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Relationship Violence During The Covid-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: *This systematic literature review aims to analyze various studies on relationship violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection was conducted with sources from Crossref between 2020 and 2022. The keywords used were "domestic violence," "intimate partner violence," "gender-based violence," and "sexual violence." From this search found thirty articles related to the topic. The results showed increased violence in relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic in various countries, with forms of violence being emotional, physical, verbal, sexual, and financial. The underlying factors are economic pressure, social isolation, difficulty and unwillingness to seek help, and sociocultural factors that favor violence. Meanwhile, the way to overcome this is through strengthening community relations, increasing ease of access to health care, government economic assistance, and improving information and communication technology for access to help and information. Another result found was a reluctance on the part of victims to seek help due to fear, shame, distrust of the authorities, and local culture and social norms.*

Keywords: *domestic violence; intimate partner violence; gender-based violence; sexual violence*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic that hit almost the entire world starting in 2019 has radically changed the lives of humanity. To prevent the spread of the virus, governments from various countries set unprecedented rules such as mandates to wear masks, wash hands, social distancing, and lockdowns. People spend most, if not all, of their time at home. This condition, even if it can prevent the spread of Covid-19, opens the gap for various new problems. Economic pressure, job loss, and mental health disorders due to a sense of isolation are some of the issues humans face during the pandemic. The development of fear and worry, as well as feelings of isolation and loneliness, leads to depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence against oneself and others (Lieberman & Olfson, 2020). The impact of this violence is most felt of course by people who relate

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to each other personally, especially intimate or domestic partners.

In one study, intimate partner violence or domestic violence was referred to as a "hidden pandemic" amid the widespread COVID-19 outbreak (Seidenbecher et al., 2023). While another article mentions that the pandemic has created a number of factors that contribute to the increase in gender-based violence, which researchers call a "perfect storm" or "shadow pandemic" (Huria, 2021). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is sexual or physical violence, emotional abuse and stalking (Mazza et al., 2020). While domestic violence (DV) is defined as a pattern of behavior used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner in a relationship, over a child, over other relatives or other family members (United Nations, 2023).

Although relationship violence can happen to both men and women, women (and children) are still the most victims. An article from WHO reveals that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or former intimate partner in their lives and lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects have increased women's exposure to hurtful partners and their risk factors, while limiting their access to help (World Health Organization, 2021). Conditions such as stress due to a sense of confinement, financial uncertainty and the desire to control existing disasters can increase the risk of violence against intimate partners, as seen in lockdown conditions in China, Spain and Italy where there is an increase in emergency calls due to IPV (Gebrewahd et al., 2020).

Various findings about the increase in relationship violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, made the author interested to know more about this topic. This article tries to find and extract the causes and solutions for violence in relationships, especially in intimate couples during the COVID-19 pandemic using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach.

Methodology

This systematic review aims to increase understanding of the phenomenon of violence in relationships that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020-2022. The systematic literature review (SLR) method is a method used to collect and evaluate research related to the question, topic, or phenomenon to be researched.

Based on what we wanted to research, namely relationship violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, this systematic review uses three guiding questions. First, the authors intended to find out whether the COVID-19 pandemic drove an increase in violence in relationships. Second, the author intends to find out what causes violence in relationships during the pandemic. Third, the author wants to know how to overcome violence during a pandemic.

Data was collected using several keywords namely "intimate partner violence", "domestic violence", "sexual violence", "gender-based violence". The database used in this study is Crossref. The articles were taken between 2020-2022.

There are thirty articles found and used as references in this systematic literature review. 17 articles contain an increase in relationship violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. 6 articles explain the factors underlying violence during the pandemic. 9 articles talk about coping ways.

