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# **THE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SWEDEN.**

**A qualitative study exploring social workers' views on how the COVID-19  
Pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence.**

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2022

Student thesis, Bachelor level, 15 HE credits  
Social Work  
Bachelor of Science in Social Work, Specialization in International Social  
Work

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# Abstract

This report was the result of a study conducted in Stockholm County in Sweden. This study aimed to gain further understanding of how social workers working with domestic violence issues perceived how the COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence in Sweden. Three social workers working with victims of domestic violence were interviewed using semi structured questions. The sample consisted of two respondents from social services and one respondent from a women's shelter. Their clients are women from the age of 18 and above with different cultural backgrounds. The results generated from the interview were analysed using feminist theory and earlier research conducted on domestic violence. Though domestic violence against women has been a social problem before the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings revealed the different factors that led to more cases of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic such as economic dependency on the perpetrator, depression, alcohol abuse, and social isolation due to the partial lockdown. These factors cause the women (victims) to be more vulnerable to the crime perpetrated by their partners, and due to partial lockdown and the stay-at-home order by the government to combat the spread of COVID-19 virus in Sweden, the social workers believed that the women (the victims) were stuck with their perpetrators and unable to come out to seek the help needed and this made their situation more vulnerable resulting to long life effects like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD), suicidal thoughts and even death.

Key Words: Domestic violence, COVID- 19 pandemic, feminist theory, lockdowns, social isolation, Shadow pandemic, Sweden.

## Acknowledgements

*Our utmost gratitude goes to the Almighty God the giver of life and knowledge. We sincerely appreciate the people who participated in this study, and we are also grateful to our supervisor, Nessica Nässen for her assistance and suggestions during the writing of this thesis. We appreciate ourselves for the hard work and efforts put together during this thesis writing, even though we were faced with a challenge as one of the authors contracted the COVID-19 virus in the process of the thesis writing. Finally, we wish to thank our family members for their encouragement and support through the whole process. Also, we can't forget to thank all the Lecturers of this programme for helping us to gain knowledge and skills needed for our future practices. We Appreciate you all!*

**THANK YOU!!!**

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# **CHAPTER 1-Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

In all countries of the world, domestic violence remains a serious threat to women's health, security, and survival. For many women, homes are far from places of safety and security (Healy, 2008). According to WHO (2005, as cited in Healy, 2008), a study conducted between ten countries on women's health and violence showed incidences of intimate partner physical violence from 13% to 61% in most of the countries (Healy, 2008). Perrota (2021), explained that violence within the home is the most prevalent type of interpersonal violence against women. Although children and men are also victims of abuse of several types within the family, intimate partner violence perpetrated by men against women is usually the most prevalent type of domestic violence (Perrota, 2021).

The United Nations describes violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that result in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nation, 1993). An analysis of prevalence data carried out by WHO on behalf of the UN interagency working group on violence against women between 2000-2018 in 161 countries shows that globally, almost 1 in 3 or 30% of women have been exposed to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence or both (World Health Organization, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic came into existence in late December 2019 from Wuhan, China and later spread across the globe. By February 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) formally named the disease COVID-19 (Yi-Chi et al., 2020) and by March 11th, World Health Organization declared Covid-19 as a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020).

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. For most people infected, the virus causes mild to moderate respiratory illness and recovery occurs without needing special treatment. However, some became seriously ill and needed medical attention (World Health Organization, 2022). Due to this covid-19 pandemic, some countries in the world began lockdowns aimed to reduce people's movement and protect national borders from foreign agents, which encourage the spread of the disease (Onyeaka et al., 2021). Although the lockdown is aimed at reducing the spread of the pandemic, there are various impacts on people such as changing people's lifestyle by reduction in human contact through mobility restrictions, working from home, and disallowing mass gathering. National borders locked down by countries, disallowing of movement of people and goods hence, hindering the economic and human relations that had earlier existed by countries. "The role of the virus in the global lockdown has affected food chain security, the global economy, education, healthcare, increased depression, and other mental health issues and domestic abuse" (Onyeaka et al., 2021). According to Leppämäki (2021), domestic violence during the covid-19 pandemic has been on the increase all over the world and Sweden has not been left out even with their strong culture of gender equality and feminist government. For example, a 30% increase in reported cases has been recorded in France since its first lockdown in March 2020. Cyprus and Singapore also reported an increase in the domestic violence helplines by 30% and 33% respectively (Leppämäki, 2021). Leppämäki (2021) explained that various factors show that domestic violence has increased since the first outbreak of Covid-19 in Sweden because the reported assaults on women over the age of 18 increased by four percent in the first half of 2020, compared with the year before. A 1% reduction on assaults against men of the same age was reported over the same period and 79% of this crime are perpetrated by someone known to the victim (Leppämäki, 2021). In addition, Unizon, Sweden's national federation, which is constituted of over 130 Swedish women's shelters, young women's empowerment centres and other support services, reported a tremendous pressure within their operations since the coronavirus outbreak and they also reported an increase between 20 and 40 percent in the applications for support as against the pre-pandemic levels (Leppämäki, 2021). Social workers deal with domestic violence issues in various forms, such as in women shelters, social services and in policy environments. Therefore, this has resulted in a major challenge for the social workers and other people engaged in the aid organization. Professional social workers become actors in the field where human rights and the well-

being of women are regularly challenged (IFSW, 2022). In combating this issue, the social workers in different ways support the victims of domestic violence such as prioritizing the immediate safety of the victim, providing a safe environment, referral of victims to specialist agencies, counselling, legal help etc (Allen, 2013). In this study, social workers working directly with the victims were interviewed.

## **1.2 Aim and research questions**

The aim of this study is to gain further understanding of how social workers working with domestic violence issues perceive how COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence in Sweden.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do social workers perceive the effect that COVID- 19 pandemic has had on women who are victims of domestic violence?

### ***Sub-questions***

1. What are the factors that contributed to more cases of domestic violence during COVID 19 pandemic?
2. How has the situation changed for women who are victims of domestic violence?

## **1.3 Explanation of concepts**

*Domestic violence:* Sometimes called intimate partner violence. It refers to all aspects of violence that are physical, sexual, psychological, and economic against women within the family or domestic unit or by current or former partners and whether they share the residence with the victim (Allen, 2013)

*Women shelters:* Temporary accommodations for women faced with domestic violence in Sweden. They provide direct help, counselling, and mentoring services for those



currently in or have left the abusive relationship. The shelters are staffed with qualified professionals like social workers. The victims are placed in the women's shelters by the social services (Petersson and Hansson, 2022).

*COVID-19* is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It causes a respiratory illness, where people experience mild to moderate respiratory illness. The recovery is without requiring special treatment; however, it might be severe illness and require medical attention for the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age (WHO, 2022).

*Shadow Pandemic*: UN Women referred to the rise of violence against women during COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdowns as the ``Shadow Pandemic. `` growing amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (United Nations Women, 2020)

## **1.4 Motivation**

Covid-19 pandemic is a global crisis that causes risks to human life and health. In Sweden, the pandemic affects the whole of society and for people who are exposed to domestic violence against women, the situation has worsened (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2021). Domestic violence itself is a pandemic and the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic contributed to more cases which made the women affected to find themselves in a pandemic inside a pandemic. Domestic violence are societal issues of huge proportion. The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 3 women across 80 countries worldwide are victims of domestic violence during their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013). Domestic violence put enormous costs on society and the victims are for example estimated to be twice as susceptible to depression and alcohol abuse, and 16% more likely to give birth to a low birth-weight child (World Health Organization, 2013). Both authors have previous experience with issues regarding women's vulnerability and have seen how this domestic violence affected the women in society. Abimbola Zainab just had an internship at The Salvation Army EU centre

Stockholm which has a women's shelter working with women who are victims of domestic violence and Esther Bohman had worked with a women group experiencing domestic violence in Kenya. These experiences of working with the women in domestic violence gave the authors the idea for the study, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though this study is focusing on Sweden, it can still be connected to the global phenomenon. The issue of domestic violence cannot be looked upon in only a specific country: it will always be an issue affecting humanity. As future social workers, we know that the issue of domestic violence is something we will have to deal with. Therefore, we find it suitable to start investigating this matter as soon as we get the chance. We will use our previous knowledge and this opportunity to deepen our understanding of domestic violence.

## **1.5 Essay disposition**

The first chapter of the thesis describes the introduction to the topic, followed by the aim and research questions, then the concepts used in the thesis are discussed. The second chapter describes an overview of the previous research conducted within the field of women who are victims of domestic violence. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework used in the thesis, consisting of feminist theory. Chapter four describes the methodology, consisting of the selection of respondents, how the interviews were conducted, tools for analysis, essay credibility, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. The fifth chapter describes the findings and analysis in relation to the theories and previous research then chapter six presents the discussion on the findings, and suggestions for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2- Previous Research**

In this chapter, previous research regarding domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic is displayed. It is fundamental for this study to review the earlier literature in

order to have a better understanding of how the COVID -19 pandemic has affected women victims of domestic violence in Sweden. Grinnell (2001) highlights the importance of previous research as it helps generate knowledge and create awareness that guides the researchers about their findings. This section will present three categories revealed during the review of the literature which are Global societal crisis, Shadow pandemic, Lockdowns and quarantine.

