



Aggressive behavior among females during the total curfew in Kuwait due to the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Objectives: The study objective was to detect differences between aggressive (anger, hostility, and violence) and socio-demographic variables among a sample of females who lived in Kuwait. **Method:** A non-random sample was recruited from 495 female participants via the WhatsApp platform. The study's tool is an online survey consisted of two parts sociodemographic information, and Aggression questionnaire (AQ) that composed of 29 self-report items Likert scale with a higher score indicating more aggressive. **Results:** The current study's outcome identified that during the total curfew females who were young, student, and single or divorced were at high risk and reported higher scores of physical and verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. **Conclusion:** These findings create the need to find effective solution to prevent violence during social distancing.

Keywords: aggression, violence, curfew, COVID-19, socio-demographic variables

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- Submitted: 27/12/2022, Revised: 14/5/2023, Accepted: 14/5/2023.

السلوك العدواني بين الإناث خلال الحظر الشامل

في الكويت بسبب جائحة كوفيد-19

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ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الفروق في العدوانية (الغضب، والعداء، والعنف) بناءً على المتغيرات الاجتماعية والديموغرافية لدى عينة من الإناث القاطنات في الكويت. **المنهج:** اختيرت عينة غير عشوائية من 495 مشاركة عبر منصة WhatsApp. وكانت أداة الدراسة استمارة إلكترونية تتكون من جزأين: معلومات اجتماعية ديموغرافية، واستبانة لقياس درجة العدوانية [AQ] ضمت 29 بنداً من نوع ليكرت للتقرير الذاتي، وتشير الدرجة الأعلى للاستجابة إلى أنها أكثر عدوانية. **النتائج:** أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أنه خلال فترة حظر التجول الكامل، كانت الفئة من الإناث الأكثر تعرضاً للعدوان وأبلغن عن درجات أعلى من العدوان الجسدي واللفظي والغضب والعداء من الصغيرات في السن، والطالبات، والعازبات أو المطلقات. **الخاتمة:** كشفت الدراسة الحاجة الماسة إلى إيجاد حلول ناجعة وفعالة للحد من العنف في أثناء التباعد الاجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عدوان، عنف، حظر التجول، كوفيد-19، متغيرات

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- تُسَلَّم البحث في: 2022/12/27، عُدِّل في: 2023/5/14، أُجيز للنشر في: 2023/5/14.

Introduction

Millions of peoples across world adopting radical alterations to their lifestyles since the declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO) of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a global pandemic on 11th of March (Montemurro, 2020; Reger et al., 2020; Sakib et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Due to the dynamics of COVID-19 disease, its rapid dissemination, and life-threatening impacts on patients' health wellbeing, public health authority worldwide impose several precautions and regulations to control the spread of the virus (Iacobucci, 2020; Paules et al., 2020; Velavan & Meyer, 2020). These precautions include social isolation, physical distancing, shutting schools and medical facilities, keeping away from overcrowded places, and stopping public events. Based on the WHO (2020) report, several mental illnesses, psychological disorders symptoms, self-harm or suicidal behavior have been reported among general population due to boredom, depression, irritability, and fear of the unknown or being alone since the emergence of the pandemic (Dean et al., 2021; Loganathan et al., 2022; Ruiz et al., 2021; Vilovic et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2022).

Other pandemic arise out of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide that affect the solidity of the family dynamic and the quality of interpersonal relationship between the couples, this is the increasing rate of reported cases of anger, hostility, aggression, withdrawal, interpersonal relations, and domestic violence between intimate partners, and parents and children (Lyons & Brewer, 2021; Sommer et al., 2021; Viero et al., 2021). According to the following studies (Barton & Bryant, 2016; Barton et al., 2018; Bodenmann et al., 2015) there are strong associations between the degree of partners responsive to each other and duration of exposing to external stress.

