

A Crisis within a Crisis: Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago: A Narrative Review

Roshnie A. Doon and Debra D. Joseph

Abstract: Across the world, Stay at Home (SAH) and State of Emergencies (SOE) have been executed at various levels of intensity to preserve the lives and livelihoods of men, women, and their families against the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while these policies were implemented to protect lives, they also became a barrier to the security of men and women who are victims of domestic violence. Indeed, the literature has highlighted a worrying trend, in that there appears to not only be a rise in the various forms of domestic violence against victims resulting directly from the SAH measures, but also in the context of climate change, issues of lack of safety, food insecurity and economic insecurity in a COVID-19 environment have all served to intensify the experiences of victims. Using a secondary research methodology, the primary focus of this chapter is to explore the prevalence of non-extreme forms of domestic violence offences in Trinidad and Tobago occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic, its connection to climate change events, and how these changes are likely to fuel domestic violence.

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), better known as the Global Goals, are a collective call to action towards the resolution of many social, economic, and environmental ills that plague our world, in the hope that future generations may live a sustainable life. Of the 17 goals established by the United Nations (UN), the goal on Climate Action, i.e., goal 13, is the one that is the most critical to the survival of the human race, as it focuses on the need to take urgent action to transform the industrial activities of the leading producers of greenhouse gasses (GHG), which are having irreversible and long-lasting effects on poorer nations across the world (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2022). The losses accumulated from climate change-related disasters pose not only a significantly large financial cost to global economies through recovery and resilience efforts, but also have a notable impact on the lives and livelihoods of many persons around the world (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022a).

It is for this reason that if Goal 13, the Call to Climate Action, is not achieved, then this can worsen the ability of the world to achieve many of the other SDGs by 2030, especially when it comes to Goals 5 and 10, which focus on gender equality, and reduced inequalities (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022b;

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022c). It is therefore essential to understand how the drivers of gender inequality such as climate change have contributed to the prevalence of gender-based violence in Trinidad and Tobago, as climate change events may act as a trigger for violent incidents (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022d).

The prolonged presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately worsened the situation of many victims of domestic violence (Adibelli et al. 2021). In that, not only have SAH measures trapped victims with their abusers, but the disruption in the functions in many sectors, such as healthcare, education, transportation, etc., have reduced their access to essential health services needed during instances of intense abuse, which may lead to severe wounds, such as traumatic brain injuries, hemorrhages, vision impairments, contusions, lacerations, and strangulation marks, as well as broken bones and fractures.

Bearing in mind that climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic when combined may have created the perfect breeding ground for domestic violence to occur in Trinidad and Tobago (Akel et al. 2021; Berniell and Facchini 2021; Glazebrook et al. 2020). This chapter will examine in great detail using a secondary research methodology not only how domestic violence manifested itself during the pandemic around the world, but also analyze the prevalence of non-extreme forms of domestic violence offences in Trinidad and Tobago, the link between climate change and domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago, and how climate change has contributed to the occurrence of domestic violence, before examining the challenges and future perspectives of the issue for Trinidad and Tobago.

Notwithstanding the significance and importance of GBV in relation to the issue of climate change, there are several limitations of the work performed in this study. These limitations mostly concern the availability of data, and the statistical coverage of domestic violence incidents in Trinidad and Tobago, which if available may have allowed for greater empirical and applied research to be carried out. In particular, there is very little historical domestic violence data collected, and as a result it is not possible to determine if the patterns of domestic violence have intergenerational effects. Furthermore, the data collected on domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago are limited in scope, in that only basic information concerning the victims such as age, sex, and marital status is collected, which also limits the level of analysis. Should this information be expanded to include information such as their level of education, previous instances of abuse, and presence of children in the household, it would have made for a much richer analysis of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago. That being said, one particular line of future research may possibly be to examine the impact that climate change has on the men who are victims of domestic violence in the Caribbean in relation to climate change. This is likely to add a great dimension to the literature as domestic violence amongst men is not at the forefront of the climate change and domestic violence discussion.

2. Global Manifestations of Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is an event that has forced the world to face many of its insecurities. From issues surrounding the equitable distribution of food and health care to that of political and economic instability, it appears that no one has been spared from the turmoil that the pandemic has unearthed. One such area that has received great attention during the COVID-19 pandemic is that of violence within the home environment, and its many linkages to topics such as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Gender Based Violence (GBV), Mental Health, Poverty, and Income Insecurity.

During the pandemic era, domestic violence in its many variations has raised its head to reveal some devastating outcomes, such as the prevalence of mental health disorders amongst pregnant women who are victims of domestic violence. Abrahams et al. (2021) explain that in a COVID-19 environment, the psychological distress that pregnant South African women experienced alongside severe food insecurity, sexual abuse, and marital distress, made many of them even more pre-disposed to common mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than in the pre-pandemic period. Similar to pregnant women, married women who were homemakers in India, as illustrated by Indu et al. (2021), exhibited depressive, anxiety, and perceived stress symptoms, which were strongly associated with domestic violence offences. Sleeping disorders were also highlighted by Peraud et al. (2021) as another contributing factor associated with domestic violence against women in France.

