

Media Awareness About Family Violence During The COVID-19 Pandemic in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Background: To explore media awareness efforts regarding family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia and compare them to global standards.

Methods: This scoping review included media awareness efforts: interviews, lectures, workshops, and forums. Moreover, all efforts must be regarding positive parenting, family well-being, care of the elderly, domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic (April-December 2020).

Results: Seven organizations in Saudi Arabia initiated 32 awareness programs; the National Family Safety Program implemented 17(53%) of awareness efforts, followed by the Family Affairs Council 6(19%). The qualitative analysis of the awareness transcripts utilized three main themes: promoting family well-being, supporting the victims, and preventing family violence.

Conclusion: Considering global efforts in Australia, Greenland, France, Spain, and Italy. Like other countries, Saudi Arabia could use more advanced measures to prevent and respond appropriately to family violence during pandemic-like situations.

Keywords: COVID-19, domestic violence, women, children.

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INTRODUCTION

The WHO declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020. As a result, social exclusion and quarantine policies were enacted, and there have been more domestic, and family violence reports worldwide¹. The term family violence is often used to refer to partner violence. However, it can also encompass child or elder abuse or abuse by any household member. It includes physical, psychological, sexually abusive, or controlling behavior. Intimate partner violence (IPV) involves violence within an intimate relationship². Whereas the WHO defines child abuse and maltreatment as including “all types of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power”².

Moreover, a study in Uganda has seen a rise in the incidence of child abuse during the COVID-19 lockdown³. The lockdown has led to increased cases of child neglect in several parts of the country, as children may express violence at home because many parents get stressed and aggressive due to the lack of social support³. Additionally, reports from the USA, China, and Brazil show increased intimate partner violence and violence against children during the COVID-19 pandemic due to isolation^{4,5}. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, the number of recorded cases of family violence and child abuse increased by 6.4% after the pandemic (4129 cases in 2019 compared to 4432 cases in 2020)⁶. Compared to international research from the same period, the findings were consistent with the rapid rise in a hidden pandemic of family violence.

Therefore, the WHO recognizes public health campaigns as having the potential to prevent child abuse². In the last decade, the internet and social media have been the main tools to spread awareness regarding public health issues, including family violence⁷. Additionally, they can be used to provide services to victims of family violence, which is especially important when there are barriers to accessing these services, such as pandemic-like situations. However, there is limited

evidence regarding the effectiveness of such social media campaigns in preventing family violence and child abuse. Thus, this study aims to evaluate community education measures through social media regarding family violence prevention and service use during the COVID-19 pandemic nationally compared to global standers. This will enable decision-makers to build upon past experiences and reintroduce appropriate interventions to overcome similar obstacles.

METHODOLOGY

This is a scoping review to identify national efforts in media awareness on domestic violence during the pandemic. Several local governmental authorities and stakeholders in Saudi Arabia were targeted throughout the search: The National Family Safety Program, The Family Affairs Council, and The Family Violence Reporting Center 1919 in The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. Afterward, their initiatives regarding compacting domestic violence during the pandemic were collected from their websites and through searching the internet and social media platforms: Google, YouTube, Twitter, and Yahoo. Furthermore, additional initiatives were found during the search. They were done by non-profit organizations such as the Saudi Society for Social Studies, the Al-Mawaddah Association for Family Development, and the Taarafu Family Counseling Center.

The included media awareness efforts were: interviews, lectures, workshops, and forums. Moreover, all efforts must be regarding positive parenting, family well-being, care of the elderly, domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic (April-December 2020). Other non-related topics were excluded.

The keywords used in the search were in the Arabic language (native language in Saudi Arabia), which are equivalence to “family”, “child”, “violence”, “woman”, “elderly”, “family stability”, “protection”, “home”, “parenting”, “domestic”, “houses”, “quarantine”, “People with Disabilities”, “Pandemic”, “Shelter”, “Awareness” in English.

