



Gender Equality & Social Inclusion in the Time of COVID-19

Strategies for responding to domestic violence

With the implementation of COVID-19 physical distancing measures, individuals worldwide have been ordered by health authorities to stay inside. In many homes, tension is rising as family members lose their jobs or livelihood, adjust to cramped conditions, and cope with the stress and uncertainty produced by the pandemic. **These circumstances, amplified by historical gender discrimination, have led to a significant increase in reports of violence against women and girls (VAWG), especially domestic violence.**

Emerging Data

The UN has called for a domestic violence “ceasefire” in light of emerging data illustrating an increase in violence:



- Peru: At least 9 femicides and 7 attempted femicides during April 2020 social isolation measures
- Argentina: 67% increase in calls to the national abuse helpline
- United Kingdom: 49% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse helpline
- France: 30% increase in domestic violence reports
- Cyprus: 30% increase in calls to a domestic violence hotline
- China: 300% increase in domestic violence incidents reported at a police station in Jingzhou in February 2020
- Australia: 25% increase in emergency domestic violence calls

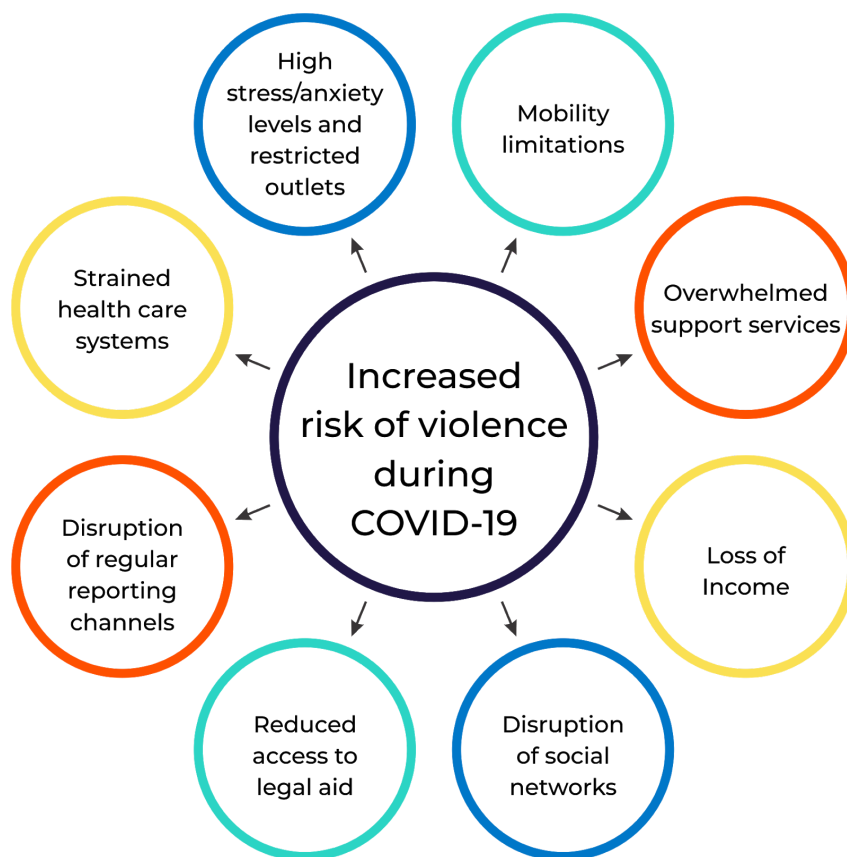
Domestic violence can include physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, economic, and verbal abuse. Women and girls are disproportionately the victims of violence due to gendered power dynamics. Men and boys can also suffer from abuse, and may be more likely to suffer in silence because they are embarrassed or reluctant to report abuse.



Globally, 243 million women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last year. Due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions, women and girls already experiencing violence have been locked in with their abusers and cut off from support networks. They may no longer have moments of reprieve from physical or emotional violence by going to work or school. Under surveillance by their aggressors, survivors may be unable to call hotlines, report abuse through existing channels, access legal aid, or obtain psychosocial support. Strained health systems imply that it is more difficult for survivors of violence to access emergency care.

Women and girls who have not previously experienced violence may also be at increased risk. **In fact, UNFPA estimates that there will be an additional 15 million cases of intimate partner violence for every three months of COVID-19 lockdown.** Existing literature suggests that economic insecurity and poverty-related stress are linked to increased violence against women and children during pandemics. As experts estimate that half a billion people could be pushed into poverty because of COVID-19 economic fallout, there are chilling implications for the safety of women and girls globally. Harmful use of alcohol, which may be used by some as a coping mechanism, is also linked to increased intimate partner violence.

Factors exacerbating the risk of violence during COVID-19



Domestic violence has serious impacts for survivors, who often sustain immediate injuries and experience depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and sleep disorders. It is linked to fatal outcomes, such as homicide, suicide, and increased child mortality. This risk has been illustrated by a number of emerging news reports during COVID-19, such as a triple femicide on the first day of lockdown in Colombia and a surge in violent female deaths in Turkey. Violence further impacts survivors' ability to focus at work. **In fact, it is estimated that violence against women costs the global economy \$1.5 trillion annually, given direct costs and labor productivity losses.**

Violence impacts our families, communities, and workplaces. We can all do our part to respond.

