



Strategies Used to Prevent Gender-Based Violence during COVID-19 Era: A Narrative Literature Review

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Abstract

Background: The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a public health emergency that was declared a pandemic in March 2020. The governments globally implemented lockdown restrictions to reduce the COVID-19 infections. Conversely, perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) diverted the aim of lockdown by convicting more GBV cases during lockdown. As a result, strategies were put in place to flatten the curve of GBV scourge.

Aim: The aim of this literature review was to explore and describe the strategies used to prevent GBV during COVID-19 era.

Setting: All relevant literature related to the strategies used to prevent GBV during COVID-19 era were used.

Methods: A literature review was conducted to answer researchers' concern of the strategies used to reduce GBV during COVID-19 era. Six databases were selected purposively to search relevant information for the review namely; Science Direct, Web of Science, Google Scholar, African Journal, JSTOR and EBSCO Delivery Service (EDS). Furthermore, reports from agencies that mainly deal with GBV phenomenon were also included.

Results: Six themes emerged from this review namely support services for survivors of GBV, multi-sectoral approach, classification of GBV as an essential service in the COVID-19 response plan, extension of access to services for survivors, engagement of the community to report GBV and increase women's economic empowerment.

Conclusion: Different governments globally were hit by the second pandemic namely GBV during COVID-19 era. Recommendations were made for future research, nursing education, nursing practice and community.

Keywords: Strategies; Gender-based violence; COVID-19 era

Introduction

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is a public health emergency that has affected different communities and races globally. The COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11th, 2020 [1]. As of September 3rd, 2021, there have been 218,946,836 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 4,539,723 deaths, reported to WHO globally [2]. To curb the spread of COVID-19, different organizations globally instituted lockdown restrictions that include early school recess, people were also encouraged to work from home, working from home and quarantine for those who were exposed to COVID-19 [3]. It was of paramount importance to institute lockdown measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 due to its significance. These measures are fundamental to protect the healthcare fraternity from collapsing [4].

Regardless of the benefits of quarantine to reduce the spread of COVID-19, literature revealed its negative effect that includes losing jobs, economy instability and psychological distress as a result self-isolation [4]. Furthermore, there was exponential spike of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during COVID-19 pandemic globally that has been precipitated by lockdown measures [5]. This public health crisis was evidenced by different states globally that include first world countries, second world and developing countries. The three partners namely United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Johns Hopkins University (USA) and Victoria University (Australia) projected that 15 million additional cases of GBV are probably to ensue in each quarter of the lockdown [6]. These authors continue to report that India as the developing country marked an increase in reported

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cases of GBV since the inception of lockdown on March 25th, 2020 [6]. The GBV crisis did not hit only the developing countries during COVID-19 pandemic; the first world countries were also affected. This is a gap that should be addressed by future studies.

The study conducted in the United States of America (USA) revealed that 18 police departments out of 22 also evidenced the spike in GBV cases [7]. Likewise, in the African context South Africa has been reported to have more reported cases of GBV during COVID-19 [8]. The accounting officer of Department of Police Minister Bheki Cele reported that 2,230 cases of GBV were recorded few days after the announcement of national lockdown by President Ramaphosa [8]. To women and girls who are in an abusive relationship continued to be submissive as if nothing wrong happened to them just to avoid losing jobs [9]. Moreover, inequalities and informal and indecent jobs with low standard security were also noted as one of the consequences experienced by women and girls who were abused. So far, there is dearth of literature on the strategies used to prevent GBV amid COVID-19 pandemic. According to [10] a strategy is a plan in place that is designed to achieve specific goals. In the context of this study, the strategies will act as a plan to prevent GBV during COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the researchers deem it necessary to review current literature on the strategies used to prevent GBV amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

The rationale for the above-mentioned initiative is to avoid the consequences of GBV that include post-traumatic symptoms, self-harm, and suicide [11]. Moreover, the researchers will be responding to the call made by that everyone globally should commit themselves in curbing the resurgence of GBV during COVID-19 pandemic [12]. This can only be effective if there are strategies in place to address all the afore-mentioned challenges. In supporting this statement [13], reiterated that there should be measures in place amid COVID-19 humanitarian response to safeguard GBV survivors and women and girls in general globally. The highlighted statement above suggests that there are many knowledge gaps that should be addressed to reduce the magnitude of GBV. Some of these knowledge gaps include strategies to reduce GBV during COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the above argument, the following review question was asked:

What are the strategies used to reduce GBV during COVID-19 era?