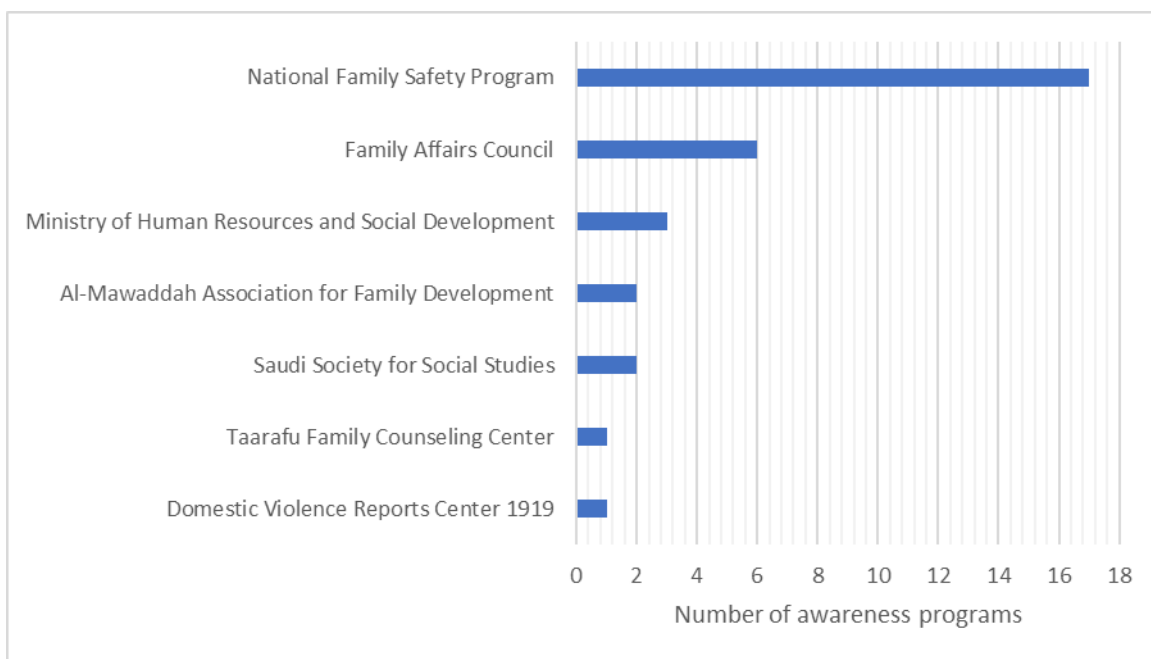


Figure 1. Number of awareness programs by local authorities and stakeholders in Saudi Arabia.

Table 1. Media awareness programs by local organizations during the pandemic (April-December 2020) n=32:

#	Title	Organization	Date	Duration	Media channel	Views	Theme
1	Family stability during the Corona pandemic (webinar)	NFSP	May 3, 2020	00:40:49	YouTube	128	Promoting family Well-being
2	Panel discussion (webinar): Child protection in light of the emerging coronavirus pandemic	NFSP	May 6, 2020	00:51:18	YouTube	147	Preventing family violence
3	Protecting children from online harassment (webinar)	NFSP	May 6, 2020	00:59:39	YouTube	148	Preventing family violence
4	Domestic Violence lecture in the Shadow of the Stone	Saudi Society for Social Studies	May 6, 2020	1:34:32	YouTube	392	Preventing family violence
5	Panel Discussion: Positive Parenting in the Shadow of the COVID-19 Pandemic (webinar)	NFSP	Apr 20, 2020	53:50	YouTube	219	Promoting family Well-being
6	Homes filled with affection	MHRSD	May 15, 2020	1:07:19	YouTube	430	Promoting family Well-being
7	Panel discussion (webinar): The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and domestic violence	NFSP	Apr 13, 2020	59:59	YouTube	863	Supporting the victims
8	The rights and duties of the family during the lockdown	MHRSD	May 21, 2020	00:59:25	YouTube	600	Promoting family Well-being
9	Homes expand with love and understanding	MHRSD	May 18, 2020	1:02:15	YouTube	803	Promoting family Well-being
10	Risks to the family during crises	Family Affairs Council	Apr 15, 2020	1:05:03	YouTube	1070	Preventing family violence
11	The fourth awareness dialogue session: Family counseling during quarantine	Family Affairs Council	Apr 22, 2020	1:07:22	YouTube	1531	Promoting family Well-being
12	Within the Family First initiative: the tenth dialogue session: the role of the family towards the elderly during the quarantine	Family Affairs Council	May 14, 2020	1:05:52	YouTube	393	Promoting family Well-being
13	Home Quarantine and its social effects on the Family	Saudi Society for Social Studies	Apr 22, 2020	1:36:53	YouTube	369	Preventing family violence
14	Webinar: dealing with children with disabilities during the Corona pandemic	NFSP	May 10, 2020	1:03:19	YouTube	84	Preventing family violence
15	Supporting the elderly during the Corona pandemic (webinar)	NFSP	May 9, 2020	00:55:47	YouTube	75	Promoting family Well-being
16	Mental health during the Corona pandemic	NFSP	Jun 11, 2020	1:18:07	YouTube	102	Promoting family Well-being
17	Developing helpline services and supporting professionals working in them during the COVID-19 pandemic	NFSP	Jun 30, 2020	2:11:34	YouTube	83	Supporting the victims
18	Webinar: positive dealing with children during the Corona pandemic	NFSP	May 5, 2020	00:53:06	YouTube	79	Promoting family Well-being
19	Violence, neglect, and abuse of the elderly	NFSP	Nov 9, 2020	1:51:02	YouTube	100	Preventing family violence
20	An overview of the basic services provided to women and girls exposed to violence	NFSP	Nov 4, 2020	2:01:35	YouTube	91	Supporting the victims
21	Administrative data collection approach on violence against women	NFSP	Nov 9, 2020	1:26:26	YouTube	96	Supporting the victims
22	Basic services provided in the judicial and security system in cases of domestic violence	NFSP	Nov 17, 2020	2:20:55	YouTube	193	Supporting the victims
23	Providing shelters with best practices globally and in the Arab world	NFSP	Nov 25, 2020	1:49:34	YouTube	85	Supporting the victims

