

Intimate Partner Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh: A Study on Working Women

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Abstract

People have been experiencing different types of challenges intensely due to the profound impacts of the corona pandemic. Domestic violence is one of the challenges that women are confronting deeply in multifarious sectors. However, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is one of the most alarming and escalating violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to explore the current scenario of IPV on working women in Bangladesh during COVID-19. Therefore, the general objective has been elaborated in three specific objectives respectively; to identify the nature of IPV on working women, to analyze the major factors of IPV on working women, and to suggest the mitigation process of IPV on working women. A mixed-methodology was followed to accomplish this study. To gather the required data, the study area included Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chittagong, and Rangpur. This cross-sectional study has found that the rates of IPV against working women increased 65% to 74.40% where about 75.50% are psychologically, 55% physically, 26% economically, and 21.30% are sexually abused by their intimate partners. However, 31.60% of women never express their abusive conditions to others. This study contributes in the academic area, especially for women that can enhance women's empowerment, and play a vital role in the national policy of respective states.

Key Words: *Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Working Women, COVID-19.*

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is considered the severe universal health disaster of the century. Human life in the world is facing multi-dimensional challenges regarding the extension of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chakraborty, I., & Maity, P., 2020). Women are recognized as the core caregiver in every pandemic situation. Therefore, they are the most vulnerable group in the context of health crises and other different impacts which was shown from the previous epidemic (IGC, 2020).

Most of the studies show that the working loads of women have increased in terms of unpaid service, domestic violence, improper professional maintenance, and inefficient sexual health service. At the same time, women are adversely affected by mental stress, financial and physical violence rather than men (UNDP, 2020; IGC, 2020). Besides, domestic violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence are increasing comparatively since the Corona virus outbreak (The FE, 2020).

In 2013, the 'Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA) 2006' was amended to incorporate the international labor standards, which provisions to enhance worker's rights including equal pay and the safety of female workers also looks forward to upholding the same remuneration as male workers (The Daily Star, 2020). Although a great proportion of women workers (29.1%) play a vital role in the gross per capita in Bangladesh, they are not treated in a superior position in the labor market typically (BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, 2020).

Several types of oppression against women have appeared during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Intimate partner violence is one of the forms of violence since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In general, intimate partner violence has occurred with physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence, and these types of violence increased gradually over the world including Bangladesh since the

appearance of the coronavirus (World Health Organization, 2012; UN Women, 2020; WHO, 2020).

According to the report of the 'Ain O Shalish Kendro' (ASK), all types of the violence against women, such as; the rape and suicide case regarding the sexual abuse, have increased outrageously (UNDP, 2020). In addition, Bangladesh is a patriarchal society where men dominate women both in private and public spaces (Chowdhury, 2009). To be very specific, Bangladesh is a male-dominated society where women are remained in a restricted environment to share their opinion (Rahman et al, 2013). During the lockdown, most of the women workers are playing double roles at home, and they are experiencing physical and sexual violence by their respective intimate partners over the world (UN Women, 2020; BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, 2020). That must push women's development backward.

Before spreading the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh had made remarkable progress in gender equality and woman empowerment in terms of various indicators. But the progress of women's empowerment goes backward regarding this unavoidable disaster (UNDP, 2020).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a kind of new challenge for women. Violence against women and children are occurred in several cases (Gelder et al., 2020). Most of the transited countries have taken several initiatives to restrain the Corona Virus pandemic, which promotes, for a given circumstance, various types of violence dramatically and it's proved by observing the reporting rate of abused women to several welfare foundations. On the contrary, there is no clear precedence in the worldwide communities and welfare organizations (Campbell, 2020). While quarantine is an effective measure to control infection, at the same time there exist high-risk factors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). While both men and women are experiencing multi-dimensional complexities during the pandemic, at the same time both are staying in the same place and thus the potential abuser gets opportunities to occur domestic violence against women (Lima et al., 2020).