Materials and Methods

Aim

This study aimed to explore and describe the strategies used to reduce GBV during COVID-19 era.

Design and methods

This study adopted a narrative literature review to explore and describe the strategies used to reduce GBV during COVID-19 era. The findings of this narrative literature review do not present new scientific evidence but aim to explore what is already known and to explicitly place the contemporary scientific evidence into perspective [14]. The main aim of this narrative literature review was to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to a particular topic or area of study, and to present that knowledge in the form of a written report [15]. For the purpose of this study, the researchers used five steps of narrative literature review namely selecting a review topic, searching the literature, gathering, and reading and analyzing the literature, writing the review and references see in Figure 1 for more details [16].

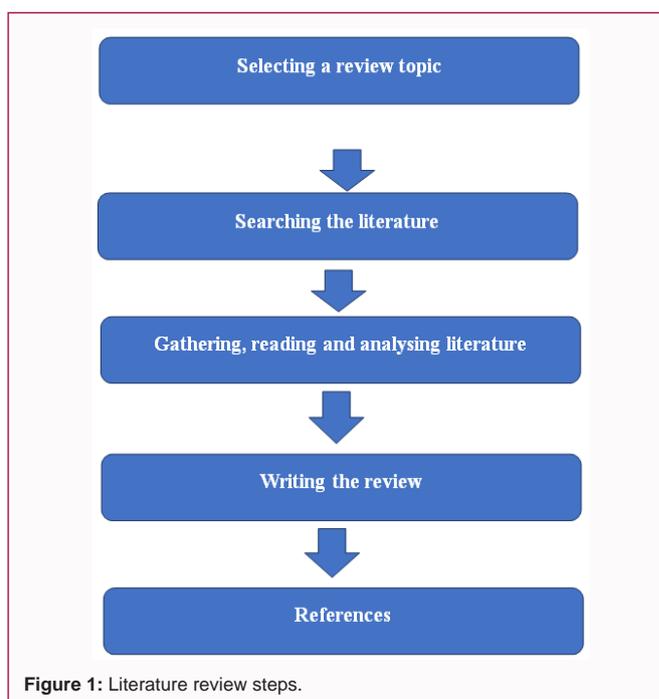


Figure 1: Literature review steps.

Step 1: Selecting a review topic

The topic selected for this narrative literature review is strategies used to reduce GBV during COVID-19 era.

Step 2: Searching literature

Different methodologies were considered to search for literature that is related to the strategies to reduce GBV during COVID-19 pandemic. These include qualitative and quantitative studies, literature and systematic reviews. More focus was on the studies that were published between 2019 and 2021 in English [16]. The following search engines namely Science Direct, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, African Journal (Previously known as SAE publication), EBSCO Delivery Service (EDS), reports from experts and organizations that champion gender equity development and organizations that addresses GBV related matters. The terms that were used to search for literature are: 'strategies/interventions' OR 'measures', 'gender based violence', OR 'domestic/sexual assault violence' AND 'COVID-19 pandemic' See Table 1 for more details [16].

Step 3: Analyzing and synthesizing the literature

Literature about GBV during COVID-19 era was fulfilled through the use of the above-mentioned databases. The abstracts and results were reviewed to check if the content or outcomes are relevant to the selected topic. This was followed step by step perusal of the information to verify whether the content is relevant to the abstract [16]. The first author and last author analyzed the findings of this study separately and met for consensus on the themes of the review. After analysis, six themes emerged namely.

