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## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19: INTERVENTION MEASURES TO AMELIORATE THE IMPACT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Reports of domestic violence cases saw a huge uproar during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2019. The height of domestic violence following the pandemic has had a critical impact universally. There is a pressing call for responding to these acts of domestic violence, and this article investigates conceivable measures and practices to moderate the impact of domestic violence and help these victims out of their abusive environment, especially during pressing times like the COVID-19 eruption. This study takes on a doctrinal examination of existing materials, including an evaluation of the Domestic Violence Act 1994, articles, diaries, and other forms of writing in relation to the current concerns. The discoveries have exhibited that the existing framework comes up short on the foundation of helping and directing the targets out of their abusers at home in conditions of undertakings

like the pandemic. Multiple forms of undertakings are expected to introduce better coordination among every vital section of society, including health, education, police, the court, and community groups, in order to embed adequate preventive measures to mitigate the consequences.

**Keywords:** Covid, domestic violence, legal, woman, abuse, crime, criminal, assault, murder, marriage.

## INTRODUCTION

Domestic statistics report a worrying hike in domestic violence cases during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Mohamed et al., 2021). Since the announcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in mid-March 2018, the number of calls to the welfare hotline has increased by 57 percent (Sukumaran, 2020). Records from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) inaugurate close to 1000 calls and over 120 emails on marriage and divorce were recorded on their MyCare Covid-19 helpline (Baharin, 2020).

The Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) reported that over 526 investigation papers were initiated to investigate offenses of domestic violence in 44 days (Baharin, 2020) before the MCO period. However, there was a decrease in these numbers by 15 percent after the MCO was announced, which was likely believed to be caused by the victim's lack of access to telephones or inability to leave their homes to lodge police reports due to the lockdown (Baharin, 2020).

Moreover, the local news reported a series of unfortunate events faced in households experiencing domestic violence abuses throughout the lockdown period. A tragic incident was reported in Bangi wherein an unemployed man was found perished at his residence. He was reported to have hit his wife and his father-in-law before hanging himself. The wife who survived the injuries lodged a report and confirmed that the suspect had, in fact, been suffering from financial difficulties. The suspect's death was classified as suicide, believed to have been caused by strangulation from hanging himself. Prior to that, the couple had an argument, but however with the intervention of the PDRM, the suspect assured an amicable settlement and returned home with his wife. However, immediately upon reaching home, he took a knife and stabbed both his wife and her father before hanging

himself from the ceiling fan in a room on the ground floor (Timbuong, 2020). This untoward incident was sparked by economic constraints, which unexpectedly led to a fatal accident.

Apart from the above tragic incident, another news that caused an uproar during the MCO among the society was the Youtuber sensation, Pavithra or famously known as Sugu Pavithra. She was amongst the many victims of domestic violence. The news reported that her husband, Sugu, was charged with two separate charges, namely, for the possession of weapons and for causing injury to Pavithra. He was said to have hit Pavithra with a mobile phone and a sickle. Pavithra, who rose to fame for her South Indian recipes shared on her YouTube channel in fluent Bahasa Melayu, has ever since been absent from her social media platforms. This news caught the attention of the media, given the limelight of Pavithra at that point; however, the question lies in what happens to victims who have no advantage to this limelight or to an impactful social media presence (Aqilah, 2020).

The above-mentioned examples happened during MCO since the victims shared the same domestic areas as the abusers. They were found to be at higher risk of danger given the circumstances of restricted movement and stay-at-home orders. A home, which is a haven for many of us, may not be the same for some individuals who face violence in supposedly safe surrounding (Randawar, 2016). Many countries reported a soar in the likelihood of domestic violence while implementing efforts to restrict the mushrooming of the virus (Campbell, 2020).

In fact, domestic violence is a widespread and major concern even prior to the pandemic and is not something unheard of in Malaysia. From 2008 to 2017, it was estimated that domestic violence crimes led to 1.6 deaths on average per 100,000 people in Malaysia (Arumugam, 2020). Further, there have been numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) vocalising on behalf of the survivors of domestic violence (News Strait Times, 2020). For instance, the formation of the Malaysian Women's Coalition for Justice (MWCJ) gives solidarity to women's rights activists and provides a supportive voice in advocating for the protection of women who are victims.