Women's empowerment is most likely to provoke the oppression of the male regarding masculinity. But men's engagement in IPV decreases when they grow acceptance of the equal gender norms. (Schuler et al, 2018). In addition to the health and human tragedy of the coronavirus throughout the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, the positions of women remained in vulnerable conditions because of the restricted mobility and extra pressure due to the lockdown. A great portion of the women couldn't give their proper involvement in the development sectors due to the mental trauma which was created by intimate partner violence. Therefore, the development of the nation might be affected in the long term (WHO, 2020). This study has tried to sort out the actual causes and solutions of the problem, which might be helpful for policymakers, gender specialists, donor agencies, stakeholders, and researchers. The findings of the study would also benefit others, and add new knowledge in the academic field.

The objectives of the study are respectively; to identify the nature of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against working women in Bangladesh during COVID-19, to analyze the major factors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against working women in Bangladesh during COVID-19, and to suggest the mitigation process of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against working women in Bangladesh during COVID-19.

2. Literature review

Several adverse situations occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 'Intimate Partner Violence against women is the most alarming issue in the world. Several researchers conducted their studies on this very relevant issue. Some of them are as follows:

2.1 IPV in Bangladesh

The study by Schuler & Nazneen, (2018) explores women empowerment executed in several ways that also contribute to the reduction in IPV. Data were collected data from 12 years of evolving women empowerment from six villages in rural Bangladesh and particularly this study examines the 'Intimate Partner Violence against women, which indicates of declining 11 points in percentage in comparison to the previous years. This

research found the exit option for abusive married women is prosperity for developing empowerment. Therefore, earning capability of women is increased than they previously did. Sanawar et al., (2019) examine the influence of women`s empowerment in IPV. The authors sourced their study by using 2007 demographic and surveys. The study explored that the more empowered women were more vulnerable to IPV than the less empowered women. While the childless and less-empowered women were supposed to be more vulnerable in IPV than the empowered women with a male child. This study suggested that a group of empowered women still facing IPV, although women empowerment in Bangladesh is progressing. Naved et al., (2018) assessed the extension of different types of IPV against female garment workers. The researchers found high levels of IPV, which reveal 34% physical, 43% sexual, and 35% economic violence had been conducted with female workers in the last 12 months. The crisis management ability of women is working as a decreased factor of IPV. At the same time, the asset ownership of women increased the risk factor of IPV. The research findings suggested that only women's empowerment is not enough for restraining IPV, besides it, there need to provide proper training for female workers about gender equity and self-defense.

2.2 Worldwide Scenario of IPV

The study of Dalal, (2011) compared the relationship between working and non-working women in terms of IPV. Data were collected through a cross-sectional study of 1, 24,385 (one hundred twenty-four thousand three hundred and eighty-five) married women in India. The findings of the research revealed that only the economic empowerment of women is not sufficient to protest IPV, besides, economic empowerment, higher education, and tempered norms can build the awareness against IPV. Al-Modallal et al., (2012), investigated the conditions of psychological health problems, as a result of IPV, among working women. The study showed nearly half of the participants claimed partner violence, where abused women were in great depression compared with non-abused women. The self-esteem of each group was in the same category. This study suggested that the identification of problems at the early

stage can protest IPV from an extreme level. Vyas et al., (2015), investigated the interrelation between paid work of women and intimate partner violence (IPV) in low and middle-income- countries. The findings of the study revealed that women who have access to money have a positive impact on their lifestyle, and help to increase the bargaining power of women against male partners to power access to their money, which might help to reduce several difficulties and conflicts in IPV. This study also suggested informal sector, being a strong agency, did not pursue women. Zegenhagen et al., (2019), explored domestic decision-making as a strong indicator of women's empowerment and it has a measurable impact on IPV. In their paper, they have focused on the association between household decision-making and IPV. Most of the female respondents reported that the accessibility of household decision-making is not a predictor of experiencing IPV, whereas men predicted two indicators of decision-making that`s respectively consumption of the husband`s earnings and mammoth domestic purchasing.

