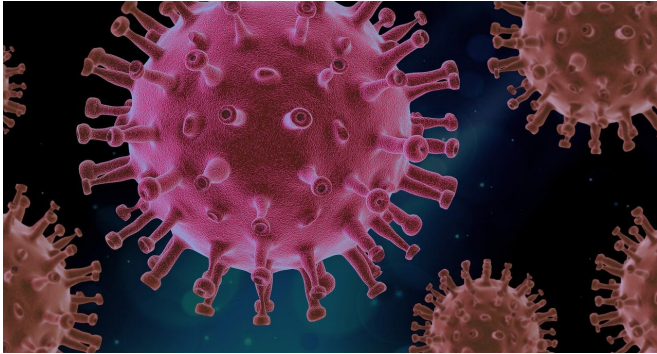


Gender-based violence in the COVID-19 pandemic

20 April 2020



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Gender-based violence has been shown to increase during global emergencies. In a paper just published by Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, researchers report that according to early evidence it is the same for the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are online in the journal *Bioethics*.

Early results from China suggest that domestic violence has dramatically increased. For example, a police station in China's Hubei Province recorded a tripling of domestic violence reports in February 2020 during the COVID-19 quarantine. Other reports suggest that police have been reluctant to intervene and detain perpetrators due to COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons.

"Gender norms and roles relegating women to the realm of care work puts them on the frontlines in times of crisis, resulting in greater risk of exposure while excluding them from developing the response," said Terry McGovern, chair of the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health at Columbia Mailman School, director of the Program on Global Health Justice and Governance, and senior author of the study.

For example:

- Globally women perform three-quarters of unpaid care work, including household disease prevention and care for sick relatives, and there is not a country in the world where men provide an equal share of unpaid care work.
- in China's Hubei province 90% of frontline healthcare workers are women as in many other parts of the world.

However, the researchers make the point that it is not too late to include the voices of women in tackling COVID-19:

- Governments can incorporate gender considerations into their response.
- Technology can be leveraged to ensure women continue to receive essential services when they need them most. For example, emergency services and victim support can be maintained via text, phone, and online services.
- Telemedicine should be considered an alternative and secure way to provide women and girls access to contraceptives and abortion medication.

"Recognizing, valuing, supporting [women's](#) roles and giving them a voice in global health governance can go a long way in avoiding unintended consequences, building resilient healthcare systems, and reducing intersectional inequalities and vulnerabilities across gender, race, class and geography," noted Neetu John, first author and assistant professor in Columbia Mailman School's Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health, and the co-authors.

More information: Neetu John et al, Lessons Never Learned: Crisis and gender?based violence, *Developing World Bioethics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/dewb.12261](https://doi.org/10.1111/dewb.12261)

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman
School of Public Health

APA citation: Gender-based violence in the COVID-19 pandemic (2020, April 20) retrieved 4 July 2022
from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-gender-based-violence-covid-pandemic.html>

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