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Table 1. References by Problem Topic

Focus	Source
Increased Relationship Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic	Alharbi, et al., 2021; Augusti, Sætren, & Hafstad, 2021; Chowdhury, 2021; Dahal, Khanal, Maharjan, Panthi, & Nepal, 2020; El-Nimr, Mamdouh, Ramadan, El Saeh, & Shata, 2021; Fawole, Okedare, & Reed, 2021; Gama, et al., 2020; Gultom, 2021; Jatmiko, Syukron, & Mekarsari, 2020; Jetelina, Knell, & Molsberry, 2021; Jung, Kneer, & Krüger, 2020; Lankarani, et al., 2022; Maji, Bansod, & Singh, 2022; Peitzmeier, Fedina, Ashwell, Herrenkohl, & Tolman, 2022; Shetty, et al., 2020; Stevens, et al., 2021; Wada, Olawade, Amusa, Moses, & Eteng, 2022.
Factors Underlying Violence	Aborisade, 2022; Chowdhury, 2021; El-Nimr, Mamdouh, Ramadan, El Saeh, & Shata, 2021; Mazza, Marano, Lai, Janiri, & Sani, 2020; Morgan & Boxall, 2020; Nagashima-Hayashi, et al., 2022.
Preventive Measures	Campbell, 2020; Dahal, Khanal, Maharjan, Panthi, & Nepal, 2020; Fawole, Okedare, & Reed, 2021; El-Nimr, Mamdouh, Ramadan, El Saeh, & Shata, 2021; Gama, et al., 2020; Muldoon, et al., 2021; Ostadtaghizadeh, Zarei, Saniee, & Rasouli, 2023; Velkoska, 2020; Xue, Chen, Chen, Hu, & Zhu, 2020

Results and Discussion

Interpersonal relationships are relationships that have an important role in the life of every human being. But every interpersonal relationship has its own advantages and disadvantages. This loss itself does not mean interpersonal relationships are something bad, but rather the consequences that must be borne by everyone who has a relationship. Unfortunately, this loss is exacerbated by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the disadvantages of having interpersonal relationships include that close relationships result in responsibility on others, the difficulty of ending relationships due to emotional closeness, and the possibility of couples being heart-breaking parties (DeVito, 2022). Responsibility can put pressure on the relationship. Suppose in the family there is a responsibility for a man to earn a living to support his family. When a pandemic comes, and there are financial difficulties, this sense of responsibility can put pressure on the relationship, potentially impacting intimate partner relationships.

While in terms of difficulty ending the relationship, it could also be that economic factors also play a role here. In one study explaining that hurting situations can get worse due to the economic crisis during the pandemic, many victims of violence find it difficult to leave their partners for economic reasons (Mazza et al., 2020).

According to Julia T. Wood based on various studies, intimate partner violence (IPV), also called domestic violence (DV), occurs not only in marriage but also in dating and cohabiting couples both heterosexual and same-sex (Wood, 2015).

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Increased Relationship Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In various countries, research has been conducted to determine whether there has been an increase in intimate partner violence or domestic violence, either in the form of physical, psychological, or sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Various results show that pandemic conditions have indeed driven an increase in violence with varying results.

A research survey in America in April 2020 showed that the worsening of victimization during the pandemic was significantly higher in physical and sexual violence (Jetelina et al., 2021). While the majority of victims of intimate partner violence reported that victimization remained unchanged from before the pandemic, sexual and physical violence worsened in the early stages of the pandemic.

In Germany, a study found an increase in violence experienced by men and women. Both verbally, physically, even sexually. In verbal abuse, 76.8% of all women and 78.2% of all men reported more verbal abuse. In terms of physical violence, 14.5% of all women and 21.4% of all men reported an increase and in cases of sexual violence, 2.6% of all women but none of the men reported an increase in sexual violence (Jung et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, in Nepal, when the country-wide lockdown began from March 24, 2020 to June 14, 2020, 885 complaints of domestic violence were received through a 24-hour helpline operated by the National Women's Commission from April to June 2020. This is twice as much as the same period before the lockdown (December 2019 – February 2020). The number of victims is estimated to be higher due to the possibility of difficulty seeking help due to continuous surveillance by perpetrators of violence (Dahal et al., 2020).

In another study conducted in Portugal (Gama et al., 2020), out of 1062 participants surveyed online, it was found that 13.7% experienced domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. As many as 17.7% of domestic violence reporters are from groups that have difficulty meeting daily needs. Abusers are not always spouses or ex-partners. The study found that violence can come from a spouse or ex-partner (47.3%), a parent or connective parent (17.8%), a child or joint child (8.9%), a sibling or sibling (1.4%), or someone else they live with (2.7%). High rates were still found in terms of domestic violence against women, although violence against men was also found, mostly in the form of psychological violence.