A similar outcome was observed for Lebanese women who were not pregnant during quarantine periods, where victims suffered from higher levels of anxiety and stress during extremely abusive situations (Akel et al. 2021). In most instances, forced cohabitation between victims and perpetrators of domestic violence was often one of the main causes of such abuse to persist during quarantine, as the possibility of conflicts and instances of interpersonal violence increased (De Berardis et al. 2021). For example, in the case of Italy, women were found to have less control over their movement, especially during stressful conditions, and were less likely to report the incident (Barchielli et al. 2021). Despite the lack of formal reporting, it was found that in the case of Italy and other European countries such as France, Germany and Spain, 5 weeks after the March 2020 lockdown, the intensity to which domestic violence searches were carried out via Google mobility data for these countries was at its highest, i.e., 20% (Berniell and Facchini 2021).

In contrast to that of European women, in the Portuguese context, even though the telephone remained the primary means of communication, many victims of domestic violence never used either social media platforms such as Facebook or videoconferencing applications such as Zoom, Microsoft teams, etc., during quarantine, and as a result, these victims received less remote support (Caridade et al. 2021b). Thus, victims of domestic violence such as those in Belgium reported greater dissatisfaction with healthcare services, and social support, and higher levels of emotional loneliness and vulnerability (Drieskens et al. 2022). Such

factors in many instances influenced the ability of victims such as women in Turkey, reducing their ability to effectively cope with stress (Evcili and Demirel 2022). This causes the victims' perception of stress to increase, which in turn increases their likelihood of worsening health and mental health outcomes.

Another manifestation of such psychological abuse is emotional abuse. Turkish women during the pandemic were found to suffer from stronger intensities of emotional and verbal abuse even if they were literate. This problem was worsened further if the woman and her partner were both unemployed during periods of lockdown (Adibelli et al. 2021). This consequence was also mirrored by married Saudi Arabian women, who endured multiple forms of domestic violence during quarantine, i.e., violent abuse (87.7%), emotional abuse (37.9%), and sexual abuse (39.9%), especially if they had many children (Alharbi et al. 2021). El-Nimir et al. (2021) explain that in the case of Arab women, 50% of victims were exposed to psychological violence during periods of lockdown at least one to three times per month, and sometimes daily if their partner lost his job during quarantine.

Apart from the social implications of the pandemic on domestic violence, the economic consequences of the virus also influenced the rate and intensity of domestic violence cases. As illustrated by Arenas-Arroyo et al. (2021), even though the economic impact of the pandemic was found to be significantly larger than the stints of lockdown, it was found that if the economic situation of the man in the household was to worsen during this period, his partner was more likely to experience the backlash from the loss of his job. In India, it was found that the type of marriage (Sikh, Parsi, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jain marriages, just to name a few), the area of residence, the husbands' age and education, and the employment status of the women were all variables (Rayhan and Akter 2021).

Given that women were more likely to have become unemployed between March 2020 to September 2021, this also increased the risk of their children dropping out of school permanently, neglecting the care of their children and dependent family members, and suffering from GBV as their level of uncertainty and job loss increased (Flor et al. 2022). Such economic instability at the household level, together with a marked decline in education amongst girls, was also noted to have led to a rise in early marriages in Bangladeshi girls originating from rural communities (Gautam et al. 2021).

Apart from the marked increase in violence against women during the pandemic, countries such as Ethiopia have noted the rise in cases against young girls. According to Kassie et al. (2022), 40.05% of Ethiopian girls have experienced some sort of violence, with psychological abuse being its primary form during the pandemic period. This statistic was positively associated with the use of social media, viewing of explicit content and substance abuse. Similar to young girls in Ethiopia, 27.6% of young adolescent girls in Kenya experienced IPV during the pandemic, and its occurrence is associated with poor support mechanisms in the home and community, and their partner's age difference (Decker et al. 2022). Further to this, as school closures continued after the initial lockdowns from March 2020, the state of Florida in

the United States also continued to record high cases of juvenile arrests for domestic violence, predominantly amongst Black and Hispanic youths (Baglivio et al. 2022).

Notwithstanding the overall impact that domestic violence has had on victims around the world, Drotning et al. (2022) find that the victims' sexual orientation also played a crucial role in their risk of violence. Sexual minorities in the United States were noted to have suffered a greater incidence of domestic violence than victims who were heterosexuals. In addition to this, other minority groups such as Refugees were noted by Mutambara et al. (2021) to have suffered from the negative effects of violence, by having their needs for safety during the pandemic ignored by state officials and excluded from mitigation measures.

In most cases of IPV and GVB cases, victims reportedly suffered from many forms of abuse cited in the literature such as physical, verbal, emotional, economic, and sexual manipulation; however, during the pandemic, new types of violence against women emerged. For Nigerian women, such violence manifested itself as threats to be thrown out of their homes by offenders, and threats concerning losing custody of their children, which in both instances hinder their ability to protect themselves and their children from becoming exposed to the COVID-19 virus (Fawole et al. 2021). In many instances, as discussed by Leigh et al. (2022), the virus was used by the perpetrators of domestic violence as a tool to control their victims and make them more submissive. This is an important issue, as McLay (2020) explains, that even in Chicago, United States, when Stay at Home Orders were issued, not only were domestic violence incidents more likely to occur, but offenders were less likely to have been arrested.