Over time, under external stressor (economic crisis, unemployment, and work stress) level of satisfaction with the partner decreased effecting the quality and stability of their relationship (Sommovigo et al., 2022). Partner become more overwhelmed, fatigued, and distracted causing many interpersonal problems due to their disorder behaviors such as blaming each other, being more argumentative or critical, and less supportive and satisfied. For example, Sediri et al. (2020) findings among Tunisian women shows that percentage of emotional violence 96% against women increased during the lockdown that caused due to the COVID-19 pandemic , followed by economic 41% and physical violence 10%. And there was a significant association between high rate reported cases of experiencing violence during lockdown and levels of psychological problems such as stress, depression, and anxiety.

Moreover, the Ministry for Women, Family, and Human Rights in Brazil reported that violence cases against women was increased by 17% since the declaration of social distancing procedures in the country (Nações Unidas Brasil, 2020). In Rio de Janeiro, after the first weekend of the nationwide social distancing rule was imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic, 50% of domestic violence cases especially against women was reported (Bassan, 2020). In the U.S, during the Covid-19 pandemic an increasing demand of owing gun and ammunition goods due to the high level of stress causing high rate of reported cases of fatal domestic violence (Campbell, 2020). In Indonesian, high rates of sexual harassment, domestic and sexual violence among children and women have been detected such as rape, online pornography, and sexual assault since the enforcement of certain health regulation by the authority such as social distancing policies and work-from-home during COVID-19 pandemic (Puspa, 2020). In Australia, once health authority imposing public lockdown

that enforcing social isolation due to COVID-19 pandemic, demand for domestic violence services increased, percentage of domestic abuse call increased to 5%, and searching for domestic abuse support via Google research engine have increase to 75% (Kagi 2020; Peterman et al., 2020; Poate, 2020). According to Dr. Marianne Hester, a sociologist who studies and analyses abusive relationships, stated that during vacations and public holidays domestic violence cases increase because families spend more time together and isolated from social support network (Hester, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, with enforcement of social isolation as a health precautions necessity, aggression and anger levels has intensified and many women exposes to their abusers with the absence of family and friends support, making it more hard to seek help or escape (Brooks et al., 2020; Greenaway et al., 2015; Usher et al., 2021).

A cross-sectional study performed by Akel et al. (2021) among married couples during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that higher total scores of stress, anxiety, and abuse by their husbands were reported by married women during the lockdown. In Italy, due to increased levels of stress and aggression during the lockdown, high levels of abuse and domestic violence were reported, causing the Italian government to authorize the use of hotels as accommodation for abused individuals (Davies & Batha, 2020). Meanwhile, during the lockdown in Indonesia, high rates of sexual harassment and domestic violence were reported (Abdullah, 2020). Rizky (2020) specifies that there were 275 reported cases of domestic violence against women between March and April 2020. Moreover, online cross-sectional surveys conducted by Killgore et al. (2021) during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic among 5,928 participants across the United States reveal that the health restrictions and regulations imposed by the health administration had a significant negative impact

on individuals' mental health. Reported rates of anger, hostility, and verbal and physical aggression were higher among individuals under lockdown compared to those who reported that they were not under such restrictions during the pandemic. Furthermore, a cross-sectional electronic survey conducted by Garcia-Zamora et al. (2022) was distributed in 19 countries in Latin America and revealed that among the 3,544 front-line health professionals who answered, many experienced verbal and physical aggression and stated that violent behavior against them increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most 95.6% of the participants complained about verbal abuse, while half of the participants complained about acts of abuse and 11.1% physical abuse. In addition, health care providers who were at high risk of abuse and aggressive behavior during the pandemic were also those who were of a younger age, women, and worked directly with COVID-19 patients. Another study conducted by Parrott et al. (2022) among 510 participants in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that there is a significant association between the escalation rate of physical and psychological aggression toward an intimate partner and heavy drinking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, a study carried out by Sommovigo et al. (2022) among 197 health care professionals in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that verbal aggression from patients had a significant impact on health care providers, causing them emotional exhaustion. Cybulska et al. (2023) also performed a study among 264 healthcare workers, which reveals that during the COVID-19 pandemic, a high rate of reported cases of mental health problems such as insomnia, verbal aggression, and anger were detected. The findings of the study reveal that most of the participants experienced insomnia and had poor sleep quality and that these factors were significantly associated with the participants' marital status, level of education, and whether they

were working with patients suffering from COVID-19. Also, the study demonstrates a significant association between the participants' ages and genders and occurrences of verbal aggression, anger, and hostility.