A study conducted in Nigeria on 7 cases of reports obtained from organizations responding to violence against women and media coverage, found similar results (Fawole et al., 2021). Commonly found case scenarios are reports of physical, economic, psychological, and sexual violence. There were reports of evictions of women and in two cases women were denied entry. For the record, this treatment puts women at risk of exposure to COVID-19, not having access to transportation, social services, or other resources during lockdown. The lockdown also disrupted women's social support and deprived them of access to formal and informal sources of help. In Lagos, one of the cities in Nigeria, a study of 130 respondents in the first 3 months of the pandemic showed 1 in 2 women experienced gender-based violence, especially those from low-income communities (Zechariah Wada et al., 2022).

While research on Arab women (53% from Asian countries, 47% from Africa) revealed that the form of intimate partner violence they experienced the most was psychological violence (30.6%). This was followed by verbal (30.2%), financial (14.5%), physical (14.3%), and sexual (13.5%) violence (El-Nimr et al., 2021). This study also

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14 showed that there was an increase in intimate partner violence during lockdown compared to the previous 7.3 percent. 18.4 percent of women exposed to violence of any type during lockdown reported suffering from a psychological disorder, while 8.7 percent reported that their violence resulted in injury. Although another study in Saudi Arabia recorded domestic violence against married women during the quarantine period, it actually decreased compared to before the pandemic (Alharbi et al., 2021).

Emotional, verbal, and financial forms of violence occupy the top three forms of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, a study results (Bagheri Lankarani et al., 2022). On the individual side as both victim and perpetrator, among individuals who are single, and also married, this type of violence shows consistent results.

Violence against children is also a concern in Kenya. As lockdowns, curfews, and school closures have been implemented, sexual violence against children has increased. Younger child victims tend to be victims of their own neighbors in private residences, and occur during the day (Stevens et al., 2021). Similar findings also exist in Norway (Augusti et al., 2021) with the subjects of the study being adolescents and in India (Shetty et al., 2020).

Other groups in the spotlight besides women are transgender or nonbinary. Research in Michigan, United States of 1169 women and transgender/nonbinary individuals, between June and August 2020 showed that there was no increase in terms of the number of cases but an increase in terms of the severity of the violence and the emergence of new cases in relationships where there was no previous violence (Peitzmeier et al., 2022).

12 In terms of violence on social media during the pandemic, research conducted by Jatmiko, Syukron, and Mekarsari, concluded that technological advances, high social media users, and increased social media intensity during the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the phenomenon of online gender-based violence (Jatmiko et al., 2020). But they also caution that online violence is a complex combination of technical elements and socio-cultural practices, so the characteristics of gender-based violence are not always created by technology but rather "facilitated by the use of new technologies".

Technology on the one hand is indeed helpful during the pandemic, which is helping those who work can continue to work from home (WFH). But even this condition does not escape the reach of perpetrators of violence. A survey conducted by SafeNet in 2020 between April 6 and April 19 of 315 respondents who conducted WFH found that 86 people were victims of harassment, 68 people witnessed sexual harassment, and 30 people experienced both (Gultom, 2021).

An Indian study (Maji et al., 2022) conducted by examining domestic violence news in three newspapers showed an increase compared to previous years in the 2015-2020 period. The increase is a sign that domestic spaces are still unsafe places for women in India.

Factors Underlying Violence

28 Financial stress and social isolation are the main reasons for domestic violence during the pandemic. Australian research focusing on social isolation, time spent at home together, and financial stress found that while more time together at home was not a direct cause of repeated or first-time violence, they found that opportunities for violence increased against women who had less contact with friends or family outside the home (Morgan & Boxall, 2020).

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El-Nimr, et al's research found that the causes of violence against Arab women include the bad temper of their husbands, arguments about family decisions, and financial causes. Another conclusion obtained is that families affected by income problems due to lockdown are connected to verbal, psychological, and physical violence (El-Nimr et al., 2021).

