

# Mitigating the Implications of Coronavirus Pandemic on Families

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**The mitigation strategies and policies enacted to reduce the community transmission of COVID-19, although necessary, may have placed victims of interpersonal violence at risk.**

Nationwide, stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders have been issued in response to COVID-19 in order to facilitate physical distancing practices. Additionally, schools, often a safe refuge for many children with an abusive parent or caregiver, have gone to virtual learning to mitigate student risk. Stay-at-home orders can remove victims from valuable resources (e.g., employment shelters, emergency medical care and reproductive health services, school breakfast and lunches for children) and loved ones, and place them at a higher risk of subsequent victimization. Fortunately, the \$2 trillion stimulus bill earmarked increased funding for domestic violence shelters and hotlines, but this may not be enough. **As the nation continues to think about how to manage COVID-19, discussions should also consider victims of interpersonal violence.**

**Isolation from support resources and social networks removes a key source of protection for potential victims.** Lack of connection to teachers, peers, or coworkers added to the stresses due to social disruption and economic uncertainty may cause perpetrators to exert further control and abuse. Some abusers, for example, are reported to use the risk of infection and shelter-in-place orders as abuse tactics (e.g., restrict partners from seeing family members, denying children's basic needs).

**Children or teenagers in households with domestic violence are at higher risk for mental health and behavioral problems.** Children with abusive parents or caregivers often struggle with depression and anxiety and are at higher risk for mental health and behavioral problems, including substance abuse. Youth who witness domestic violence often suffer similar social and emotional consequences as youth who are direct victims of violence in the home (See CDC's summary: Violence Prevention for [children](#) and Intimate Partner Violence for [adults](#)).

**Additional assurances and resources are needed for immigrant survivors of abuse and other populations who may face additional barriers to seeking help.** Studies show that immigrant women are less likely to seek help because of fear of themselves or family members facing legal consequences if their immigrant status is disclosed (Zadnik et al., 2016). Although the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ([CARES Act](#)) offers some necessary support for survivors of abuse, additional consideration for reducing barriers to seeking help is needed.

**Digitalized evidence-based programs (EBPs) for youth could be a solution by policymakers to support providers' need for adapting to digital demands.** Evidence-based programs for youth, such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multisystemic Therapy (MST) are highly effective intensive, in-home, family-focused programs that can be adapted to work with families where domestic violence has been a concern. Some adaptations could be conducting initial meetings for MST through video-supported platforms, encouraging video connections with families, forming online training, and emphasizing the need to help connect families to community resources as part of their overarching engagement strategies.

Examples of the successful adaptations of [MST programs in Connecticut](#): (i) MST Intimate Partner Violence (MST-IPV) is an adaption of standard MST specifically for families where IPV was identified as either the presenting problem or a recurring issue in the home as part of the overall 'symptom pattern, and (ii) MST Child Abuse and Neglect (MST-CAN) is an adaptation which has a much longer history of development with evidence behind it;

thus it is in the replication phase. With policymakers' support for providers' needs for adapting to digital demands, such adaptations for dealing with families who present with child welfare concerns and/or a history of domestic violence (often including substance abuse, criminal behavior) could be scaled up.

**Community organizations and shelters may offer alternative and tailored forms of support for survivors of abuse within times of public health epidemics.** Community organizations have important roles not only in preventing, identifying, and responding to interpersonal violence but also in assisting survivors in recovering from the physical, psychological, social and economic impacts of domestic violence. Survivors of abuse, however, may not be able to call hotlines (e.g., [alarming low number calls in MO](#)) and seek help due to abusers' restrictions, threats, and fear of virus exposure. Both service provision and resource allocations to service providers should consider the changing needs of abuse victims in an evolving national crisis. Developing a pandemic response protocol that is tailored to the COVID-19 containment strategies and to victim profiles in a given district would allow community organizations to leverage existing resources.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline has a number of resources for people in each district. The featured brief in this newsletter, *Supporting Families Facing Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, summarizes concerns and presents some recommendations for policymakers on how to help survivors navigate physical distancing while staying connected with formal and informal supports.

#### References

Zadnik, E., Sabina, C., & Cuevas, C. A. (2016). Violence against Latinas: The effects of undocumented status on rates of victimization and help-seeking. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*, 1141–1153.

#### Additional Resources

- [National Domestic Violence Hotline post on Staying Safe during COVID-19](#)
- Interviews by Dr. Apryl Alexander, Graduate School of Professional Psychology, University of Denver
  - [America's COVID-19 recovery may not be similar to what is happening in China](#)
  - [Stay-at-home orders could serve as an important test for the future of remote working](#)
- Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living at UT Austin School of Public Health Webinar Series
  - [COVID-19 Fighting a Fire Blindfolded Webinar \(YouTube link\)](#)
  - [Contaminated Air: The Invisible Threat to Patients and Healthcare Workers](#)
- [Building Blocks Resilience Briefs](#) by Family Resiliency Center at the University of Illinois are posted every Wednesday.
- [This article by Dr. Patricia Watson](#) notes concerns about the increased risk for domestic violence, substance abuse and economic hardship that negatively impact families during pandemics
- [NPR news](#) about domestic violence and child abuse amid COVID-19
- [Dr. Bart Klika's paper](#) in the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal (CASWJ)* on the economic burden of child maltreatment in each state (using NCANDS 2018 data)