



## **An Unforeseen Side Effect of COVID-19: Domestic Violence**

By: Marcus Allen

Due to COVID-19, Americans across the country are living in locked down cities and are socially isolated from the masses. Many people, excluding the essential workers, are working from home, thereby spending the majority of their day confined to their homes. All this time at home has been directly correlated to a staggering rise in domestic violence. Marianne Hester, a Bristol University sociologist who studies abusive relationships, said, "Domestic violence goes up whenever families spend more time together, such as the Christmas and summer vacations." Often times, many families, especially in the inter-cities, live in small living quarters offering no room for privacy. The sheer lack of space, along with the required sheltering, increases the risk of domestic violence. This unexpected side effect of the virus is absolutely devastating, considering the government didn't adequately prepare for the circumstances this novel public health measure would create.

Josie Serrata, PhD, a research and evaluation consultant, stated, "We found social factors that put people more at risk for violence are reduced access to resources, increased stress due to job loss or strained finances, and disconnection from social support systems." All of these factors are aggrandized during this pandemic. People can't freely access all their resources with everything being closed. Also, many people are being furloughed leaving them without an immediate way to provide for

their families. This creates a lot of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. The stress is only increased with the separation from their social groups outside of their families like their friends or coworkers. Most domestic violence victims already experience social isolation at the hands of their abusers; therefore, the forced separation only intensifies the abuse.

Now, how can this be combatted in the midst of such a novel public health crisis? One resource is the National Domestic Violence Hotline, [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org); they can be reached both through phone call or chat. Their advocates are available 24/7 at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) in more than 200 languages. The live chat can also be accessed on the website, and it is a valuable option if he/she can't get away from their abuser due to the lockdown. Both options are completely anonymous. As a result, he/she will be more willing to be transparent. The advocates help victims come up with a safety plan whether in a relationship, leaving a relationship, or after a relationship. Please note that this hotline isn't a replacement for calling 911. If your life is in danger, call 911. The hotline provides tips and ways to protect and escape from the situation but does not replace law enforcement. In addition, to learn more about local emergency shelters and resources visit [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov), where they give various resources state by state.

The next pressing issue at hand is where he/she goes once leaving the abuser. This is a very nuanced situation considering everyone has a unique situation. The global climate makes this a stressful situation. Some places are now closed or completely full because of the coronavirus. For instance, "Connecticut's 227 licensed emergency beds for people fleeing domestic violence are now almost completely filled and 29 other victims are now being housed in hotels for their protection." With the overflow of different families at shelters, the risk of coronavirus spreading in such a space is very worrisome. With some shelters having to put families together on top of the existing crowding, the infection rate will only increase. Despite the crowding, it is necessary for some women and families to resort to that option. If one has to take this route, refer to the following website: [www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public). This site gives specific guidelines and protection tips for a plethora of different situations. Besides the shelter, churches and family/friends homes could be additional places to shelter in that may be less crowded during this pandemic.