24	An overview of women's violence (16 days campaign)	NFSP	Dec 10, 2020	1:32:09	YouTube	181	Preventing family violence
25	Conduct practical risk assessments of violence against women in the justice and security system	NFSP	Dec 15, 2020	1:59:20	YouTube	38	Preventing family violence
26	Existing violence against women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic	Family Affairs Council	Dec 21, 2020	2:05:10	YouTube	239	Preventing family violence
27	Webinar: Violence against women, protection, rights, services	Family Affairs Council	Nov 30, 2020	2:10:30	YouTube	449	Supporting the victims
28	Saudi Family Forum 2020: The Family in the Face of Crises	Family Affairs Council	Two days: Oct 11-12, 2020	Day1: 2:55:30 Day2: 2:42:55	YouTube	Day1: 237 Day2: 353	Preventing family violence
29	Raise awareness among children and improve their well-being	Al-Mawaddah Association for Family Development	Nov 20, 2020	1:19:30	YouTube	91	Promoting family Well-being
30	The Impact of violence against women on family stability	Al-Mawaddah Association for Family Development	Nov 25, 2020	1:08:55	YouTube	101	Preventing family violence
31	Violence Determinants and Effects	Domestic Violence Reports Center 1919	Nov 24, 2020	1:20:54	YouTube	79.6K	Preventing family violence
32	Violence Against Women workshop	Taarafu Family Counseling Center	Dec 16, 2020	2:04:30	YouTube	125	Preventing family violence

NFSP: National Family Safety Program, MHRSD: Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development

Recorded awareness campaigns by media programs were transcribed verbatim in Arabic, then analyzed using the MAXQDA software program. Two independent coders coded transcripts and conducted discussions to resolve coding discrepancies and maintain consistency. Triangulation/peer debriefing with a superimposed researcher was used to assure validity. Two bilingual team members translated the findings from Arabic to English and then reviewed them with two native English speakers. In addition, descriptive analysis was done in Excel 2016 for Windows.

RESULTS

Seven local authorities and stakeholders in Saudi Arabia initiated awareness programs during the first nine months of the pandemic (April-December 2020), comprising 32 programs. More than half of the programs were done by the National Family Safety Program (NFSP) 17(53%), followed by the Family Affairs Council 6(19%), the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) 3(9%), Saudi Society for Social Studies 2(6%), the Al-Mawaddah Association for Family Development 2(6%), the Domestic Violence Reports Center (1919) 1(3%), and the Taarafu Family Counseling Center 1(3%) (see Table.1 and Figure.1).

The main themes and subthemes of media awareness campaigns during the pandemic were described in (Figure.2) using the MAXQDA program as follows:

Theme #1: Promoting family Well-being

Eleven online awareness programs covered this theme during the COVID-19 pandemic. The efforts were carried out by local organizations as follows:

- 1-Family stability during the Corona pandemic (webinar) by NFSP
- 2-Panel Discussion: Positive Parenting in the Shadow of the COVID-19 Pandemic (webinar) by (NFSP)
- 3-Homes filled with affection by (MHRSD)

- 4-The rights and duties of the family during the lockdown by (MHRSD)
 - 5-Homes expand with love and understanding by (MHRSD)
 - 6-The fourth awareness dialogue session: Family counseling during quarantine by (Family Affairs Council)
 - 7-Within the Family First initiative: the tenth dialogue session: the role of the family towards the elderly during the quarantine by (Family Affairs Council)
 - 8-Supporting the elderly during the Corona pandemic (webinar) by (NFSP)
 - 9-Mental health during the Corona pandemic by (NFSP)
 - 10-Webinar: Positive dealing with children during the Corona pandemic by (NFSP)
 - 11-Raise awareness among children and improve their well-being by (Al-Mawaddah Association for Family Development)
- These awareness efforts provided some recommendations for positive parenting with teenagers and children. These recommendations include:

-Growth Needs: For children, each stage in childhood requires a different level of awareness, especially regarding sexual violence; more importantly, educating children is a continuous process. As for teens, adolescence includes many changes, including physiological changes. Therefore, parents should educate teenagers about these changes, emphasizing sexual education. Also, parents must be the source of awareness, not others.