## **2.1. Global Societal Crisis**

Societal crisis like economic instability, social unrest and disasters can be linked to the increased risk of gender violence (Petersson & Hanson, 2022). Petersson and Hanson (2022), further describe gender violence as a wide range of violations against individuals or groups of individuals based on and affiliated in gender-based relationships. According to Yenilmez and Celik (2020), gender equality is a topic that is never discussed during any crisis in society. The fact that emergency response put into place by the relevant authorities fail to recognize the gender implications put into place may possibly worsen the existing inequalities, hence worsening the outbreaks. Globally, the nature of every pandemic, the fear and the uncertainty it creates are the breeding ground for the violence against women (Yenilmez and Celik, 2020). Researchers have concluded that past pandemic crises like the Ebola, SARS swine flu and bird flu had led to the intense and the long-lasting effects on gender inequality and domestic violence globally (Shah and Mufeed, 2022). There is evidence of past epidemics like Ebola and Zika virus which affected both high- and low-income countries, and also experienced cases of women domestic violence (Shah and Mufeed, 2022). The SARS- COV-2 pandemic also known as COVID-19 brought about global societal crisis including domestic violence which affected various countries of the world including Sweden. This COVID -19 pandemic outbreak created fear around the globe and domestic violence escalated due to confined living conditions and the tensions due to health, security and financial conditions (Petersson & Hanson, 2022).

Violence against women through their life cycle is a demonstration of a long history of unequal proven power relations between men and women (United Nations, 2010). The manifestation is institutionalized by traditions and customary practices that give women

lower status in the family, workplace, community, and the society which is brought about by the social pressure. The violation of women is a global phenomenon where some women are subjected to various forms of violence, physical, sexual, psychological, and even economic violence within the home or outside their homes. The violence they experience creates an obstacle to the achievement of the objective of equality, development and peace, hence a violation of women's rights and fundamental freedoms (United Nations, 2010).

## **2.2. Lockdowns and quarantine**

Reports around the globe shows that lockdowns, quarantine, and the restrictions contributed to more cases of domestic violence arising with negative consequences (Shah and Mufeed, 2022). Moreover, Shah and Mufeed, (2022) claim that imposing strict lockdowns and quarantine on a whole population contributes to more challenges for the victims of domestic violence who become more vulnerable. It is a challenge for feminist social workers and stakeholders to help the victims of domestic violence during the pandemic as they are overburdened by more workload during the current crisis of COVID-19 pandemic (Shah and Mufeed, 2022).

A previous study by Petersson & Hanson (2022), shows that women and children have experienced domestic violence during the COVID- 19 pandemic. Women in Sweden have been exposed to physical abuse and the violence increased rapidly during the pandemic due to the partial lockdown restrictions which were put into place by the government of Sweden (Petersson & Hanson, 2022). Cases of domestic violence reported to police in 2021 increased by 3 percent compared to the year 2020 (Petersson & Hansson, 2022). In Guatemala the empirical research shows that domestic violence increased at a high rate due to lockdowns and stay at home mandates during the Covid 19 Pandemic (Iesue, Casanova & Piquero, 2021). Unemployment due to loss of jobs during the Covid 19 Pandemic and financial constraints contributed to stress on relationships which had a negative impact for domestic violence during the pandemic (Iesue et al., 2021). Weekly calls for Police due to domestic violence were more frequent during the lockdowns (Iesue et al., 2021). Previous research by Vranda (2021)

claims that the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns resulted in increased women domestic violence, isolation, and the reduced support system in India. The ministry of health and Women and Child Development have not taken enough measures to introduce strategies and policies to prevent violence against women in India (Vranda, 2021).

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, there is evidence from various sources with reports of increased domestic violence against women worldwide (Yenilmez and Celik, 2020). This escalated more due to lockdowns imposed by many countries which resulted in financial worries as people were forced to stay home without going to work. Security concerns and health issues like mental health issues due to stress brought tensions in many homes which resulted in domestic violence (Yenilmez and Celik, 2020). In Sweden, it became more challenging for the victims of domestic violence to contact authorities and in women's shelters during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hansson and Petersson, 2021). This was caused by reduced movements due to government authorities' recommendations to work at home, maintain social distance and to avoid travelling. Furthermore, abused women become more vulnerable because of the risk of no social connection with society (Hansson and Petersson, 2021). A previous study done in the USA, Sweden, Ethiopia, Egypt, Spain and Turkey revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions of people to stay at home in order to minimise their social contacts in order to decrease the spread of the virus. These measures contributed to social isolation and hence caused abuse of alcohol due to increased anger and aggression (Mojahed et al., 2021). The media and newspapers reported the negative effects of the mass lockdowns and quarantine as cases of domestic violence started to be on the increase due to both social isolation and geographical isolation. The victims of domestic violence could not get the help needed as most of the places like the women shelters were closed. They could not contact or run to their families or friends for help due to lockdowns (Mojahed et al., 2021).

A previous study by Standish and Weil (2021) mentioned that the United Nations Secretary General Anonio Guterres referred to the terrifying rise in domestic violence which was targeted at women and girls and was linked to lockdowns by governments all over the world. If domestic violence increases, there is a chance that the rate of femicide will also increase globally. Femicide can be referred to as an extreme form of domestic violence and it's most often as the result of intimate partner abuse. The killing or

femicide can sometimes occur if the women complain to the police or authorities about domestic violence, where the abuse can result in femicide or alternatively can be because of continuum of abuse over the years by the perpetrator (Standish and Weil, 2021). Femicide is the intentional murder of women because of their gender as females. Globally, the majority of homicide victims are males but the majority of intimate partner or family-related femicide are women. Femicide which is the most extreme form of violence against women rose globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation became worse during the lockdowns as the women in many countries were forced to stay in the `Safety` of their homes with their abusive partners (Standish and Weil, 2021). According to the Anadolu Agency (2021), in Sweden femicide became on the rise when at least five women were killed by men. In 2020, during the COVID -19 pandemic, around 9000 women filed reports of violence by men with whom they had a close relationship. The then Prime Minister Stefan Lofven condemned the killings and addressed the issue that for the violence to be curbed, men must change and say no to domestic violence (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

### **2. 3 Domestic violence as a ``Shadow pandemic``.**

Previous research done by Wake and Kandula (2022), claims that domestic violence against women is a crisis that has prevailed throughout the world for many years, but the problem has been disputed during the lockdowns because of the COVID - 19 pandemic where women are facing twin pandemic of domestic violence as ``shadow pandemic`` and health issues due to coronavirus brought about by COVID- 19 pandemic. Domestic violence can be referred to as a shadow pandemic that is growing during the covid -19 crisis. There is a need for advocacy and a call for action globally for all the governments, global health institutions, human rights organisations, stakeholders, and humanitarian organisations to focus on domestic violence as a shadow pandemic during the COVID-19 pandemic and place the women and girls in safety as a priority because the victims are silenced (Wake and Kandula, 2022).

In Sweden, quarantine, lockdowns, school closures and recommendations to work at home, maintain social distance and avoid travelling resulted in some women being isolated with a violent and controlling partner at home. This social isolation made it

harder for the women exposed to violence to seek help (Petersson and Hansson, 2022). The United Nations (UN, 2020) as cited in Petersson, and Hansson (2022) referred to the situation of the social isolation and the rise of domestic violence against women during the COVID -19 pandemic and the lockdowns as a ``shadow pandemic``. The United Nations Women entity dedicated to gender equality and empowerment of women launched the shadow pandemic campaign focusing on the global increase in domestic violence amid the COVID -19 health crisis (United Nations Women, 2020). Many households were placed under the increased burdens that came from security, health, money worries, and confined living conditions when many billions of people were forced to stay at home thus increasing the levels of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the globe, many government authorities, women rights groups and civil societies reported increased calls for help lines to domestic violence helplines and enhanced the demand for emergency shelter (United Nations Women, 2020).

## **CHAPTER 3- Theoretical Framework**

The following section presents the theoretical framework which is used in conceptualising the topic of how COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence in Sweden. While comparing between feminist theory and critical theory, the researchers discovered that feminist theory is more relevant to aim of this study. This is in ground that feminist theory opens a wide range of explanations of oppression focusing on gender inequalities while critical theory focuses only on identifying inequalities due to class and race divisions (Payne, 2014). Feminist theory was used to interpret the data and answer the aim of this study.

