



Domestic Violence Rates Have Increased as a Result of COVID-19 Crisis

With the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, the nation at large has shut down. Some [28 million](#) small businesses in the U.S. are at risk of never opening their doors again. Shelter-in-place orders have been given across several states, which means people are spending a lot more time at home. As quarantine and shelter-in-place measures continue to increase, a dangerous issue is surfacing: domestic violence.

According to the [World Health Organization](#), domestic violence is “the most widespread but among the least reported human rights abuses,” with one in three women having experienced physical or sexual violence in their lives.

[Domestic violence](#) is defined as any kind of assault that is alleged to have occurred between people who have a domestic relationship. In most instances, domestic violence occurs between couples who live together. The recent surge in domestic violence accounts doesn't come as a surprise to Marianne Hester, a Bristol University sociologist who studies abusive relationships.

“There was every reason to believe that the restrictions imposed to keep the virus from spreading would have such an effect,” Hester said in an interview with the [New York Times](#). “Domestic violence goes up whenever families spend more time together, such as the Christmas and summer vacations,” she added.

And given just how much time families are spending together amidst the COVID-19 crisis, hotlines and support services are overwhelmed with reports of abuse across the country and around the world. Many of

the victims who call in report feeling trapped with their abusers and isolated from resources they would otherwise have used.

Now, governments around the world are struggling to address a different kind of crisis that experts like Hester say we should have seen coming a mile away.

In China, the number of domestic violence instances [reportedly tripled](#) back in February. This is compared to data from the previous year. In Spain, the emergency domestic violence hotline saw an 18% increase in calls during the first two weeks of lockdown than in the same period one month prior.

Under ideal circumstances, a [felony conviction of domestic violence](#) can lead to a sentence of up to five years in prison. With near-total shutdowns across the nation and around the world, governments are faced with the fact that they simply did not prepare for the probable surge in domestic violence rates. The delay in taking protective measures against domestic violence, as with the virus itself, may mean that irreparable damage has already occurred.

Reports have flooded in from victims whose abusers have allegedly threatened to withhold medical and financial assistance in the event they fall ill. Some reports allege victims have been told they'll be thrown out onto the streets if they show symptoms of COVID. The surge of reports like this has sparked outrage in countless organizations that advocate for victims of domestic abuse. The situation has also warranted a response [from the UN](#). Secretary General António Guterres called for urgent action to combat the surge in cases worldwide on Twitter. Civic groups across the U.S. have called for government action, as well.

While the lockdowns won't last forever, there is still a ways to go before reaching the end of the COVID crisis. Until then, the danger will only grow for victims of domestic violence. With research showing that abusers are more likely to murder their partners after personal and financial crises, protection for victims is more important now than ever.