

## Q&A: Expert discusses this year's surge in domestic violence

August 18 2020, by Matt Reeder

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Violence against women often happens in secrecy and isolation, something that has been exacerbated by the global pandemic. Credit: Kat Jayne from Pexels

Reports of an increase in domestic violence in Canada and around the world since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic have been yet another bleak development in an already challenging year. The United Nations calls the situation a "[shadow pandemic](#)," estimating that cases of

domestic violence could rise by [as much as 20 percent this year](#).

Domestic violence can be a challenging problem to tackle in the best of times, but lockdowns and economic upheaval add even more barriers for victims—predominantly [women](#) and children—looking to overcome it.

Nancy Ross is an assistant professor in Dalhousie's School of Social Work and studies interpersonal violence, addictions, childhood trauma and related topics. We spoke to her about the factors behind this year's increase and how the pandemic has impacted individuals' ability to seek help.

## **What are some of the key factors influencing the increase in domestic violence this year?**

We are hearing reports of increased rates of [domestic violence](#) during the pandemic and this is largely a result of the imposed isolation and limited opportunities to leave the home.

Global experts document direct and indirect pathways linking pandemics and violence against women and children that include economic insecurity and poverty related stress; quarantines and [social isolation](#); reduced health service availability and access to first responders; and an inability of women to temporarily escape abusive partners.

## **How do these factors vary around the world?**

Economic insecurity and poverty related stress is heightened in [low-income countries](#) and in countries where women do not have equal access to the social determinants of health or where the rule of law is compromised. And a lot of times in the countries where women may not work outside the home so much because of religious reasons or

patriarchal structures, their vulnerability is heightened.

Women of color or women that have economic insecurity or ability challenges are at heightened risk. And that happens all around the world. That increases their vulnerability for sure. It's a global phenomenon. I know some countries are reporting more than others, but it seems to be consistent around the globe.

## **Statistics Canada data shows that six in 10 spousal homicides in Canada are preceded by a history of family violence. What is the latest guidance for those seeking help before a situation worsens?**

It's basically the same advice that would be given without the pandemic but recognizing the impact of restrictions. What I think might be happening with loosening [of restrictions now] is more people are feeling freedom to report the violence they are experiencing. A lot of people have been isolated in their homes, experiencing more surveillance. I think with the loosening of restrictions, there's a little less of that surveillance, so people might have time, space and freedom to reach out more.

The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability at the University of Guelph has mapped a decade of recommendations to address violence against women that include a recognition of the role alcohol plays and the need for increased funding to sexual assault centers such as the Avalon Sexual Assault Center in Halifax.

If you or someone you know is in danger, you can phone 911 for immediate assistance. You can also call a local transition house such as Bryony House in Halifax, which will provide assistance. The best guidance is to find ways to reach out to a variety of online resources that

include mental health and addiction resources as [violence](#) against women often happens in secrecy and isolation and the first huge step is to speak to someone else about it.

**More information:** For a list of organizations and resources by province, visit the [Ending Violence Association of Canada site](#).

Provided by Dalhousie University

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