In essence, the call against domestic violence is a multi-layered effort in which different actors carry respective burdens and responsibilities

(Hetzell-Riggin, 2022). Besides looking at the emergency measures to dampen the spread of the virus, appropriate conceivable measures and practices need to be implemented to moderate the impact of domestic violence. Necessary approaches need to be initiated to help these victims out of their abusive environment, especially during pressing times like COVID-19. There is a need to address domestic violence during a pandemic, and this paper examines appropriate intervention measures to assist victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 outbreak.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study conducted a qualitative research style based on materials available in libraries. Relevant papers, including statutory statutes, articles in legal journals, and precedent cases in which reasons for improving and amplifying the impact of domestic violence as a result of the epidemic, were well addressed. A grim methodology of the law was embraced in this research (Gawas, 2017). By elucidating the repercussions, this study showcases thorough and concerted results, which are essentially in line with the need to boost and mitigate the impact of domestic violence as a consequence of the pandemic.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Domestic violence-related crimes are not peculiar in Malaysia. Numbers have shown that almost one in four women experiences domestic violence in their lifetime. The main reason behind this is the lack of awareness and education. There are many cases where domestic violence cases go unreported because of the fear of shame and social stigma associated with it. The victims might have been forced by their partners not to report it, or they might not know how to report it. The victims themselves might also think that they can handle it on their own without any help from external sources or agencies. Every woman that suffers from domestic violence struggles to wrestle and protect herself and her children from the abuse. However, it is the duty of the state to ensure sufficient access to remove oneself from a violent household. A study conducted by Aisyah and Parker (2014) identified that women have undeniably suffered difficulty in escaping domestic violence. In fighting this challenge, as much burden is put on the victim to remove

themselves from these situations, it is of utmost necessity to uphold that men can play an important role in assisting to empower and act as change agents in the community. Through collaborative projects and endeavours, the issue of patriarchal violence can be reduced. Enthralling many men's groups have taken a step by testing new innovative techniques to impede the plight (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). Thus, combining the voices of men and women can empower women to take a stand against domestic violence. The mentioned articles discussed the issues of empowering society regarding domestic violence. Nevertheless, they did not address preventive measures that are essentially important to empower society.

As much as domestic violence is loathed, it is sadly not alien to the nook and cranny of the universe. Domestic violence had been ubiquitous in the United Kingdom long before the Coronavirus pandemic (Chandan et al., 2020). Movement restrictions and stay-at-home orders have globally trapped victims and survivors of domestic violence, trapping them with the abusers and increasing the danger of escalated violence (Kofman & Garfin, 2020). The focus of the above two writings was more on the effect of the confining orders during the pandemic. Thus, a comprehensive measure of preventive is elaborated on in this article.

Academics have cited that women suffer physical and emotional health and well-being as a consequence of the lockdowns imposed by the government (Abdul Latif et al., 2022). Studies showed that victims with a history of domestic violence suffered from anxiety or insomnia during the MCO (Peraud et al., 2021), likely to be caused by the tension of having to share their homes with abusers. Due to the effect on mental health caused by abusive households, psychologists urge the government to remain vigilant of this concern as a consequence of the pandemic and to promote self-sufficiency in promoting strategic methods to overcome hostile situations of the victims (Usher et al., 2021). In Huq et al. (2021), it was found that basic necessities, captivity in small homes, and limited mobility are the major causes among the 586 clients interviewed to discern the consequences and the repercussions of this pandemic in their homes.

The pandemic has definitely been an eye-opener and has kept everyone vigilant to strive and change the world for the better. People have started to give much thought and attention to the healthcare system with the aim of a more prosperous and sustainable future for all. In

the study of Donga et al. (2021), the interviewees confirmed that they learnt some significant lessons from the lockdown, varying from hygiene care, health awareness, working remotely, and the very need for financial savings, among others. It is essential for society to erect upon the experience of this pandemic to calibrate according to the necessary strategies in dealing with this pandemic for a better healthy environment (Forman et al., 2020). This study elaborates in detail on the harshness of the pandemic. However, there seems to be a lacuna of preventive measures that are required in fighting domestic violence.

Thus, in contributing to the body of knowledge on some measures for the betterment of society, this article focused on intervention measures and strategies to ameliorate the impact of domestic violence, along with the rightful approaches and mechanisms in assisting and providing support to domestic violence victims from the COVID-19 outbreak.