Step 4: Writing the review

The researchers adopted a smart way of presenting the findings of the study to show thorough understanding of the selected topic [16]. Furthermore, the principles of academic writing that include simple English were used to write the review was adhered to. For the mere fact that researchers are health care professionals, medical terms were

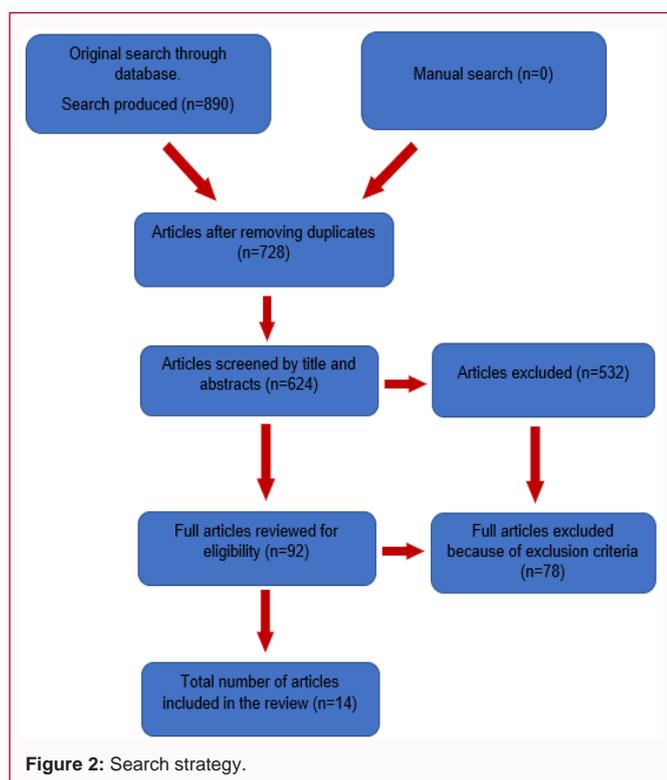


Table 1: Literature search.

Databases	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Science Direct	English studies focusing on strategies to reduce gender based violence during COVID-19 pandemic	Newspapers Conference reports Other databases not mentioned in this study
Web of Science		
Google Scholar		
African Journal		
JSTOR		
EBSCO Delivery Service (EDS)		

to women and girls during COVID-19 era was to promote their well-being. This was achieved by instituting national hotlines to report all form of abuses to the relevant authorities [19]. The services that were rendered include mental health and psychosocial support through digital platforms by the trained professionals [19].

The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) coordinated the response to GBV amid COVID-19 pandemic with the relevant organizations and stakeholders. They also provided support to these groups to reinforce inter-agency advocacy on fundamental aspects in the COVID-19 response that contribute to gender inequality and GBV [19]. This include focusing on the protection of the community were put in place to protect women and girls from GBV. Moreover, UNFPA ushered the technical support to facilitate GBV prevention program, medical care services and referral systems are standardized in line with the national guidelines [19].

Multi-sectoral approach

The second theme identified from the literature as a strategy used to prevent GBV during COVID-19 pandemic is multi-sectoral approach. The multi-sectoral approach in this study refers to collaboration of all sectors namely governmental and non-governmental organizations to prevent the scourge of GBV. To address this strategy, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) in South Africa collaborated with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DJCD), the Department of Health (DoH), the Department of Social Development (DSD), and the South African Police Service (SAPS) to establish a national anti-rape strategy that aims to reduce the magnitude of GBV [20].

The facilities responsible for rendering care among women and girls known as Thuthuzela Care Centers (TCC) were initiated to mainly address high rate of GBV [20]. The author elaborated the key responsibilities of TCCs as to render comprehensive services that include professional medical care, counseling and access to investigators and prosecutors in order to avoid secondary victimization. The study conducted by [13] suggests that government sectors should forge collaboration with non-governmental organizations to formulate program to mitigate GBV during COVID-19 pandemic. Such programs should be designed in such a way that it dominates or given the priority in the world Humanitarian COVID-19 response plan [13]. The Italian judiciary officers enforced the laws that expel the offender from the family if it happens that he indulges on GBV acts [9].