Salah satu penelitian yang dilakukan untuk wilayah Asia Pasifik memberikan wawasan yang lebih detil. Dalam penelitian yang diterbitkan pada tahun 2022 dengan partisipan dari 12 negara di Asia Pasifik (Nagashima-Hayashi et al., 2022) mengungkapkan bahwa ada beragam faktor yang mendasari kekerasan berbasis gender dan meningkatkan risikonya, yang juga memiliki kemiripan dengan kekerasan domestik yaitu:

1. First level: Individual
 - a. Anxiety due to economic stress
 - b. Increased use of drugs and alcohol
 - c. Teenagers and children
 - d. Pregnant women
 - e. Discrimination and stigma from marginalized groups
2. Second level: Relationships
 - a. Isolation and confinement with the perpetrator
 - b. Unable to seek help
3. Third level: Community
 - a. Shortage of sexual and reproductive health services due to having to respond to COVID-19
 - b. Fear of contracting it by a service provider
 - c. Lack of information about helplines
 - d. School closures affect the safety of teens and children
 - e. Distrust of healthcare
4. Fourth level: Society
 - a. Gender-based violence is not a priority due to the pandemic
 - b. Culture and social norms

One of the root causes of high violence against women is socio-cultural factors. In Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2021) women have had to deal with rigid and unfair social norms that support patriarchy and gender discrimination, which makes them more vulnerable to violence in the context of the pandemic. It explained that issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, violence caused by Salis and Fatwa, and child marriage are deeply embedded in socio-cultural aspects. It further said that there needs to be a change in men's attitudes towards women.

In one study in Nigeria (Aborisade, 2022), the causes of violence in relationships, especially in women, were caused by the sudden announcement and enforcement of lockdowns in Nigeria, the ways in which the quarantine was enforced by the Nigerian police, the absence of relatives and limited service assistance to women and by the police, and being locked with a hurting partner. In one of the sources' statements, even the perpetrators of sexual violence are the police themselves.

The similarities found as factors causing violence to occur in intimate and domestic partners are:

1. Economic pressure
2. Social isolation and confinement along with abusers

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3. Difficulty or unwillingness to seek help
4. Cultural factors and social norms

Lack of Willingness to Seek Help

These findings have prompted research on how to provide help and how victims respond to seeking help. Based on the studies above, it can be found that even if violence occurs, the response to seeking help or receiving help does not always end positively.

In one study conducted in Ottawa, Canada, it was found that there was a drastic decrease in the number of violent patients receiving treatment despite fears of an increase in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Treatment for victims of sexual assault decreased by 53.49 percent and for victims of physical assault decreased by 48.45 percent from the previous year. Despite the decline, the majority of causes remain the same. The majority of cases occurred in female patients (88.57%), 51.43 percent were attacked by intimate partners, and most locations of attacks occurred at the perpetrator's home (40.00%) or the patient's home (31.43%) (Muldoon et al., 2021).

In Portugal, the majority of victims of violence do not seek help (62.3%). Only 17.8 percent sought professional help and 1.4 percent sought help from legal institutions. Only 4.3 percent sought police help. Some victims revealed that they did not believe the police would do anything (8.9%) (Gama et al., 2020). Victims do not seek help for several reasons:

1. They feel no need (32.2%)
2. They felt it wouldn't change anything (13.0%)
3. Feeling embarrassed (3.4%)
4. Feeling distrusted or taken seriously (2.7%)
5. Not wanting to trouble health care workers (2.7%)
6. Don't want the perpetrator to get into trouble (2.7%)
7. Unwilling to bring a bad name to the family (2.1%)
8. Financial or transportation limitations (2.1%)

Research into seven cases of violence against women in Nigeria (Fawole et al., 2021) shows that lockdowns have isolated women and reduced opportunities for them to disclose violence that has occurred or receive necessary support services or other resources. Home beds, and religious organizations that often offer important emotional support and provide opportunities for relief for victims are no longer open during the pandemic leaving these women nowhere to complain. In Nigeria, violence by an intimate partner is seen as a family affair that does not require outside intervention. Many of these cases were reported by nongovernmental organizations, while the government itself rarely provided assistance and police regarded incidents of intimate partner violence as family matters that tribal leaders should have resolved.

Almost half of Arab women who experienced violence during the pandemic (42.7%) also did not seek help in any form. Some of the factors found were that these women received the treatment and considered the husband to have the right to do so to them and the possibility of being isolated by their husbands (El-Nimr et al., 2021).