Significant of the study

According to the UN Women Policy Brief a report (2020) states that during COVID-19 pandemic, women were more affected than men in many areas (out/inside their homes) during the lockdown because of increasing of their workload both at home and at workplace especially if they work in the health sector. According to ecological systems theory (EST), individuals are surrounded by four main ecological systems (the exosystem, microsystem, macrosystem, and mesosystem) with which they interact through mutual dynamic action that shapes their daily settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since the individual is the center of the ecological system in EST, the impact of the individual on the ecological system is less powerful than the impact of the size and the scope of their surrounding ecological system (Tanhan & Strack, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals' ecological systems underwent a radical alteration in terms of their lifestyles and behaviors due to health polices and regulations that were designed to contain the spread of the virus and have caused individuals to experience many mental health problems such as depression, adjustment disorder, aggression, and anxiety (Campbell, 2020).

Wang et al. (2007) and Sediri et al. (2020) believed that during traumatic and toxic environment such as pandemic, war, or lockdown women were more likely to developed psychological distress because of biological, hormonal, and sociocultural factors. Women are seen to have a more anxious temperament than men and are worldwide engaged more often in stressful environment such as health sector than men (Jalnapurkar et al., 2018; Kilius et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020).

Moreover, MacGregor et al. (2017) and Wesemann et al. (2017) findings among military healthcare personnel demonstrate that women after deployment were identified as an important emotional indicator of the onset of posttraumatic stress disorders, depression, and anxiety disorders. To the researchers' knowledge, the current study is the first research conducted in Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic that aims to examine physical and verbal aggression, anger, and hostility among females who lived in Kuwait during the total curfew that caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective of the study

The current study objective is to detect whether there are significant differences between socio-demographic characteristics (marital status, age, and employee status) and reported cases of physical and verbal aggression, violence, hostility, and anger among females who lived in Kuwait during the total curfew that caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Study Terminology

- Aggression: Baron and Richardson (1994) defined aggression as “any act that harms another individual who is motivated to avoid such harm” (Benjamin, 2016, p. 33). Meanwhile, Colman (2003, p. 18) defines aggression as “a behaviour whose primary or sole purpose or function is to injure physically or psychologically.”
- Physical aggression: a “hostile form of aggression. Its aim is to cause bodily damage. It includes kicking, molesting, harassing, biting, pushing, torturing, fighting, bullying, vandalism, destruction and gangsterism, shoving, hair pulling, stabbing, shooting (Sameer & Jamia 2007; National Youth Violence Prevention Research Centre 2002)” (Onukwufor, 2013, p. 64).

- Verbal Aggression: Sameer and Jamia (2007) defined verbal aggression as “acts such as insulting with bad language, displaying anger, threatening, swearing and being sarcastic all in order to cause emotional and psychological pain, whereas the National Youth Violence Prevention Research Centre (2002) defines verbal aggression as behaviors that includes [sic] intimidating others, threatening, and engaging in malicious teasing and name-calling” (Onukwufor, 2013, p. 64).
- COVID-19: A new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, initially named 2019-nCoV) that was named on January 12, 2020 and is a severe acute respiratory syndrome. Its first reported case was in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019 (WHO, 2020).

Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional design, which involves collecting data at one particular point in time from a large number of individuals. Cross-sectional research involves observing variables without affecting them.