-Effective Communication: It is essential to maintain positive communication between parents and their children/teens, despite the possibility of increasing disagreement between them, as parents must be the source of the child's education.

-Independence: Although teenagers need more freedom, parents' support is still needed.

-Responsibility: Feeling responsible starts in adolescence; parents should continue observing teenagers until adulthood.

-Problem-Solving: Providing assistance to teenagers during problems and urging them to learn from their mistakes.

-Discipline: Parents should avoid physical punishment and avoid any punishment if the child is less than two years old.

-Role Models: The best role models for children are always their parents. Therefore, they should have upbeat personalities and observe their behaviors in front of their children.

-Rewards: It is essential to promote children's positive behaviors, which could be done by offering them incentives.

-Flexibility: Listening to children and involving them in decision-making is essential in building their confidence and personalities.

-Organization: Organizing a positive routine is essential, as adherence to specific activities and a structured schedule reduces children's feelings of boredom and contributes positively to their mental and physical development.

Theme #2: Supporting the victims

Seven online awareness programs covered this theme as follows:

- 1-Panel discussion (webinar): The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and domestic violence by (NFSP)
- 2-Developing helpline services and supporting professionals working in them during the COVID-19 pandemic by (NFSP)
- 3-An overview of the essential services provided to women and girls exposed to violence by (NFSP)
- 4-Administrative data collection approach on violence against women by (NFSP)
- 5-Basic services provided in the judicial and security system in cases of domestic violence by (NFSP)
- 6-Providing shelters with best practices globally and in the Arab world by (NFSP)
- 7-Webinar: Violence against women, protection, rights, services by (Family Affairs Council)

As stated below, these efforts provided awareness regarding the reporting channels and services for domestic violence victims in Saudi Arabia.

Reporting channels: The main governmental entities responsible for responding to violence reports are The Domestic Violence Reporting Center (free number: 1919) which is under the umbrella of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Child Support Line of the Ministry of National Guard Medical Affairs, and the various alternative communication methods of reporting channels such as fax and receiving cases from government agencies. In light of the pandemic, the Child Support Line continued to receive emails, and individuals could seek advice and help and send inquiries through the National Family Safety Program.

It was also mentioned that the communications center serves all domestic violence victims, whether citizens or residents. The mechanism for dealing with cases of violence has also been explained. For example, "dangerous/high-risk cases must be started within 3 hours, medium risk cases within eight hours, and low-risk cases within twenty-four hours", and cases may be referred to the relevant authorities to complete the protection mechanism. For example, the case may be referred to a hospital for treatment.

Additionally, some international experiences related to protecting victims of violence during the pandemic were discussed. It was highlighted that many countries, including Saudi Arabia, relied on modern technology to facilitate victims' access to support lines.

Interventions: Furthermore, there was an emphasis on the importance of the qualifications of the specialists. For example, specialists working with children in sexual violence should be familiar with adequately collecting related information from children. It was noted that efforts should be made to educate the Saudi community about forensic physicians and their vital role in conducting a proper examination.

Protection centers & units were described as the place for all victims to seek help. The intervention process and the severity of violence,