3. Research Methodology

For the purposes of this chapter, a secondary research methodology will be implemented to investigate the linkage between climate change and gender-based violence in Trinidad and Tobago during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main type of research conducted is that of secondary research or desk research as the data used in this chapter was retrieved from the TTPS and the Metrological Office of Trinidad and Tobago, while drawing on articles, journals and reports as discussed below. This type of research was chosen for this study because of its cost effectiveness, and it is largely based on existing research that aids in achieving the objectives of this chapter.

First, to examine how domestic violence cases manifested themselves around the world, several sources of scholarly literature are used to investigate the experience of victims around the world. Second, to study both the prevalence of non-extreme forms of domestic violence offences and its relationship to climate change in Trinidad and Tobago, domestic violence and climate change data were sourced from the Meteorological office of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS).

The data which were collected during the period of 2020–2021 were compiled by the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police

Service (TTPS). This registry is notably limited in nature due to a lack of resources by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) to put together a comprehensive domestic violence database, and as a result the database only gathers information on the date of the incident, month and year when the incident occurred, the division and station where the incident was reported, the type of offence, the marital status of the victim, the victims' citizenship, ethnicity, occupation, sex, date of birth and age. It is well-known, however, that issues surrounding the non-collection and incomplete gathering of domestic violence data are cited throughout the literature as being a common limitation to carrying out empirical-type analyses that can aid policy development in this area.

Third and finally, to understand how climate change is likely to fuel domestic violence in the Caribbean, and the challenges that it poses to the region, a host of scholarly literature, reports, and discussion papers are used. The use of the secondary research methodology is paramount to the success of this chapter, as it enables one to not only identify and fill current research gaps in the literature that concern the Caribbean perspective that climate change has concerning gender-based violence, but to also serve as a starting point to understanding how climate change adaptation and mitigation plans influence the environmental linkages of violence.

4. The Prevalence of Non-Extreme Forms of Domestic Violence Offences in Trinidad and Tobago during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Before investigating the connection that climate change events are likely to have on domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago, it is important to examine the overall prevalence of non-extreme forms of domestic violence offences occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a sample of 2372 men and women who are victims of domestic violence and are between the ages 18–65, a summary of some of the characteristic features of the victims shown in Table 1 below reveals that for the period of 2020–2021, most victims of domestic violence are between the ages of 25–34 (36.4%), married (34.7%), employed (72.2%), and considered to be non-essential workers (48.5%).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (2020–2021).

Variable	All Victims (%)			
	All Offences	Physical Offence	Verbal Offence	Legal Offence
Age Group				
Age 18–24	11.40	13.60	7.40	6.50
Age 25–34	36.40	38.90	33.80	24.50
Age 35–44	31.30	31.00	32.00	31.00
Age 45–53	13.10	11.30	14.90	21.50
Age 54+	7.90	5.20	12.00	16.50
Marital Status				
Common Law Relationship	28.30	31.40	24.80	15.50
Divorced	1.60	1.00	2.30	4.00
Married	34.70	34.10	36.10	35.50
Separated	4.10	3.30	4.80	8.50
Single	30.10	29.80	30.50	30.50
Widowed	1.10	0.30	1.60	6.00
Time of Assault				
Weekday	73.50	72.40	75.40	76.50
Weekend	26.50	27.60	24.60	23.50
Employment Status				
Employed	72.20	72.20	74.10	66.50
Essential Worker	23.70	23.80	23.90	21.50
Non-Essential Worker	48.50	48.30	50.20	45.00
Unemployed	27.80	27.80	25.90	33.50
Observations	2372	1562	610	200

Source: Table by authors.

In addition to this, most of these offences, i.e., 73.5%, appear to occur on a weekday (Monday–Friday). For the purposes of this chapter, the three main types of non-extreme forms of domestic violence offences considered will be those that reflect physical, verbal, and legal abuse, as these types of abuse were most widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic. Briefly defined according to Living Without Abuse (LWA) (2022),

- Physical abuse includes behaviors such as biting, beating, burning, slapping and other similar actions that can lead to permanent injuries.
- Verbal abuse includes behaviors such as the frequent use of name-calling, obscene language, demoralizing and discounting the feelings of others, as well as the use of silence to exert control.
- Legal/financial abuse includes behaviors such as withholding money from their partner, making them accountable for everything spent, and either taking out loans or creating debts in their partner’s name.

Based on the sample data taken, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, most of the domestic violence victims appear to suffer from physical abuse (65.9%) and to a lesser extent verbal (25.7%) and legal (8.4%) abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of physical abuse, many victims are between the ages of 25–44 and 35–44, in either a common-law relationship or married, while being employed and a non-essential worker. A similar outcome was also found for victims of verbal abuse; however, victims of legal abuse were slightly older, falling in the 35–44 age category.

