



## National Task Force to End Sexual & Domestic Violence

### FAST FACTS:

## Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence are at Heightened Risk Now, and Will Remain So Long After the Current Crisis<sup>1</sup>

### Countries that Faced COVID-19 before the U.S. are Reporting a Surge in Domestic Violence in the Wake of the Virus.

- [The UN Secretary-General on April 5, 2020 called attention to a “horrifying surge in domestic violence”](#) related to responses to the virus and the economic impacts, and noted that in some countries, the number of women calling support services has doubled.
- [Countries reporting spikes include: India](#) (gender-based violence cases doubled in first week of restricted movement); [Turkey](#) (killing of women surged after government stay-at-home guidance); [South Africa](#) (almost 90,000 reports of gender-based violence in first week of lockdown); [Australia](#) (government reported 75% increase in online searches for support on domestic violence); [France](#) (police reported domestic violence rose 30%); [China](#) (domestic violence NGO in Beijing saw a surge in calls in February); [Spain](#) (emergency number for domestic violence received 18% more calls in first two weeks of lockdown); [Italy](#) (domestic violence reports rose soon after lockdown in early March); and [England](#) (domestic violence reports in some areas were up by 20% one week into lockdown).

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<sup>1</sup> See [Domestic Violence in the Context of COVID-19](#), Congressional Research Service, April 10, 2020. Additional examples of impacts on survivors and survivor-serving programs can be found in these articles: Amanda Taub, [A new Covid-19 crisis: Domestic abuse rises worldwide](#), *New York Times*, April 6, 2020; Marissa J. Lang, [Sheltering in peril](#), *Washington Post*, April 5, 2020; Casey Tolan, [Some cities see jumps in domestic violence during the pandemic](#), *CNN*, April 4, 2020; Sarah Fielding, [In quarantine with an abuser: surge in domestic violence reports linked to coronavirus](#), *The Guardian*, April 3, 2020; Anahita Mukherji, [South Asian Domestic Violence Survivors in Silicon Valley Grapple With COVID-19 Lockdown](#), *The Wire*, April 3, 2020; Ina Fried, [Increase in domestic violence feared during virus lockdown](#), *Axios*, April 2, 2020; Sara Dorn, [Domestic violence victims facing higher risks amid coronavirus quarantine](#), *New York Post*, March 28, 2020; Marissa J. Lang, [Domestic violence will increase during coronavirus quarantines and stay-at-home orders, experts warn](#), *Washington Post*, March 27, 2020; N. Jamiyla Chisholm, [COVID-19 Creates Added Danger for Women in Homes With Domestic Violence](#), *Colorlines*, March 27, 2020; Scottie Andrew, [Domestic violence victims, stuck at home, are at risk during coronavirus pandemic](#), *CNN*, March 27, 2020; Alisha Haridasani Gupta and Aviva Stahl, [For Abused Women, a Pandemic Lockdown Holds Dangers of Its Own](#), *The New York Times*, March 27, 2020; Tanya Selvaratnam, [Where Can Domestic Violence Victims Turn During Covid-19?](#), *The New York Times*, March 23, 2020; Daniella Silva, [Coronavirus isolation raises concerns for domestic violence survivors, experts say](#), *ABC News*, March 20, 2020; Mélissa Godin, [As Cities around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out](#), *Time Magazine*, March 18, 2020.

## Survivor-Serving Programs in States and Cities Across the U.S. Report Increased Demands for Help.

Some examples:

- [A survey by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence that yielded responses from over 600 programs](#) across the country found that **89%** need emergency stimulus funding to provide support and emergency assistance to survivors and **40%** have experienced an increase in demands since the onset of the public health crisis both in terms of new requests, and in terms of more direct and complicated requests from current clients, including because responding to survivors' medical and legal needs and become more complex and difficult. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and the budgets of many agencies have been hard-hit by cancellations of major annual fundraisers.
- **Minnesota:** Statewide crisis hotline reported a **25% increase** in calls in the first weekend after a stay-at-home order was put in place.
- **Louisiana:** Statewide coalition reported a **sharp increase** in calls to the hotline and requests for service at most of its domestic violence programs starting the week of March 30, 2020.
- **Washington, DC:** The city's largest domestic violence crisis intervention agency reports that the traffic on its response line **has doubled**.
- **New York City:** The city's domestic and sexual violence resource website reported a **250% increase** in daily traffic on the website between March 18 and April 5.