## **IMPACT OF THE VIRUS OUTBREAK**

Covid-19, a pandemic disease that swept through Malaysia in 2020, has also contributed to an increase in domestic violence. The pandemic is not only a medical and health crisis but also has led to many other disasters in society, including general family well-being. Children who were also victims of this pandemic may have been abandoned by their parents during this period. Beyond emotional repercussions and developmental difficulties, the pandemic's impact on children is significant. Children who share a home with parents who are suffering from severe socioeconomic stress are at a greater risk of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The pandemic, which started as a health crisis, quickly evolved into a global economic crisis affecting the whole nation globally (Pak et al., 2020). The spreading of the virus has rapidly paralysed the world with devastating effects on the world's economy (Dey & Loewenstein, 2020). Millions of people were not able to go to work (Barnes & Sax, 2020). People were retrenched (Azilah Husin et al., 2021). Job loss is one of the most devastating financial blows that most families experience, making it incredibly difficult to make ends meet, which eventually leads to multiple scenarios that could trigger a domestic violence reaction (Mörk et al., 2020). The Women, Family, and Community Development Ministry

recorded a total of 4,349 occurrences of child abuse in 2020. Family disagreements, abuse of intoxicants, loss of income, and the stress that came with it were among the contributing factors to domestic violence during the epidemic, based on the Royal Malaysian Police.

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) cites an uproar of misuse of the internet among children during the pandemic. This was found in the rise of reports against the sexual exploration of children and even children's pornographic materials. As much as we had believed that these children were protected within the walls of their homes and that dangers were when they stepped out, this pandemic proved us wrong. The children facing the pandemic were enduring maltreatment ranging from physical abuse and sexual predation, among others.

The increase in domestic violence offences in society has contributed to the economic and social crisis. Legislation and services available to these victims are often inadequate, thus exacerbating their situations (Mittal & Singh, 2020). The voices and needs of victims and survivors are often overlooked because they are frequently overshadowed by the compelling issue of COVID-19.

Regarding the social crisis, the availability of support from family, relatives, and friends was a major hurdle for victims of violence. Due to the MCO, victims lived in the same domestic premises as their perpetrators, which directly exposed victims to greater risks during this period. The slogan "Stay at Home" does not mean that they are safe at home, and a house where someone is unsafe is not a home. The instruction to stay home was originally intended to protect society from widespread contagion, but in reality, many victims of violent crimes remained trapped with their perpetrators (Evans et al., 2020). Sadly, with the pandemic raging outside, victims tended to believe that they were safer at home anyway (Yeong, 2020). Perhaps some view the lockdown period as a kind of family reunion, but what really happened behind closed doors may be frightening to some.

Overcrowding and living arrangements during the outbreak affected the quality of life of individuals living under the same roof. Different age groups of individuals possessing different desires and needs did cause dissatisfaction and unhappiness among family members.

Limited space and housing conditions were a matter of issue during the pandemic (Ahmad et al., 2020). Movement restrictions ultimately lead to isolation and overcrowding, which increase stress, anxiety, and risks of violence and child abuse, especially among those already living in violent or dysfunctional families (Boo, 2021). Being cooped up at home, especially for joint families, is proven to have negative effects on the family (Krieger & Higgins, 2002).

Women had a disproportionate role in responding to the virus by working from home, caring for their families, organising home-schooling for their children, performing housekeeping in between Zoom meetings, and even making sure the groceries were delivered (Del Boca et al., 2020). As a result of always being at home, the barrier between work and home became blurred.

The crisis of COVID-19 has a different impact on men and women. Women are perceived to bear the majority of the responsibility for keeping communities together, whether at home, in health care, at school, or in caring for the elderly, and are thus expected to conform to a new norm between work-from-home and home-schooling (Power, 2020). Women confront great obstacles in every part of their lives, globally, due to the different roles they play in their personal and professional lives. They continue to encounter difficulties in achieving equality, from violence and sexual abuse to gender wage discrepancies and limiting reproductive rights, education, and healthcare—the list is endless (Fisher & Ryan, 2021). As a result, the COVID-19 consequences may stymie progress toward gender equality and women's rights.

### **The Impact on Children**

COVID-19 also had an adverse impact on education and schooling. Besides being strained physically due to abuse, families were also burdened with the needs related to education and childcare. Children were affected by school closure, and having children at home unexpectedly added to the expenses of childcare (Spinelli et al., 2020). Malaysia's Education Ministry implemented home-based learning during the MCO to ensure the continuity of the syllabus, and these children were asked to adapt to online learning. Undoubtedly, online education was a sensible choice during the pandemic. Nevertheless, its accessibility may not be satisfactory and adequate for those students without reliable internet access and affordability to acquire a device.