A further look at the overall occurrences of each type of domestic violence offence shown in Figure 1 reveals that for the period of 2020–2021, all offences appear to peak in the months of March and July, after which offences tapered off and declined during August–December. A similar trend is observed for victims of physical abuse; however, while cases declined considerably between April–May, there was a steady rise in cases in the May–July period. When compared to victims of verbal abuse, the number of cases peaked in the month of May, declining thereafter, while the number of legal abuse cases remained small and relatively stable regardless of the month.

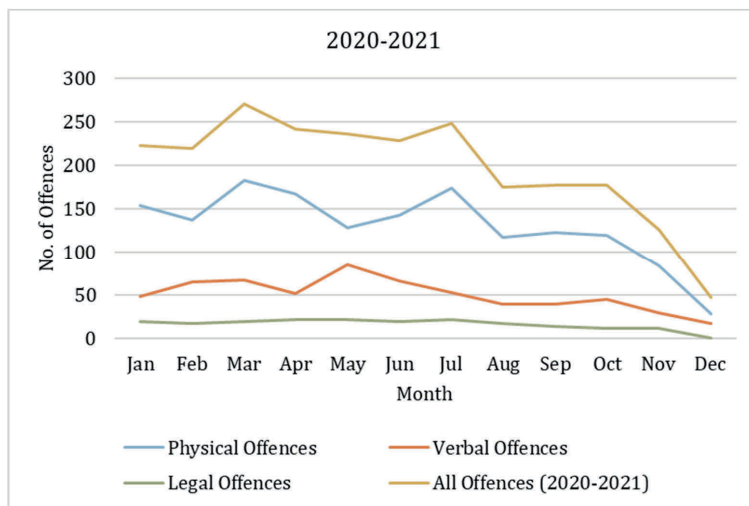


Figure 1. Domestic violence offences (2020–2021). Source: Figure by authors.

When the occupational status of the worker is considered as reflected by Figure 2a most essential workers tend to experience physical abuse, which peaks in the months of March, May, and October, when compared to verbal abuse, which seems to be consistently high during the months of March–July. In terms of Figure 2b, non-essential workers tend to experience higher rates of domestic violence in the months of March and July; however, when the type of offence is considered, non-essential workers tend to suffer from higher rates of physical abuse in the months of March, April, July, and September. A somewhat similar trend is observed for victims of verbal abuse, but there is a greater fluctuation in cases after July. Finally, Figure 2c shows that unemployed victims of domestic violence tend to consistently experience high levels of domestic violence during the months of February–May,

which peaked in July and declined thereafter. A similar pattern is exhibited by unemployed victims who experienced physical abuse, but there was a visible decline in cases during May. The opposite was observed for verbal abuse, which was at its highest in May, and relatively low for the remaining months. Regardless of occupational status, the cases of legal abuse tend to be small and stable over time.

