

NO MORE

violence against women

The current pandemic crisis has made those who are in vulnerable and dangerous situations even more at risk. The fear is that the current lockdown may see a rise in the numbers of domestic violence cases.

What follows is information collated from various helpful resources and contact information should anyone require it. I have also provided a brief account of why I am involved in dealing with domestic violence.

We are in unprecedented times with COVID-19 and its impact on provision of specialist domestic abuse services. Under normal circumstances, spending time indoors is often unsafe for those experiencing domestic abuse, and other forms of violence against women and girls. However, during lockdown the danger to women is exacerbated. Social distancing and self-isolation will be used by perpetrators as a tool of coercive and controlling behaviour and will shut down routes to safety and support.

In homes that are already prone to abuse, a COVID-19 lockdown creates a living nightmare. That is partly because of the all-too-obvious reason that it is hard to run away. But it is also due to a more subtle problem: the mental cage. Abusers typically control their victims not just through physical violence but by making them think that abuse is justified, if not inevitable. Sometimes they deliberately isolate victims from others, controlling their communications; other times they use emotional abuse to make the victim feel ashamed. In an abusive situation, the abnormal gradually starts to seem normal as a wider perspective slides away, to a degree that detached outsiders can struggle to understand. COVID-19 cruelly reinforces this. Today nothing seems entirely “normal”. Social distancing is required. Many people feel emotionally drained. For abuse victims, it thus seems doubly hard to flee; breaking free requires extraordinary amounts of emotional and physical energy — not to mention money.

The impact of self-isolation will also have a direct impact on specialist services who are already operating in an extremely challenging funding climate.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic abuse was a significant concern in the UK. Statistics show that more women and girls are abused and at risk during a pandemic or major disaster, and the UK is following that pattern.

On 6th April, traffic to the national domestic abuse website run by the charity Refuge **increased by 700%** compared to the previous day, and calls and contacts to their helpline were **49% higher** in the week up to 15th April than the average before the pandemic. That's around 400 calls per day.

If you, or someone you know, are experiencing abuse, please visit the **Women's Aid** information page, where you can access support from national online and telephone services or connect with a local service <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

Or try the Freephone 24h **National Domestic Abuse** Helpline, run by Refuge, on 0808 2000 247 or visit www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

In an emergency, call 999.

Jeannie's Story

I became a victim of domestic abuse at the age of fifteen and this went on for 10 years until I was put in intensive care and then managed to get away. Having an uncaring mother who told us we had to leave at 15, I met an older, wealthy man who showed me attention and moved me in with him and his mother. The abuse started straight away and he threw me downstairs when I was about seven months pregnant and I gave birth to a baby girl. I called her Hope and she was buried in a grave with a lady who had no family.

This abuse was before safe houses and at a time when police were powerless to intervene. It was either a case of my going into a hostel and my children going into care which wasn't an option so I stayed. Thankfully there is more help available today.

Jeannie Bloomfield, Walsham Le Willows WI