Feminist thinking has a history dated back in the nineteenth century. This is a time when domestic violence against women becomes a major issue of concern when women experienced violence in all social classes (Payne, 2014). However, the concern about violence against women and the pursuit to understand its causes can be found in the earlier traditions of feminist thinking (Allen, 2013). In her article contemporary review in 1878 (the period which was described as the first wave of feminism), British Journalist Frances Cobbe explained the serious assaults women went through in all the

social classes of contemporary British society. Cobbe identified what became of the modern feminist approach to intimate partner violence where there is a power differential between men and women. The man becomes the proprietor and controlling while the woman is regarded as submissive. The roots of these concepts of ownership and control over women are to be found in the cultural mechanisms which give expression to societal beliefs and values which in turn determines the distribution of power at micro level and macro- levels (Allen, 2013, p.20). Feminist theory is more gender sensitive and focuses on analysing gender inequality in the society in the malestream where the man dominates power over the woman (Payne, 2104). This study focuses on women who are victims of domestic violence. Feminist theory aids this study to understand how gender inequality played a great role in violence against women during COVID- 19 pandemic in Sweden. Sweden is regarded as the world's most gender-egalitarian country which is since men and women should share power and influence equally (Martinsson and Griffin, 2016, p.1). According to Esping-Andersen (1990); and Melby et al. (2009) as cited in Martinsson and Griffin (2016), the Nordic model of gender equality is well structured and very effective in both national and international discourses. Sweden as one of the Nordic countries has a strong and notable self-image as the most modern and gender-equal country in the world. This image is described by many as ``*Swedish exceptionalism*`` The Swedish welfare system makes it easier for both men and women to balance work and family life. But the government of Sweden acknowledges that there is still room for improvement in many areas (Martinsson and Griffin, 2016, p.1). Therefore, gender inequality continues to prevail in the country even during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the nature of the pandemic.

As explained in the earlier research, partial lockdowns and stay at home mandates were imposed in Sweden where victims became more isolated and where they spend more time home with the perpetrators who took power over their victims. Furthermore, the theory explains and responds to the oppressed position of women in many societies (Payne, 2014). This links to this study as it helps to analyse the major stressors of domestic violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the women as victims of domestic violence became more oppressed in the society hence creating gender imbalance. The feminist theory defines domestic violence as male coercion where the cause of women's assault is grounded in male domination of power over the woman by using threats, humiliation, and any other form of abuse to harm, frighten or



punish their victims (Yick, 2001). Feminist theory provides guidance on how to analyse how some men took control of women during the partial lockdowns and stay at home mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden. For example, the situations where the woman was rendered economically dependent on the perpetrator due to loss of job during the pandemic hence the perpetrator takes control over her. From a feminist perspective, the possibility of a woman being financially dependent on her male partner is a component of her vulnerability which is a risk factor of domestic violence (Parrish, 2009).

Men and women have different access to structural resources which is a result of the society grouping value to certain individuals and deeming them inferior or superior. In most of the societies gender is the approval which determines status where power is primarily given because of one's position in the society and according to the gender (Yick, 2001). Furthermore, socialist feminism argues that women's oppression is grounded from the inequality inherent in the social structures of a class-based social system. Socialist feminism focuses on that women's role in capitalism is to reproduce the workforce for capitalism benefit by involving in domestic duties and even childcare (Payne, 2014).

Domestic violence is regularly correlated with substance abuse as alcohol always aids as a disinhibitor where behaviours that are usually suppressed are exhibited when one is drunk, and the outcome is violence in and out of the home (Parrish, 2009). From the feminist perspective, the consequences of violence due to alcohol abuse heighten the vulnerability for the women as victims and it arises from patriarchal systems of dominance and control. The perpetrators often believe that alcohol is an acceptable dimension of masculinity, and that alcohol-fuelled aggression is a male prerogative in the home (Parrish, 2009, p. 258). This notion aids this study in analysing how alcohol abuse makes cases of domestic violence to be more as perpetrators become more aggressive when they abuse alcohol due to the prevailing factors brought about by the pandemic and also the thought that they have the right to abuse alcohol as alcohol is regarded as permissible to men.

Feminist theory focuses on situations where women have suffered from domestic violence or sexual assault. However, due to the assumptions about women's gender roles in society, domestic violence can arise where women are strongly involved

(Payne, 2014, p. 359). Apart from mental health, alcohol abuse, homelessness, poverty and child welfare, violence against women is part of the vast social and health problems that women play an important role in resolving within their families (Payne, 2014, p.359). Moreover, the radical feminist argues that women's family life is effectively aimed at the women's drawbacks in the aspect that traditionally, women are regarded as the primary determinates of their family's emotional wellbeing and social achievements. This includes when there is domestic violence and paternal abandonment, where women have in ages carried the social and emotional responsibilities for their families where in the feminist perspective these expectations are neither pragmatic nor fair (Parrish, 2009, p.255).

The theoretical framework is relevant for this research as it helps understand the concept of how women become more potential to long- term effects like trauma due to lockdowns and quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden. The victims become more exposed to domestic violence as they stayed with the abusive partner. At the same time the women played other roles in the family like taking care of the kids, the potential alcohol abusive partner while still facing health issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All this combined made women more vulnerable they were facing a double pandemic due to the COVID 19-pandemic and at the same time a pandemic of violence (shadow pandemic). Feminist theory also benefits this study to understand the consent that women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner or former partner than a stranger. The term femicide is used to refer to this act rather than homicide because the killing is subjective to the females hence women killed by their intimate partners (Parrish, 2009). The earlier research confirms that there were more cases of femicide during COVID - 19 pandemic both in Sweden and other countries globally. The killings were subjected to women because of their gender as females thus referring to the killings as femicide rather than homicide (Standish and Weil, 2021; Anadolu Agency, 2021). This helps the authors to understand that the extent of the violence during covid 19 resulted also in killings of women in Sweden.

The feminist practice enhances practice methods and skills in shared discourse and group work that can be used to achieve awareness of problems affecting women in their social connectedness in the society and strategies to respond to them (Payne, 2014). Feminist thinking recognizes the many social pressures that cause women to live in a violent relationship even after being mishandled by their partners. Women who have

asked for police help often later change their minds about prosecuting the male partner and stay in the abusive relationship (Payne, 2014). This is due to the conventional assumptions regarding the values of women maintaining a relationship or marriage for the children's sake, being regarded as a failure in a relationship, and even the men having financial power in marriages (Payne, 2014). Therefore, women can suffer in silence for fear of being intimidated by society if they leave the abusive relationship hence, making them more vulnerable.

Feminist theory provides a framework for studying gender roles and identities which is essential in understanding and resolving the issues experienced during COVID-19 pandemic (Shah and Mufeed, 2022). The feminists social work practice is an all-inclusive framework that ultimately advocates for the healing of all the levels of the society including the women who are faced with domestic violence during COVID -19 pandemic (Shah and Mufeed, 2022). It also accepts and promotes the important principles of social transformation within social work and most remarkably empowerment and oppression abolition which includes intimate partner violence (Shah and Mufeed, 2022). Therefore, it is of considerate for this study to use the feminist theory to gain knowledge on how the social workers working with issues of domestic violence perceived the effect COVID-19 pandemic has had on the women who are victims of domestic violence.

The feminist theory we are incorporating is not immune to criticism in this study as it only focuses on domestic violence in general but did not address the aspect of crisis in this study. If the study had another theory which could address domestic violence during the pandemic, this could have helped the researchers to address the issue of domestic violence in a perspective of pandemic crisis.

## **CHAPTER 4-Methodology**

This chapter describes the entire process of this study where details of validity, reliability and generalisation is briefly discussed. Ethical considerations were considered while conducting the whole research.

### **4.1 Philosophy of Science Approach**

The purpose of this study is to gain further understanding of how social workers working with domestic violence issues perceive how the COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence. This social phenomenology is viewed based on our personal perspectives and subjective experiences of social workers interviewed. Phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl in 1900 and described it as a philosophical perspective based on the subjective life world, how people describe things and how they experience them. Human beings can only identify what they experience if they take the perceptions and meanings which awaken their consciousness (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Phenomenology stresses the importance of perceiving on the focus people's subjective experience which include those of the researcher and those of the participants' experienced world through the social workers views (Grinnell, 2001). Phenomenology in this study helped us to gather data through qualitative inquiries using semi-structured interviews with open ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of the purpose of the study. Due to ethical considerations social workers working in social services and women's shelters in Stockholm were interviewed instead of the victims themselves.

## **4.2. Research Design**

Since the purpose of this study was to explore the effect of covid-19 pandemic on certain group, a qualitative method was used in conducting this study. The reason for this study was to perceive how social workers describe the effect of covid-19 pandemic on women who are domestic violence victims. This selected method goes in line with Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) who explained that a qualitative method generates opportunity for deeper understanding of the aim. Grinnell (2001) also explained that the qualitative method is a process of discovery sensitive to holistic and ecological issues and its focus on facts of nature as they occur under natural conditions and emphasises qualitative description and generalisation (Grinnell, 2001).

A semi-structured interview technique with open ended questions was used for the interviews. This was explained according to D'Cruz and Jones (2004), that qualitative methods are mostly relatively unstructured or semi-structured, relying on open-ended questions or themes to "elicit responses in questionnaires, survey, interviews, observations and text analysis". The authors considered this method appropriate because

it's allowed the authors gain the knowledge that was aimed for the interviews and a deeper understanding of the chosen topic was achieved. Below are the overview of this technique and how the interviews were conducted.

## **4.3 Data collection**

### **4.3.1 Sampling method**

The authors looked for social workers who were willing to participate in the study and had been working with women experiencing domestic violence. The respondents were chosen at both the social services and shelter. The search for the interviewees was done by both authors. The first respondent was gotten by a referral who works at the social services by giving contact information. Then after this, a snowball sampling method was used. According to Rubin & Babbie (2014) this type of snowball sampling method is usually used in studies aiming to explore and it means asking the interviewee if he/she can suggest others who might be possible participants in the study. Snowball sampling is a crucial and usually used technique in qualitative research. The second respondent was gotten through this method and the respondent agreed to participate after being contacted and informed about the study. The third respondent was gotten by direct contact with the social services in a municipality through email informing them about the aim of the study and asking for an interview. A consent letter was sent to all the participants prior to conducting the interviews through emails. The interviews were done through visual (Zoom) though all the respondents required for the interview questions prior the interviews.

