

Domestic Violence in the Time of COVID-19

Right now, we're undergoing a once-in-a-century (for most of us, a once-in-a-lifetime) pandemic, an international health crisis that has caused unprecedented fear and pain for many people and nations, has upended our norms, and is restructuring our current reality. In such uncertain times, it's imperative to listen to the experts and follow their instructions to ensure that we emerge safe, healthy, and alive—with our loved ones just as intact. Above all, it's important to face uncertainty and fear with the only thing that is guaranteed to make today and tomorrow better: loving kindness toward ourselves, our loved ones, and society as a whole.

This three-article series—examining **Child Abuse, Suicide, and Domestic Violence**—shares the expert insight of mental health professional Dr. Linda Miles, with content primarily drawn from an interview conducted by Francine Bianco Tax. These articles are directed to anyone and everyone who is struggling with such issues that were initiated or amplified by COVID-19. These articles are meant to raise awareness of these issues, and to provide resources, hope, and guidance toward overcoming them.

There is always a way out. There is always the possibility of a brighter future. There is always a helping hand. Look and reach for it. Help is only a phone call away.

[Domestic Abuse Hotline](#): 800-799-SAFE (7233)

What can you do if you are suffering from domestic violence?

Or perhaps someone you know—a family member, friend, neighbor, or community member—suffers from domestic abuse. The likelihood of this being someone's reality has sadly increased over the past few months.

For some people, “lockdown” equals misery.

COVID-19 is an unconventional virus that has caused unconventional challenges. Many nations throughout the world, the U.S. amongst them on a state-by-state basis, have issued stay-at-home orders and lock-down mandates in efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus and flatten the curve. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the international number of daily reported coronavirus cases is finally decreasing after more than 3 months of ravaging Europe. The situation remains fragile, but **healthcare experts across the globe agree that stay-at-home measures have indeed helped to minimize the virus' spread.**

For some—like for those who are healthy, live comfortably at home, have the ability to work from home, and are in good company—this stay-at-home policy can be a time of peace, calm, joy, and family-bonding. For others—as for people whose homes are anything *but* a sanctuary—staying at home is closer to a prison sentence. It brings sadness, danger, and abuse.

It can be life-threatening.

For some, a stay-at-home policy can be a time of peace, calm, joy, and family-bonding. For others, staying at home is closer to a prison sentence. It brings sadness, danger, and abuse. And it can be life-threatening.

A sad and obvious fact: domestic violence existed around the world long before COVID-19. But today's circumstances make it worse. COVID-19 has caused major economic devastation, disconnected many from their communities and support systems, mitigated or terminated people's jobs and sources of income, and caused widespread uncertainty, panic, fear, and stress.¹

An article by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration notes that these **conditions may stimulate violence in households where it didn't exist, or worsen violence in homes where domestic abuse is already happening**. Even before COVID-19, the statistics are daunting. It's estimated that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience intimate partner sexual violence (which can result in physical injury or death), physical violence, or stalking in their lifetime. Tens of millions of women and men have or will experience psychological aggression by an intimate partner. And U.S. crime reports suggest that 1 in 6 homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner.²

Today, the numbers are getting worse.

The WHO notes that, **in the time of COVID-19, many countries have reported a spike in domestic violence**—including, in some countries, a 60% increase in emergency calls by women subjected to their partner's violence (comparing April 2019 with April 2020).³ One expert warns that there could be an extra 31 million cases of gender-based violence if lockdowns are to continue for six months.

Why is this?

¹ <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/social-distancing-domestic-violence.pdf>

² <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/social-distancing-domestic-violence.pdf>

³ <https://unric.org/en/who-warns-of-surge-of-domestic-violence-as-covid-19-cases-decrease-in-europe/>

We might all be bombarded by uncertainty, fear, and stress during this time, but some people succumb to unhealthy coping mechanisms. For example, because of COVID-19, maybe your partner is now jobless. Sources of income are drying out or suddenly nonexistent. In self-isolation, that person feels angry, lonely, and depressed. They might “self-medicate” or “cope” by consuming more alcohol, doing drugs, and/or losing their temper and self-control. Addictions may form or worsen. Statistically, men have a harder time admitting that they have a problem and do not usually seek mental health assistance.