Participants

The target sample was 495 female participants who live in Kuwait during COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were recruited using a non-random sample method during the total curfew in Kuwait. In addition, an online survey was used to collect the study data. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 ($M = 43.1$ years old, $SD = 13.5$). 70.9% were Kuwaiti and 29.1% were non-Kuwaiti. The majority of the participants were married 62.4%, followed by single 25.1%, divorced 8.3%, and widower 3.0%. In terms of level of education, 19.2% of the participants had a high school diploma or lower, 61.2% had a bachelor's degree, and 19.4% had a master's

degree or PhD. The majority of the participants were employees (53.9%), followed by retired (20.8%), students (13.7%), businessmen (5.7%), unemployed (3.6%), and other (2.2%).

Measure

Aggression Questionnaire (AQ)

The current study used aggression questionnaire (AQ) which developed by Buss and Perry (1992). The AQ is a 29 self-report measure containing four subscales. Furthermore, the four subscales are: physical aggression (PA) which contains 9 items, verbal aggression (VA) which contains 5 items, anger (A) which contains 7 items, and hostility (H) which contains 8 items. The responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “Extremely uncharacteristic of me” to 5 = “Extremely characteristic of me” The AQ showed good concurrent validity. In addition, the AQ had very good internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha for total scale score (.89); the alpha coefficients for subscales were: PA (.85), VA (.72), A (.83), and H (.77) (Fischer & Corcoran, 2007). The AQ was translated into Arabic by professionals who were fluent in both the Arabic and English languages. In the current sample the alpha coefficients were: AQ (.91), PA (.80), VA (.70), A (.75), and H (.78).

Ethical statement

All participants provided an electronic written informed consent and the data was collected anonymous and the procedure was followed the ethical standards of the Kuwait University regulations and policies and approved by Kuwait University, Research Administration.

Statistical analysis

The current study used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS 25.0) for analyzing the data. In addition, descriptive

statistics for means, standard deviations, percentages, and frequencies were used. Furthermore, Cronbach's α was used to calculate the reliability of the scales. Moreover, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to measure differences between aggression and socio-demographic variables. The effect size (η^2) was grouped as small ($\eta^2 = 0.01$), medium ($\eta^2 = 0.06$), and large ($\eta^2 = 0.14$) (Piehet et al., 2020).

Results

There were differences between age and aggression among females during the total curfew in Kuwait due to COVID-19 pandemic. Females who were between 18-29 years old showed more physical aggression, verbal aggression, and anger. Females who were in the 30-39 years old category displayed more hostility and aggressive than the other age categories. The results presented in Table. 1.

Table 1

Aggression Questionnaire by Age

Subscale		Marital Status				ANOVA		
		18-29	30-39	40-49	50+	F ratio	df	η^2
PA	<i>M</i>	15.9	16.2	13.6	12.2	15.0**	469	0.088
	<i>SD</i>	7.2	6.1	4.5	4.2			
VA	<i>M</i>	12.9	13.4	12.2	10.5	13.0**	473	0.076
	<i>SD</i>	4.5	4.0	3.5	3.8			
A	<i>M</i>	18.4	19.2	17.3	15.8	12.1**	370	0.072
	<i>SD</i>	5.4	4.4	4.7	4.4			
H	<i>M</i>	19.8	19.1	17.9	15.7	11.7**	456	0.072
	<i>SD</i>	6.4	6.1	5.9	5.3			
AQ	<i>M</i>	70.8	70.0	64.1	55.8	19.9**	446	0.119
	<i>SD</i>	20.3	18.0	15.0	15.6			

Note. $N = 495$; $p = p$ -values (2-tailed); ANOVA= analysis of variance; F = F-test; PA = Physical Aggression subscale; VA = Verbal Aggression subscale; A = Anger subscale; H = Hostility subscale; AQ = Aggression Questionnaire. ** $p < .001$.

The results of the ANOVA test showed that there were significant differences between marital status and aggression which are presented in Table. 2. Females who were single showed more physical aggression than the other marital status categories. However, Females who were divorce showed more aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility than other groups.