## Police and 911 Operators Nationwide Also Report an Uptick in Calls for Help.

*Mother Jones* identified 13 cities and counties that have reported increases in emergency calls to 911 or domestic violence hotlines over the past month. [CNN](#) reported that nine metropolitan police departments saw spikes in double-digit percentages of domestic violence cases in March when compared with case numbers from either March 2019 or earlier months of 2020.<sup>2</sup>

### ....But Calls to Police Always Underestimate Abuse, and Will Especially Undercount Abuse in this Crisis:

**In non-crisis times**, many survivors never report abuse to law enforcement for a multitude of reasons. Survivors hesitate to call the police on someone they know and love. They may have good reasons not to trust law enforcement or the criminal justice system based on prior negative personal or community

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<sup>2</sup> Examples include: **Seattle, WA** noted a 21% increase in domestic violence reports to police as local stay-at-home orders and the COVID-19 impact intensified; **San Antonio, TX** police reported a 21% increase in family violence calls, with 500 additional calls during the first three weeks in March when compared to the same timeframe in 2019; **Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC** reported a 16% increase in domestic violence calls, nearly 400 more calls, when compared to 2019; **Nassau County, NY** reported a 10% increase in domestic violence 911 calls since January 2020 when compared to 2019, leading to an announcement that it was opening a second domestic violence shelter; **Portland, OR** reported a 27% increase in domestic violence arrests during a 10-day period in mid-March when compared to the same timeframe in 2019. See also Rachel Bucchino, [Domestic violence cases surge amid stay-at-home orders](#), *The Hill*, April 13, 2020. This frequently updated [spreadsheet](#) documents increased calls to local law enforcement and hotlines during the pandemic.

experiences. Immigrant survivors may fear deportation consequences for abusers—or themselves—if they seek help from the authorities. A [survey by the National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) found that **up to 60% of survivors had reasons that kept them from calling the police**. One in three victims reported feeling less safe after contacting police. The [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) has found that only **half of domestic violence cases were reported to law enforcement**, though the true number is likely even lower.

**In this current crisis**, there are several ways in which measures to combat the pandemic create obstacles to victims accessing help, including:

- The closure of schools and workplaces leaves some survivors trapped in violent homes with nowhere to retreat and/or no access to the usual networks on which they would rely for support and protection if they did report abuse;
- Abiding by shelter-in-place guidance means that some survivors cannot make calls to hotlines or to police without being overheard by their abuser;
- News stories may leave victims with the false impression and fear that police are not responding to calls, courts are closed, and shelters are full or unavailable.
- Additionally, news stories about the spread of the COVID virus in jails may leave victims fearful that their abuser could contract it, if arrested.<sup>3</sup>

### **Coercive and Controlling Tactics Routinely Used By Abusers Have Special Force and Terror Now.**

The majority of victims of domestic violence are subjected to [financial abuse](#), which is exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic because many victims will lose their jobs or be unable to find work. Perpetrators often act with impunity, increasing their abusive behavior because they think victims cannot leave, or, will have to return to a violent home to avoid homelessness. With minimal access to paid time off or unemployment insurance, many survivors will be dependent on an abusive partner for housing and support.

Immigrant survivors are particularly vulnerable: even in non-crisis times they may lack access to many safety-net benefits due to limited eligibility rules. At this time in particular, early COVID relief bills passed by Congress did not ensure that access to COVID testing and care would be universally covered under Medicaid, nor that direct cash payments would be provided to all taxpayers, regardless of immigration status.

Some other examples of abusers' tactics manipulating pandemic dynamics and fears include:

- Preventing survivors from seeking medical care or COVID-19 testing;
- Preventing survivors from leaving the home by instilling fear of contracting/exposing the household to COVID-19;
- Threats of deportation to immigrant survivors;

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/01/rikers-island-jail-coronavirus-public-health-disaster>

- Violations, or threats to violate, protective orders and/or custody orders, or to put children at risk of COVID-19 infection while courts are closed or struggling to administer virtual proceedings in certain types of cases;

### **An Increase in Reports of Domestic Violence Routinely *Follows* Any Large Scale Disaster**

Calls to hotlines and requests for shelter and assistance surge after the disaster recedes and people can safely leave their homes. The World Health Organization cites a [consistent rise in interpersonal violence](#) incidents following a natural disaster, and numerous other similar reports about natural or other large-scale disasters underscore this finding.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Other documentation of the rise in requests for assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as hurricanes, oil spills and blizzards, include: Andrea Gonzalez-Ramirez, [After Hurricane Maria a hidden crisis of violence against women in Puerto Rico](#), *Refinery29*, September 19, 2019; Maya Salam, [Amid hurricane chaos, domestic abuse victims risk being overlooked](#), *The New York Times*, September 17, 2017; Sarah Friedman, Natural disasters and domestic violence may have an alarming connection, *Bustle*, August 29, 2017; Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, [Louisiana Domestic Violence Programs Mark Grim Anniversary - BP Oil Spill One Year Later](#), April 13, 2011; Rosaline Houghton et al., [“If There Was a Dire Emergency, We Never Would Have Been Able to Get in There”: Domestic Violence Reporting and Disasters](#), *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, August 2010; Avis Jones-DeWeever, [Women in the Wake of the Storm: Examining the Post-Katrina Realities of the Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast](#), *Institute for Women’s Policy Research*, 2008; Helga West, [Victims of Violence in Times of Emergency or Disaster](#), July 2006; Lin Chew and Kavita Ramdas, [Caught in the Storm: The Impact of Natural Disasters on Women](#), *The Global Fund for Women*, December 2005.