In the Republic of North Macedonia, efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have had their own impact on categories of people who are vulnerable to violence, namely women and children. Three key efforts to prevent the spread of the pandemic, namely social isolation, restrictions on movement, and curfews, prompted an increase in violence against women due to 24-hour surveillance by perpetrators of violence at home. Due to

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the perpetrator's physical presence, women are unable to call the helpline or file a report. Women are afraid to seek health care or leave their neighborhoods for fear of being infected with COVID-19. They fear losing their jobs or job opportunities, when the crisis is over. There is also a chance that these victims will experience new violence after reporting (Velkoska, 2022).

Julia T. Wood revealed that these statistics of violence between intimate partners are also based on reported incidents and many people do not report them. Women don't report for several reasons:

1. They fear worse consequences for violence.
2. They want to protect their partner from punishment.
3. They want to protect children or themselves from the abuser's anger or retribution.

While for men who experience violence by women will not report it because they feel ashamed that their attacker is a woman (Wood, 2015).

Preventive Measures

8 Despite studies showing an increase in intimate or domestic partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and how difficult or reluctant victims are to seek help, as well as inadequate responses from authorities, more can be done to address the problem. Even if the pandemic is over, this experience can teach us lessons on how to deal with similar events if they happen again in the future.

Actually, the problem of intimate partner violence was already an unwon problem before the pandemic occurred. For this reason, cooperation between parties who provide professional assistance in this issue and the local community is needed. For example, workers in the postal sector, garbage collectors, food delivery services, and home repairs can have the opportunity to become early detectors of domestic violence and report it to the authorities. Local communities also need to encourage their citizens to be vigilant and willing to check on the condition of their neighbors, friends, and family and report suspicious things (Campbell, 2020).

There needs to be preparation for health workers to be able to respond to cases of violence. It is also necessary to prepare shelters for victims of violence and be accessible. In the case of Nepal, there is a need for increased public awareness of violence and the participation of mothers' groups to examine women and children at risk of violence. In terms of the economy, various ways such as cash transfers, insurance for the unemployed, food for the poor are needed to reduce the economic burden that will reduce violence (Dahal et al., 2020).

10 A way to do this is to open a chat channel to help individuals who cannot verbally ask for help to get support for safety planning, emotional support, and relationships with relief services. For example, in Ottawa there is a chat channel called "Unsafe at Home" which even in its first month of opening has received more than 300 chats asking for support, safety planning, and other resources (Muldoon et al., 2021).

On the social media side, a finding that focused on public discussion of family violence and COVID-19 on Twitter, concluded that Twitter could be a platform for large-scale, real-time surveillance of family violence. Observing the development of information on Twitter can provide input for professionals working with families of victims of violence and survivors about building social network support systems for informal and formal assistance, conventional assistance is not available (Xue et al., 2020).

No one expected another pandemic like this. One of the anticipatory efforts that can be done in the future is to strengthen information and communication technology