Table 2

Aggression Questionnaire by Marital Status

Subscale		Marital Status				ANOVA		
		Single	Married	Divorced	Widower	F ratio	df	η^2
PA	M	15.7	13.5	14.8	11.7	5.56**	477	0.034
	SD	6.5	5.2	4.7	3.0			
VA	M	13.2	11.4	13.5	12.0	8.22**	481	0.049
	SD	3.9	3.9	4.3	4.4			
A	M	18.5	16.9	18.8	15.5	4.84*	479	0.029
	SD	4.7	4.7	5.8	4.6			
H	M	20.11	16.5	20.13	17.9	12.8**	463	0.077
	SD	6.1	5.6	6.3	5.7			
AQ	M	70.4	60.8	68.6	59.4	9.78**	453	0.061
	SD	18.2	17.2	17.1	12.9			

Note. N= 495.; p=p-values (2-tailed); ANOVA= analysis of variance; F= F-test; PA= Physical Aggression subscale; VA= Verbal Aggression subscale; A= Anger subscale; H= Hostility subscale; AQ= Aggression Questionnaire. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

There were significant differences between employee status and aggression among females during the total curfew in Kuwait due to COVID-19 pandemic. Females who were students showed more aggression, physical and verbal aggression, anger and hostility than other employee status categories. Results for ANOVA analysis were presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Aggression Questionnaire by Employee Status*

Subscale	Marital Status							ANOVA		
		Student	Employee	Retired	Business man	Un-employed	Other	F ratio	df	η^2
PA	<i>M</i>	16.9	14.3	12.1	13.7	12.0	14.6	6.89**	481	0.067
	<i>SD</i>	7.3	5.4	3.3	3.1	3.7	10.0			
VA	<i>M</i>	13.5	12.1	10.4	13.0	12.9	12.4	5.98**	485	0.058
	<i>SD</i>	4.1	3.9	3.7	3.3	4.8	5.8			
A	<i>M</i>	18.9	17.8	15.8	17.0	16.4	17.1	4.06**	483	0.040
	<i>SD</i>	5.0	4.9	4.1	3.7	5.4	5.9			
H	<i>M</i>	20.8	18.2	15.6	15.8	16.3	17.2	7.07**	467	0.07
	<i>SD</i>	5.4	6.3	5.2	4.7	3.8	8.9			
AQ	<i>M</i>	73.7	65.2	55.1	61.4	60.6	62.1	9.80**	457	0.097
	<i>SD</i>	17.5	18.0	13.8	13.0	13.9	27.3			

Note. *N*= 495.; *p*=*p*-values (2-tailed); ANOVA= analysis of variance; *F*= F-test; PA= Physical Aggression subscale; VA= Verbal Aggression subscale; A= Anger subscale; H= Hostility subscale; AQ= Aggression Questionnaire. ***p* < .001.

Discussion

The reported cases of domestic violence between intimate partners, verbal and physical aggression, and interpersonal relations have been increased since the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Neufeld et al., 2021; Nnawulezi & HacsKaylo, 2021; Noman et al., 2021). Finding of the current study revealed that there were significant differences between participants' socio-demographic characteristics and reported cases of physical and verbal aggression, violence, hostility, and anger among females who lived in Kuwait during the

total lockdown that caused by COVID-19 pandemic. This study shows that females whose age category were between 18-29 years old reported higher scores of physical aggression, verbal aggression, and anger scores, whereas females whose age category between 30-39 years old reported higher scores of hostilities and aggressive during the total lockdown. These findings reflect the significant effect of the pandemic and related health constraint such as lockdown and quarantine on women's mental health and psychological wellbeing in Kuwait. Many factors accompanied enforcement of the lockdown that increase the level of the aggression, and anger, and hostility such as living in small house with few rooms and overcrowding, everyday around-the-clock contacting with the aggressors, and isolation from social network for support (Holmes et al., 2020; Yue et al., 2020). Besides worrying from the virus, overload home duties and tasks of take caring after children and elderly, and economic problems. Many women lose their own business due to the lockdown such as hair salon, nursery, and home business. These findings are similar to the following cross-cultural study's findings that detect huge negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on individuals' mental health that caused to increase reported rates of physical and verbal violence and hostility due to feeling of loneliness, physical and social isolation that have formed separation from family, friends, and social support networks (Tanaka & Okamoto, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Moreover, the current study finding reveals that physical aggression reported scores was higher among single women, whereas level of verbal aggression, anger, and hostility were found higher among divorce women. These findings detect that social network and social support have significant impact on individuals' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current study result is supported to Wang et al. (2020 a) findings that found a significant association between single participants, using maladaptive coping styles and high rate of reporting psychological distress. This study's