Such hurdles certainly create a gap in digital learning (Restubog et al., 2020). The transition to adapt to the new norm requires us to quickly adopt teleconferencing platforms and online tools. For it to be effective, stable high-speed internet connectivity is essential (De' et al., 2020).

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The government of Malaysia and the relevant authorities, alongside NGOs, are heavily invested in addressing domestic violence. It is seen as the parasite sitting in the homes of our women and children, causing social tremors amongst the upcoming generation. In Malaysia, amendments to the Domestic Violence Act 1994 (DVA 1994) (hereinafter have been brought on by Act 621 in 2016, which protects victims of domestic violence. In addition to that, there are several other provisions that address different forms of domestic violence, such as in Section 8(3)(q) of the Child Act 2001 (Act 694), which criminalises all forms of physical or psychological harm to a child including abuse by a parent against another parent (Sukumaran, 2020).

Domestic Violence Act 1994 arguably covers only spouses and former spouses, leaving other unmentioned intimate relationships, such as cohabitating partners, outside the application of the Act (Mohammed Na'aim et al., 2019). Section 3 of the DVA 1994 lays down that in ensuring the prosecution of the abusers, the requirements of the DVA 1994 shall be read together with the Penal Code (Randawar & Zin, 2019).

The objective of the DVA 1994 is to protect and compensate victims of domestic violence. Nonetheless, despite the act's presence, domestic abuse victims continuously faced obstacles during the MCO. Laws should be accessible, transparent, and predictable to preserve every citizen's fundamental rights. Laws should be created in such a way that they are sufficiently adaptable to cover all eventualities, yet this was the gap identified only during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article aims to articulate the available remedies to best suit the victims of domestic violence, specifically during the movement control order. Amongst the remedies made available through the DVA 1994 are the Emergency Protection Order (EPO), Interim Protection Order (IPO), and Protection Order (PO).

## **Emergency Protection Order**

The amendments to DVA 1994, effective January 1, 2018, provided for Emergency Protection Orders (EPO) to sanction power on the officers from the Social Welfare Department (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat). This allows for the EPO to be produced in less than two hours within the application. This is evident in Section 3A (1) and (5) of DVA 1994. Section 3A (6) of the DVA 1994 enables an EPO application to be registered without any preliminary First Investigation Report (FIR) lodged with the Royal Malaysia Police. In short, the EPA works like a band-aid where it provides an interim order for the protection and safety of the victim.

The EPO likewise restrains the perpetrator from having any physical interaction with the victim, even approaching or visiting the home or shelter of the victim. The EPO has a lifetime of seven days, and the victims ought to seek safer alternatives during this period.

In short, the EPO is a quick, legal, and safe alternative for victims to turn to in seeking temporary protection without having to go through the tedious process of law and order. Because of the MCO limitations, the EPO became an important tool for protecting survivors of violent crimes under the DVA 1994. The EPO was relied upon as a safety net to protect victims during the MCO, given the leniency provided in the statute, which allows for the order to be issued by an officer from social services (Randawar & Zin, 2019). Without having to appear in court or at the police stations, the victims could be sanctioned an EPO by simply reaching out to Talian Kasih (15999) or, alternatively, by visiting their nearest social welfare department. Talian Kasih hotline seemed to be indispensable to domestic violence victims during the MCO period as they were able to access advice and support even while isolated at home with their abusers.

## **Interim Protection Order**

The Interim Protection Order (IPO) is an extension of the EPO. Unlike the leniency in the EPO, the IPO is empowered through Section 4(1) and Section 12 of the DVA 1994. These provisions lay out that the IPO is to be issued during the progress of the police investigation. Ultimately, from the time an FIR is lodged up to the charge sheet is produced, police personnel are progressively investigating the matter.

Hence, the IPO is to be issued while police investigations of an act of domestic violence are ongoing. As a pre-condition to the issuing of the IPO, the victims have to first lodge a police report and provide the details of the domestic violence they have suffered. Indisputably, even during the pandemic lockdown, although there was no need to leave the house, if there was a necessity or need to go to the police station, the police would not stop or apprehend the person.

