

Data show spike in family violence after stay-at-home orders

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Researchers at The University of Texas at Dallas have found that incidents of domestic violence in Dallas increased in the three weeks after local stay-at-home orders went into effect in response to the

coronavirus pandemic, then they gradually declined.

In the study, published online in the *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, researchers evaluated daily counts of [domestic-violence](#) incidents reported to the Dallas Police Department from 83 days before Dallas County enacted its order on March 24, through the 35 days after the order. Incidents included abuse or assault against a family member, current or previous household member, or a current or past dating partner.

"The data show a 12.5% jump in domestic violence incidents in the three-week period after the Dallas County stay-at-home order went into effect compared to the three-week period before the order took effect," said Dr. Alex Piquero, co-author of the study and the Ashbel Smith Professor of criminology in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences. "Our study shows there may be unintended consequences to such orders—policies that were designed to keep us safe in one sense may inadvertently harm us in another."

The researchers cautioned that their analysis does not necessarily indicate the stay-at-home orders were the sole cause of the short-term spike in incidents. The study also showed an upward trend in domestic violence just prior to the orders when businesses started closing, leading them to believe there might be additional factors driving the brief uptick in numbers.

"The short-term increase could be due to the fact that people were already changing their routines in light of other public-health warnings," said co-author Dr. Nicole Leeper Piquero, Robert E. Holmes Jr. Professor of Criminology and associate vice president for research development in the Office of Research at UT Dallas. "It's also possible the increase could be associated with people working more from home, furloughs, finances or layoffs."

The researchers noted that perpetrators and victims confined in close quarters for long periods of time might reinforce negative behaviors and emotional responses, such as anger and violence. This dynamic can also intensify common forms of partner abuse, including forcing isolation from friends and family, preventing the victim from working or attending school, and generally controlling the victim's associations, movements and activities.

"Stay-at-home orders may compound the threat for domestic-violence victimization by trapping at-risk partners at home with their abusers and disrupting access to lifelines and social services," said Chelsey Narvey, a doctoral student in criminology and co-author of the study. "This includes access to support measures such as domestic-violence hotlines and shelters that are typically available to victims."

While the study does not indicate a lasting increase in domestic violence associated with the stay-at-home orders, Dr. Alex Piquero said more research is needed.

"We will likely be living with COVID-19 for quite some time," said Piquero, who also serves as director of social impact research in the Office of Research at UT Dallas. "So it is incumbent on the community of scholars to continue to track the disease's adverse effects on persons throughout the world."

More information: Alex R. Piquero et al. Staying Home, Staying Safe? A Short-Term Analysis of COVID-19 on Dallas Domestic Violence, *American Journal of Criminal Justice* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s12103-020-09531-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09531-7)

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