



## **Recognizing and Addressing Domestic Abuse in the Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In a recent video message, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described “a horrifying global surge in domestic violence”, since the lockdowns and quarantines that are essential to suppressing COVID-19 can also trap women with abusive partners. According to the Secretary-General, for many women and girls “the threat looms largest where they should be safest — in their own homes”. The Secretary-General’s message underscores the fact that women and girls are the primary victims of domestic abuse.

Any household member may potentially perpetrate or become a victim of domestic abuse regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith or other social group. Therefore, potential victims include an intimate partner, a child or other relative. In response to this threat of escalating domestic abuse, the Secretary-General has called for the creation of safe ways for household members to seek support without alerting their abusers, including emergency warning systems in pharmacies and grocery stores.

Working from home during an extended period may heighten stress and anxiety. Although being with immediate family members and loved ones could alleviate feelings of isolation, confinement may aggravate pre-existing inter-familial tensions where long-term abusive patterns are now exacerbated. Confinement may also create new tensions, resulting in domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse does not necessarily involve bruises, broken bones or other physical injuries. It is often invisible and subtle, and typically includes aggressive behavior by a household member who exerts power or control over another household member. This power may be physical, economic, emotional, sexual or psychological, and may include isolation, intimidation, belittling and threats. Perpetrators of abuse may even use restrictions related to COVID-19 to increase power and control over their partners by further limiting access to essential help, services, goods and items as well as access to psychosocial support from both formal and informal networks. This behaviour adversely affects the victim’s health and well-being. Consequently, in addition to trauma, the victim may also experience shame or unwarranted guilt.

To alleviate stress during this period, experts recommend developing daily routines that include office work as well as meditation, exercise and other hobbies to promote well-being. Furthermore, it is essential to make full use of technology to remain in contact with networks, and to participate in group activities that alleviate stress and provide avenues for receiving and providing comfort.



A range of resources are available to provide emotional support and guidance on how to mitigate domestic abuse and support victims. Staff members who experience or witness domestic abuse are strongly encouraged to contact relevant resource personnel in their respective locations. These include: Police, possible refuges where they exist, Staff Welfare, Occupational Health or any trusted person in the first instance.

<https://www.iom.int/iom-staff-welfare>

<https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/wellness>

**Contact details:** Staff Welfare ( [swo@iom.int](mailto:swo@iom.int) ) , Occupational Health ( [ohugva@iom.int](mailto:ohugva@iom.int); [ohumac@iom.int](mailto:ohumac@iom.int) ), [ohupac@iom.int](mailto:ohupac@iom.int),

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