Victims are entitled to the same remedies provided in Section 6 (1) (a) to Section 6 (1)(f). These orders include requiring the offender to be refrained from communicating with the victim, prohibiting the offender from entering the home, workplace, or school (of the victim or children of the victim, if involved), and allowing the victim to enter the home accompanied only with an enforcement officer to retrieve personal belongings; and requiring the offender to refrain from communicating with the victim via any mediums.

### **Protection Order**

The Protection Order (PO) is the highest in the hierarchy of remedies under the DVA 1994. Empowered under Section 5(1) of the DVA 1994, the PO authorises a full court order for an ongoing domestic violence proceeding before the court (Randawar & Jayabalan, 2014). The court commands the authority to issue a PO to prevent the perpetrator from causing harm to the family, and in such cases, the petitioner is the victim (Randawar & Jayabalan, 2014). Like the IPO, the PO includes the same orders as Section 6(1)(a) until Section 6(1) (f) of the DVA 1994. However, the lifeline of the PO is up to twelve months, as specified in Section 6(1)(1A) of the DVA 1994. The option for extension for an additional twelve months is to be laid down in Section 6(2)(b) of the DVA 1994. Thus, a PO may be valid for only twelve months from the date of its issuance and may be renewed thereafter for additional periods of twelve months if the court deems it necessary.

### **Offences**

As previously stated, the Penal Code has been revised in various parts where the penalty for specific offences has been amended (Randawar & Zin, 2019). Section 326A of the Penal Code and Section 352A of the Penal Code have been amended to a higher term of punishment.

For the offence of causing harm in a marriage, Section 375A of the Penal Code provides the punishable section. Likewise, Section 326A of the Penal Code punishment for inflicting injury by the spouse, Section 352A of the Penal Code criminal force by the spouse, and Section 375A of the Penal Code deals with causing harm to have sexual relations.

Relatively, the DVA 1994 has provided comprehensive legislation in combating domestic violence in Malaysia. Despite the partial shutdown order announced by the Prime Minister, which called for the temporary closure of all non-essential businesses, police work was still ongoing beyond enforcing the MCO (Kandasamy, 2020). It is evident that punitive, protection and preventive measures are incorporated wholly.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

In battling the flood of domestic violence cases, a multifaceted action must be called on. The baton of ending domestic violence does not end with the policymakers or enforcement bodies, but, in fact, that is just the beginning of the marathon. The baton of bringing an end to domestic violence should be handed down to the general public. The duty of curbing domestic violence lies within every member of society, regardless of power, position, gender, and economic stature. We are duty-bound to educate the citizens of this state that the act of fighting domestic violence and lending a shoulder of economic or psychological support is a multi-layered effort. Right off the bat, states are developing creative ways for victims of domestic violence to seek assistance. Countries have introduced using of a general password for pharmacists or storekeepers to report domestic violence.

There are several remedies that ought to be enacted in order to curb domestic violence. The prevention of domestic violence rests on three major aspects, firstly making the message about domestic violence public. This will educate the general public that domestic violence is viewed as an act of crime and thus creating fear among abusers and possible abusers. Secondly, raising awareness about domestic violence in each community. As much as we detest it, there are still voices of approval and support for domestic violence in some of the cultures and ethnicity in Malaysia. Therefore, it would be of utmost

importance to reach the crux of these traditionally inclined members of society in order to promote and send awareness of the necessity to fight against domestic violence in these communities. Lastly, providing professional support for survivors (Sukumaran, 2020).

Domestic abuse has been a frequent and major worry during the COVID-19 epidemic. Thus, it is critical to raise awareness and strengthen protection for women. The speed of arrest should be communicated to society because it increases the victims' and bystanders' ability to report the crime (Sharma & Borah, 2020). A legally empowered society fosters transparency and accountability in the administration of justice. Monitoring through tweets is essential during a pandemic and can help identify practical policy programs that can provide targeted support to victims and survivors in future outbreaks (Xue et al., 2020). Programs aimed at preventing acts of violence are needed during the emergence phase (Mazza et al., 2020).

A well-informed public contributes to a more resilient society. A well-informed society improves victims' access to justice. This is supported by Gerster (2020), who emphasised that neighbours of violent families can also help reduce the incidence of violence by engaging in conversation with them. In addition, under Section 18(1) of the Domestic Violence Act 1994, any person who has reason to believe that an offence involving domestic violence is being or has been committed may provide information about the offence to a law enforcement officer. In addition, under Section 18(2) of the DVA 1994, no person who provides such information in good faith can be held liable for defamation. In light of this, the public should be aware of this law and immunity, as witnesses can be an important source of support for victims. Such legal measures to ensure the safety and privacy of the witnesses will certainly benefit the victims. Extended family, friends, and neighbours can be a great help and ensure that their loved ones are safe.