Three interviews were conducted in total. Two of the social workers are working with the social services but in different municipalities while the third social worker was working at the shelter. All the participants are working with women experiencing domestic violence. The sample consisted of respondents from Stockholm but from different municipalities and they are between ages 30 – 60. The respondents' working experiences differ and range from 5 years to more than 15 years. One advantage of this study is that the respondents are very familiar with the target group, and they have knowledge from different perspectives and different educational backgrounds. The women who are the victims were not interviewed in this study.

#### **4.3.2 Conducting Interviews**

The data collection was achieved by interviewing social workers working with domestic violence issues during the COVID-19 pandemic through visual (Zoom). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to obtain descriptions of the victims' lifeworld in connection to understanding the stated phenomena (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Three social workers from Stockholm County (two social workers working with social services and another one working in the shelter) were interviewed. This sample represents different agencies/authorities working with domestic violence victims in Sweden. An interview guide was formulated for all the interviews which was used as a supporting tool throughout the interview process. One of the interviews was conducted in Swedish so the interview guide was translated. The questions were formulated in line with the aim and research questions of the study. The respondents required review of the interview questions prior to the interview for proper preparations.

Both the interviewers had the chance to interview the participants. When one of the interviewers held the interviews the other focused on taking important notes, recording, and physical parts of the interview like the body language and vice versa. The authors assured the respondents' anonymity as they requested so that gave respondents confidence and the openness to answer the questions in detail because the main reason for the interviews is to find an answer for the research questions and fulfil the aim. Both authors were present during the interviews conducted in English and Swedish and the interviews lasted between 50- 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded since the respondents agreed to it prior to the interviews.

#### **4.3.3 Literature review of secondary source**

Secondary data sources were used in this study because it provides a wide range of materials covering different areas. This provides a greater and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being researched then using only primary data. (Frankfort-Nachmias, 2008). Using the University of Gävle library, a lot of information was retrieved for the aim of this study from journal articles, some with the latest study for 2021 and 2022.

Online materials were retrieved using the database like SocIndex, Google scholar and Sage journals and EBSCO Host and Discovery. Online materials were retrieved using the google search engines Keyword phrases such as ‘Sweden and domestic violence during COVID-19’ and ‘COVID -19 pandemic and domestic violence` were used to search for earlier research.

#### **4.4. Data Analysis**

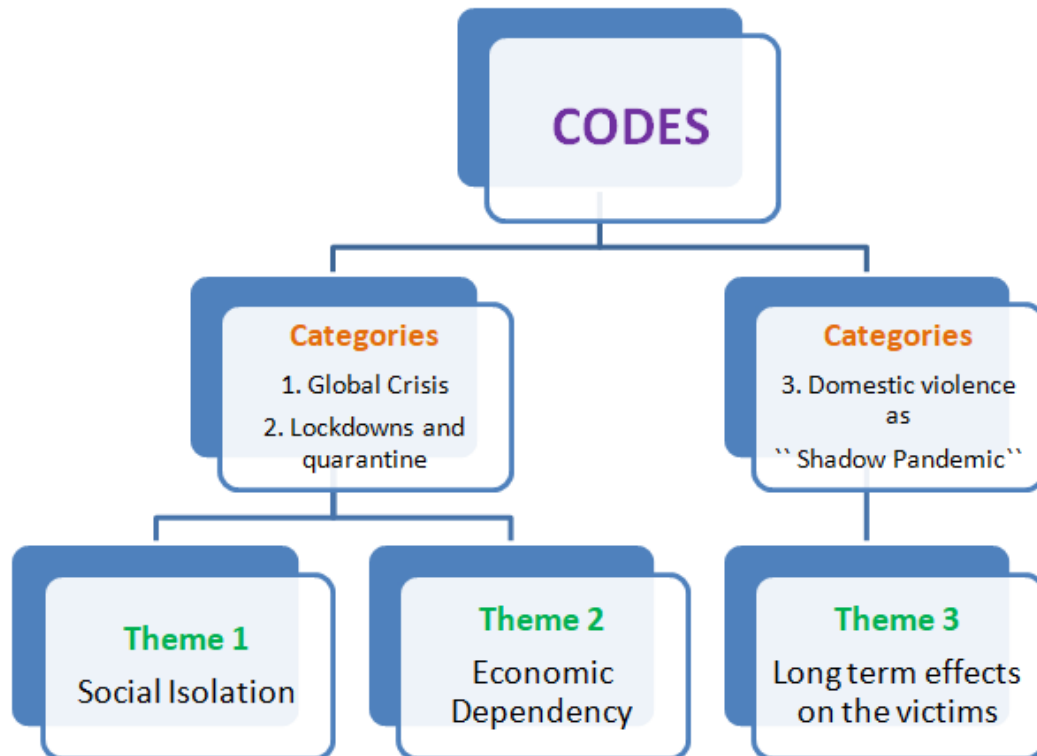
Both the authors agreed to do the coding and creating the themes manually. The data was analysed by noting the important themes formulated throughout the study. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, organise, and describe the data collected (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

##### **4.4.1. Coding**

For this study to have a focus on women as victims of domestic violence during Covid 19 pandemic in the research aim, the interview questions were formulated from critically reading and reviewing the previous research. The three categories of the earlier research were used as the keywords (Global society crisis, domestic violence as a shadow pandemic, and Lockdowns and quarantine) constituted the basis of the process of coding and creating the themes .The words showed a repeated pattern , similarities and information related to the theory. Coding was used in analysing the data. Using coding enabled the interviewers to classify or categorise individual pieces of data manually by transcribing the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The manual coding was done by both the authors and themes were classified according to the phenomenon being studied.

These procedures allow the authors to retrieve materials that are of interest in the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The authors included and combined all the data collected, then the data was modified and the one not needed for the study was dismissed (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008). Data transcriptions were read by both the authors where related codes were grouped under the same classifications which later compiled different themes. These themes are social isolation, Economic Dependency on the perpetrator and long-life effects on the victims emerged and are further discussed in the results and the analysis section.

The diagram below is an example.



#### 4.4.2. Thematic Analysis

The authors analysed the data by noting the important themes formulated throughout the study. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, organise, and describe the data collected (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). After conducting the study, the authors expected to get the results that are generated from the study. The findings from the study acts as a guideline in understanding how COVID-19 pandemic impacted women who are victims of domestic violence and their current situation as victims of domestic violence. The study results are discussed in summary and coupled with the contents of the previous studies and feminist theory. The results are presented in a clear way that enables the reader to understand the whole context of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).



## **4.5 Credibility**

Regarding credibility, the authors ensured that the study presented true values of the research findings. The study presented credible information received from the participants original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original view.

### **4.5.1 Reliability**

Reliability means the trustworthiness and consistency of the findings in research. By looking into the reliability, it allows other researchers to reproduce at other times using the same method (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this study, the reliability was strong because two authors conducted and transcribed the interviews and analysed the findings and sometimes the respondents were asked questions severally to check the stability in the comments. To enhance the reliability, the interview questions were formulated for each respondent so we would get an in-depth description during each interview session.

### **4.5.2 Validity**

Validity means the real structure and content of whatever method is used to obtain the information needed to respond the research questions (D'cruz & Jones, 2014). According to Grinnell (2001) measuring validity occur when a measure measures what we think it measures. Two validity was mentioned, internal validity and external validity. Internal validity means the degree to which the instrument measures the concept being studied and, besides, measures that concept accurately while external validity goes a step further consider the degree to which the answers to the questions given by the individuals in the sample can be generalised to a larger population or different research setting (Grinnell,2001). In this study, the guidelines suggested by Grinnell (2001) were followed while formulating the interview guide such as the use of simple language, making the questions clear, asking questions that respondents are qualified to answer, keeping the question short and avoiding double-barrelled and negative questions. The authors conducted the interview with three respondents as mentioned earlier, and at the end of the interview session, the authors summarised what has been said to the respondents that it was understood. The respondents were allowed to express themselves in a more detailed manner and freely as possible which enhances the validity.

### **4.5.3 Generalisation**

Generalisation of a study means the extent to which it can be used to inform us about persons, places, or events that were not studied (Grinnell, 2001). The responses of the three respondents cannot not be generalised to all the social workers of social services because their responses might be based on personal feelings and opinions sometimes. However, the authors met the respondents as representatives from social services and as a result of this, other representatives from social services would have expressed similar opinions and feelings which could result in similar findings.

### **4.6. Ethical considerations**

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles in social work practice. The interviewers applied the ethical considerations provided by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008). These ethical principles helped the authors to protect the respondents and represent our professional responsibilities, direct our data collection, and guide our change efforts towards acceptable and worthwhile goals. A written informed consent was sent before proceeding with the study, this means that all respondents were duly informed about the study, why the study was conducted, and what the study would be used for. They were informed that the study is conducted by third-year students from the University of Gävle in Sweden studying international social work and the study is for education purposes. In the informed consent, adequate information was given, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured (Grinnell, 2001). All respondents in the study were confidential, names and any exposing information was blinded, meaning that the respondents were referred to as, respondents 1, respondents 2, and respondents 3.

