Research Diary

The impact of change on individuals and communities. It is to document case examples, design processes, actual projects, intermediate interface developments, experiments carried out deal with peculiar circumstances. How this phenomenon is taking shape at local/regional/national/international levels differently. To think for distributed solutions, their scalability, inclusiveness, frugality, participatory contributions, and of course, sustainability.

Overall, the design is going to be very different in the post COVID-19 life driven by changes in human behaviour, social dynamics, restricted community interaction, rise and fall of industries, changes in geopolitical policies and rise of local economic dependence, followed by technological evolution with respect to the changes in the context.
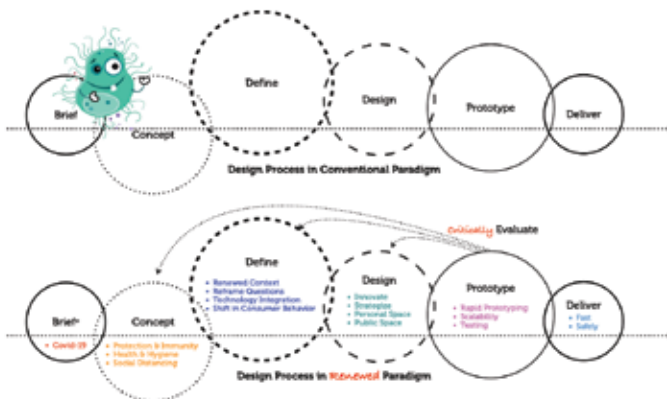
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Home Alone - Urban Patterns of Domestic Violence, Emotional Abuse, and Anxiety during the COVID-19 Lockdown
KID: 20200122

The disturbing data emerging from across the world reveals that in countries that include among others China, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Brazil, Tunisia, France, Australia, South Africa, and India, domestic violence and intimate partner abuse have registered a sudden spike during the COVID-19 lockdown because of the home-trapped situation in which people find themselves. In the United States, domestic violence programs across the country have cited increases in calls for help, from Cincinnati to Nashville, from Portland and Salt Lake City, and statewide in Virginia and Arizona. In China, the number of domestic violence cases reported to the local police tripled in February compared to the previous year. In South Africa, operating under the Department of Social Development, the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre (GBVCC) received increased calls on its helpline and accommodated as many as 131 abuse survivors between 27th March and 13th April. In India, between the beginning of March and the 5th of April, the National Commission of Women received 310 grievances of domestic violence and 885 complaints about other forms of violence against women, many of which are domestic in nature. The Child Helpline in India (1098) saw a 50 % spike in the number of calls from across India between March 20-31, totalling 3.07 lakh calls that reported cases of child abuse.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one out of three women in the world experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This has worsened significantly in the current global lockdown. Being borne out of the abuser's desire for power and control, the current global uncertainties and financial losses that deprive individuals of a sense of control over their lives only serve to perpetuate this disaster in the form of domestic violence, where the abuser criminally controls and abuses the powerless victim. The fact that there is an increase in violent, abusive, impulsive, compulsive, and controlling behaviour and aggression towards cohabiting partners during times of economic hardship has been recognized and researched extensively such as in studies of the Great Depression by several scholars such as Mirra Komarovsky (in The Unemployed Man and His Family). The increase in cases of domestic and intimate partner violence is the direct result of factors typical to situations of home-incarceration that exacerbate the conditions which facilitate these forms of abuse. These extended home-locked situations worsen the impact of patriarchal power structures that unduly affect not only women but also men who occupy gender-subordinate positions.

COVID-19

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Firstly, these individuals are trapped within the interiors of their living quarters for extended periods of time that provides their manipulative abusers with greater freedom and access in enacting their abuse, whether emotionally or physically. What we note, as a result, are increased rates and intensity of threats, humiliation, intimidation, controlling behaviour, and explicit physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Secondly, the economic uncertainty and losses of these troubled times lead to rising stress levels within the family structure that instigates and sustains violence against the partner by fostering emotional justifications of criminally violent behaviour. Thirdly, lockdowns provide for phases of isolation when the victims of abuse - otherwise able and empowered to access channels of social and interpersonal support—are starved of these networks of help. Alarmingly, often low-earning and minimally assertive in relationships, these victims are also therefore restricted by their abusers from accessing the public realm in general and critical health services in particular.

According to WHO, domestic violence and intimate partner abuse are the most widespread but among the least reported human rights abuses. Starting from a rights-based perspective, the project is directed at studying the underlying patterns that bolster these structures of abuse and suggests concrete ways of recognition and redress that can be adopted at governmental and social levels. This is a qualitative study that collects responses from a large group of individuals inside and outside India who were recently or are currently affiliated to higher education academic institutions, and who have considerable and demonstrable access to the internet and social media. The study addresses issues such as the level of awareness of the meaning of abuse—especially emotional abuse—among this demographic, and their ability to seek for themselves or for other victims relief and redress from these traumatic situations. A particular emphasis of the project lies in the area of mental health. The responses are being studied to understand the extent to which mental health is comprehended and prioritized by these individuals as part of their 'Right to Health,' and as part of the continuum of health services which they typically consider essential.

The current reality we are encountering has made it abundantly clear that domestic violence and mental health repercussions need to be incorporated into all programs of public health and pandemic preparedness at the governmental and social levels. Nationwide campaigns need to be envisaged and launched by the social sector, and by national and local administrations, that classify and project the 'protection from domestic and emotional abuse' as a human right and as an 'essential service' during emergencies like pandemics. Moreover, the state and other stakeholders need to find ways to make personalized treatment by mental health professionals both more accessible and more affordable - a situation that is far from the current reality. Thus, weighing responses collected internationally with the data procured from within India, the project aims to inform and innovate when it comes to ways of strategizing public mental health and freedom from intimate partner abuse - especially during periods of global crises such as the current one which upsets domestic balances of power and mechanisms of relief.

Compilation of images procured from the Social Samosa page, Facebook (Posted on 14 May 2020)
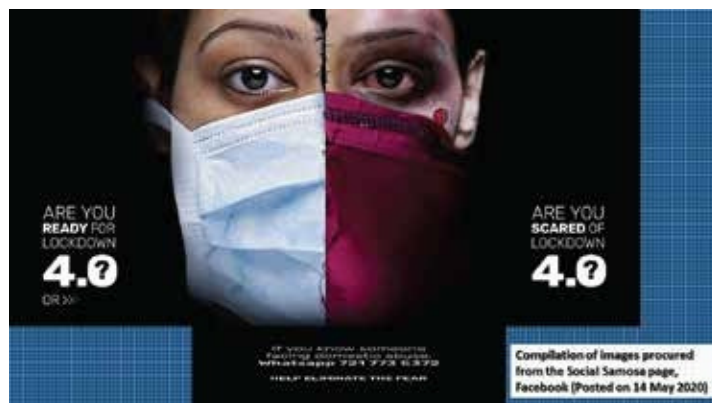
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