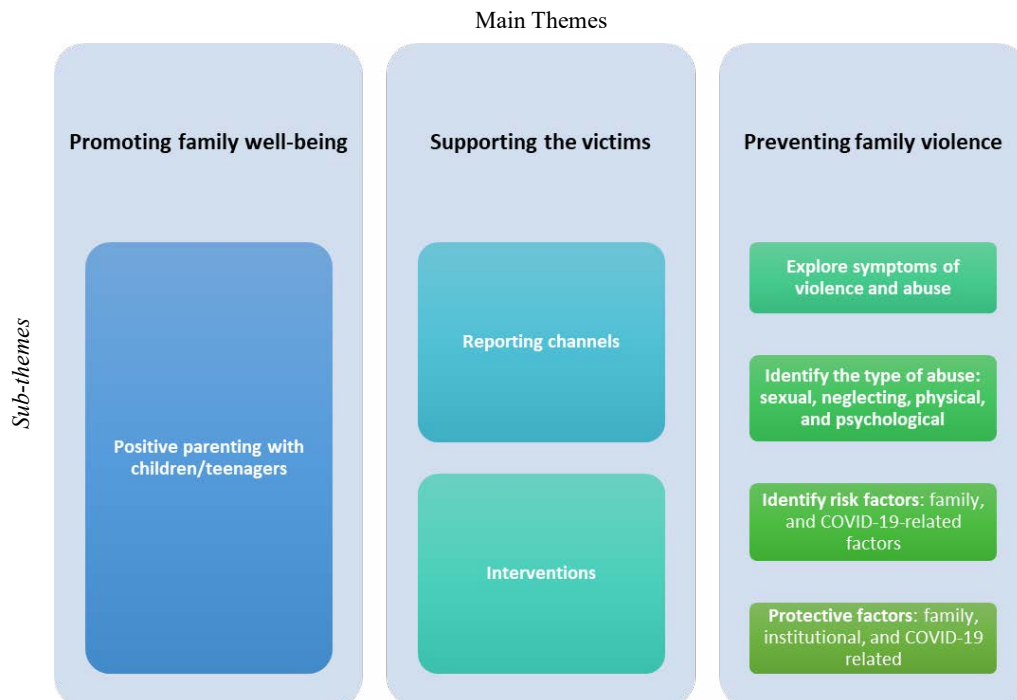


Figure 2. Main themes and subthemes of media awareness campaigns during the pandemic identified by the MAXQDA program.

similar to international practices, were also discussed. However, there was no clarification regarding each level of severity.

Additionally, the treatment period and the importance of educating parents about the treatment stages, which may last for a long time, were addressed. Emphasis was placed on the importance for parents and caregivers to focus on victims of violence and their treatment rather than on the punishment of the assaulter/abuser. Moreover, the significance of supporting the family throughout the treatment phase and ensuring the efficiency and qualifications of specialists dealing with victims, especially children, was mentioned.

Theme #3: Preventing family violence

Fourteen awareness efforts addressed preventing family violence as follows:

- 1-Panel discussion (webinar): Child protection in light of the emerging coronavirus pandemic by (NFSP)
- 2-Protecting children from online harassment (webinar) by (NFSP)
- 3-Domestic Violence lecture in the Shadow of the Stone by (Saudi Society for Social Studies)
- 4-Risks to the family during crises by (Family Affairs Council)
- 5-Home Quarantine and its social effects on the Family by (Saudi Society for Social Studies)
- 6-Webinar: dealing with children with disabilities during the Corona pandemic by (NFSP)
- 7-Violence, neglect, and abuse of the elderly by (NFSP)
- 8-An overview of women's violence (16 days campaign) by (NFSP)
- 9-Conduct practical risk assessments of violence against women in the justice and security system by (NFSP)
- 10-Existing violence against women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic by (Family Affairs Council)
- 11-Saudi family forum 2020: The Family in the Face of Crises by (Family Affairs Council)
- 12-The impact of violence against women on family stability by (Al-Mawaddah Association for Family Development)
- 13-Violence Determinants and Effects by (Domestic Violence Reports Center 1919)
- 14-Violence against women workshop by (Taarafu Family Counseling Center)

These awareness programs provided comprehensive information on abuse symptoms, types, risks, and protective factors.

Explore symptoms of violence and abuse: The symptoms of violence and abuse were only addressed during one webinar conducted by a governmental entity during which symptoms were classified, especially sexual harassment (online and face-to-face), according to age groups for children. It was also noted that sexual harassment might occur without symptoms or changes in children.

Symptoms in the adolescent age group, from fourteen to eighteen years, may include a tendency to commit suicide or isolation and mood swings. As for children between six to thirteen years, the speaker discussed several symptoms, including isolation, attention deficit (spacing out) in the classroom, sleep disorders, and changes in appetite. For the younger group, where communication is more complex, the semantics of sexual harassment may include oversleeping, appetite disturbances, isolation, and introversion.

The symptoms of violence are indicators for parents and other caregivers to predict the existence of violence in one of the vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, women, and people with disabilities. Therefore, awareness and prevention programs assumed a

broad focus on educating the community about the types and forms of these indicators and linking them to types of abuse. For example, when discussing child sexual harassment, parents must be educated to detect signs such as involuntary urination and constant nightmares. If they exist, an investigation should be conducted on what change occurred in the child's life and the possible reasons behind these behaviors.

Noticeably, the awareness efforts on this subject are rising. There was a lack of awareness regarding the indications of different types of violence and linking them to age groups and the type of abuse. Most awareness efforts focused on sexual harassment of children, while awareness about other types of harassment and other groups was lacking.