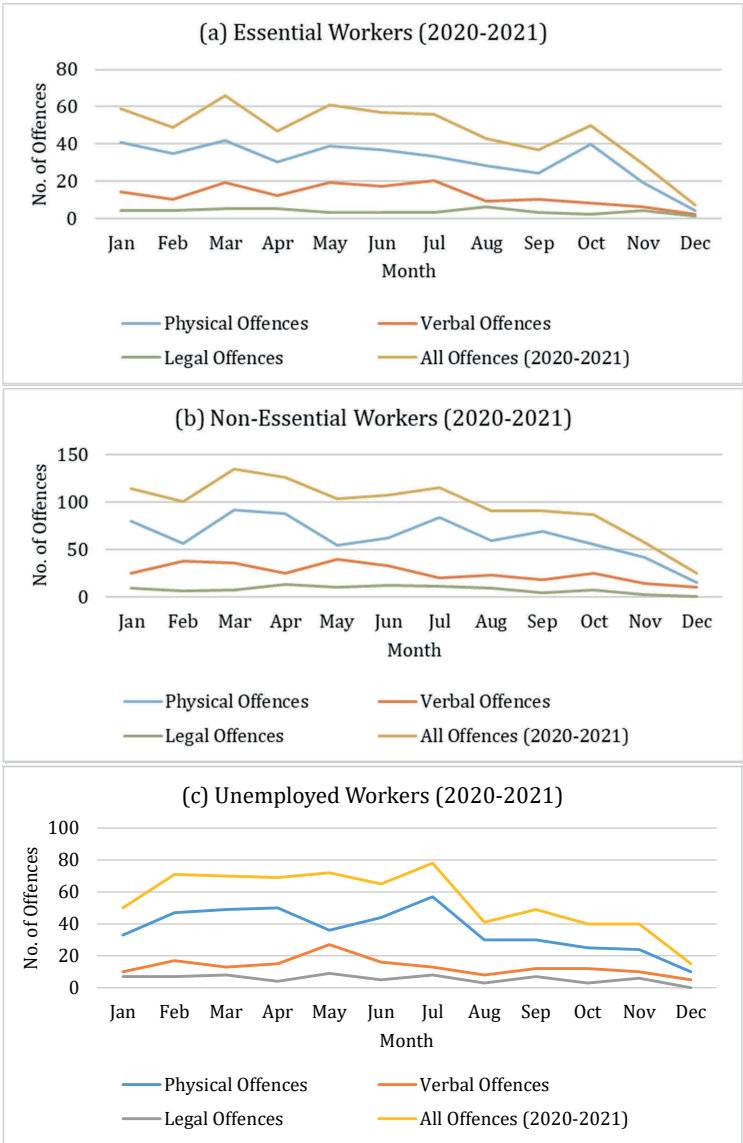


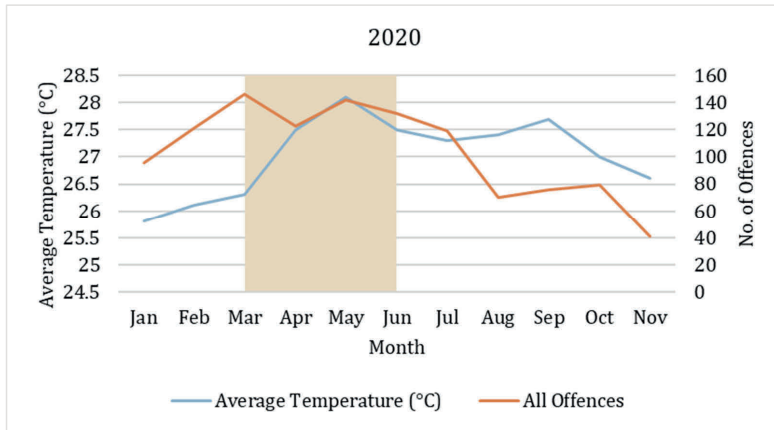
Figure 2. Employment status of domestic violence victims (2020–2021). (a) Shows the incidence of domestic violence experienced by essential workers; (b) shows the incidence of domestic violence experienced by non-essential workers; (c) shows the incidence of domestic violence experienced by unemployed persons. Source: Figure by authors.

5. Climate Change and Domestic Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

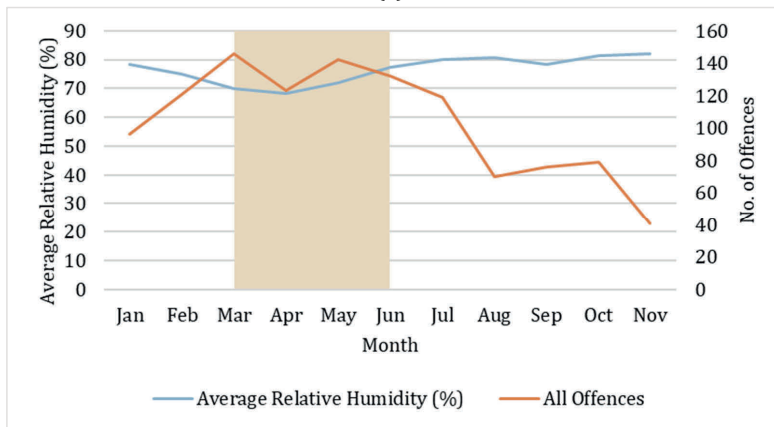
The negative implications of extreme climate change events are not a problem that can be dealt with in the future. It is a current ongoing problem that is taking place in real-time and is having an irreversible impact on the lives and livelihoods of those vulnerable to these events, particularly when originating from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as Trinidad and Tobago. The current effects of global climate change are likely to have widespread effects on the environment, as the occurrence and intensity of climatological (extreme temperatures, droughts, and wildfires), geophysical (earthquakes, landslides, volcanic activity, and tsunamis), hydrological (avalanches, floods), and meteorological (cyclones, hurricanes, tropical storms, tropical waves, typhoons), events have all grown in magnitude (Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) n.d.).

These climate change events have all contributed to the breakdown of the protective mechanisms of the household by intensifying the problems of insecurity related to relationships, social interactions, jobs, and employment, as well as the provision of basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare. Such disruptions to the safety and well-being of the household are also linked to the collective occurrence of violence within the home and communities, as their lives and livelihoods are now threatened more perceptibly, which can make worse the level of poverty and socioeconomic inequalities that women and victims of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago may experience (Belsey-Priebe et al. 2021). Thus, leading to a higher incidence of violence and violent crime. Climate change events such as famine and drought have led to periods of war as the social mechanisms put in place to protect people erode. One example of such a breakdown can be seen from the relationship that the presence of domestic violence cases may have with changes in the climate (Caridade et al. 2021a).

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, according to Figure 3, during the 2020 SAH orders, which lasted during the months of March–June, the number of non-extreme forms of domestic violence was at its highest. In 2020, as the average temperature increased from 25.8 °C in January to a high of 28.1 °C in May, so too did the occurrence of domestic violence cases, which increased from 96 to 142 cases. These cases peaked at 146 in March just at the onset of the SAH Orders. Following the relaxation of the SAH Orders, as the average temperature declined to 26.6 °C in December, the number of cases also declined to 41 in December. Interestingly enough, during periods of high temperature when the prevalence of domestic violence cases was elevated, the average relative humidity as expected was low, i.e., 70.1 mm to 71.8 mm between March–May 2020. Under these conditions, on these uncomfortably hot days, it is noted that warmer temperatures are likely to increase feelings of anger, hostility, and aggression, resulting in higher levels of domestic violence (Mahendran et al. 2021).



