

Domestic abuse increased globally during pandemic, say researchers

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Incidence of domestic abuse may have doubled in some countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests a *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* editorial by Prof Gene Feder from the University of Bristol, colleagues

in Brazil and Nepal, and the CEO of IRISi, a social enterprise in the UK domestic violence sector. The editorial highlights the need for improved access to support services and 'safe spaces' due to the global rise in calls to domestic abuse hotlines and in police incident reports.

Extrapolated estimates from calls to domestic [abuse](#) hotlines suggest that the incidence of domestic abuse significantly increased during the pandemic in the UK and globally.

In south Asia, calls to the national helpline in Nepal doubled between April and June 2020 compared with the previous year. In Brazil, domestic abuse was increasing even before the pandemic because of cuts in social and healthcare funding and to support programs.

Yet in some countries emergency department attendance for [domestic abuse](#) and non-partner [sexual violence](#) has fallen substantially, along with general emergency department attendance, suggesting that reduced access to [health services](#) or shift during the pandemic made recognition of abuse and appropriate support even more difficult.

Author, Professor Gene Feder from the University of Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care, said: "Domestic abuse has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic in two senses: incidence has increased globally, and the presence of domestic violence within all societies has also been revealed more clearly, alongside other adversities and inequalities. Although better data on the incidence of domestic violence during the pandemic are necessary to quantify the resources needed for extra services, we don't need to wait to provide safe spaces for disclosure in healthcare settings, or to invest in advocacy and support services that are fully integrated with healthcare.

"In many parts of the world, the shift to remote (audio or video) consultations makes confidential conversation difficult, inhibiting

disclosure. Yet healthcare may be the only contact that an abused person—isolated by the perpetrator from friends and family—has with the outside world. We must not let the abused slip under the radar."

The authors argue that after the [pandemic](#), resources are targeted on improving the healthcare response by building on the increased visibility of this kind of abuse, improved understanding of its association with other inequalities, and the likelihood that healthcare in many countries will continue to use a blend of remote and face-to-face consultations.

More information: Gene Feder et al. Domestic violence during the pandemic, *BMJ* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.n722](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n722) Gene Feder et al. Domestic violence during the pandemic, *BMJ* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.n722](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n722)

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