

Domestic Violence in the Time of COVID-19

Domestic violence around the world has increased exponentially since the Covid Crisis Began

UNITED STATES, May 28, 2020

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Right now, we're undergoing a once-in-a-century (for most of us, a once-in-a-lifetime) pandemic, an international health crisis that has caused unprecedented fear and pain for many people and nations, has upended our norms, and is restructuring our current reality. In such uncertain times, it's imperative to listen to the experts and follow their instructions to ensure that we emerge safe, health, and

alive—with our loved ones just as intact. Above all, it's important to face uncertainty and fear with the only thing that is guaranteed to make today and tomorrow better: loving kindness toward ourselves, our loved ones, and society as a whole.



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Dr. Linda Miles

This three-article series—examining Child Abuse, Suicide, and Domestic Violence— shares the expert insight of mental health professional Dr. Linda Miles, with content primarily drawn from an interview conducted by Francine Bianco Tax. These articles are directed to anyone and everyone who is struggling with such issues that were initiated or amplified by COVID-19. These articles are meant to raise awareness of these issues, and to provide resources, hope, and guidance toward overcoming them.

There is always a way out. There is always the possibility of a brighter future. There is always a helping hand. Look and reach for it. Help is only a phone call away.

Domestic Abuse Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233)

What can you do if you are suffering from domestic violence?

Or perhaps someone you know—a family member, friend, neighbor, or community member—suffers from domestic abuse. The likelihood of this being someone's reality has sadly increased over the past few months.

For some people, "lockdown" equals misery.

COVID-19 is an unconventional virus that has caused unconventional challenges. Many nations throughout the world, the U.S. amongst them on a state-by-state basis, have issued stay-at-home orders and lock-down mandates in efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus and flatten the curve. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the international number of daily reported coronavirus cases is finally decreasing after more than 3 months of ravaging Europe. The situation remains fragile, but healthcare experts across the globe agree that stay-at-home measures have indeed helped to minimize the virus' spread.

For some—like for those who are healthy, live comfortably at home, have the ability to work from home, and are in good company—this stay-at-home policy can be a time of peace, calm, joy, and family-bonding. For others—as for people whose homes are anything but a sanctuary—staying at home is closer to a prison sentence. It brings sadness, danger, and abuse.

It can be life-threatening.

For some, a stay-at-home policy can be a time of peace, calm, joy, and family-bonding. For others, staying at home is closer to a prison sentence. It brings sadness, danger, and abuse. And it can be life-threatening.

A sad and obvious fact: domestic violence existed around the world long before COVID-19. But today's circumstances make it worse. COVID-19 has caused major economic devastation, disconnected many from their communities and support systems, mitigated or terminated

people's jobs and sources of income, and caused widespread uncertainty, panic, fear, and stress.

An article by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration notes that these conditions may stimulate violence in households where it didn't exist, or worsen violence in homes where domestic abuse is already happening. Even before COVID-19, the statistics are daunting. It's estimated that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience intimate partner sexual violence (which can result in physical injury or death), physical violence, or stalking in their lifetime. Tens of millions of women and men have or will experience psychological aggression by an intimate partner. And U.S. crime reports suggest that 1 in 6 homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner.

Today, the numbers are getting worse.

The WHO notes that, in the time of COVID-19, many countries have reported a spike in domestic violence—including, in some countries, a 60% increase in emergency calls by women subjected to their partner's violence (comparing April 2019 with April 2020). One expert warns that there could be an extra 31 million cases of gender-based violence if lockdowns are to continue for six months.

Why is this?

We might all be bombarded by uncertainty, fear, and stress during this time, but some people succumb to unhealthy coping mechanisms. For example, because of COVID-19, maybe your partner is now jobless. Sources of income are drying out or suddenly nonexistent. In self-isolation, that person feels angry, lonely, and depressed. They might "self-medicate" or "cope" by consuming more alcohol, doing drugs, and/or losing their temper and self-control. Addictions may form or worsen. Statistically, men have a harder time admitting that they have a problem and do not usually seek mental health assistance.

Another problem is a missing safety net. Domestic violence patients—including children—usually end up in emergency rooms. Doctors and other hospital staff often have been trained to notice the signs of domestic abuse. The same applies in other settings—abused kids might get noticed at school, abused women might get noticed at social gatherings with friends or community members. Now, however, with citizens urged to "stay home" at all costs, these domestic violence cases are unseen and unreported. Those safety nets are gone.

Yet there are others, still.

Here is the good news.

In the words of WHO's Regional Director Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge: "Violence is preventable, not inevitable." Violence isn't a "family affair" or a private matter. If you suffer from domestic

violence, reach out. If you see someone else suffering, speak up.

“Violence is preventable, not inevitable.” –Dr. Hans Kluge

Realize you’re not alone (or to let that person know that he or she is not alone). Realize that this is a situation you can and must emerge from.

COVID-19 won’t go away any time soon or on its own. Neither will domestic abuse. This is a long-term situation. If you’re isolated, you’re at risk. But you’re not alone.

You are not alone.

Again: YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

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