



GENDER ISSUES CELL CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

An Issue Focusing On The Coronavirus Pandemic Of
2020.



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MACABRE.

BY KRINAL P. KC COLLEGE, TYBA

Have you ever seen past the flimsy covering that people call a “mask”?

You see, there are two different types of masks that people wear;

1. A simple cloth of threads to protect you from contamination.
2. An invisible mask of human emotions to protect you from the probing eyes of strangers

If you look at it deep enough, these two have the same job, to protect people. It is simple enough, but complicated still...

As the number of “masks” for the new strain of virus is increasing, the latter has become more visible to our ignorant eyes. As the need and requirement of more masks and equipment against COVID-19 rises, the number of bleeding bodies that are hidden in tombs are overflowing.



Wailing cries are breaking through the soundproof “masks” as we see desperate hands trying to break out from their tombs that are suffocating them.

These people, these women, these children are not just afraid of the virus lurking around the corner; they are more terrified of those hands which has blood on them. They are petrified of living in those tombs as they simultaneously battle the virus with their “masks”.

“Lockdowns around the world brings about a new rise in domestic violence.”

“Domestic violence cases rise in Turkey.”

”Domestic violence calls increase locally.”

You see the house that we call “home”, the one that provides us with peace and safety against coronavirus is the same one that brings chaos and danger to some people and their lives. It does not matter if their houses are built of finely made glass worth a fortune; it does not matter if their houses are made of mud or stone walls.

It does not matter. It does not matter because domestic violence is not confined to these “classes”, “castes” that we have created. It only listens to the perpetrator who gives it power. What matters is that more and more people are suffering as their safe place is snatched from their hands and for those women, for those children, it is a tomb. Moreover, the outside world where the pandemic awaits them? It is just another tomb filled with different worms.

THE UNIVERSAL GUEST

BY JANICE LOBO, ST XAVIER'S COLLEGE, FORT, SYBA

The pandemic arrived and everything changed, person from person they all were estranged.
It feels as if time has suddenly stopped, no human contact, 'cause in our homes we have been locked.