### **4.7. Limitations of the study**

The authors encountered some difficulties in finding the interviewees at the beginning of the study because most of the organisations contacted didn't want to be involved in the study, but three social workers from social services were later interviewed. The topic was discussed in-depth by the Interviewees however, the study would have been

more beneficial if the national board of health and welfare (socialstyrelsen) agreed to conduct the interview when contacted, this would have given the authors a holistic view of the topic in relation to the covid-19 pandemic in Sweden as a whole and not only at the county's levels. Language was also a limitation for this study because one of the interviewees conducted the interview in Swedish, which is not the authors native languages hence, this limited the authors abilities to ask questions freely and find the adequate words to use. Due to the on-going covid-19 pandemic, all the interviewees opted to conduct the interviews on visual platform instead of their offices which would have given the authors a better knowledge about their office settings and other things which could be useful to the authors. Because of the time frame of the thesis, other sectors like police, health professionals who collaborate with the social services could not be interviewed.

## CHAPTER 5 -Results and Analysis

The results provide a clear indication that domestic violence against women was more during the Covid- 19 pandemic in Sweden. Women continued to suffer in silence under their abusers while at the same time the pandemic continued to attack them. The data and results generated in this study are presented and analysed using the feminist theory perspective and the previous research. While analysing the data, 3 themes-became relevant to the aim and research questions emerged in the process. They include *1. Social isolation. 2. Economic dependency on the perpetrator. 3 Long term effects on the victims of domestic violence.* These themes are coupled with the feminist theory and previous research. Due to ethical considerations the participants' identities and specific agencies remain confidential:

*Respondents 1-* A social worker working in the social services in Stockholm since 2015, graduated as a social worker in 2014.

*Respondents 2-* A social worker working in the women's shelter in Stockholm with experience of more than 15 years.

*Respondents 3 -* A social worker working in the social services in Stockholm with 10 years' experience.

All the respondents acknowledged that they deal with clients who are women from 18 years and above and from different backgrounds and cultures.

## **5.1. Theme 1: Social isolation.**

In our research, we discovered the social isolation phenomenon as the major factor which contributed to more cases of domestic violence in Sweden during Covid- 19 pandemic. Social isolation can be described as lack of social contacts or of sustained interrelations with individuals and institutions that represent the mainstream society (Mojahed et al., 2021). The findings showed that social isolation was brought about by Stay-at-home orders and partial lockdowns in Sweden as explained below.

### **5.1.1. Stay at home order due to partial lockdowns**

From the results generated from this study, there is evidence that partial lockdowns imposed by the government of Sweden and ministry of health contributed largely in social isolation to most of the victims of domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic. The victims had less movement, and they were forced to stay home with their perpetrators thus having to spend more time with the abuser. The government of Sweden passed directives that people can work from home instead of from their offices if the type of occupation allowed it. So, these stay-at-home directives made the victims spend most of the time with the perpetrators hence subjecting them to more vulnerability. There is a common agreement among all the participants that partial lockdowns contributed to social isolation where most of the victims had minimal or no social connections to their families or friends. Some lost their jobs, and they were forced to stay home with the perpetrators, while some worked from their homes. Respondent 1 mentioned that most of the victims had no social networks, no families, or no friends. They could not go to social gatherings due to the restricted movements and they were left with no choice than to stay home with their perpetrators.

Respondent 3 quoted...`*stay at home order which was the most practical order from governments and health organisation alike in combating the spread of COVID-19. This has affected most victims of domestic violence more and we have seen in my department*

*especially in 2020 -2021. It is known that home is not a place of safety for victims of domestic violence``.*

There was an extreme case brought by social isolation which is evidence from this study how Covid 19 affected the victims of domestic violence. The side effects of global pandemic and its consequences like lockdowns either partially or totally, imposed physical and social distancing can foster social isolation which may result in victims of domestic violence being trapped at home with the perpetrators (Mojahed et al., 2021). This was confirmed by respondent 3 who works in the social services, who claimed that there were severe cases of social isolation due to detachment from their social networks of support. The victims experienced depression, anxiety, and mental health since the system was not working as well as it should have, which meant delays in getting help for the victims which in turn made the situation worse. Moreover, the social support from family and friends might be limited while in addition closed shelters and limited accessibility of protection services can contribute to the victims' having difficulties to escape from their perpetrators.

*Respondent 2 claimed that... ``it was difficult for the victims to access help in our women's shelter because most of the workers worked from home due to restrictions of social distance. Most of my colleagues were sick of Covid and we could not get any placements to work instead. The situation was horrible! ``*

Feminist theory supports that isolation can bring negative effects on the victims and the more cases of domestic violence because the theory claims the issues of gender inequalities in the society are brought about by man dominating power over the woman. Since feminist theory emphasises that domestic violence is male coercion where the man uses threat's, humiliation, and all other forms of abuse to punish the victim (Payne, 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden the partial lockdowns and stay at home mandates contributed to the victims being isolated together with their perpetrators hence the latter imposing power on the former. Earlier research supports the theme of social isolation due to the partial lockdowns and stay at home restrictions which reduced the movement of people in Sweden. Thus, preventing the victims from getting help from families, friends and other authorities like the women shelters (Hansson and Petersson, 2021).

The findings can conclude that social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to more issues of domestic violence in Sweden. Women spent most of their time with their abusers when partial lockdowns and quarantine were imposed by the government of Sweden. Many women lost their jobs and others were forced to work from home. The movement was restricted and most of the victims lost their social networks resulting in the victims spending more time with the perpetrator

### **5.1.2. Alcohol abuse and Depression**

COVID- 19 pandemic brought about uncertainties and negative effects to most of the world population (Yenilmez and Celik, 2020). When lockdowns and stay at home mandates were imposed by most of the countries in the world, social isolation became the norm of the day, people started getting depressed and abusing alcohol hence cases of domestic violence increased (Mojahed et al., 2021). Alcohol abuse has been explained as a significant risk factor in domestic violence. Social workers' response to our study mentioned that during the Covid 19 pandemic there were increased cases of alcohol abuse which was related to depression brought about by the pandemic. From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that alcohol abuse due to depression are some of the social stressors which caused more cases of domestic violence in Sweden. Alcohol abuse has been related to intimate partner violence. There is clear evidence of a relationship between heavy drinking and domestic violence. The more opportunities there are to access or to buy alcohol, the more likely that severe domestic violence will occur (Allen, 2013).

Respondent 1 claimed that...*“when a person is depressed chances are that the person can abuse alcohol in order to release the stress and this triggers violence if the person is in a close relationship with the partner”*

Due to the partial lockdowns, people bought more alcohol from Systembolaget ( a store for selling alcohol in Sweden) or other stores. This gave the abuser the chance to access alcohol and alcohol intake increased the chances of abuse manifold for women.

Respondent 1 narrated how the partial lockdowns affected everybody mentally and few municipalities in Sweden registered cases of increase in depression. There was also an increase in alcohol abuse and due to this, the situation worsens for the abuser. Feminist

theory connects to the finding of the implication of alcohol abuse and depression on the cases of more domestic violence in Sweden. The theory gives an insight of how man's power oppresses the woman even when the woman has the responsibility to take care of the alcohol abuser partner (Parish, 2009). Due to the nature of the COVID pandemic people become worried of the certainties of the future, and many become depressed and start abusing alcohol because they were isolated indoors, in this situation domestic violence can arise. Feminist theory expresses how the society assumes women's gender role where the woman is supposed to resolve the problems pertaining to her family, like mental health, the alcohol-addicted partner, the children's welfare and domestic violence can dominate when the woman is trying to resolve the problem pertains to the family (Parish, 2009; Payne, 2014).

The findings of this thesis showed that alcohol abuse and depression are some of factors that led to more cases of domestic violence, and this can be related with previous research of this study where lockdowns and quarantine contribute to people being depressed when COVID-19 pandemic becomes a global crisis and created fear around the globe. The tensions created health problems like depression and people started abusing alcohol as they became isolated and idle. Some lost their jobs, and their economy was affected. This is a clear indication in our findings how the nature of the pandemic contributed to women being more abused by their partners as they become trapped home with their perpetrators. Earlier research corresponds with most of the respondents who confirmed that lockdowns contributed to cases of people being depressed and abusing alcohol hence subjected their anger to the victims (Mojahed et al., 2021).

In conclusion the views of the respondents who are social workers interviewed concludes that lockdowns and stay at home restrictions made the situation worse for the victims of domestic violence. Men's power over women dominates even in Sweden which is a multicultural country where some cultures still hold the women captive and as a symbol of violence. The triggers of lockdowns and stay home mandates continued to oppress the women in the hands of her abusive partner at the same time the woman was supposed to take care of the family hence subjected her to more humiliation and victimisation. So there was gender inequality because the abuser continued to depress the woman as a victim of domestic violence (Martinsson and Griffin, 2016).