Identify the type of abuse: In the awareness programs, violence was mentioned in all its forms. The definition of violence was clarified in the Saudi system and policies, but this came without a detailed explanation. The four types of violence were covered: sexual, neglect, psychological, and physical as follows:

Sexual abuse in children was discussed, and different types of sexual harassment of children were explained, especially online sexual harassment, complete harassment, rape, and injury to the victim's sexual organs. It was further explained that child molestation and child pornography websites are sexual harassment against children. Other forms of sexual harassment, such as sexual blackmailing of teenagers and sexting, were also mentioned. Although online sexual harassment of children was covered in detail, other types of sexual harassment were not addressed, such as sexual harassment between adults and spouses, especially concerning sexual assault or marital rape.

As for neglect, it has various forms, as follows: insufficient family support, neglecting children's vaccinations, failure to fasten seatbelts or lack of concern for children's physical safety, forcing the family to live in unsuitable conditions, neglecting children's education, neglecting children's care, guidance, and support during their different ages, especially during childhood and adolescence in which children need more support due to their physiological and emotional characteristics, or neglecting children in public places. This may expose them to loss and danger, leading to the risk of sexual harassment and moral issues. From this standpoint, it is clear that neglect is critical when discussing violence, as it may lead to the exposure of victims to violence.

Psychological violence has been defined as terrorizing the victim through destroying property, diminishing the victim's confidence, intimidation, humiliation, imposing dictates regarding what the victim can or cannot do, or depriving the victim of family members without rights. It was also discussed that isolating the victim from social ties and beliefs is a form of psychological violence, as it is a human right to manifest and practice their beliefs.

As for physical violence, only physical injuries such as pushing, hitting, strangling, or using a weapon were mentioned as forms of physical violence. There was a lack of discussion regarding other types of physical violence, including those concerning age groups (children and adults), the difference in the severity of physical violence, and the dire consequences of physical violence for each age stage.

Identify Risk Factors

1-Family Factors

Many factors and family characteristics that lead to exposure to violence were covered in the included awareness programs as follows:

- Families with a history of violence.
- Families with members who practice transgressive behavior, such as drug abuse.
- Dysfunctional Families.
- Broken Families.
- Isolated families are often more significant in immigrant or culturally isolated families.
- Families that rely on violence to solve problems and on a culture of assertiveness instead of positive dialogue.
- Families with one of its members who were abused during childhood.
- Families that suffer from weak parental supervision and parents' failure to carry out their duties towards family members the entire way. Poor parental supervision is a risk factor equivalent to the risk of family disintegration that threatens the safety and security of family members.

2- Factors related to COVID-19: Eight awareness efforts highlighted the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in increasing domestic violence as follows.

Panel discussion (webinar): Child protection in light of the emerging coronavirus pandemic by (NFSP), protecting children from online harassment (webinar) by (NFSP), domestic violence lecture in the shadow of the stone by (Saudi Society for Social Studies), risks to the family during crises by (Family Affairs Council), home quarantine and its social effects on the Family by (Saudi society for Social Studies), webinar: dealing with children with disabilities during the Corona pandemic by (NFSP), existing violence against women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic by (Family Affairs Council), and Saudi family forum 2020: The Family in the Face of Crises by (Family Affairs Council).

The previously mentioned efforts emphasized that domestic violence is among the most common problems that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic globally, which may have some manifestations locally, is the loss of a parent due to infection and its repercussions. Additionally, the dangers of online sexual harassment and cyberbullying were addressed since children are the most vulnerable groups affected by this type of violence due to increased internet and social media use during the pandemic¹.

Protective Factors

1-Family protection factors: The role of the family in protection from violence was discussed in all four awareness efforts, where the role of family members in facing crises and limiting their effects was emphasized, especially the male authority figure in the family and parents. It was described how the positive role of a male influence in the family contributes to helping family members to perform their roles and acts as a source of stability and protection from exposure to violence and abuse. In addition, building and maintaining a good relationship between parents and children enhances the family's ability to face and adapt during crises and reduces their potential adverse effects.

Moreover, preparing children psychologically and considering their abilities when discussing violence-related topics were discussed. For example, when talking about online sexual harassment, more simplified phrases and ideas in a way that the child can understand may be needed, especially during the pandemic period when children's internet usage increased for education or entertainment purposes.

The topic of children and social media was also highlighted. It was emphasized that parents should educate their children about internet safety which includes: maintaining privacy, cultural values, relationship

limits and standards, and data sharing. It was also recommended not to neglect educating children about Islamic legal opinion in some cases, like spying, cheating, and stealing.