2.3 IPV during COVID-19

Campbell, (2020), elucidated the risk factors of family violence are increasing constantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the transited countries have taken several initiatives to restrain the assassination of Corona Virus pandemic, such as; social-distancing, staying at home, limited travel, and limited services of community foundations, which promote different violence dramatically. This study suggested, improving the cooperation between human and animal welfare agencies, and enhancing the community partnerships that make concern about the expected initiatives against violence. Gelder et al., (2020), illustrated the current status of intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have mentioned that the outbreak of this pandemic is creating pressure on health services and societies all over the world. To some extent, limited social and economic security represents a severe hindrance to seeking help from abused individuals. The findings also indicated vulnerable groups can be protected by growing social awareness and required action. Rayhan and Akter (2021), had conducted a cross-sectional study in which they found the prevalence of

'Intimate Partner Violence', where 44.12% are emotionally abused, 15.29% physically, 10.59% sexually, and 19.22% are abused either physically or sexually. They also discovered that financial scarcity is the most crucial risk factor.

There have been conducted several studies on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) both at the national and international levels. So far, this paper has examined and summarized existing literature with relevance to IPV against working women during the COVID-19 pandemic. But there is missing a recent study of IPV against working married women. This study, therefore, would fulfill this gap.

Kelly and Johnson (2008), had applied a wheel model in their study to identify several types of Intimate Partner Violence, and the model has been used in this study as a conceptual framework to identify the actual reasons for increasing IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh.

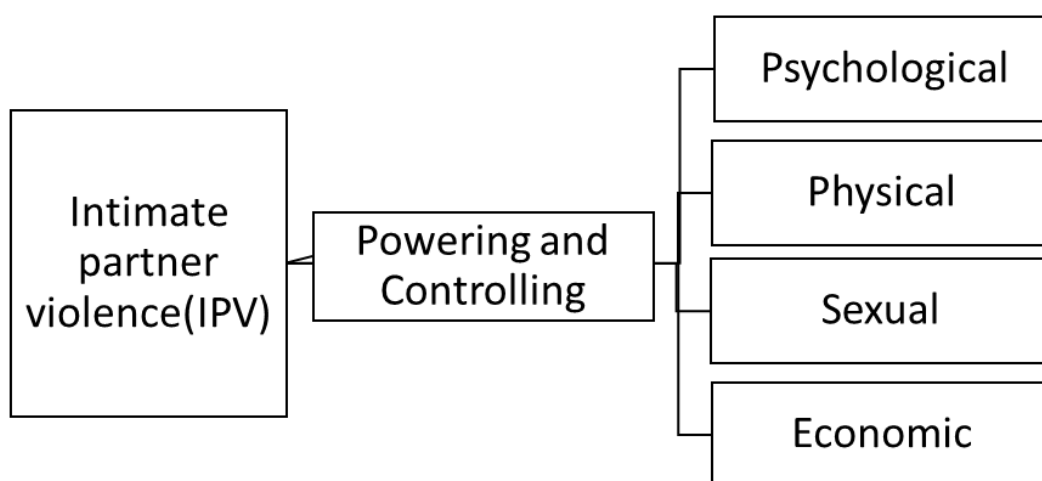


Figure 1: Adapted from Kelly and Johnson, (2008)

3. Socio-demographic status of the respondents

Table 01: Socio-demographic Table

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
18-24	18	11.4
24-30	18	11.4
30-36	59	36.8
36-42	42	26.3
42-48	18	11.4
48-54	5	2.6
Geographical Area		
Urban	76	47.4
Rural	84	52.6
Educational Qualification		
SSC	6	3.5
HSC	21	13.2
Graduation	42	26.3
Masters	45	28.1
Others	46	28.9
Current Profession		
Teaching	50	31.25
Business	02	1.25
Corporate	05	3.12
Others	103	64.37
Type of Family You're Living in		
Nuclear	112	70.2
Extended	45	28.1
Others	03	1.8

Table (01) indicates the socio-demographic status of the respondents based on 160 (one hundred sixty) respondents.

4. Methods

4.1 Study population and sampling

By convenience sampling, a total of 160 (one hundred sixty) questionnaires were collected from adults aged 18 and older who were living in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chittagong, and Rangpur districts across Bangladesh during the pandemic. Participation was voluntary, and each participant was informed about the study's background. No reward or incentive was offered for participation. For ensuring the validity of the data, a reliability test was done.