## **5.2 Theme 2: Economic dependency on the perpetrator**

Another factor which contributed to more cases of domestic violence is economic dependency on the perpetrator. With the government implementing partial lockdowns and stay at home order across the globe with no exception from Sweden, this has caused sudden disruptions to labour markets, and movement of people. The first time in modern economic history that governments have purposely imposed extensive restrictions on economic activity to protect people's health. The global effect of the COVID-19 pandemic vis-a-vis the government's response with lockdowns and stay-at-home orders has resulted in business closures and widespread unemployment (Kabeer et al., 2021). The findings showed that economic dependency on the perpetrators brought about more cases of domestic violence in Sweden as explained below.

### **5.2.1. Lack of employment**

A woman has the right to report or contact the authorities to seek help when she is abused. However, because of their financial dependence on their partners they are silent and prefer to stay with the perpetrators. According to the three respondents, lot of people including women lost their employment during the covid-19 in Sweden and due to this, the women affected were left with no choice than to depend on their partners for financial resources. The report published by Statistical authority (2020), also justified the lack of employment stating that "in 2020, the whole of Swedish society was marked by the outbreak of covid-19, and the labour market was no exception" The number of unemployed increased by 86,000 people to 459,000 people. Respondent 1 mentioned that this lack of employment leads to economic dependency which is one of the major reasons women become more vulnerable and stay back in their abusive relationships. Many women's inability to be economically independent resulted in more cases of domestic violence as the perpetrators usually have all of the economic positions and absolute control over the family finances and they believed the women have no say in the relationship. There was higher percentage of violence against women who are economically dependent on their partners compared to women who are economically independent. This also correspond to the respondent 3 views:



*“Some of the women don’t have any source of income or have lost their employment during the covid-19 pandemic, and these gives the perpetrators the power to abuse them because they know that these women have nowhere to go”. Lack of employment make worse the women (victims) vulnerable to domestic violence during the covid-19 pandemic.*

The feminist theory connects to this finding that states women are oppressed by social structures and relationships in the society that privilege men and male views of social priorities, excluding and devaluing women and women’s views of the society. This leads to the oppression of women, particularly those with little social or economic power. This oppression comes from inequalities occurring from gender divisions (Payne, 2014). The feminist theory points to proof of widespread gender inequality and the effect of the exploitation of and violence towards women, as well as neglect of their needs. The alternative feminist perspective called socialist feminism also pointed out that women’s oppression comes from inequality inherent in the social structure of a class-based social system. It focuses on power relations between men and women to economic power, class and economic oppression. It highlighted how women’s oppression interacts with other forms of oppression, such as race or disability. This perspective of feminist thinking stated that the oppressive characteristics of social relations should be analysed and understood, so that diverse interests can be met in alternative ways. Feminist thinking recognizes the many social pressures that result in women wanting to accept even a violent relationship. For examples of these pressures are the views of other family members, conventional assumptions about the importance of sustaining a marriage for the children’s sake, the sense of failure in an important relationship and the financial power the men sometimes have in marriage (Payne, 2014). The feminist perspectives contributed to social work a focus on explaining and responding to the oppressed position women hold in many societies. This is important because in most societies, women are the main clients of social work, and most of social workers and social care workers are woman hence feminist perspectives help everyone to understand how their social role and position is worked out in society (Payne, 2014).

Findings from this study confirm that lack of employment added to the cause of more cases of domestic violence and can be related with previous research of this study where lockdowns and quarantine contribute to unemployment due to loss of jobs during the Covid 19 Pandemic and financial constraints contributing to stress on relationships

which had a negative impact for domestic violence during the pandemic (Iesue et al., 2021).

In conclusion the views of the respondents who are social workers interviewed concludes that domestic violence is more in Sweden, even though there was absence of a strict lockdown. They believed that is related to the socio-economic changes brought about by the covid-19 pandemic.

### **5.2.2. Lack of knowledge**

All of the respondents emphasized that the lack of knowledge about their rights or Swedish law is another reason why some women stay back in their abusive relationship. Although those who have knowledge about their rights or Swedish law still stay back in their abusive relationships for reasons best known to them, but some claimed is because of love, some claim it is because of their children to avoid separation from them and some claimed is because of their cultural beliefs. During the covid-19 pandemic, the lack of knowledge contributed to more cases of domestic violence because some of women who experienced the abuse do not have good knowledge on the Swedish legislation and hence many of them did not talk to the authority. They are alone because they do not know anything, not even about their rights and what help/support they can get. Respondent 1 and 3 mentioned that because these women are controlled by their perpetrators, and usually the perpetrators keep them away from any information or any means of getting information so that it will not be used against them. The perpetrators are manipulative and full of control, and they pretend to be caring and a loving partner at the outside but threaten the women because they are economically dependent on them, and they see themselves as their all in all. This also corresponds to the respondent 2 views:

Respondent 2 view ``*The perpetrators purposely prevented them from getting formal education because they believed the women would be thought about their rights and the law in Sweden. Also, to prevent them from knowing the possible ways to seek help/support*``

This can be connected according to Allen (2013) which explained that an abused women may be so frightened of her partner that she may be unable to state what is

happening in the home, but her partner may be very charming to the worker, making it difficult to understand that he can also be very violent.

The feminist theory connects to the finding which is the postmodern feminism that identifies the complexity and sophistication of social relations that involve women by examining how discourse in society creates assumptions about how women are and should be treated. This theory also looks at social relations in which powerful groups in this case particularly dominated by men and men's interest, surveil (consistently and oppressively watch) and discipline others (Payne, 2014).

### **5.3. Theme 3. Long term effects on the victims**

#### **5.3.1 Extreme Vulnerability**

The findings of this study concludes that the situation changed for the victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic due to social isolation which was the major contributor of more cases of domestic violence in Sweden. The victims become more vulnerable due to the double pandemic they were facing in their life. The United Women UN, (2020) referred the rise of domestic violence against women during the COVID -19 pandemic and the lockdowns as a ``shadow pandemic``. Domestic violence is a growing pandemic within the Covid- 19 pandemic (Petersson and Hansson 2022; Wake and Kandula, 2022). When women were being oppressed by their partners, they continued to suffer the consequences of the COVID -19 pandemic hence making their situations very vulnerable. The issue of domestic violence as a shadow pandemic in Sweden was confirmed by the three participants with different views and how it subjected women as victims of domestic violence to become more vulnerable. They mentioned that some victims of domestic violence suffered long term effects of trauma because they were being subjected to abuse by their perpetrators when the COVID -19 pandemic was still going on. The three respondents 1,2, and 3 had the similar answers when asked the question of how the situation has changed for the victims.

Respondent 1 gave an account of some instances where some victims of domestic violence became sick of COVID-19 and at the same time the perpetrator was still abusing her.

Respondent 1... *“one of my clients got the virus but the alcoholic husband continued abusing her. The case becomes complex as the client is still traumatised and sometimes, she has suicidal thoughts. I have started post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) therapy sessions with her because she is extremely traumatised. Some clients also need long term rehabilitation”*.

Respondent 2... *“I work in the women’s shelter and one can tell that some of my clients are really traumatised. They feel they have no hope and no future”*.

Respondent 3 confirmed the same that the victims are suffering from a double pandemic and gave an account of how most of the victims are traumatised when they report to social services offices. The cases of more victims wanting to commit suicide due to trauma during the Covid-19 pandemic has increased because the victims are still suffering from the pandemic health issues and the same time from the abusers. From the views of the three respondents, the findings are that domestic violence is an issue which is still silent not only globally but also in Sweden. This is also confirmed in our earlier research where previous studies have shown that domestic violence is a topic which is never discussed during the onset of any pandemic in the whole world due to the aspect of gender inequality (Yenilmez and Celik, 2020). Women continue to suffer with long term effects caused by these pandemics and still the shadow pandemic of domestic violence.

There were instances where victims of domestic violence died during COVID-19 pandemic. According to Savage (2021), a reporter at BBC News reported how six women were killed in a span of five weeks in Sweden during COVID- 19 pandemic. In all the cases, the victims had a close relationship with the killer (perpetrators) and were well known to them. This created a heated debate on domestic violence in Sweden a country well known as the world’s safest and for its gender equality and feminist government. Sweden's Gender Equality Minister, Marta Stenivi said that though there is gender equality in Sweden, there are still structures that suppress women in the society (Savage, 2021). Another report by Anadolu Agency (2021) confirmed the same killings which happened in Sweden during Covid 19 pandemic and regarded the killings as

femicide as they were related to only women. These killings incidents were confirmed by respondent 2, who explained to us that there were even cases of women being killed in Sweden by men during the Covid -19 Pandemic. This shows that the victims were never safe in any environment as their situation continues to deteriorate especially more during the pandemic and in Sweden, a country known for its gender equality reforms.