The Scottish government should be praised for re-launching a national campaign to reassure anyone facing domestic violence receives help and is accessible around the clock during terrible times (Scottish Government, 2020). According to Humza Yousaf, the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, victims who feel lonely and alone and express a desire not to bother the police or aid agencies because of the crisis; however, there are services available to help

them. It has been shown that victims of violent crimes lack self-confidence and self-esteem because of the abuse and suffering they have experienced. Therefore, support from the authorities helps these victims to become stronger and free themselves from the clutches of domestic violence.

In Malaysia, authorities reported a decrease in the number of violent incidents during MCO, which may be due to the fact that victims were prevented from leaving the house. However, Baidoo et al. (2021) considered that the decrease in police reports of violent offences during house arrest could be due to a lower frequency of violent offences or increased underreporting. In essence, the house arrest order and social distancing are important in containing the spread of the virus, but they make domestic violence worse and less transparent. Because it is vital for the victims to respond quickly, digital reporting systems that allow for faster reporting are needed.

Even before the global lockdown, the government of Malaysia had taken the necessary steps to address gender-based violence. While we understand the plight of the government, the necessary steps must still be taken to ensure the safety of victims in a domestic violence home. In several parts of the world, measures were taken to address gender-based violence during the severe pandemic wave. For example, pharmacies and grocery stores in France provided emergency alert systems with the code word 'Mask 19' for people to indicate that they were in danger and needed assistance (Guenfoud, 2020). Since pharmacies were operating during the lockdown, victims sought help there, and in return, pharmacists passed the information to the police. In addition, the Italian government launched an app that allows women to call the police for help without having to make a phone call. The app allows victims to send real-time pictures and messages to state police personnel, not only from the survivors themselves but also from neighbours or other family members, even anonymously (Recavarren & Elefante, 2020).

The Malaysian government also has taken measures towards the prevention of domestic violence. As a first step, Malaysia is implementing a program that provides counselling and legal assistance to victims who want to file claims against the abuser. Furthermore, there is the provision of telecommunication by-laws that prohibits abusive and threatening behaviours by means of communication tools connected to mobile phone signals.

Governments must include measures to address gender-based violence and protect children in COVID-19 response and recovery plans and ensure that plans are gender- and age-appropriate and cross-sectoral. Programs that address gender inequality are essential to create awareness in society (Kaur & Garg, 2008). Another measure is by expanding the capacity of shelters for victims of violence by repurposing other spaces, such as vacant hotels or educational institutions, to meet the need for quarantine space and incorporate accessibility considerations for all.

In solving the problem from the ground up, men must be involved in the process of empowering women. As allies, men can serve as role models in improving women's access to employment, acceptable working conditions, ownership of economic resources, and full participation in decision-making. The findings of Estevan-Reina et al. (2021) suggest that men who fight back for egalitarian reasons are more likely to be perceived as women's allies because they not only make women feel better but also encourage them to keep fighting. Men's advocacy for gender equality fuels fears of the negative consequences of intimate partner violence (Schuler et al., 2017). Inclusion of all people, regardless of gender, is important to have an open future free from any inequality.

The constant availability of hotlines is an important source of assistance that can be utilised by every person. People under quarantine should be capable and adept at accessing hotlines with proper well-trained healthcare providers, support services, and enforcement officers to ease and ensure that people in need of help can receive the necessary help (Power, 2020). Web-based support groups for those who are isolated in their homes due to the pandemic might also be helpful in reducing levels of fear and anxiety. Finding the right support group is predominant as it provides the victims with a form of support mechanism during the ordeal.

In addition, victims of domestic violence are often afraid to go to the hospital for fear of contracting COVID-19. Public health agencies and governments can play an important role in reducing the physiological impairment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by providing emotional support to society, especially to those at risk (Baidoo et al., 2021). Telepsychology is more important than ever to the delivery of psychological services during the COVID-19 pandemic because of

its demonstrated ability to extend services to underserved and hard-to-reach populations, and its broad applicability makes it extremely suitable to become an integral part of our profession, especially with the support of strong public policy (Perrin et al., 2020). Therefore, telepsychology, which in effect brings care to the patient's location, should be a viable practice used by health professionals, especially in times of pandemic.