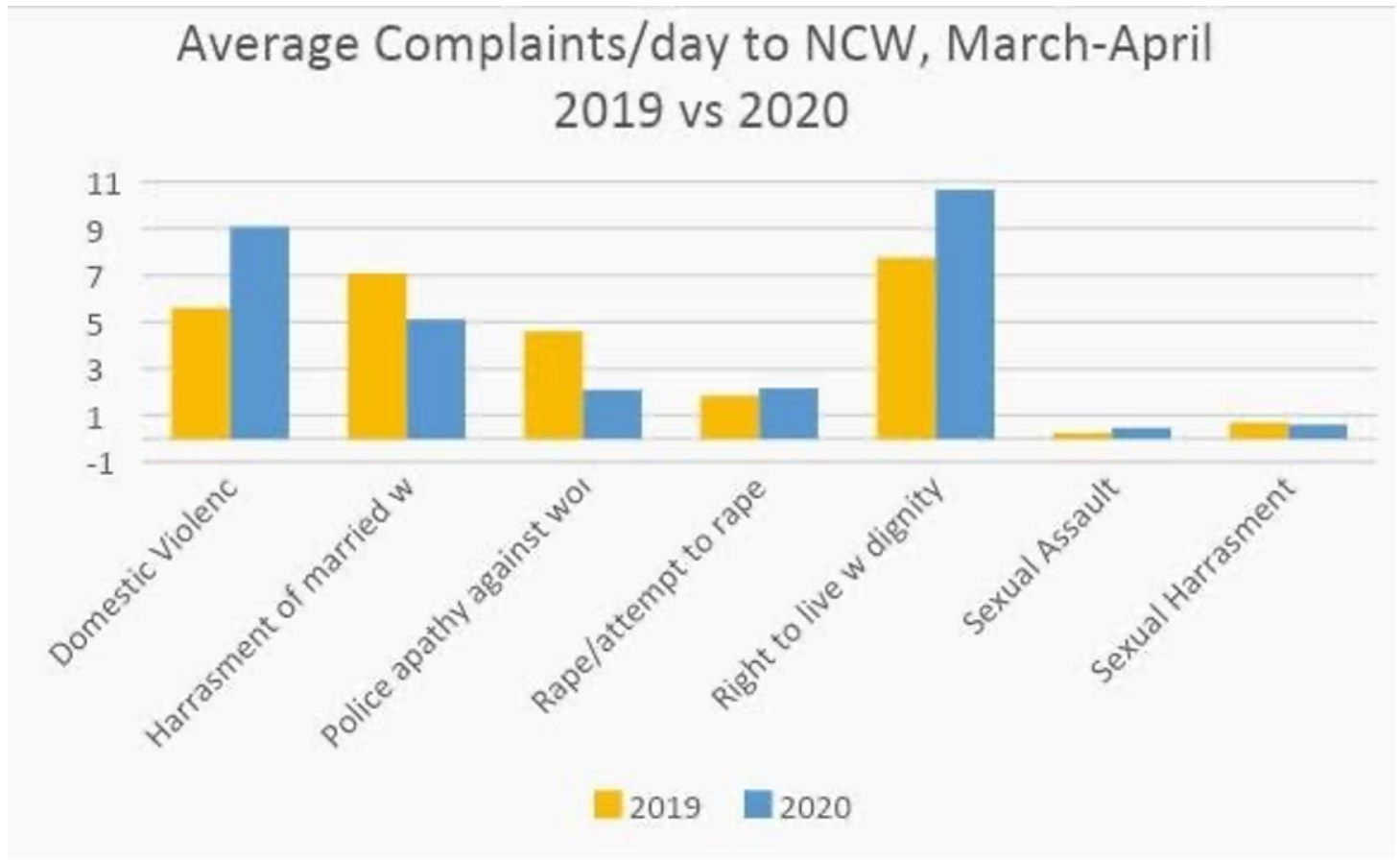
Mother Earth seems to be happy, because human harm has decreased.
The quality of water and air has amazingly increased.
Just as a coin has two sides, so does the virus.
Poverty, hunger, anxiety and despair seems to be endless.

Women are suffering domestic abuse, circulation of fake news has led to social media misuse.
Muslims are being wrongly accused by some for causing the spread.
And many poor people still have to struggle for their daily bread.

But there is still some hope that this too shall pass, it's only distancing and prayer that will help us surpass the enemy that has given us unspoken pain.
We will fight this together 'cause we are confined not broken!

HOW THE NEWEST GLOBAL PANDEMIC IS AFFECTING DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIMS.

BY ANJALI G, KC COLLEGE, SYBA.



As we focus on things like self-isolation, working from home, and a lack of leisure activities, let us not forget that the homes that are supposed to be “safe places” can also act as omphalos for verbal, emotional and/or physical abuse. It is important to remember that “working from home” brings several challenges. In a country where 1 out of 3 women face domestic violence at the hands of known perpetrators, being quarantined at home may not be the most sheltered experience.

Anuradha Kapoor, Founder and Director of a Kolkata-based Non-Profit Organisation called ‘Swayam’, said that although they have put out their helpline numbers, the organisation's outreach ability is very limited considering several victims were abused at home. Kapoor says, “Only after the lockdown is lifted will we understand what the situation was”. In Bengal, a woman was forced to starve during the lockdown after her husband stole her ration card. “She wasn't getting any ration because the police refused to give it to her without her ration card,” said Kapoor. “The impact of this lockdown is not just about violence, it is also about the after effects it leaves. What will the impact be on single mothers, survivors of abuse who do not have the family support?”

According to Swetha Shankar from PCVC (The International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care) women are bound to find it difficult to speak and reach out when the perpetrators are at home. There have been similar trends in domestic violence during natural disasters. For instance, they witnessed the same situation during the Chennai floods where the number of calls dropped and later increased.