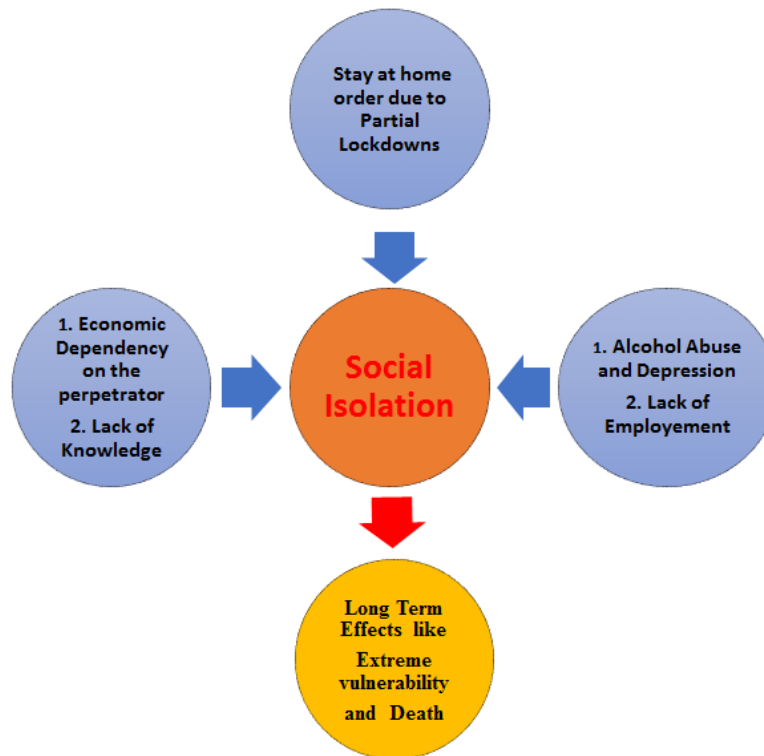
Feminist theory coincides with this result because the theory terms domestic violence as a male coercion where the man uses power to dominate the woman. The woman is rendered helpless, by being confined by the perpetrator making her oppressed in the society. However, the victim becomes even more oppressed and vulnerable when she is facing more stressors in life. This causes the woman to have long term effects in her life like trauma. Victims of domestic violence globally faced a double pandemic, and it was, and it continues to be a difficult situation of every woman going through domestic violence and at the same time suffering from the pandemic. In this aspect, the women are totally oppressed and pushed to the war by both oppressors thus suffering from twin pandemic. Conclusion is drawn that women continue to be more vulnerable and suffer long life effects like post -traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts and even death due prevailing oppressions surrounding her due to the gender inequality in the society. The feminist perspective regards the killing of women as femicide as the woman is more likely to be killed by her intimate partner (Parrish, 2009). The findings of women being killed in this study is coupled by feminist theory and earlier research where femicide is subjected to women as females rather than homicide and there were more cases of femicide during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden due to partial lockdowns (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

### **5.3.2 Summary of the Themes**

After critically interpreting the results generated from this study the authors drew a line that social isolation was the major factor that contributed to more cases of domestic violence during the COVI-19 pandemic in Sweden. When society became socially isolated due to stay at home directives and partial Lockdowns, this created room for the perpetrator to abuse the victim in cases where the victim economically depended on the perpetrator for survival. Abuse of alcohol and depression became prevalent, and the victims continued to suffer and finally the victims suffered from long term effects as

they became not only the victims of domestic violence but victims of COVID-19 pandemic.

**The diagram is a summary of the themes**



## **CHAPTER 6 - Discussion.**

### **6.1 Brief summary of the results in relation to the aim**

This study aimed at gaining further understanding of how COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence in Sweden through the views of social workers working with the victims. The research questions focused on effects COVID-19 pandemics have had on women who victims of domestic violence are, the factors that contributed to more cases of domestic violence and how the situation changed for

the victims. Through the review of the previous literature, three main areas were identified which assisted in answering the research questions which included, social isolation, economic dependency on the perpetrator and long-term effects on the victims of domestic violence.

In summary of social isolation, the findings show a clear indication that lockdowns due to stay at home mandates escalated the cases of domestic violence. According to different social workers' views, there is a clear indication that partial lockdowns and stay-at-home mandates contributed to the escalation of domestic violence cases due to social isolation as most of the victims were forced to stay home with the perpetrators. Social isolation was regarded as the major contributor to women being subjected to violence. Due to the detachment from their social networks and support system they were caged home in the hands of their perpetrators. The victims suffered from depression, anxiety, and mental health issues. Delayed help due to work at home mandates and restrictions of social distance to minimise the spread of COVID-19 virus and closed shelters made it harder for the victims to get help, thus the perpetrator taking more advantage of the victim. The authors acknowledge how being socially isolated from society can contribute to women being more violated by the man especially when there are more stressors caused by the pandemics.

The authors got a deeper understanding of what contributed to more cases of domestic violence in the limelight of alcohol abuse and depression. The findings of this study show a clear indication that when pandemics affect the world, people become more worried on how to handle the pandemic without being infected by the virus. The future becomes more uncertain especially if the virus is serious like the COVID -19 virus. As discussed in Chapter one COVID-19 was declared a serious and dangerous pandemic which even today is spreading very fast. Fear was inflicted to many people and there was uncertainty of tomorrow and at the same time many places were closed causing thousands to lose their jobs and Sweden was not exceptional. This caused many people to start abusing alcohol due to depression. The interviewees reflected greatly on the effects of pandemic and alcohol abuse citing on how there is a relationship between heavy drinking and domestic violence. If the perpetrator has access to but alcohol, the more likely that the domestic violence will occur (Allen ,2013). The authors concluded that alcohol and depression can be a social problem because it goes hand in hand with more cases of domestic violence especially when the woman is socially isolated from

other social structures especially during the time of even global pandemics which are caused by serious viruses.

In summary of the economic dependency on the perpetrator, the findings show that women were forced to stay with their perpetrators as they solely depended on them during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors became aware how economic dependency can contribute to the man controlling the woman who has no good economy creating gender inequality. Lockdowns brought restrictions of movements thus rendering women unable to depend on themselves economically. Most of the women were caged in the hands of their abusive economic independent perpetrator and hindering them from seeking information thus preventing the victims from reporting them. This is in case if the victim is solely depending on the perpetrator for financial support. Some of the victims lack knowledge of their women rights in Sweden. The authors got to understand the effects of COVID-19 pandemic through the participants' views which contributed to the victims depending on the perpetrators for their survival, hence the perpetrator taking control of the woman.

Findings from this study shows that COVID-19 pandemic brought about the long effects on the victims of domestic violence in Sweden. The authors acknowledge the issues of shadow pandemic or rather a pandemic within a pandemic made the situations of women suffering from domestic violence worse. This finding helped the authors get an in-depth understanding of how victims became more vulnerable due to them facing a shadow pandemic of domestic violence and COVID -19 pandemic. The interviewees aired different accounts of how they experienced cases of victims who were very traumatised and needed long term rehabilitation as some of the clients were traumatised and had suicidal thoughts. This is an indication that the victimisation during COVID -19 pandemic changed the situations of many victims by making them more vulnerable. The authors got a clear understanding of how the shadow pandemic created long life effects on the victims when another participant of this study narrated how some victims suffered violence from the perpetrators and at the same time, they were suffering from COVID-19 disease. This scenario gave the authors an insight of how the COVID- 19 pandemic contributed to long term effects on the victims hence rendering them more vulnerable.



## 6.2 Comparison with earlier research

In summary of social isolation, the findings of this study supported that social isolation shows similarities as to why it becomes a major effect of more cases of domestic violence. Partial lockdown as depicted in our earlier research contributed to the issue of social isolation in Sweden because many places were closed, and movements reduced. Social workers confirmed that partial lockdowns and stay -at home- mandates imposed by both the government of Sweden and ministry of health played a great role in domestic violence cases. In the process, women continued to suffer in silence and became traumatised in the hands of the COVID- 19 pandemic and the ``shadow pandemic`` of domestic violence. An additional comparison to earlier research connects to how victims of domestic violence become more vulnerable due to social isolation and lack of social contact in Sweden. The author acknowledges the earlier research connects with social isolation and how it can be a major risk factor for the increase of domestic violence. The author got the knowledge that lockdowns can make the society more isolated and reduce communication and movements, therefore, when the victim stays home with the perpetrator, the abuser takes advantage of the situation especially if the abuser is depressed and addicted to alcohol. The earlier research connects with this finding as social isolation caused anger and aggression hence more abuse of alcohol. The interviewees agreed that alcohol and depression brought about by social isolation due to stay at home mandates affected the victims of domestic violence in a negative way in the notion that the more the perpetrator abused the alcohol the more the anger can be subjected to the victim.

In summary of economic dependency on the perpetrator, the result of this study is supported by earlier research where pandemic is a global society crisis which brings about economic instability, hence causing domestic violence. The authors connected with the fact that women are pushed to the edge because domestic violence is rarely discussed during the pandemics. Social workers explained how perpetrators use power to hold women hostage because they have nowhere to run to. Social isolation due to lockdowns brought about social isolation as depicted in our earlier research. Social workers confirmed that partial lockdowns and stay -at home- mandates imposed by both the government of Sweden and ministry of health played a great role in domestic violence cases. In the process, women continued to suffer in silence and became traumatised in the hands of the covid 19 pandemic and the ``shadow pandemic`` of

domestic violence. The findings showed that lockdowns and quarantine also created unemployment and the abuser who usually possessed the money held the woman captive and in control.

In summary of the subject of long-term effect on the victims, previous research on the issue of domestic violence is kept silent and nobody wants to address the problem during any pandemic crisis. Women continue to be oppressed in the eyes of men even during the crisis, they undergo double suffering, in the hands of the perpetrator and in the effects of the pandemic. The accounts of the interviewees helped the authors to comprehend how domestic violence is a serious crime committed to women because many end up with long life suffering and even death during COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden. The trauma, mental illnesses, suicidal thoughts are some of the social problems which women carry throughout their life. The authors were able to gain some idea of the extent of long-term effects to the victims of domestic violence and its implications which some results to death.