The responsibility of parents in educating the child about how to deal well with friends and the means of modern technology was emphasized. Several efforts have alerted the importance of educating the child about not sharing their private information with others or family members, such as their passwords. Some practical recommendations were made to parents about children's internet usage during the pandemic. For example, computers and laptops should not be placed in bedrooms or behind closed doors. Unlimited access to the internet without a specific time, camera, and webcam access should always be prohibited. It is clear that the role and responsibility of parents in protecting their children from forms of violence, especially online sexual harassment, is very significant compared to other types of violence.

In addition, the vital role of parents when a child is exposed to sexual harassment was discussed. The balanced reaction of the parents when the child is exposed to harassment is critical to protect the child, as it helps prevent violence against the child, enhances the child's self-confidence, and encourages the child to speak with them in detail about the harassment. The parents' adverse reactions, such as blame and violence, may hinder the child from speaking later if exposed to violence and abuse. It was emphasized that the positive reaction that aims at education and containment and includes supervision and follow-up enables the child to overcome the crisis and limits its adverse effects.

2- Institutional protection factors: Protecting from violence is not limited to the individual level but requires concerted efforts at all individual, societal, and institutional levels.

Flexible working hours and their importance were also discussed, as it supports families and prevents them from falling into violence. However, it may lead to an increase in the burdens on women in particular. Therefore, the success of flexible working hours may be conditional on the availability of male "parents" support to protect the family from falling into neglect and abuse.

In addition, the forum discussed the importance of effective communication with children and the need to find and sustain effective methods of communicating with children and allowing them to express their concerns and needs, whatever they are. It is vital to develop the skills of parents and caregivers in how to communicate meaningfully with children. It was also recommended to involve children when preparing legislation related to them. Some local entities do this already, such as the Child Committee in the Family Affairs Council. However, it must be ensured that a transparent and fair mechanism is provided when nominating children, as the needs and challenges facing children and their families differ from one region to another.

Furthermore, the forum did not neglect the digital world's importance and risks. It emphasized the benefits of the internet and digital communication, such as providing continuity and a communication outlet for children with their friends and school and providing means for entertainment and comfort. However, it is also necessary to consider the dangers of using the Internet without supervision. Here the relevant authorities' role is to provide solutions to prevent internet exploitation and reduce its risks and misuse, as it may be a risk factor that leads to exposure to violence. It was also suggested that the concerned authorities take advantage of children's knowledge and skills related to digital communication by communicating with them and hearing their needs and suggestions.

3- Protection factors resulting from the Impact of COVID-19: The Arab and local experiences supporting families during the COVID-19 pandemic were highlighted, which may have contributed to protecting the family from exposure to violence during the Saudi Family Forum on Facing Crises and a webinar held by the NFSP. For example, Bahrain has facilitated giving the spouses of women working in the health sector the option to work flexibly or remotely so that they can take care of their children as long as their wives are on the front line of defense in the health field. The experience of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in providing financial support to families affected by the pandemic, such as families of widows, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and families of prisoners, was also addressed. As for the United Arab Emirates, a decision was issued to allow some categories of workers in federal government agencies to take paid leave to care for children under sixteen.

Moreover, the importance of family and social networks was also discussed. The existence of such networks, for example, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the society contributes to helping parents care for their children, such as relying on grandparents to take care of children when parents are absent and busy. However, urbanization and the transfer of small families far from the rural areas where their extended families reside may have somewhat weakened the effect of the support provided by these social networks. Therefore, it is necessary to work on strengthening and preserving these connections to benefit from them in times of crisis.

In the webinar, it was noted that there was a decrease in the number of violence cases referred to protection teams in hospitals, according to the records in the national registry. Although it is considered a positive indicator, we must consider that there may be unreported violence cases. Due to quarantine, victims may not be able to reach the service providers or communicate with other nearby individuals who can help them. Therefore, it is essential to be careful when interpreting the low numbers of reports during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

This study gives an overview of the media awareness efforts conducted in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding combating domestic violence. Governmental entities and non-profit organizations primarily conducted these efforts.

Interestingly, the awareness programs included in this review had significantly high views (89,495 Viewers). This might be because all programs were virtual, and the number would be significantly less if there were onsite programs. Therefore, the pandemic was an opportunity to increase online or virtual awareness initiatives, which are considered effective in targeting specific populations with less time and effort, as explained by Latha et al.⁸. Furthermore, Higgins identified features of successful public health strategies, including “public awareness campaigns (implemented in settings such as schools, community organizations, workplaces, and the media) with messages that target not only the individual but also broader social attitudes; provision of programs to improve relevant skills; regular surveillance and strict enforcement of prescribed behaviors; and making improvements in environmental circumstances affecting the behaviors and its context”⁹.