Rituparna Borah's Queer Feminist Resource Group, has been organising Zoom meetings every Thursday and Saturday. The virtual meetings have connected queer communities from Chandigarh, Jharkhand and even Thailand. "For queer people, home is often not the most comfortable space. They find their freedom outside. With the lockdown, they are trapped inside," she said. This results in 'mental violence'. Even something as simple as what clothes to wear could turn into an argument that then turns into a violent showdown.

Ashwini Deshpande, professor of economics at Ashoka University, created a graph showing the difference between average per day complaints made by victims to the National Commission for Women from March-April of 2019 to March-April 2020. The graph shows that there is already a spike in complaints related to: domestic violence, violation of a woman's "right to live with dignity" and rape or attempted rape and sexual assault

Here is a list posted by Professor Nicole Westmarland on the ways one can help an abuse victim during the COVID-19 pandemic: (Westmarland, 2020)

- Understand that stress and anxiety can cause not just domestic abuse but may also increase it in families where it is already perpetrated. Acknowledge that this is an extremely unsafe time.
- Check in on someone whom you are personally worried. Always assume that the perpetrator could be listening in on calls you may make to a suspected victim. The same goes for instant messaging services.
- If you suspect that the victim or survivor is unable to talk because of being overheard, give them a readily thought out line to end the call. For example, "if it is not safe to speak right now then please repeat after me 'I'm sorry there is no one called Tina here, you must have got the wrong number' and put the phone down."
- If it is safe to talk when you call, arrange a code word or phrase that the victim can use if interrupted. For example, "if you need to end the call at any point please say 'no, sorry I'm not interested in taking part in the survey' and put the phone down".

You may know more abuse victims than you think. Speaking up about domestic abuse is a taboo, but being on the lookout for victims is the least we can do.

(Westmarland, N. (2020). The lockdown is a dangerous time for victims of domestic abuse - Durham University. Retrieved 30 March 2020, from <https://www.dur.ac.uk/news/newsitem/?id=41398&itemno=41398>)

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

BY NIMISHA N. KC COLLEGE, TYBA.

The novel Coronavirus pandemic, also known as the Covid-19, has been a matter of concern for the whole world that has been affecting every one differently. However, some people and communities have been worst hit due to this- especially those that have been marginalised and discriminated against.

Transgender individuals struggle the most at this time. Due to the nationwide lockdown, they cannot earn a living. Majority of them cannot beg and cannot engage in sex work due to lack of clients. This leads to them not having any source of income, thus being financially vulnerable. Unlike the poor and migrants who at least have access to food because of allotted government ration cards, the transgender and Hijra community are fighting to survive as their food supplies and funds continue to drain.

It leaves them with virtually no social security. These communities have always been stigmatised for their identity and work. A factor that puts them under additional scrutiny is that there is a prominent fear that the virus is spreading among those who are HIV positive, even though there is no clarity and evidence regarding this.

A major question of concern that arises is will a transgender person who tests positive for the disease, be admitted to the hospital as any other patient would be or will they face problems of accommodation due to their gender?

The Supreme Court of India ruled in 2014 that transgender individuals have the right to equality as any other citizen but the prejudice and discrimination against them continues.

CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

Many individuals from these communities face various health issues that have worsened because of this lockdown. Individuals who have just had their gender affirming surgeries are not able to visit their doctors and might not understand the changes their body is going through. Those who use hormone medication fear that the chemists will run out of the medication, which only intensifies the dysphoria they experience.

While we all sit in the luxury of our home escaping the harsh realities outside our homes and waiting for the lockdown to end to continue our lives, there are many others who are at risk of abuse in their homes. Transgender persons living with hostile families face stress and trauma, especially those who do not have support from their parents or are not part of a supportive Hijra community.

Not everyone has the privilege of accessing online spaces or getting their salaries while working from home. Many are poverty stricken and discriminated. Death is a very real possibility for the transgender community- not only due to the virus but also due to, lack of food supplies, emotional and mental torture, and lack of economic funds and so on. In times like this, Transgender communities must receive equal access to resources without any discrimination and as much attention as any other citizen of this country.

