

Background Information

Domestic violence is a type of abuse that occurs in the victim's domestic circle, inflicted by someone related through blood or intimacy. There is typically a close relationship and a large power gap between the oppressor and the victim, resulting in physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse. This includes child abuse, senior abuse, honor-based violence (ex. female genital mutilation, forced marriage) and violence inflicted by a current or former intimate partner. Around the world, 1 in 3 women are subjected to domestic violence during their lifetime and the pandemic has only caused it to intensify. According to The Guardian, the statistics show that 90% of the causes of domestic violence in this period are related to the Covid-19 epidemic. This increase is due to:

- social isolation, providing an ideal environment for the abuser to assert control;
- increased stress, provoking long-term elevated aggression;
- economic and financial difficulty;
- rise in alcohol abuse.

Domestic violence helplines and shelters across the world have registered rising calls for help, for example helplines in Singapore and Cyprus have reported an increase by more than 30%. Domestic violence shelters were not prepared and, in many cases, do not offer sufficient capacity.

Ways in which the pandemic prevents victims from seeking help:

- Restricted movement – victims cannot leave their domestic area and seek shelter
- Restricted communication – prevalent especially in third world countries
- Lack of resources (services, domestic shelter capacity)
- Insufficient government aid and action – 1 in 4 countries have no laws specifically protecting women from domestic violence

UN Involvement

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has urged governments to include the protection of women in their response to the deadly novel coronavirus pandemic. Describing the rise in domestic violence as "horrifying," he urged all governments "to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19." Guterres called for setting up emergency warning systems in pharmacies and groceries, and for safe ways "for women to seek support, without alerting their abusers."

Overall, domestic violence has been a recurring topic in numerous resolutions. It is important to note that these resolutions have no binding legal authority, however they do set forth international standards and initiate political, economic and humanitarian actions. The *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* is considered as the most important resolution addressing this issue, passed in 1993. The DEVAW establishes the most comprehensive set of standards in international law for the protection of women against sexual and gender-based violence.

Questions to Consider

- In what way is domestic abuse viewed and resolved in my country? Are there any laws in place? What is the legal procedure?
- What are the possible ways to fund the effort in my country and on the global scale?
- How to provide and boost helplines, psychosocial support and online counselling? How to make them easily accessible for those in need during the pandemic?
- What are the necessary steps in the fight against domestic abuse? How can we maximize their result?
- How to encourage victims in situations identified as domestic abuse to seek help?
- How does domestic abuse impact my country as well as the world, socially and economically?
- How to provide more awareness to the public on the 'shadow pandemic'?

Helpful Resources and Links

UN statements:

<https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic#notes>

UN resolutions and involvement:

https://www.stopvaw.org/domestic_violence_un_resolutions#:~:text=In%202004%20C%20the%20UN%20General%20Assembly%20also%20specifically,58%2F147%20C%20entitled%20%E2%80%9CElimination%20of%20domestic%20violence%20a%20gainst%20women.%E2%80%9D

News articles:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

Other:

<https://www.government.nl/topics/domestic-violence>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/making-sense-chaos/202005/why-the-increase-in-domestic-violence-during-covid-19>