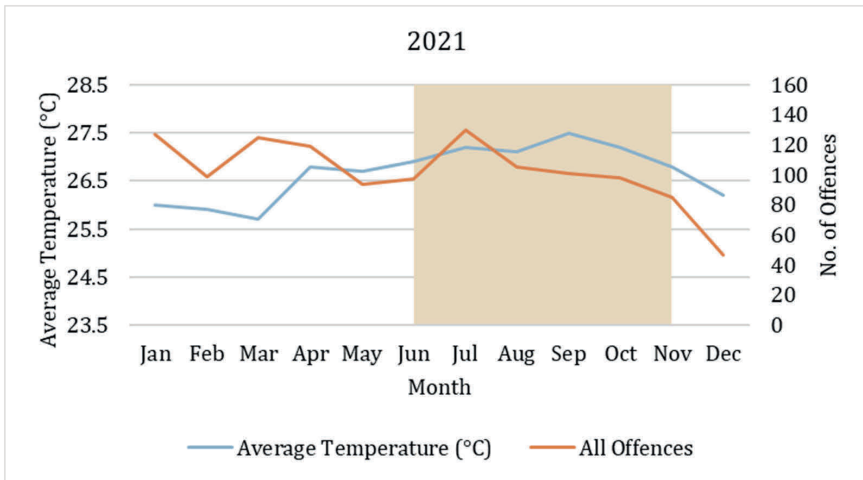
(a)



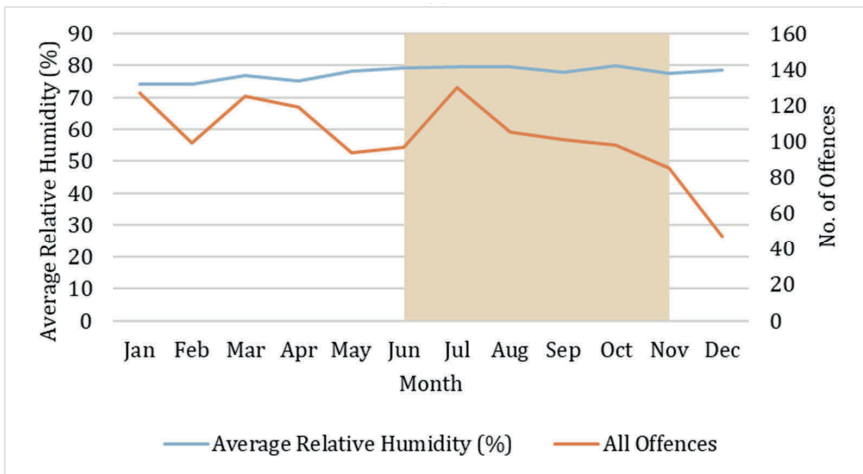
(b)

Figure 3. Average temperature (a), relative humidity (b) and DV offences during Trinidad and Tobago’s 2020 SAH orders. Source: Figure by authors.

In 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic persisted, Trinidad and Tobago also introduced an SOE during the months of June–November to assist in the management of the virus. During this time, according to Figure 4, although the number of overall cases of domestic violence remained high, between June to November the cases of non-extreme forms of domestic violence dropped slightly from 97 to 75 cases. However, one month into the SOE, the number of offences peaked at 130 cases in July 2021. In Trinidad and Tobago, some of the warmest months occur during the June/July–October period, averaging at around 27 °C, and coincidentally throughout this timeframe the cases of domestic violence were again high, with at least 100 cases per month.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4. Average temperature (a), relative humidity (b) and DV offences during Trinidad and Tobago’s 2021 SOE orders. Source: Figure by authors.

From June/July–October, when the average temperatures were elevated, the average relative humidity was observed to also be quite high, 79.2 mm to 77.5 mm. The presence of both high levels of temperature and humidity are known to cause physical and behavioral changes in persons such as mood swings, depression, anxiety, drowsiness, fatigue, heat strokes, and sleep disturbances, as the human body struggles to cool itself, where again such a distortion in the behaviors of perpetrators and victims of domestic violence can lead to intense bursts of aggression and extreme violence (Otrachshenko et al. 2021). However, as the temperature declines and becomes more comfortable, and with the lifting of SAH in 2020 and the SOE orders in 2021 after July 2020 and December 2021, as more people are now outdoors, the incidence of domestic violence is likely to decline.

6. Climate Change Fuels Violence Against Victims

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, as with many regions around the world such as Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, which are vulnerable to experiencing disastrous climate change events, the arrival and departure of tropical storms, hurricanes, flooding, and extreme temperature and rainfall, together with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have all threatened the livelihoods of those most vulnerable in society. This is especially the case as it relates to gender-based violence since the twin island state continues to experience adverse climate events, which according to Thurston et al. (2021) can open three main pathways for gender-based violence to occur. The first is that climate change can be a stressor that triggers gender-based violence; second, climate change enables environments in which gender-based violence can thrive; and third, climate change often exacerbates the underlying drivers of gender-based violence.