CORNERED PRIVILEGE

BY ZAINAB L.KC COLLEGE, TYBMS

As we hear the hunger of the homeless
And the cries of the needy,
As we see the shelves getting empty
To fulfil the wants of the greedy,
As we slowly lose ourselves
While being petrified of losing our lives,
While even our worst days include having a roof on our head
Knowing our families are safe and fine,
An infant in a distant village
dies before being born,
For the religion of its parents
Is what the doctor calls 'wrong'
A child, while shedding a tear,
Has to hear how men have to be strong,
And girls all over the country
Are told that the kitchen is where they belong.
So many of us don't feel safe at home
A place where we shouldn't be judged for what we are,
no matter what our sexuality, our choices,
no matter why we have certain scars.
So many of us are struggling each day
Struggling to survive
amongst the people who hate what we believe in,
where being open-minded is almost a crime,
And loving the same sex, a definite sin.
The world is suffering in so many ways,
The spun hatred leading the list,
It's time we rise above the toxicity in our hearts
And learn, to finally, coexist.

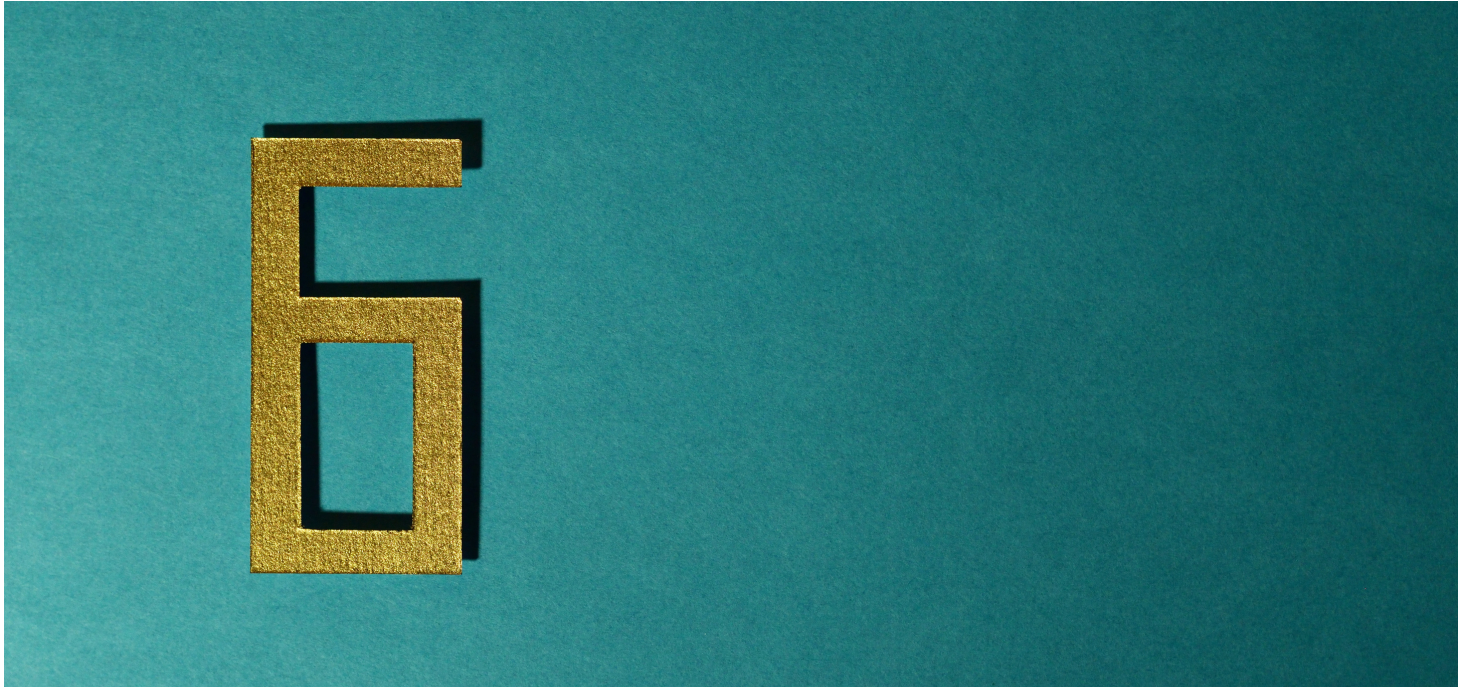


Image source: www.canva.com.