4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires distributed to various groups of women. The questionnaires were prepared focusing on Intimate Partner violence including both physical violence and mental violence. Due to the mandatory lockdown, questionnaires were distributed systematically to reach the very remote regions.

Following the informed consent process, respondents completed the questionnaire, which contained three sections. The first section captured the demographic characteristics (i.e., age [categorized as 18-24, 24-30, 30-36, 36-42, 42-48, and 48-54 years], participants' level of education [i.e., level of education categorized as SSC, HSC, Graduation, Masters, and others], geographical area (i.e., geographical areas classified as Rural and Urban, occupation [i.e., categorized as teaching, business, corporate, and others], and Types of Family [categorized as nuclear, extended and others].

5. Ethical Issues

The study has been accomplished by maintaining proper ethical issues followed by taking consent from the respondents according to the Sample size. On the other hand, it's set with a "consent form" in every questionnaire.

6. Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed in SPSS version 25, mainly using descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and regression analysis. Pearson's correlation

coefficients were calculated to assess the strength of the association between the level of physical complaints and the independent variables of the participants, including age group, place of residence, mother's education, and occupation. A sequential regression analysis was adopted to screen off the variables without significant influence. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant

7. Results

7.1 Reliability Statistics

Table 02: Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.765	5

Interpretation

In the reliability test, the value 0.7 is considered the standard of reliability statistics. The reliability level of this survey is 0.765 [Table: 02], which indicates that this data set is reliable. The Dependent variables and the Independent Variables were taken for this analysis, and the value of Cronbach's Alpha was satisfactory enough.

7.2 Regression Analysis

Table 03: Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate
1	.843	.711	.700	.735

a. Predictors: (Constant), I face psychological violence from my partner. I do not get economic independence from my partner. I do face sexual violence from my partner. I do face physical violence from my partner.

Discussion

In the regression analysis, the dependency percentages of the dependent variable on independent variables have been shown. The value of the adjusted R square is 0.70, which indicates that the dependent variable can be explained 70% by the Independent Variables. The score is entirely satisfactory as it has a good percentage. It also ensures the interdependency level between the independent variables.

7.3 Correlation Matrix

A correlation matrix has been used here for observing the consistency of the responses of the participator.

Correlations						
		Violence level is intolerable	I faced 'Physical Attack' during COVID-19	I faced 'Psychological Violence' from my partner during COVID-19	I did not get 'Economic Independence' during COVID-19	I faced 'Sexual Violence' during COVID-19
Violence level is intolerable	Pearson Correlation	1	.824**	.974**	.630**	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160
I faced 'Physical Attack' during COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	.824**	1	.827**	.792**	.781**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160
I faced 'Psychological Violence' from my partner during COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	.974**	.827**	1	.613**	.510**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160
I did not get 'Economic Independence' during COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	.630**	.792**	.613**	1	.873**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160
I faced 'Sexual Violence' during COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	.523**	.781**	.510**	.873**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	160	160	160	160	160
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Figure: 02: Correlation Matrix

This correlation matrix has been drawn from the data of 160 respondents. The significance level is less than 0.05, which indicates the validity of the correlation.

Observing this figure (figure: 02), it is noticeable that there is a significant relationship between physical and psychological violence.

7.4 Chi-Square Test of Physical and Psychological Violence

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	166.095 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	151.866	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	108.851	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	160		

b. Two cells (22.2%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.

Table: 04: Chi-Square Tests

The Asymptotic Significance level is less than 0.05 for all the cases. It shows that there is a relationship between physical and psychological violence. The women who face psychological violence face physical violence too.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	1.019	.000
	Cramer's V	.720	.000
N of Valid Cases		160	

7.5 Symmetric Measure

Table 05: Symmetric Measure

By observing the result of Phi and Cramer's V, the value is more than 0.5; that means these two variables have a significant effect on each other.