Another problem is a missing safety net. Domestic violence patients—including children—usually end up in emergency rooms. Doctors and other hospital staff often have been trained to notice the signs of domestic abuse. The same applies in other settings—abused kids might get noticed at school, abused women might get noticed at social gatherings with friends or community members. Now, however, with citizens urged to “stay home” at all costs, these domestic violence cases are unseen and unreported. Those safety nets are gone.

Yet there are others, still.

Here is the good news.

In the words of WHO’s Regional Director Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge: “Violence is preventable, not inevitable.”⁴ Violence isn’t a “family affair” or a private matter. If you suffer from domestic violence, reach out. If you see someone else suffering, speak up.

“Violence is preventable, not inevitable.” –Dr. Hans Kluge

Realize you’re not alone (or to let that person know that he or she is not alone).
Realize that this is a situation you can and must emerge from.

COVID-19 won’t go away any time soon or on its own. Neither will domestic abuse. This is a long-term situation. If you’re isolated, you’re at risk. But you’re not alone.

You are not alone.

Again: **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

If you’re suffering, you need a support system and you need to be heard. If you are worried about someone suffering, you need to reach out and speak up. Many credible support groups, helplines, hotlines, tele-health lines, and reputable online counseling services are all available and they can help. There is so much literature out there to assist people, and so much information is available online.

⁴ <https://unric.org/en/who-warns-of-surge-of-domestic-violence-as-covid-19-cases-decrease-in-europe/>

Here are some excellent resources:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline
[Staying Safe During COVID-19](#)
Phone Number: **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**
- The National Network to Eliminate Domestic Violence
[Resources on the Response to the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Department of Justice, Office of Women’s Health
[Local Resources on Domestic Violence](#)
- Prevent Child Abuse America
[Coronavirus Resources & Tips for Parents, Children & Others](#)
- [Stronghearts Native Helpline](#)
1-844-762-8483
- Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) offers a session on Addiction Recovery and Intimate Violence <https://healthknowledge.org/course/view.php?id=18>: This is a one hour self-paced course and is based on industry awareness about Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).
- The National Hispanic and Latino ATTC recorded a webinar this February on the “Intersection of Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence and Addiction” <https://attcnetwork.org/centers/national-hispanic-and-latino-attc/product/intersectiondomestic-violence-or-intimate>
- Substance Abuse Treatment and Domestic Violence - Quick Guide for Clinicians Based on TIP 25 - <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Substance-Abuse-Treatment-andDomestic-Violence/sma15-3583>
- The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health, a SAMHSA partner, recently released: Supporting Survivors’ Access to Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health Services During the COVID-19 Emergency <http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/2020/03/covid-19-resources-foradvocates/>⁵

A crisis is a time of danger—yet it’s also a time of opportunity. This is the time for you to act—doing so could save your life, your child’s, or someone else’s. Instead of being frozen with terror and weighed by remorse or sorrow, tell yourself that you are grateful to the coronavirus for shedding light on a dangerous underlying

⁵ <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/social-distancing-domestic-violence.pdf>

problem. See opportunity as collateral beauty. Seize the opportunity it gives you to take control and get help *now*.

Reach out, get help, get out.

**This is the time for you to act—doing so could save your life,
your child's, or someone else's.**

ABOUT DR. MILES

Dr. Linda Miles is a leading psychotherapist, crisis therapist, award-winning author, and relationship expert. She has studied and worked in the field of counseling psychology for over 35 years and focuses on mindfulness, stress reduction, mental health, and relationships. She has published several books on relationships and mindfulness (the latest: *Change Your Story, Change Your Brain*) as well as articles in the Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, Reuters and Miami Herald, and has appeared as a guest expert on numerous national TV shows including CNN, Fox News, ABC, and NBC. You can find additional resources on Dr. Miles' Facebook page, Mindfulness Rewrites, or at www.DrLindaMiles.com.