Whether you are an individual who wants to support survivors, someone personally experiencing violence, someone concerned about hurting a loved one, or a workforce leader, you can contribute to building a world that upholds every person's right to a violence-free life.



This is your plan of action:

For individuals such as neighbors, coworkers, or friends

- ✓ Learn to recognize signs of violence. This may include:
 - Physical marks (bruises, cuts, etc.)
 - Emotional distress
 - A change in behavior (becoming more quiet, sullen)
 - Uncharacteristic habits at work or in social settings
 - A sudden change in work performance
- ✓ If you suspect that someone you know is experiencing violence, respond appropriately by expressing your concern and letting them know that you are available to support them. Ask questions, listen, do not jump to conclusions, validate their feelings, and let the survivor make decisions on actions and remain in control.
- ✓ Look up local hotlines and support services including health providers, shelters, counselling, or domestic violence organizations. Evaluate what is currently available given COVID-19 restrictions on movement and health care capacity, and research alternatives such as phone or online services.
- ✓ Provide help for someone that discloses violence to you by keeping in regular touch to check if they are safe, sharing information on available services, and being prepared to call emergency services if urgent help is required.
- ✓ Be discrete in your communications with the survivor to decrease the risk of additional harm. Assume that a perpetrator of violence is monitoring communications, and determine accordingly the best way to be in touch with the survivor.
- ✓ Consider donating to local support services, such as women's shelters or NGOs promoting awareness of gender-based violence.

Resources & Tools

- **Tool:** [Violence against women during COVID-19](#) (WHO)
- **Learning resource:** [Resources for coworkers/survivors](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)
- **Learning resource:** [Survivor-centred approaches to eradicating GBV: Centring survivor experiences, intersectionality and restoring power](#) (Protection Collaborative)



For individuals experiencing violence

- ✓ Maintain contact with or reach out to people in your life that you trust and who support you.
- ✓ Make a safety plan in case violence against you and/or your children escalates:
 - Identify a neighbor, friend, or shelter for an emergency.
 - Keep essential items (e.g., ID, phone, money, medicine, clothing) available in case you need to leave quickly.
 - Plan how you will exit the home safely and reach your destination (e.g., evaluate transportation options).
 - Develop a code with a trusted neighbor so they can come to your aid in case of an emergency.
- ✓ Talk to a trusted person at work, who may be able to adjust work responsibilities to help.
- ✓ If you need urgent medical attention, call for an ambulance or contact your country's emergency health services. If you need any other support, contact a specialized service if available or a health provider.

Resources & Tools

- **Tool:** [MyPlan App](#)
- **Tool:** [Pod worksheet](#) (BATJC)
- **Tool:** [Violence against women during COVID-19](#) (WHO)
- **Tool:** [Domestic violence country context](#) (Equilo)
- **Learning resource:** [Help for men who are being abused](#) (HelpGuide)



For individuals concerned they are hurting a loved one

- ✓ If you feel yourself getting angry or frustrated, try to remove yourself from the situation by leaving the room or stepping outside.
- ✓ Practice calming techniques such as counting to ten.
- ✓ Talk to a trusted person such as a friend, religious leader, or coworker, and, if necessary, seek help from local health or counselling services.
- ✓ Eliminate or reduce your alcohol consumption as much as possible.
- ✓ Demonstrate kindness and patience in words and actions.

Resources & Tools

- **Tool:** [BETTER MAN](#) (University of Melbourne, & No to Violence)



- **Tool:** [How to deal with domestic violence: A self-help booklet for men who want to change](#) (Freedom from Fear)
- **Tool:** [Self-assessment: What kind of abusive man am I?](#) (Men's Resource Center of West Michigan)
- **Tool:** [Violence against women during COVID-19](#) (WHO)



For workplace management and leadership

- ✓ Upskill your human resources (HR) staff with virtual training on taking a survivor-centered approach to handling disclosure of violence, including sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and domestic violence.
- ✓ Share resources with your team, such as a hotline number, contact information for local shelters or support organizations, and digital tools.
- ✓ Continue paying all workers so they have the economic resources to get out if necessary.
- ✓ Consider training male and female employees about domestic violence (e.g., recognizing what it is and its impacts, how to prevent violence).

Resources & Tools

- **Learning resource:** [Resources for employers](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)
- **Training:** [Virtual training exercise: A supervisor responds to an employee's experience of domestic violence](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)
- **Training:** [Virtual training exercise: A supervisor responds to an employee who experienced sexual assault](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)
- **Case study:** [Ending violence is our business: Workplace responses to intimate partner violence in Asia and the Pacific](#) (UN Women)
- **Training:** [Handbook: Addressing violence and harassment against women in the world of work](#) (UN Women)
- **Guidelines:** [How to revamp your harassment prevention program](#) (SHRM)

Together, we can do this.

Believe survivors of violence, and let's fight for their fundamental right to safety.

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This brief was written by Lisa Taylor, Grace Petrie, and Jessica Menon at Equilo. Emily McKinney led design and layout.

This practical guidance is part of an ongoing series on gender equality, social inclusion, and COVID-19. Equilo uses the most recent data, validated research, and technology to deliver analysis and action planning for pressing international development and workplace equality issues. If you are interested in tailored deliverables for tackling gender equality and social inclusion in your organization's COVID-19 response or other work, contact us at hello@equilo.org.

