

# Domestic Violence against Women and COVID-19

Subjects: Womens Studies

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Domestic violence against women is defined as harmful behavior that occurs within a home and it involves aggressive and violent conduct towards women. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the restrictions imposed to combat the pandemic (lockdowns, staying at home, isolation), domestic violence against women has increased worldwide. The current entry presents existing knowledge and discusses issues important for public awareness.

Keywords: domestic violence ; violence against women ; COVID-19 ; pandemic ; lockdown

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According to Carl Rogers, "The strongest force of our universe is not overriding power, but love" <sup>[1]</sup> (p. 204). Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon <sup>[2]</sup>. Unfortunately, domestic violence has existed since the dawn of human civilization. Additionally, even today, in some cultures and belief systems, and regardless of the existing human rights, domestic violence within families or towards women, is still encountered <sup>[2]</sup>. It has been reported that 1 in 3 women have been subject to gender-based violence by their intimate partner or by a non-partner at least once in their lifetime in different regions <sup>[3]</sup>.

Domestic violence against women is not a new phenomenon <sup>[4]</sup>. It is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that many have attempted to explain throughout the years <sup>[5][6][7]</sup>. It has been influenced mainly by the views of Christian and Judeo cultural and ideological beliefs, law, and Greek philosophy that purported patriarchy—male-dominant behavior which views the male as a superior figure <sup>[8]</sup>. During the Roman era and under Roman law, a woman was considered to be the property of her husband to do with as he pleased (abuse, beat or kill) as a way of demonstrating who was in control in the home <sup>[9]</sup>. According to some religions, during the 15th century the husband had the right to judge a woman for the way she behaved and acted <sup>[9]</sup>. At this stage, domestic violence against women was not evident or yet defined, as a man beating his wife was considered to be an indication that he cared about his wife's soul <sup>[9]</sup>. During the 15th century in the United Kingdom, a man had the right to be abusive towards his wife in order to maintain discipline in his home and family <sup>[9]</sup>. All these stereotypes and beliefs were carried over from generation to generation for centuries, making it extremely difficult to prevent these views on gender-based violence <sup>[5][10]</sup>. Colonial (patriarchal) institutions benefited by the inequality between genders and colonization (power, control, and patronage) as men were further empowered to abuse women <sup>[10][11]</sup>. This brutality broke down the confidence of many women, and their sense of self, and as a result women were victimized for years <sup>[10]</sup>. During the 16th and 17th century, women who disobeyed their husbands were still punished <sup>[8][11]</sup>. For instance, during 1711–1713 in London, it was reported that a man named Antony Pitts beat, kicked, and locked-up his wife, because she disobeyed his order <sup>[8]</sup>.

A new era has begun since 1960, whereby domestic violence against women became more well-known to the media as more cases started being revealed <sup>[12]</sup>. Additionally, starting in the 1970s, in some States, men were banned from having the right to beat their wife as a stricter enforcement of laws against violence was observed <sup>[12][13]</sup>. In the 1970s, 2 to 4 million women still reported abusive behavior by their partners annually <sup>[9]</sup>. A major change in communities and in many societies began after 1970, when the Women's Movement raised awareness on domestic violence against women. The definition of domestic violence changed form, and laws appeared to be more evident in theory and practice after 1973 <sup>[14]</sup>. The term "domestic violence", after the Women's Movement, was first used in 1973 without yet being clearly defined <sup>[14]</sup>.

Between 1975 and 1978, 170 shelters for abused women opened worldwide <sup>[9][14]</sup>. In the U.S. in 1978, more than 300 shelters were established to prevent domestic violence against women. Finally, during the end of the 1970s, domestic violence was defined and considered as a crime as many interventions were justified by the Criminal Justice System of the USA <sup>[15]</sup>. After the 1980s, emergency hotline services also became more visible, as well as legislation reform, new government programs and policies, and emergency support for women who were victims of domestic violence <sup>[9]</sup>. Since 1980, more legislation was enacted in different countries demonstrating the massive need to prevent domestic violence against women, a continuous battle that requires further progress <sup>[12]</sup>. During the 19th century, violence against women from their partners began to be understood <sup>[16]</sup>. As a social phenomenon, it began to be recognized. Sometimes it was implicitly accepted, and at other times, this phenomenon was ignored completely.

Laws against domestic violence and police interventions became a reality during the 20th century; in fact, convictions and arrests started taking place <sup>[16]</sup>. It is important to note, however, that since incidents of domestic violence are not always physical and apparent there are reported cases that are not convicted. For instance, the reporting of shouting in a neighbor's house might not be recorded as a notifiable crime <sup>[17]</sup>.

However, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, statistical data shows a rapid increase in cases of domestic violence against women <sup>[18]</sup>. This mainly stemmed from the implications of the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, such as staying at home and quarantining <sup>[19]</sup>. Staying at home during COVID-19 is a method used for safety, but not every home felt safe. Domestic violence is a social phenomenon that pervades all cultures, countries, and societies, regardless of demographics, traditions, socioeconomic class, education, and health. Nowadays, it is recognized as a direct or indirect crime. This phenomenon seems to affect the entirety of society <sup>[20]</sup>. This entry will present an overview of domestic violence in crisis situations and domestic violence's association with COVID-19. It will mainly outline the types of domestic violence, the cycle of abuse, the role of the victim and perpetrator, as well as the effects, after-effects, challenges, and interventions.

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