In ensuring that children's education does not fall by the wayside, an education policy must be implemented that includes education in emergency situations. In order to ensure the continuation of education during MCO, the Ministry of Education (MoE) implemented four strategies during COVID-19; flexible class schedules and pedagogies, synchronous and asynchronous online classes, collaboration with mass media, and digital learning communities for professional development to deliver the necessary education to students during the pandemic (Izhar et al., 2021). All educational institutions must take serious measures to ensure that interesting and innovative courses are offered so that students can continue their studies. This essentially requires introducing online classes as a new method for teaching and learning processes in the future (Selvanathan et al., 2020). Education policies must ensure that vulnerable children such as poor, indigenous, and special needs children are not excluded from this learning process (OECD, 2020b; United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). There is a need to strengthen digital education after COVID-19 by taking measures that are accompanied by a low-cost and definitive internet package and wider coverage to develop an appropriate action plan for pedagogy (method and practice of teaching) during a crisis such as the outbreak of a pandemic (Di Pietro et al., 2020). The structure of curricula and the design of courses also need to be revised to prepare graduates for the acceleration of the technological revolution (Azmi, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to adopt educational policies that include education in emergency situations.

Since work-from-home has been a practised new norm, employment policies need to ensure long-term economic growth (OECD, 2020a). This new norm of working from home has made some changes to the work arrangements, such as no more daily commuting, reducing carbon emissions, and more time with loved ones (Spurk & Straub, 2020). After a long wait, the Malaysia Human Resources minister announced that the Employment (Amendment) Act 2022 has come into force on

1 January 2022, in which an employee can apply for flexible working arrangements (FWA) to the employer (Daim, 2021). The FWA application must be made in writing and cover changes in working hours, working days, and also the place of work. A hybrid working model is not only safe but also ensures the continued operations of companies. There is a need for all relevant stakeholders to address all aspects of teleworking in a comprehensive, fair, and equitable way (Samek, 2021). The study conducted by Afrianty et al. (2022) states that from now on, in view of the crises occurring in the environment, such as floods, droughts, and recurrent fires, organisations will have to seriously plan and organise staffing and service delivery through IT systems. This current form of development becomes indispensable and underpins a proactive current change in most workforces.

## CONCLUSION

The repercussion of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an enormous switch to our day-to-day living in society. New greetings have emerged, replacing the customary conventional handshakes. Everyone is now trying to settle into their new routines. Some have tried to assimilate with the whole situation and are unearthing with comfort in the new pattern and way of life. On the other hand, some may be wrestling with lethargy, exasperation, depression, unhappiness, despondency, misery, and despair in adapting to the new pattern of life. Although we are allowed to resume back operations, certain restrictions and Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) are required and necessitated to be adhered to strictly.

Women had throughout a disproportionate role in responding to the virus by working from home, caring for their families, organising home-schooling for their children, performing housekeeping in between Zoom meetings, and even making sure the groceries were delivered (Del Boca et al., 2020). As a result of always being at home, the barrier between work and home has blurred.

The crisis of COVID-19 has had a different impact on men and women. Women are perceived to bear the majority of the responsibility for keeping communities together, whether at home, in health care, at school, or in caring for the elderly, and are thus expected to conform to a new norm between working from home and home-schooling

(Power, 2020). Women confront great obstacles in every part of their lives, globally, due to the different roles they play in their personal and professional lives. They continue to encounter difficulties in achieving equality, from violence and sexual abuse to gender wage discrepancies and limiting reproductive rights, education, and healthcare—the list is endless (Fisher & Ryan, 2021). As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences may stymie progress toward gender equality and women's rights.

This pandemic has caused unimaginable devastation and hardship and has changed our way of life. Despite that, a change can only happen through our actions. The epidemic has provided us with the chance to build a better, stronger, more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future for all. Rather than constantly whining, let us take it as a wake-up call and go forward to mitigate and open the door to meet the transformation challenge. Though we understand the government's situation, required steps must be adhered to in order to safeguard the well-being of victims in an abusive home. Efforts are needed to increase coordination among all key players, including health, education, the police, the court, and community groups, in order to embed adequate preventive measures in order to mitigate the consequences.

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