### **6.3 Comparison to the theory**

The theoretical perspective of this study was the feminist theory which provided a framework for interpreting the findings in the perspective of gender inequality due to and the negative consequences of power imbalance. In terms of the social isolation, the theory of feminism gave the researchers of this study a wider perspective of understanding the complexities surrounding the power of gender inequality and its vast effects on the victims of domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden. Feminist theory argues that domestic violence is a male coercion where the man uses power over the woman to subject her with threat's, humiliation and all forms of abuse to punish the victim. The participants interviewed had the same views that lockdowns caused isolation in Sweden where men took control over women. One of them said that home was never considered a safe place for most of the victims as many men took advantage of social isolation due to lockdowns to inflict more violence on the women. The researchers of this study were able to understand how gender inequality can play a vital role in domestic violence especially when a whole population is forced to stay indoors due to lockdowns caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

On the area of economic dependency on the perpetrator, feminist theory helped the authors to get more understanding on how the power relation between men and women to economic power and class can contribute to women being oppressed especially if the woman is depending on the man for financial needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic many people lost their jobs. From the views of the participants, unemployment increased the cases of domestic violence because most of their clients depended on their perpetrators for survival. While at the same time the victims had no knowledge about their rights that they can report the matter to the authorities because some of them come from different backgrounds without the knowledge of their women rights in Sweden. With this notion the authors were able to get a clear picture of why domestic violence took the role during the pandemic considering Sweden is a more gender sensitive country. Women as victims of domestic violence continued to be oppressed by their abusers who took control of them as the victims were depending on them for economic needs. Some victims lacked knowledge of how to deal with the situation adopted to stay with the abusers

Feminist theory was well suited in the aspect of long-term effects on the victims as the theory argues of domestic violence is male dominated which creates gender inequality in the mainstream society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many women were facing double pandemic. The pandemic due to COVID-19 and the pandemic of violence which was considered as a shadow pandemic by the United Women (UN) in year 2020. Incidents were confirmed by the interviewees where some clients were faced with long term effects as they got violated by their perpetrators and at the same time, they were facing health issues from COVID-19. Therefore, they become more traumatized, had suicidal thoughts due to the effects of encountering a double pandemic. This gave the authors of this study an understanding of how women as victims of domestic violence become more vulnerable when they face more stressors of oppression surrounding her and more when the man dominates power over the woman making her more vulnerable with long life effects.

## **6.4 Critical discussion of the theory**

This study chooses to use feminist theory due to its gender sensitivity and it created an understanding to the authors of this study to know how gender plays a role in the treatment of others in the society using power. The feminist model is grounded in the

principle that domestic violence is as the result of the men oppressing the women in the aspect that men are the main perpetrators of domestic violence. The study focused on domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis so, the authors can conclude that the study did not get the clear aspect of domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic as feminist theory argues about domestic violence in general and does not address domestic violence during the pandemic crisis.

In our earlier research, there is evidence that the issues of pandemic and domestic violence started a long time ago, but domestic violence and gender equality is a subject which is never discussed during any pandemic crisis. The authors can critically criticize the feminism model because it could have been adjusted and argue more on the issues of domestic violence during the global crisis of pandemics. If the theory had been reviewed, it could have given us a holistic view of domestic violence and gender equality during COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden.

## **6.5 Critical discussion of the methodology**

The choice of using a phenomenological research approach was relevant for the research because the aim of the study was to gain further understanding on how COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence in Sweden. By choosing to interview social workers working with the victims of domestic violence, the study was able to gain further understanding of the victims' lived world through the lens of the social workers. The interview questions were structured according to the review of the previous research. The results from participants' views analysed and coupled with the feminist theory and the previous research. There were no limitations on the questions to be answered and the interviewers were not forced to answer the questions they felt they could not answer. This made it easier and flexible for the interviewees to give us more information which was suitable for our study.

We had some setbacks when looking for participants willing to participate in our study. The authors contacted various organisations in Stockholm working with victims of domestic violence in social services and women shelters in Stockholm. Our plan in this study was to interview two social workers from social services and one social worker working in the women's shelter in different municipalities Stockholm. There was a long waiting time before the social services, but we got the first respondent from a referral. We got the other respondent by using a snowball sampling method by asking

another interviewee to suggest for us another participant willing to participate. While the third one responded to our email later with a positive response.

A letter of informed concept was sent to all the participants prior to the interview through email. All the respondents requested the interviewers to send them the interview question before we conducted the interview for them to have prepared and have a clear understanding of our topic. Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the authors did not conduct face to face interviews as the three interviewees preferred the use of Zoom for the interview. Both the authors participated in the interview session where one held the interview and the other one concentrated in recording (with participants consent) and taking notes. Being the fact that one interview was held in Swedish, the authors experienced a language barrier as Swedish is not their native language and questioned the credibility of the information received. Thematic analysis was used to analyse, organise and transcribe the data where different or same patterns were coded and categorised, hence creating the themes. This increased the credibility of this study by aiding the authors to interpret the findings in an understandable way to the reader.

The authors of this study, when reviewing the previous literature, noted that many studies done on the impact of domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic have been conducted using quantitative methods. This study is based on social workers' views on how COVID-19 pandemic affected women who are victims of domestic violence. However, the phenomenological method approach used in this study helped the authors to get a more detailed way of explaining how the social worker perceives the effects of COVID-19 pandemic has had on the victims of domestic violence. The authors acknowledge that similarities between the findings of this research with some of the previous quantitative research helped to increase the credibility of this study. The interview questions were based on the earlier research and did not influence any participants' answers. The participants almost gave the same answers based on different views and accounts.

## **6.6 Suggestion for further research**

The authors acknowledge that there is need for further research particularly on the issue of domestic violence during the pandemics. Earlier research reviewed in this study have shown that issues of domestic violence during pandemics have been prevailing throughout and will continue to attack the world. Women will continue to suffer due to gender inequality as the authorities continue keeping silence on this social problem. The feminist theory used in this study does not address the issue of domestic violence in a perspective of the pandemics but only generalizes domestic violence. Therefore, the need for this topic to be researched more using the feminist theory in perspective of pandemic crisis.

Another suggestion is to conduct research about COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected the women who are domestic violence victims in different geographical location. This would help the researchers to have more understanding and a comprehensive comparison between different countries. Our study was only based in Stockholm, but another location could have provided more details of the women as victim of domestic violence during the pandemic Furthermore, qualitative research where the women who are victims are being interviewed about the experiences would be beneficial to the present research and this could help the researchers to have the holistic view of the situation. The study did not focus on the intervention for victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic because the study was to have a deeper understanding about how COVID-19 affected women who are victims of domestic violence hence there is a need for further research regarding the intervention for the victims of domestic violence particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# **Appendix 1: Interview Guide**

## **Interview questions.**

### **Background questions for social worker and their work**

1. Could you tell us little about your background as a social worker?
2. What motivated you to be a social worker?
3. What is your role in the shelter?
4. How long have you been employed?
5. How is your experience working with women who are victims of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic?

### **Background questions about the women experiencing domestic violence**

1. What is the background and the age of the victims?
2. Where do most victims come from?
3. Could you tell us about the women's social situations (friends, work, networks)?
4. What do the women believe are the major reasons why they are getting abused?
5. Are their partners usually the abusers?
6. How did the abused women call for help?
7. Are there any situations where women go back to their previous, abusive environment? Do you know why?

### **Questions regarding the Covid 19 pandemic**

1. Has the covid 19 pandemic in any way/ways affected the victims of domestic violence?
2. How do women as victims of domestic violence describe the kind of violence, they encountered?
3. How can you attribute what made domestic violence cases more during the pandemic?
4. Was it easy for the victims to access help during the Pandemic?
5. How can you explain the situation of the victims in the shelter now?
6. Can you describe how the shelter is helping the victims during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

7. Are there barriers encountered by these women while seeking help during the covid-19 Pandemic?
8. What is your view on why there is violence against women especially during the Covid pandemic?
9. Please describe how you think these women's situations could be improved.

## **Appendix 11: Consent Form**

### **Information on participation in interview**

#### **Main Topic; The victims of domestic violence and COVID-19 pandemic**

We are students studying the International Social Work program at the University of Gävle. We are currently writing our final paper/thesis research. The thesis is a degree project conducted within the international social work program at University of Gävle. Our interest is in the victims of domestic violence and COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of our study is to explore the social worker's views on how COVID-19 pandemic affected the women who are victims of domestic violence in Sweden. We want to have an in depth understanding of our topic through the lens of social workers working in social services and in women shelters.

Participation in the study is voluntary and the respondent is free to withdraw from it at any time or decline to answer a question. The interview will be recorded, and the material will only be used for research purposes, and it is only the researchers, the supervisor and the examiner that will have access to the material. Also, the material will be destroyed once the thesis has been completed. All information that is disclosed in the study will be confidentially and the information will be presented in a way that makes no one able to understand whom it is written about, and the respondents are free to contact the researchers to seek further clarification and information if needed.

Thank you.

With this Information, I agree to participate in the study:

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_