SIXTH SEPTEMBER

BY TANISHA RAO, KC COLLEGE, TYBA

It is perhaps fated that I write this on the 6th of September, two years to the day. Or maybe the day wrote itself. Now, I am not the sort to write political poems. Political poems are the sibyls that know too much of glory. Of violent unbecoming. Of ravished desires and gluttonous fingers that just want / it / too much.

Of course, two years ago, when that glory came, I didn't recognise its face. Seated at the grimy table of a beloved college bar, I watched cigarette smoke dissipate into warm light. The September humidity lay bereft on wilted collars as the room closed in slowly — as though its shoulders were curling inward and keeping us safe. While the scent of cheap vodka and Marlboros clung to the air around us, X and I were clinking glasses — sharp raucous laughter climbed up and out of parted lips. In a muzzy film of joy, glasses clinked, lighters clicked and sparked and the pungent aroma of tikka masala wound us higher and higher till we were splayed and buoyant, like shadows cleaving to browned walls.

The sad songs playing on the jukebox could not have been more dissonant but we didn't care. This kind of azaadi has an electricity of its own. The draconian law had been read down earlier that day. I had come to know of it while riding the train to college. I remember sifting through my phone and pulling up a playlist from the 2010s and jiggging to Pharrell Williams' Happy with the widest smile plastered on. If I could have shouted freedom from the rooftops and spires of every building in the city's skyline, I would have. Funny how glory can come in such clandestine ways.

Now, six months into a pandemic, this love now lives under my skin — thrumming in the same unleashed manner that secreted things do. The memory of touch and the many vignettes of intimacy live in the hushed space of our joined minds. Floating on clouds that day, I walked the length of the platform, imagining in a flurry of moving pictures, some secret celebrations — that somewhere, in the pockets of this city and every other like it, two hands were revelling in the joy of touch and queer desire; that somewhere, lips of different shapes were pressed together in a hushed litany of freedom.

COVID-19: UNHEARD VOICES FROM 'HOME' ECONOMY

BY SANJAY W. KC COLLEGE, TYBA

Human beings are popularly viewed as 'social animals'. This social nature has vanished in times of 'social distancing' - a concept that stresses little to no physical contact. However, we continue to operate partially in a virtual sphere. The pandemic COVID -19 has brought in a big miasma, which is known to have born in Wuhan, in late 2019. Even the most significant rendezvous of the world has been postponed. However, the 'Home' economy continues to function with similar zest or even more than that in such a crisis. In fact, today, we all are solely relied on 'Home' economy.

A 'woman' is the sole manageress of this economy. Staying within the four walls of a house was primarily regarded as a woman's job, according to the lore of our sub-continent. However, this ludicrous ideology has been disrupted today. Today, masculinity is grappling to sustain within the four walls of a house.

We feminists, with staunch optimism, had hoped for a brighter 2020, in terms of gender inclusivity. This has received a reverse response due to the pandemic. There has been an increase in the demand of women's unpaid work. Since long, social scientists have recorded this as the biggest inequality prevailing in the system.

Apart from home economy, women constitute 70% of population in the informal sector of developing economies. The UN Report says that, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs and are likely to be employed in the informal sector. They are mostly employed in tourism, teaching, retail, restaurants, hospitality, and nursing. Women are unpaid or less paid. Their work, at large, is not respected by both economy and society. They are constantly prone to the evil of domestic violence because of the prevailing loutish culture. In fact, with the outbreak of pandemic, COVID-19 has been repeatedly used as a threat towards women. Women's increased workload in the unpaid economy deteriorates their health.