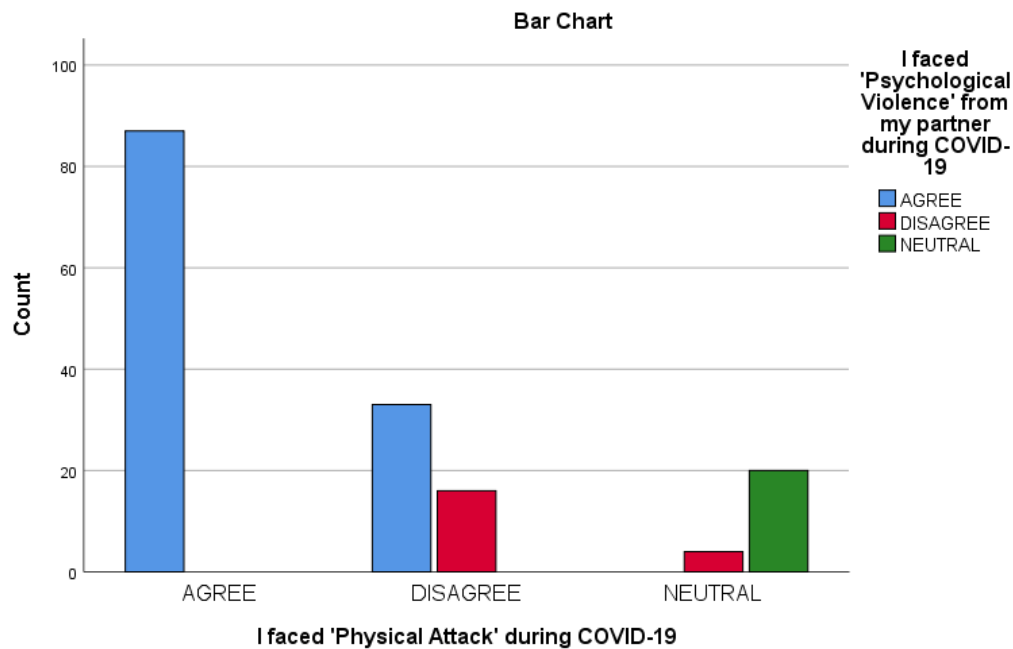


Figure: 03: Bar chart

Discussion

A chi-square test for independence with $\alpha = 0.05$ was used to assess whether physical violence is related to psychological violence. The chi-square test was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1, N=160) = 166.095, p < .001$. With a Phi (Φ) coefficient of 1.02, it's indicating a strong relationship. As seen in Figure 06, psychological violence from an intimate partner has a significant relationship with physical violence.

7.6 Percentage of Affected Women by IPV Before and During Covid-19

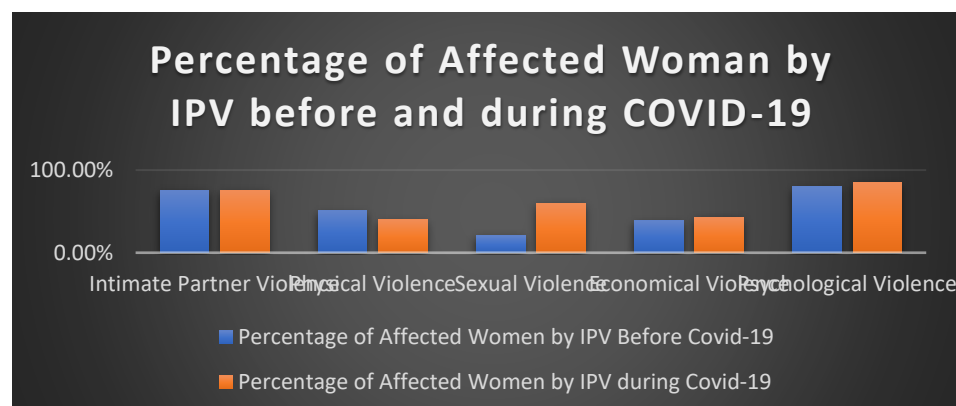


Figure 04: Percentage of Affected Women by IPV before and during Covid-19

Discussion

This graph (fig. 04) depicts the amount of acceptability of IPV among respondents. During COVID-19, around 74.4% of women reported being victims of partner abuse. Psychological Violence has the highest peak, accounting for more than 75% of all cases. Women are subjected to a great deal of violence, and they are unable to tolerate it. Following that, Physical Violence comes in second; according to the poll, more than half of the women experienced this. Then, in terms of affected women, sexual and economic violence accounts for around 26 % and more than 21.30%, respectively. More importantly, the rate of psychological abuse against women has grown by 10%.

