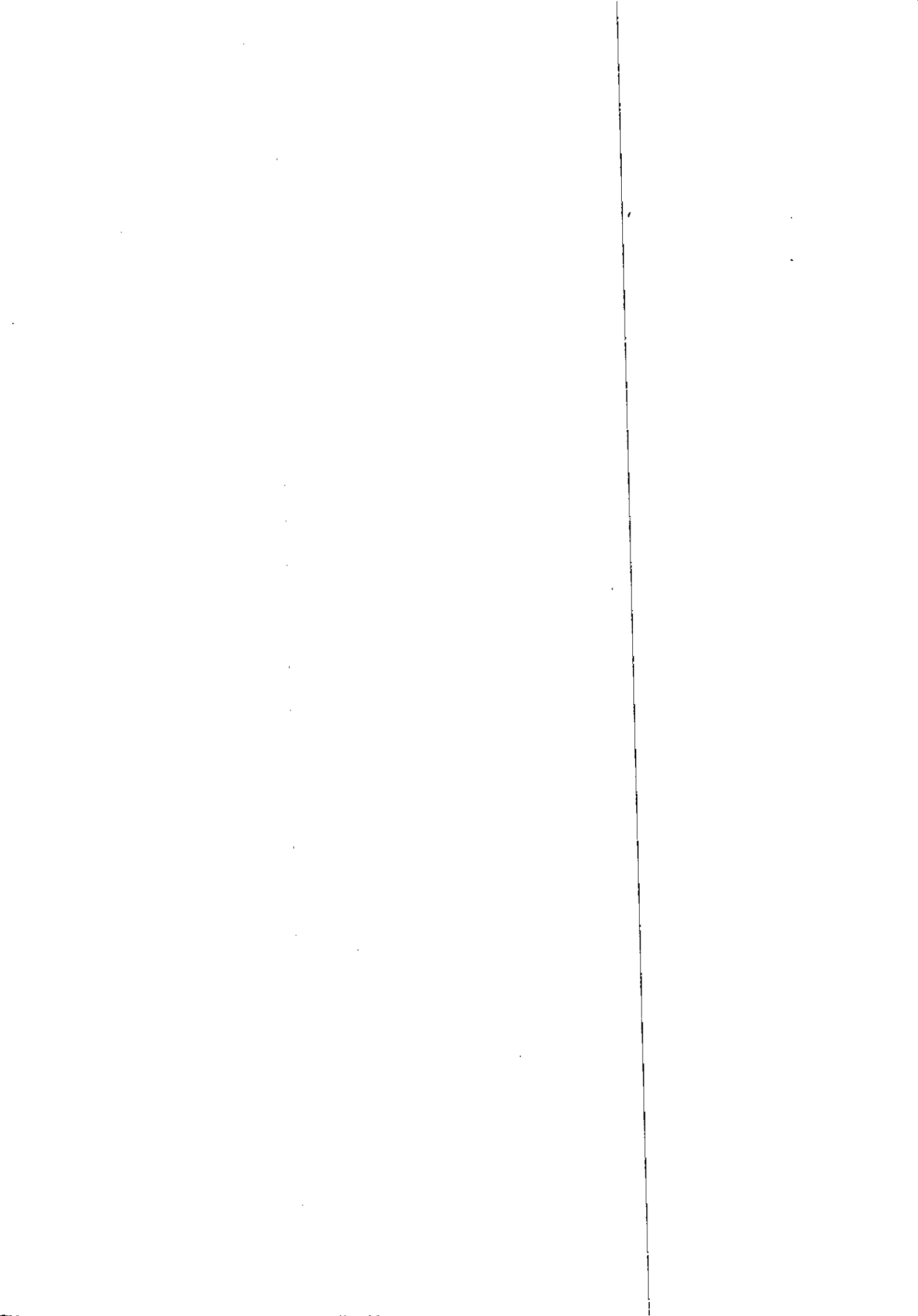
One Stop Centres (OSCs) are intended to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women

facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status; marital status, race and culture are supported and provided with help to seek redressal. The OSCs have been functioning during the pandemic, as stated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.²

4. What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health.

Essential medical services, including reproductive and neonatal health services remained functional throughout the lockdown period in India as per guidelines issued by Ministry of Home Affairs. The Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) also had clearly mandated guidelines that pregnant women must be provided with all essential maternal health services. A case was filed by a non-government organisation, SAMA-Resource Group for Women and Health, as a public interest litigation in the High Court of Delhi as despite the guidelines, the services on the ground were not readily available to pregnant women. The court directed that the Union and Delhi government will work in tandem to ensure that services required by pregnant women will be available and the Delhi government also stated that a helpline number that was being set up for senior citizens of the State would also be made available to pregnant women.³

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5. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRI or equality bodies.



Research Unit-II of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India deals with the subject of women's rights. During the lockdown, several steps were taken by the research team to work on various human rights issues faced by women during the COVID-19 pandemic. NHRC had appointed Dr. Indu Agnihotri as the Special Monitor on Women in 2019 and since her appointment, she has been working on various women's rights upliftment initiatives with the Commission. During the lockdown, she brought the problem of increase of domestic violence and the issues being faced by migrant women to the notice of the Commission. She suggested that NHRC look into advisories and guidelines issued by various ministries for migrants, especially women and children. On her suggestion and due to the need of the hour, NHRC is currently working on preparing its own advisory for all the sections which are more vulnerable during times of such crisis and suffer major human rights violations. This includes women and the advisory will cover various aspects from reproductive health and domestic violence to food and nutrition.

Furthermore, a webinar is also being planned in the month of July on the above mentioned topics so that experts can give their comments on women issues in times of the present crisis and also weigh-in and give their perspective on what NHRC should include in its advisory.