Pandemics leave behind horrid memories with a plethora of economic loss. Again, the marginalised suffer more because of the disastrous aftermath of pandemics. During the global recession of 2008, support measures were introduced for the professions dominated by men whereas jobs were cut in all female-intensive sectors. In India, the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers are facing the dual burden of work in these times of crisis. Equal distribution of work between both men and women in home economy can help to overcome the gender gap.

Men often squirm to work at home because of vile machismo. It is high time for them to change their attitude. Masculinity can become a productive asset only when it is feminized. The burning need of the hour is to feminize masculinity. The feminist lens needs to be applied while formulating fiscal stimulus packages. Alleviating the tax burden on women owned businesses could also help to reduce the gender gap. Let us humanise both home economy and the world during and post this crisis.

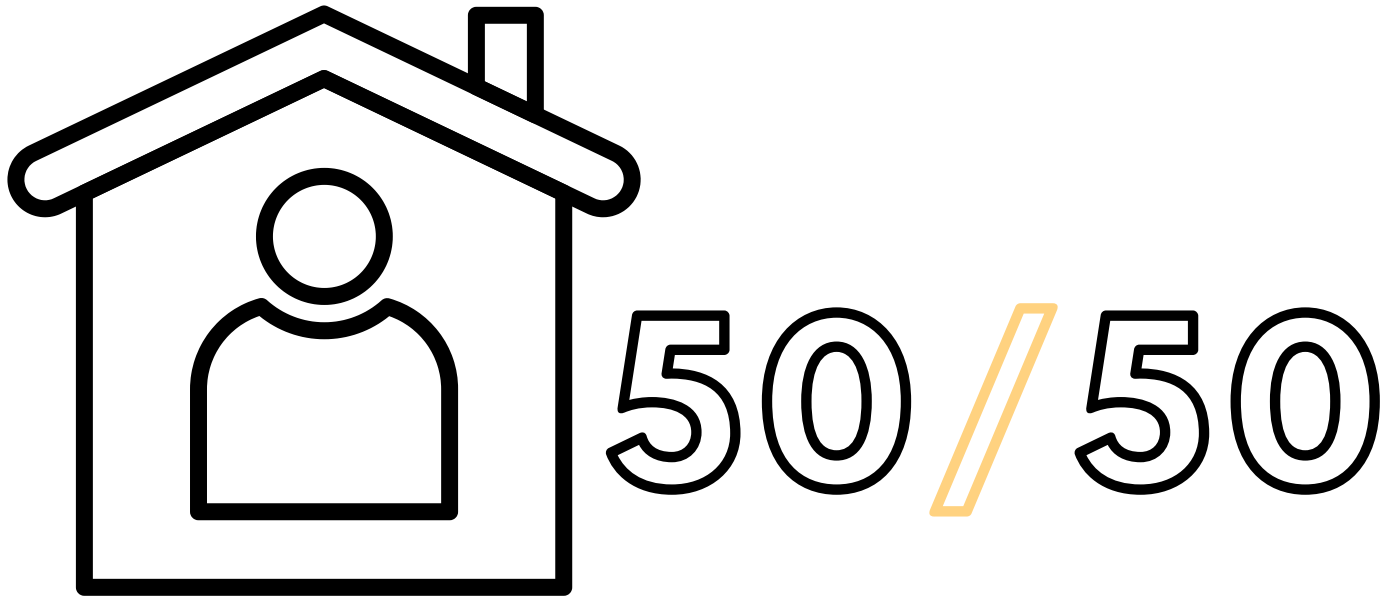


IMAGE SOURCE: WWW.CANVA.COM

THE SHAM OF 50-50 DURING QUARANTINE

BY NISHA K. KC COLLEGE, MA

It began as a fun, Zoom call between cousins on my mother's side on a late Friday evening. We were determined to share embarrassing stories from the past, talk about our daily shenanigans and how we are coping with the global lockdown and pandemic. A few minutes into the call, one of my uncles declared, "In my house, the division of housework is 50-50! My wife is lucky to have me as her husband."