findings reflect the impact of the drastic alteration occurred in women's lifestyle schedules, multiple tasks, and economic condition on their mental health status. These multiple stressors environment overloading divorced women's emotional and cognitive resources, thereby evoking their feeling of isolation, loss, and separation from others, and causing conflict to balance between their duties during this frustration time which threatening their relationship stability and quality with their children and people who were reliant on (Funder et al., 2021; McRae et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020).

In addition, this study presents that during the COVID-19 pandemic reported scores of aggression, physical and verbal aggression, anger and hostility were higher among women who were exposed to violence. This finding is relevant to the following cross-cultural studies that detect an increase reported cases of gender-based violence during COVID-19 lockdown (Akel et al., 2021; Killgore et al., 2021). For example, Agüero (2021) finding among women who live in Peru during total lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic reveal that more than half of the women reported that they were victims of domestic violence before the pandemic, and this disruptive behavior increased by nearly fifty percent during the lockdown. These studies demonstrate the significant negative impact of the duration and status of the lockdown during the pandemic on the quality of family dynamics and relationship. The impact of such ongoing stress, impossibility of socially contacting others, difficulties to adjusting to the present social or economic challenges, and fear from the unknown are all considered as nourishing environment to induce disruptive and hostile behaviors which are strongly associated with physical and verbal aggression, violence, and anger during the total lockdown in Kuwait (Bradbury-Jones & Nikupeteri, 2021; Dekel & Abrahams, 2021; Gosangi et al., 2021; Ribeiro-Junior et al., 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study detects that women who were at high risk of being abused and experienced physical and verbal aggression, and anger during the total curfew due to COVID-19 pandemic in Kuwait were at younger age, students, being single or divorced, and who were exposed to violence. The disruptive behavior that was produced by the rapid alteration of people life due to COVID-19 pandemic causing globally increased in the incidence of domestic violence, aggression, and anger towards women and children. This issue needs to be identified as a public health priority for policy makers to design effective behavioral programs to moderate the burden of the pandemic and the unpleasant and maladaptive behaviors as an outcome of the health regulation to constrain the disease such as lockdown and quarantine. And the present study findings create the need to find effective solutions to prevent violence during social distancing.

Findings of the current study will help social workers and mental health specialists to design Effective intervention programs to enhance women's quality of life who were being victims of physically and verbally aggression, violence, hostility, and anger during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, this study's results can be beneficial for institutions, social organizations and public health authorities when they plan for future policies that impose social isolation and lockdown to overlook all conditions that evoke stressful and aggressive behaviors of stay-at-home orders on women's safety. Since the current study is a cross-sectional survey design constructed during the total curfew, it is difficult to assume that the curfew induced the escalation of the aggression. The current study data was collected via an online survey applying a non-random sample method; therefore generalization of the outcomes should be managed with caution.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known personal relationships or competing financial interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgment

This study was funded and approved by Kuwait University, Research Administration (Project number: OS03/21). Authors would like to thank Kuwait University for their support.

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To cite:

Al-sejari, M. M., & Al-Ma'seb, H. B. (2024). Aggressive behavior among females during the total curfew in Kuwait due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, 50(193), 331-355. <https://doi.org/10.34120/jgaps.v50i193.167>

