

When Sheltering in Place is Not Safe: Nowhere to Hide

Keith Klostermann^{1*}, Theresa Mignone¹, and Emma Papagni¹

¹Department of Counseling & Clinical Psychology, Medaille College, 18 Agassiz Circle, Buffalo, NY 14214, USA

***Corresponding author:** Klostermann K, Department of Counseling & Clinical Psychology, Medaille College, 18 Agassiz Circle, Buffalo, NY 14214, USA; 716-880-2559; [kck35\[at\]Medaille.edu](mailto:kck35[at]Medaille.edu)

Received: April 16, 2020; **Accepted:** April 27, 2020; **Published:** May 03, 2020



All articles published by Gnoscience are Open Access under the Creative Commons Attribution License BY-NC-SA.

Abstract

Given the recent pandemic, millions of people around the world have been advised to not leave the house unless absolutely necessary. As a result, people have been ordered to stay home from work and schools have transitioned from traditional classrooms to online learning platforms in an effort to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. Politicians and celebrities alike have stressed the need to stay home as means to keep individuals and others safe and emphasized the possible benefits of more family time, increased sleep, and binge watching your favorite television shows as incentives for staying home. However, for some, being forced to stay home and spending more time with the family could present its own challenges and risks such as exacerbating already existing mental health challenges, and creating new mental health challenges. In particular, victims of intimate partner violence as well as any children living in these homes could be placed at increased risk because of increased contact with their abuser and limited options for escape.

1. Description

Recent statistics from around the world reveal an alarming increase in reports of domestic violence since the start of the coronavirus lockdown. As noted by United Nations Chief, António Guterres, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a “horrifying global surge in domestic violence directed towards women and girls, linked to lockdowns imposed by governments”¹. In the United Kingdom, the largest domestic abuse treatment provider (i.e., Refuge) reported a 700% increase in calls to its helpline in a single day. According to recent data reported from the United Nations, the number of calls to domestic violence hotlines in both Lebanon and Malaysia have doubled compared to the previous year. In China’s Hubei province, domestic violence reports to police more than tripled in one county during the lockdown in February. In Australia, Google reports a 75% increase in online searches for help with domestic violence and in Turkey, rates of femicide have risen sharply since a stay-at-home order was issued on March 11.

¹[Online]. Available: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>

Citation: Klostermann K, Mignone T, and Papagni E. When sheltering in place is not safe: Nowhere to hide. Ment Health Substance Abuse. 2020;1(1):102.

As a bit of context, domestic violence impacts millions of people each year. Results from the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) indicate about 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 10 men in the US have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of intimate partner violence-related impact [1]. Moreover, findings from the NIVS reveal over 43 million women and 38 million men experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime [1]. Among survivors of intimate partner physical aggression, over 40% of females and 14% of males experienced some form of physical injury related to the incident [2]. In extreme cases, IPV results in death with data from U.S. crime reports suggesting that approximately 1 in 6 of homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner [3]. Even more troubling, data from US crime reports also found that almost half of female homicide victims are killed by a current or former male partner [4].

In a recent interview with Time magazine, Katie Ray-Jones, CEO of the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported that perpetrators are using mandatory stay at home orders as a means of further isolating victims from their family and friends noting, "Perpetrators are threatening to throw to their victims out on the street so they get sick" and withholding financial resources and medical assistance².

Complicating matters further is that the normal sources of support may not be accessible as victims may not have access to technology that can keep them connected to supports and they may not feel comfortable staying with elderly parents out of risk of possibly exposing them to the virus. Moreover, travel restrictions may also limit the ability to access supportive friends and family.

The challenges presented by the coronavirus are diverse and many and extend beyond the disease itself. It's important to note that domestic violence is typically a behavior which is underreported so as alarming as these statistics are, they are likely far worse in reality. This commentary does not even consider the systemic implication on the psychosocial and emotional adjustment of children living in these homes – the long-term consequences are likely staggering. The needs of victims must be considered in service delivery discussions and how best to improve access to safety resources, regardless of the situation. We can do better.

²[Online]. Available: <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>

REFERENCES

- 1 Breiding MJ, Chen J, and Black MC. Intimate partner violence in the United States — 2010. GA: National Center for Injury Prevention, Atlanta; 2014.
2. Cooper A, and Smith EL. Homicide trends in the United States, 1980–2008. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington, D.C.: NCJ 236018 2011.
3. Petrosky E, Blair JM., Carter J. Betz, et al. Racial and Ethnic Differences in Homicides of Adult Women and the Role of Intimate Partner Violence - United States, 2003-2014. MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report. 2017;66(28):741–746.

4. Smith SG, Zhang X, and Basile KC, et al. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief—Updated Release. GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta; 2018.

Citation: Klostermann K, Mignone T, and Papagni E. When sheltering in place is not safe: Nowhere to hide. Ment Health Substance Abuse. 2020;1(1):102.