Silence followed.

My mother quickly quipped in disbelief, "Oh really? Tell me what you do the moment you wake up in the morning," He said that he wakes up at 9, checks his phone for half an hour, eats breakfast that his wife makes, does his office work for a few hours, helps in washing the dishes, cleans his room, helps his children with their schoolwork online, sleeps, goes to his friend's house to drink and watch T.V and comes back to have dinner which he occasionally makes. His wife, on the other hand, loudly laughed and said that she has neither the time nor privilege to wake up late and check her phone. The moment she wakes up, she has to plan the entire day's menu, wash clothes, wake up the children, do her office work, clean the entire house, look after her in-laws' needs, and other invisible work that she is expected to do.

More silence

"You think that was 50-50 division of the housework?" my aunt asked him. As it turns out, my uncle was not the only man who thought that doing the bare minimum at home was "50-50". This same trend is observed across cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. According to an analysis done by Dan-Cassino, from Fairleigh Dickinson University and his wife Yasemin Besen-Cassino, from Montclair State University, men especially avoid housework as a stealthy way to avoid having their masculinity threatened.

This reunion zoom call turned into a debate competition. My uncle relentlessly argued that he is in charge of dropping his kids to school and ensures that they do their homework daily. My mother rebutted saying that eventually, their kids will grow up and wouldn't need him to drop them to school thanks to school buses and would also learn to become independent with their studies as they grow up. After that, he would be free from all his responsibilities with regard to their children. However, their mother? Their mother would still be responsible for planning their tiffins along with plan the menu for the day and cook, ensure their studies are going well, take care of other domestic duties and she is expected to give her 100% at work. Now that everyone is at home, the father is obviously saved from doing most of the work. Did he still think it was 50-50?

In our country, men have traditionally taken up the role of the breadwinner; hence, they are generally not expected to help their partners out with the housework. As time went by, we saw more women in the task force and are said to be "multi-tasking". The notion that women are "better multitaskers" is often used against women to keep the patriarchy intact. Women are given more work if not less than men (and paid less, in most cases) and are expected to juggle household duties. As the world is dealing with the lockdown, women again, are picking up the slack for both partners. It is something that I am seeing in my family and have heard from other relatives and friends that men, simply, are NOT doing their share of the household duties. Always the wife, mother, and sister, mother-in-law is expected to do household chores, while men if working from home, disappear and only show up when it is time to eat.

Another interesting trend that I have noticed in my family and many others is that men in the household get special credit for the chores. The way my father gets appreciation and gratitude when he cooks dinner for us sometimes, one would think he has cracked the code for World Peace. My mother and I, often muse that if we had the same reaction when we did any housework, we would never complain in our life! Sociologist Arlie Hochschild commented on this phenomenon in her book "The Second Shift" (1989) which said that when a man does a bit more than the national average man in his community, he is viewed as exceptionally helpful.

After talking to many women in my extended family, I also learned that in this one month, they have not had the time to think about self-care and relaxation at all. There is never a time where they can sit back and enjoy a Netflix show or watch live concerts hosted by artists online. They are always planning the next meal, the next chore to be completed, and the next shopping list when they have to go out and buy essential items for the family and in the case of women who are working from home, they have to ensure that there is no decline in the quality of their work.

There is no doubt that the lockdown will continue until we have the virus contained. There is also no doubt that there is immense pressure on individuals who have to ensure 100% work efficiency, take care of their health and do household chores. If each and everyone in the house sits down together and distributes work in a way that no one individual is overburdened with work, and also get time to relax, we would be able to come out of this difficult time, feeling less fatigued.

Back to the Zoom call, after everyone voiced their concerns and difficulties, it was endearing to see how all of them empathized with each other in the end and swore to not be overworked and not let the other person be overworked as well. There were voices of upliftment and we all thanked each other for their contribution.