Though public health campaigns are recognized by the WHO, as having the potential to prevent child abuse, there is less research providing evidence of the effectiveness of such campaigns in preventing family violence and child abuse². Moreover, many countries encourage all healthcare professionals to report violence and abuse cases. For example, Elementary schools in Japan are dedicated to detecting child

abuse and neglect as early as possible. Dentists in Japan are legally obligated to participate in child welfare and the early identification of child abuse. Dental experts inspect the child's oral cavity in the dental practice and closely study the speech and behavior of children and their parents; they can lead to the early detection and prevention of abuse¹⁰.

The awareness programs stressed that parent loss due to infection and its effects and domestic violence are among the most prevalent issues that have arisen globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to increased internet and social media use during the pandemic, children are the most susceptible groups affected by this sort of violence, as there is an increased risk of online sexual harassment and cyberbullying¹.

In Saudi Arabia, several government authorities are responsible for responding to violence reports even before the pandemic. In 2010, the Child Helpline was established and operated by the National Family Safety Program (NFSP) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as counseling services to families for 24-hour service for the data collection on maltreatment and referral of emergency cases¹¹. In addition, during the pandemic, several governmental authorities kept their services and support toward domestic violence victims as follows: The Domestic Violence Reporting Center (free number: 1919), which is under the umbrella of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Child Support Line of the Ministry of National Guard Medical Affairs, and the various alternative communication methods of reporting channels such as fax and receiving cases from government agencies. In light of the pandemic, the Child Support Line continued to receive emails, and individuals could seek advice and help and send inquiries through the National Family Safety Program. The “Supporting the Victims” awareness program addressed these efforts.

Compared to global practice, some nations are looking for strategies to increase access to services related to violence, as quarantine restricts people's freedom of travel and personal mobility. 'Pop-up' centers have been established in France at grocery stores, where women are probably already customers (March 30, 2020). Pharmacies are instructed to call the appropriate authorities using a specific "code word" in several nations, including France, Italy, and Spain. Some nations have introduced or updated covert apps through which women can get services without speaking with abusers face-to-face¹².

Moreover, to limit risk factors associated with violence, some countries are addressing the unfavorable COVID-19 coping strategies that could increase the danger of violence. To lessen the likelihood of domestic violence against children, Greenland has outlawed the sale of alcohol in the city of Nuuk (March 29, 2020). Similar actions have been taken in South Africa (March 26, 2020). The relationship between alcohol addiction, problematic drinking, and more violent severe incidents is complex, and there is scant information regarding how alcohol-related laws affect violence. However, some nations have not taken proactive measures to reduce these hazards. For instance, limiting access to lethal weapons during stress would restrict gun sales, potentially lowering the incidence of child and female homicide. Effective policymaking can lower the likelihood of harm and provide opportunities for productive stress reduction and mental health promotion¹².

As an action, Australia has made several changes to its family law to appropriately respond to situations during quarantine. They first give judges the authority to impose electronic monitoring demands for bail and conditional release decrees. They also make it possible to file restraining orders online. Thirdly, they add a new crime, raise the fine, and prolong the statute of limitations for restraining orders. Further innovation and modifications are required to guarantee the safety of survivors under challenging circumstances as more nations encounter protracted periods of curtailed justice services¹².

Although these measures were admirable, many nations have not yet dedicated money to expanding services. Most initial policy responses come from high-income nations, which may indicate that despite a crisis, funds for addressing violence against women and children are often constrained in resource-poor situations¹².

Thus, this study gives an overview of the media awareness efforts conducted in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding combating domestic violence. Protection centers play an influential role in evaluating cases, identifying the effects of violence, as well as providing support to victims and caregivers. Nevertheless, despite local efforts, there is still a need to make more efforts to achieve the required progress.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the local authorities' efforts in the awareness programs, some topics were not discussed in their educational content. When analyzing the awareness efforts in the prevention axis, it is noticed that the relevant institutional factors were not covered much, as they mainly discussed family-related factors.

CONCLUSION

This scoping review showed various social media awareness efforts in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding family violence by governmental entities and non-profit organizations. Although media awareness plays a role in preventing family violence, it is not effective on its own. Healthcare professionals should be involved in detecting and reporting cases of abuse and violence after proper training.

In addition, there is a continuous need to activate initiatives from the Family Affairs Council and other stakeholders in proposing relevant legislation to relieve pressure on parents. Identifying and understanding which areas lacked awareness efforts is essential to address them in the future better.

Considering other developed countries' response to family violence during the pandemic, Saudi Arabia could use more advanced measures for pandemic-like situations to prevent and respond appropriately to family violence and enhance the reporting channels.

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