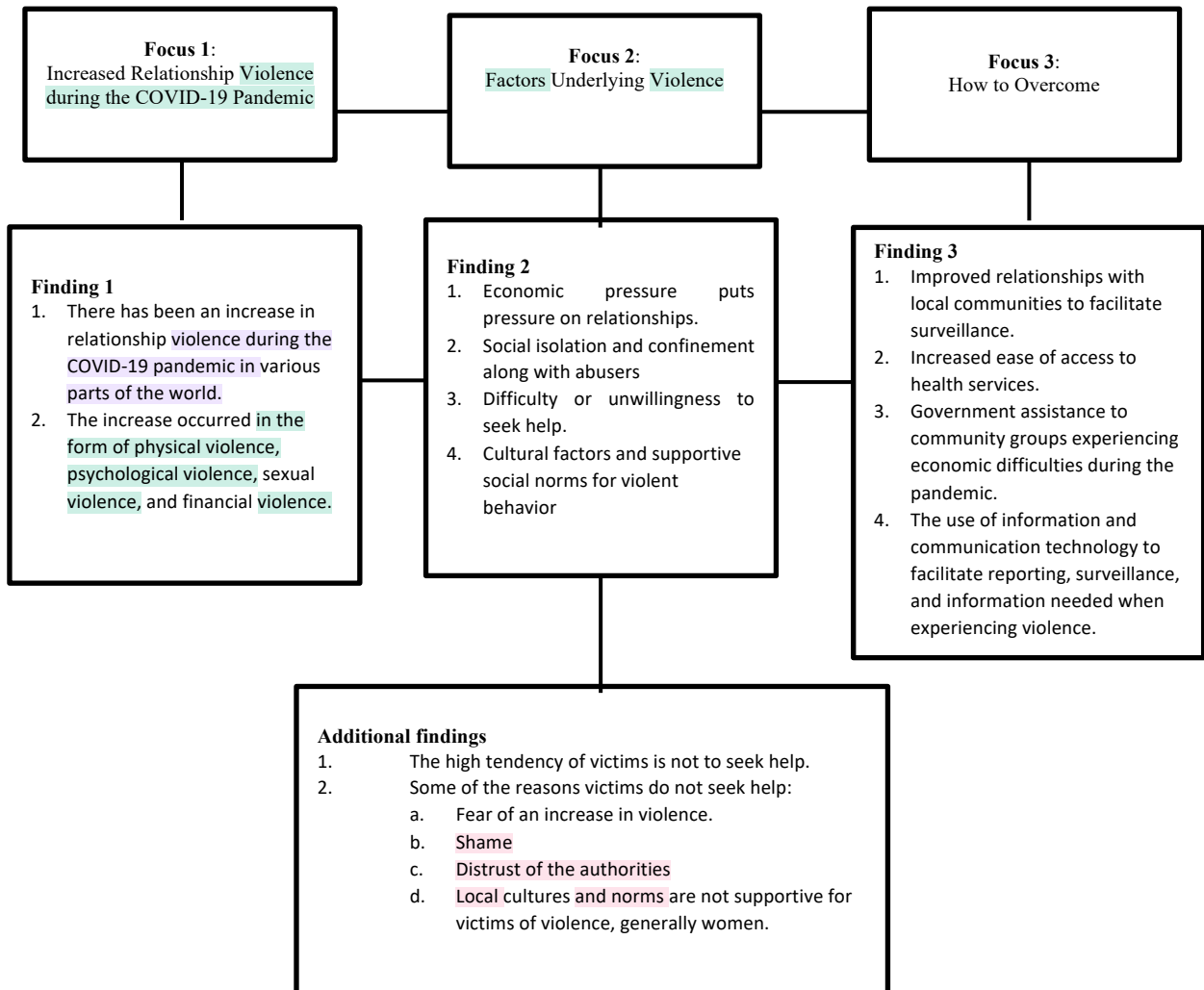
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infrastructure, provide comprehensive government policies and planning, economic support by the government, social support by national and international organizations, and health services to manage incidents of gender-based violence against women (Ostadtaghizadeh et al., 2023).

In this case we can listen to what Joseph A. DeVito wrote about what can be done if our partner is violent (DeVito, 2022):

1. Realize that you are not alone. There are others who suffer from similar things and there are mechanisms that can help you.
2. Realize that it's not your fault. You don't deserve to be a victim of violence.
3. Plan your safety. Violence, if it happens once, tends to happen again, and part of your thinking needs to be directed towards your own safety.
4. Get to know your resources—phone numbers you can call for help, and the location of money and spare keys.

Figure 1. Focus and Findings Flowchart



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Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's lives around the world. The pandemic has given rise to new problems and magnified or clarified pre-existing problems, one of which is relationship violence in the form of intimate partner violence or domestic violence, with the most victims being women.

The results of the study have shown an increase in relationship violence in various countries. Common forms are emotional abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual assault, and financial abuse. Common causative factors include economic pressure and social isolation. Other factors that arise are difficulty and unwillingness to seek help and socio-cultural factors that favor violent behavior against women. Additional findings of reluctance to seek help were due to fear, shame, mistrust of the authorities, and local culture and norms.

To be able to overcome this problem in the future, whether there is a pandemic or not, the following things can be done, namely improving relations in the community, economic assistance by the government, facilitating access to health services, and the use of information and communication technology for reporting and access to information.

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