Hopefully, a fair one in the future.

REINFORCEMENT OF GENDER BINARY AND ROLES AT HOUSEHOLDS DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN.

BY SHREYA J. MA

In order to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus and its ensuing pandemic, COVID – 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an initial lockdown in the country for 21 days on March 24, 2020. The lockdown had mixed reactions from the masses; whilst many viewed the ‘work from home’ as a positive, relaxing aspect of the lockdown, not many could understand or see that there was little to no positive view for people who ‘work at homes’, i.e. women, in majority of the cases. India has always been a patriarchal society wherein the traditional roles comprise a man working and the woman taking care of household chores. In contemporary times, we find women working outside their homes in jobs like men, yet the mentality of men being superior to ‘others’ persists in most Indian minds.

Patriarchal society and expected Gender roles since birth

Right from the birth of a child, one finds gender roles and duties imposed based on sex. This disparity is problematic in three ways:

- Rigid impositions of expected gender roles and behaviour in society
- Reinforcement of patriarchy and sexism in all spheres of life
- The child being socialized to view these notions as ‘normal’

All social institutions, right from family to educational institutes, religion, media and peer groups reek of patriarchy. Sexist jokes in WhatsApp forwards and Comedy shows are normalized and highly popularized. Much of pop culture goes back to this: characteristics related to men are seen as macho, strong, glorious and valorous while traits pertaining to femininity are weak, emotional, submissive and nurturing. The mother cooks, cleans and nurtures while the father works outside the house. Women are taught since childhood to be calm, docile and giving, learning household chores and adjust to others’ needs while men are socialized to be carefree and explore the world.

Impact of Covid19 Lockdown on Genders

Most men have said they feel relaxed, and a pleasure to be at home with their families in the lockdown. Social media is filled with how ‘the man of the house’ is helping in household chores. Three ideas that stem from this are:

1. One reinforces patriarchal notions when ‘man of the house’ is said since it generalizes the idea that men are superior and they have the final say in families
2. Men working at home seems to be glorified and exaggerated to be a huge deal as men contribute little to nothing in everyday domestic chores.
3. Men lending a hand at home should be the norm. Domestic chores are basic tenets for survival and hygiene. Seeing men lending a hand at home is nice, but this should be seen not as charity but as the new ‘normal.’

Since women are considered nurturers, the physical, emotional and mental state of the house members become her responsibility too. Those in lower socio-economic backgrounds suffer even more. The burden of domestic chores, looking after the family, sharing food under scarcity falls upon women. This is the time when one may see females learning to cook and posting challenges like making Dalgona coffees and Pizza in a mug more than our male counterparts make. Many elderly women are happy to see their daughters and granddaughters to being ‘sanskari’ and getting ‘ready for marriage’. Men rarely are told to learn to cook to get ‘ready for marriage’.

Anyone who does not identify with the gender binary is now forced to do so. Family being a primary institution with most people living at home, the lockdown barring the masses from leaving their house, it has become difficult for queer, non-binary and trans individuals to stay in households that are usually homophobic, transphobic, sexist and patriarchal. There is immense imposition of gender roles on them, like dead naming, abuse and jabs for being ‘abnormal’ according to societal norms. Queer individuals are forced to behave how the family may seem fit, e.g. a girl should learn how to cook and clean while a boy should be focusing on his studies.

There is a notion that men work harder and thus should be given time to rest at home while others should provide domestic aid to him like serving food to him first. Right from contributing to household chores to time ‘allowed’ to be on phone, the way one dresses even at their own house, the tone and way of talking, body language, adjusting and scheduling the day- everything is a battle for women and queer individuals, being stuck at home, which is not always a safe space. One may even say that anyone who is not a Cis- het male is disadvantaged at some level.

The lockdown has a huge impact with intersections of age, class, caste, religion, ableism, race, region and gender. The more one belongs to the lower strata of these intersections, the more they have generationally suffered. The hierarchy of privilege has become even more evident in these times of crisis.

GENDER ISSUES CELL

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