Classification of GBV as an essential service in the COVID-19 response plan

The third theme identified as a strategy used to prevent GBV amid

simplified and long sentences were also avoided [16]. The reviewed literature was separated into themes and it was presented sequentially [16].

Step 5: References

The list of references or sources used in this literature review is given below. All sources used in this narrative literature review were acknowledged and they appear on the reference list [16].

Ethical considerations

Based on the research expertise that the researchers have, they consistently applied the relevant knowledge and skills throughout this study [17]. They also behaved ethically during conceptualization, searching of literature, compiling searched literature and writing the report. Likewise, they have equally contributed to the success of this manuscript. This study did not require any permission from Research Ethics committees no consent from participants to be conducted. The researchers also acknowledged authors and sources utilized to compile this article and they all appear on the reference list.

Results

Six themes emerged from this review of literature namely support services for survivors of GBV, multi-sectoral approach, Classification of GBV as an essential service in the COVID-19 response plan, Extension of access to services for survivors and engagement of the community to report gender-based violence. See the search strategy in Figure 2 [18].

Support services for survivors of GBV

The first theme identified from literature as a strategy used to prevent GBV during COVID-19 era includes support services for survivors of GBV. In this study “support services” refers to the provision psychosocial and physical support to women and girls who were survivors of GBV. The purpose of providing immense support

COVID-19 pandemic is classification of GBV as an essential service in the COVID-19 response plan. According to [11], all women and girls should be given the priority to be provided with shelters during quarantine and self-isolation as part of essential service package to avoid been abused. Furthermore, all states should put in place laws and legislations that prioritize GBV and perpetrators of GBV should get tougher punishment [11]. Moreover, different precautionary measures that address the potential elements of GBV should be implemented to mitigate the prevalence of GBV during COVID-19 pandemic. The government in Spain implemented the regulations that automatically excuse women and girls from the lockdown if they encounter any form of GBV [9]. Globally, different states were also supported in ensuring that the human rights of women and girls are not infringed throughout COVID-19 response [21].

Extension of access to services for survivors the fourth theme identified in this review is the extension of access to services for survivors. The reinforcement of national hotlines to report all form of abuses to the law enforcement officers is imperative amid COVID-19 pandemic [22]. To address this initiative, the services for victims of GBV was opened 24 h a day and 7 days a week without been closed. This includes services that address social aspects and mental health support [23]. Services that were rendered at these centers include supportive counseling, encouragement, and advocacy for the minority groups [23]. Additionally, the services that were rendered during COVID-19 pandemic to prevent GBV also include the extension of operating hours of judicial services that was operational day and night, and digital platforms were also used to render these services [21]. The sectors responsible for humanitarian response should initiate services that address the needs of women and girls exposed to violence in their COVID-19 response plan [24].

Engagement of the community to report gender-based violence

The fifth theme identified in this review is engagement of the community to report GBV. The reporting of GBV incidents to law enforcement officers was not effective during COVID-19 pandemic due to stricter lockdown regulations imposed with the aim of curbing the spread of infection. To address this concern [25], suggested proper training to the survivors, families. The author further reiterated that government sectors should take a lead on capacitating community members on strategies to report acts of GBV violence during COVID-19 pandemic.

The Campbell et al. [26] also recommended collaboration with community-based organizations to raise public health awareness campaign about reporting GBV cases within the society. The society community should be aware of the exponential rise of GBV amid the COVID-19 pandemic and consistently usher unconditional support for the victims [24]. They should also be in the position to provide direction to the victims about relevant institutions to report acts of GBV attitude. Community empowerment should be a key principle adopted by states to empower different communities about precautionary measures to mitigate GBV during COVID-19 era. This includes the use of community resources namely media and design programs that seeks to prevent the occurrence of GBV [27].