6.1. Patriarchal Societies and Fragile Communities

The vulnerability of domestic violence victims to climate change events is often linked to the traditional values and cultural norms regarding the role of women in the household and the community, where men traditionally have power over women, which implies that the security of women may be hampered during weather-related events such as tropical cyclones in countries such as Fiji, as men may have more control over the use and allocation of resources needed during and after the occurrence of natural disasters, while women have extraordinarily little influence during the adaptation, mitigation, and recovery process (Kopf et al. 2020).

For this reason, it is expected that climate change events may worsen the living situation of victims of domestic violence, particularly those residing in fragile communities such as coastal communities in countries such as Nigeria, as well as low-income urban and rural areas in Trinidad and Tobago (Akinemolu and Obafemi 2019). These areas are often considered to be vulnerable to climate change events because there is little investment made to develop and maintain the infrastructure of communities (housing, roads, drainage pathways), and to provide basic services such as healthcare, frequent waste collection, clean drinking water and electricity (Fraser 2021).

Consequently, the victims living in these communities may not be able to put in place adaptation and mitigation plans at the community level to deal with the adverse effects of climate change events such as flooding and landslides. This unfortunately leaves communities in Trinidad and Tobago more vulnerable to experiencing higher levels of discord in their communities such as crime, civil disobedience, and displacement during the post-disaster period (Memon 2020). Such heightened tensions, created by flood events in other countries such as Kenya, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, have been observed to be followed by a growth in gender-based violence and may serve as an example of what is likely to happen in Trinidad and Tobago if climate-related violence of the poor is left unchecked (Bonds 2016).

In an environment where both climate change and domestic violence are rampant, it may also strengthen feelings of vulnerability, hopelessness, and despondency, within the community. This is likely to make victims of domestic violence from these living areas in Trinidad and Tobago more predisposed to experiencing higher levels of exploitation, as their living situation is now insecure. This heightened feeling of vulnerability is unfortunately made worse by the slow process to access grants and financial assistance from government bodies to undertake recovery efforts, which may be fraught with unnecessary bureaucratic red tape (Cameron et al. 2022; Parkinson 2022).

6.2. Access, Use and Control of Resources

In the aftermath of a climate change event, men and women tend to experience and react to these challenges in diverse ways depending on their access to resources. Given that women and domestic violence victims in Trinidad and Tobago may have a higher social disadvantage, given that they have less ownership of land, they are more dependent on local natural resources for food, water, and energy supply used in cooking and heating, and have less access to environmental goods and services. It is also possible that victims may also have less access to education and training on how to deal with the effects of extreme weather events, which may all contribute to creating the perfect conditions for violence to thrive in their homes (Caridade et al. 2021a; Chersich et al. 2019). The growing scarcity of fertile croplands and other essential environmental resources, together with climate extremes such as temperature and precipitation, all contribute to the development of collective forms of violence such as riots, protesting, and youth gangs within communities (Levy et al. 2017).

6.3. Extreme Temperatures and Employment

Violence in hot weather is not a new phenomenon, as with the case of Trinidad and Tobago, other countries such as South Africa have found that temperature changes can have a profound effect on the psychology and behavior of perpetrators and their victims. Where extreme weather may bring about a sense of discomfort, emotional instability, mood disturbances, eroding well-being, irritability, confusion, anger, and aggression, which together may increase the likelihood of violence against one's partner or family members (Chersich et al. 2019). For this reason, when related to variations in temperature, this type of abuse, according to Henke and Hsu (2020), reduces to a form of expressive violence, which is aggression that occurs as an emotional response to frustration. This is further supported by the fact that countries in warmer regions of the world are more likely to exhibit higher rates of violence and dangerous crime during hotter weather. Such conditions have led to higher rates of physical and sexual violence and even cases of femicide.

Interestingly enough, Henke and Hsu (2020) explain that if the victim of domestic violence is employed and has job opportunities regardless of the industry of employment, then this often protects them from experiencing temperature-based

violence, as the victim has greater bargaining power. It is noted, however, that while the victims of domestic violence can be employed in any industry, some sectors are more labor intensive such as in the areas of agricultural/farming and garment construction such as in the case of Bangladesh and Ghana, and victims may be more exposed to heat stress and extreme weather events, which could lead to higher instances of extreme violence (Anderson Hoffner et al. 2021; Glazebrook et al. 2020).

6.4. Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

As climate change events restrict access to resources, when conflict arises, so too does the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence. This is because the environmental conditions created by natural disasters as well as the COVID-19 pandemic not only worsen the inequalities that victims in Trinidad and Tobago may also experience but may provide the perfect disguise for the perpetrators of sexual gender-based violence to target victims (Clark et al. 2022). Given that legal restraints, social protective measures, social networks, and health care services may be weakened during the occurrence of natural disasters, perpetrators may use these conditions as an intentional tactic to intimidate their victims. This effectively displaces victims, as well as migrant and refugee victims of abuse, who are now more than before vulnerable to entering into the sex-trade industry, as well as child marriages in response to their desperation for necessities, food insecurity, mental stress, mental trauma, post-traumatic stress disorders, as well as privacy and protection (Ovenden and Daalen 2022; Desai and Mandal 2021).