When other factors are taken into account, all of the factors go upward, indicating that the percentage level has increased significantly. The level of violation against women has increased as a result of Covid-19.

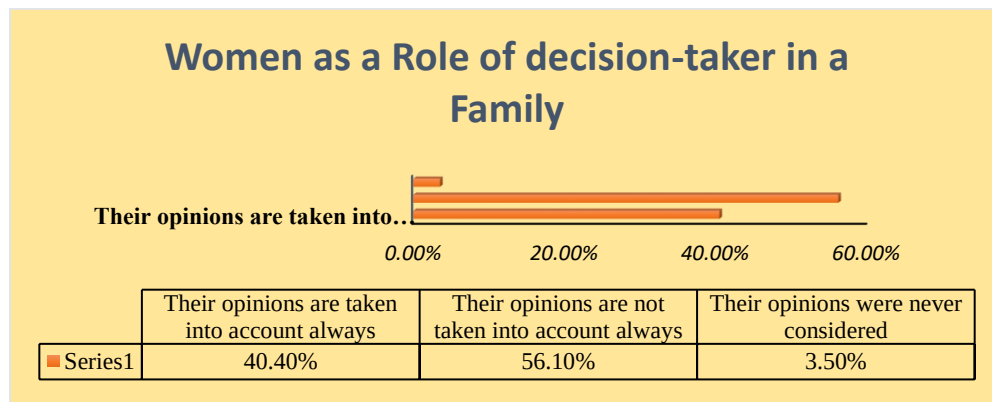
7.7 Woman as a Role of Decision-taker in a Family

Figure 05: Women as a Role of Decision-taker in a Family

This graph (figure 05) shows the importance of women as decision-makers in a household. Their opinions have a high priority level. They are being verbally abused by their colleagues. According to the report, 40% of women believe their opinions are

always taken into account; on the other hand, 56.6% of women's opinions are not always taken into account. The prevalence of these issues among women shows that they encounter violations whether they make a statement or contribute to a decision-making process.

7.8 Opportunity for Expressing Opinions Regarding Partner Violence



Figure 06: Opportunity for Expressing Opinions Regarding Partner Violence

Discussion

The study concludes that very few women reported having the opportunity to express their feelings about their partner's abuse. The frequency is insufficient (31.60%). As to the graph (fig. 03), it is commendable that 57% of women claimed that they occasionally have the opportunity to communicate their feelings about their partner's violence. They are to conceal their circumstances from others as well as the society. They are continually looking for ways to shield their partner from such accusations.

8. Recommendation and conclusion

From the results, it is clear that the working married women of Bangladesh are still experiencing strong IPV in multi-dimensional ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through analyzing the several factors and causes behind IPV as well as exploring the nature, causes, and context of IPV, it is observable; the working married women of Bangladesh are alarmingly being abused by both psychological and physical violence amidst the pandemic. Moreover, the rates of violence are increasing day by day since they are living together in the same place for a long time regarding lockdown. Besides

that, women, most of the time, play a role in triple in this tough time. Therefore, they are going through severe mental pressure. To say the least, as to the researched evidence, working married women go through psychological, economic, sexual, and physical violence in their relationships.

As for the recommendation, this paper concludes that we have too many issues to deal with when we talk about IPV against working women. A big change is required to enhance the awareness-building process so that they could feel free to share their opinions and ask for help whenever they need it. We also need to ensure proper counseling for them, especially for the victim. IPV has not just been acknowledged as a social problem in our nation, but there is a huge lacking of adequate studies. So, regarding this, we need more social work, activities, and research.

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