Increase women's economic empowerment

The sixth theme identified in this review is increase women's economic empowerment. Governments should introduce prevention strategies to address the scourge of GBV by empowering women and girls economically to instill a sense of independence. As a result, they

will be able to escape abusive relationships as they will not be relying on men [28]. The United Nations (UN) collaborated with different states globally to engage businesses led by women to manufacture personal protective equipment as they are in high demand amidst COVID-19 pandemic [12]. The organization further served as a champion in organizing those networks and capacitates them with knowledge and skills to render quality services. The businesses led by women that were mainly affected by the pandemic and rely on face-to-face interaction were upgraded to digital access. Furthermore, women and girls who were on entrepreneurs were also supported financially with funds to recover from the pandemic [29]. The authors further suggested that women who are farmers should be supported in all dimensions to augment their farm outputs and income.

Discussion

The reviewed literature revealed that different countries globally experienced the scourge of GBV during COVID-19 era. The current report from United Nations highlighted the heightened statistics of GBV during lockdown that was imposed globally to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infection [30]. The increase in the statistics of GBV was evidenced by all countries across the globe including Africa. The South African government experienced an exponential rise of GBV immediately after the president imposed national lockdown [31]. The total cases of GBV reported since the inception of national lockdown was estimated to be 87,000 [31]. Likewise, there was a rise in reported cases of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) help desk worldwide.

In South America, Argentina experienced the 39 percent increase of daily calls reporting GBV during COVID-19 era between 20 and 31 March 2020 [32]. Literature revealed that the culprits of GBV used lockdown restrictions to inflict sexual, physical, emotional and psychological harm among women and girls [9]. From the researchers' point of view, the perpetrators of GBV misinterpreted the mission of lockdown globally based on the conduct they displayed during COVID-19 catastrophe. They were supposed to have portrayed characteristics of protecting women and girls against violence so that they can feel warmth and safe when they are around them.

The call for imposing lockdown restrictions globally contributed to the spike in GBV because there were no services available to curb the magnitude of GBV [33]. Women and girls were exposed to different forms of GBV during COVID-19 catastrophe. The United Nations (UN) released the statement in May to caution the world about the increase in rape and domestic violence [34]. This was supported by the findings of the study conducted in France that revealed that domestic violence increased by 30% amid COVID-19 pandemic [21]. Moreover, sexual, and physical violence was observed on women and girls aged between 15 to 49 [21].

In the South African context, the state President Cyril Ramaphosa recently announced three new bills to national assembly bringing perpetrators of GBV to book [35]. This include the bill to revamp criminal law particularly transgressions that are sexually related, the criminal and related matters amendment bill which focuses on punishing the perpetrators of GBV and the domestic violence amendment bill that tolerate victims of GBV to utilize online platforms to apply for protection order [35]. All strategies to reduce GBV discussed on this article were implemented by different states globally therefore there is dearth of literature to attest whether strategies were effective or not.

Limitations

The literature that is research related to address the phenomenon were limited as the majority of data were reports from international health bodies and non-governmental organizations that focus on women and girls' health. This study also focused on strategies that were implemented and recommended to prevent GBV during COVID-19 pandemic.

Implications and Recommendations

There is a necessity for additional studies on the strategies used to prevent GBV during COVID-19 era as main data published are reports that are from different organizations that promote gender equality, changing social discrimination and violence against women and girls. More phenomenological studies to be conducted in different contexts globally. There should be more community engagement activities as one of the strategies to address the scourge of GBV. Nursing education institutions must consider including GBV on the curriculum so that student nurses can be capacitated with proper skills to manage GBV. Community health nurses in practice must be supported and empowered to conduct awareness campaigns in communities regarding the strategies to reduce GBV.

Conclusion

The findings of this article revealed that GBV is a public health phenomenon that affects different communities globally and requires collaborative actions. There should be standard stricter rules in place for individuals who convict GBV.

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