Even though climate change plays an important role in the spread of sexual gender-based violence during climate change disasters, victims continue to be victimized because there is not only an international legal instrument that adequately addresses such violence, but several major United Nations (UN) Climate Negotiations such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—1992, Kyoto Protocol—1997, and the Paris Agreement—1995, and several earlier Conference of the Parties (COP), barely addressed SGBV in great detail (United Nations (UN) 1992; United Nations Climate Change (UNCC) 2022; Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) 2022). As a result, women and victims of domestic violence will continue to experience verbal, physical, and sexual violence in their communities.

6.5. Environmental Degradation

Apart from climate change events, natural and fabricated environmental degradation influences the intensity of domestic violence and violence against women. From a legislative and climate change policy perspective, not only is there little inclusion and representation of women, but the rights of Indigenous communities in countries such as Indonesia, who are also disproportionately affected by environmental degradation caused by problems such as deforestation, land disturbances, pollution, landfills, and overpopulation, are hardly considered

(Csevar 2021). As a result, this often serves to worsen their current vulnerabilities inclusive of gender-based domestic violence, as well as the marginalization and social exclusion of these Indigenous communities and communities in low- and middle-income countries.

One example where environmental degradation through water insecurity has fueled violence occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, where prolonged periods of drought forced women to not only venture far distances outside of their communities to search for water, but also put themselves at risk to verbal, physical and sexual violence, as well as being raped and abducted by strangers such as armed groups (Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) 2005), not to mention the risk of intimate partner violence dealt with by their partners when they fail to secure water and food resources to meet the needs of the household (Tallman et al. 2022).

7. Challenges and Future Perspectives for Trinidad and Tobago

Based on the recommendations put forward by United Nations Women (UN Women) (2017), one must ensure that service providers and survivors realize that not only physical violence is violence but there is also psychological abuse, verbal abuse, financial abuse, and emotional abuse as well. Education on the domestic violence act and what constitutes abuse is crucial for building awareness of abuse. This can go towards recognizing, preventing, and addressing abuse. Schools, as part of their social education, should incorporate this in their curricula. Domestic violence is too pervasive for society to do anything. It must also be noted that domestic violence can ensue from as early as the beginning of a relationship. Observing red flags concerning the types of abuse can auger well for prevention and leaving a relationship early.

Many women experience victim blame from persons in society, for example, the police, family members and random persons. This can prevent the reporting of the violence for months. Women may be embarrassed and shamed, leading to non-seeking help behavior for counselling, community programs, clinics and other supportive interventions that are available. Domestic violence can create both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. Understanding abuse can help women build their self-esteem, develop healthy self-concepts, and realize that they are worthy of their place in society.

Resources need to be strengthened. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are fund deficient and struggle to employ staff, finance staff training and enhance existing programs. More funding is needed to hire social workers and counsellors. When social workers and counsellors are stretched, the interventions could be compromised, and clients may not feel that their needs are being met. This is an added burden that they do not need. Shelters may need the presence of child psychologists as children could be particularly affected by domestic violence and may wake up screaming in the night and or have behavioral challenges. Shelters can neither address mental illness nor suicide attempts. Women who fall into this category can become invisible to services and have greater difficulty accessing shelter

and support. Further to this, state resources are also too limited and inadequate to address domestic violence. Although this issue is dealt with in ministries and units, there is a need for greater coordination. Relationship factors such as patriarchy, economic stress, men's multiple partners and substance abuse to name a few exacerbate women's vulnerability to domestic violence. The sexual violence of rape in marriages or with partners needs greater attention, as it is under-discussed in forums. Economic insecurity is likely to increase because of COVID-19 and with-it women's and men's dependence on each other.

Women must be able to negotiate safely for finances to support themselves and their children in households, especially those who are dependent on partners for financial support. Women may feel alone and do not know where to turn despite the range of services available by both the State and NGOs. They remain at risk, especially when they leave violent relationships. There are inadequate provisions for their immediate and sustained protection. Interventions must be fast, immediate and consistent. The protection system is not effective enough. Holistic support is sorely needed.

8. Conclusions

Many women have experienced domestic violence throughout their lifetimes and continue to do so presently. New layers of challenges tend to exacerbate this violence, such as COVID-19 and climate change. These added layers tend to perpetuate inequality and inequity concerning women and their needs. If mechanisms are not put in place to alleviate this scourge in society now, women are going to continue to suffer the consequences. These consequences can lead to death, with increasing homicidal figures in the country. The challenges faced have been highlighted and provide a way forward for the provision of adequate and holistic support for women in such circumstances. Those in authority must take notice and act immediately.

The empirical evidence provided within the scholarly literature, and actual research highlights and interprets the voices of women who have experienced domestic violence. The findings cannot be generalized to the population of Trinidad and Tobago, as such, further scientific studies or a systematic literature review with meta-analysis are necessary to confirm this hypothesis.

This issue should be placed high up on the agenda of policies and programs to be initiated or supplemented by the state. Awareness programs, whether they be via social media, press or television, should be developed and distributed accordingly. Education is a key component to understanding the elements of domestic abuse. The impacts of climate change on women should also be a part of this campaign as it adds another layer to the plight of women and can be a factor in domestic abuse. The links should be delineated to inform the public. Hopefully, persons in the public will take notice and join the advocacy for additional resources and services for women who experience domestic violence in our society.

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