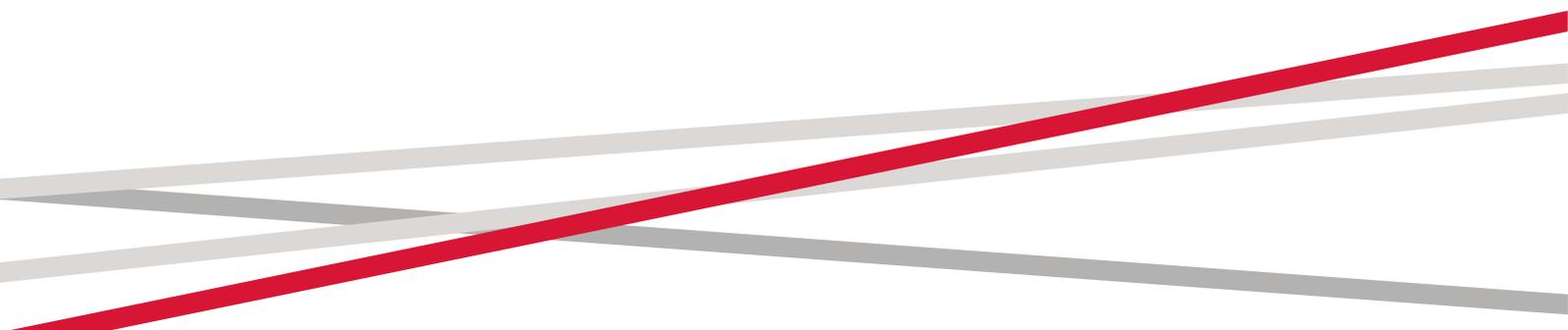


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Economic Perspectives on Domestic Violence | Insights from the FROGEE Webinar | Part 2

This policy brief is the second in a series of two briefs summarizing the research presented at the online workshop “**Economic Perspectives on Domestic Violence**”, organized as part of the Forum for Research on Gender Economics (FROGEE). The current brief offers an overview of the presentations that specifically studied the implications of the Covid-19 crisis for domestic violence. The remaining research presented at the workshop is addressed in the [first policy brief](#) of this series.



Introduction

As governments around the globe are continuing to enforce contagion management strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19, many experts are voicing their concerns about a different kind of pandemic. Alarming reports have surfaced from a wide range of countries suggesting significant increases in domestic violence (DV), including one of its most prevalent forms - intimate partner violence (IPV).

In Europe, the number of IPV emergency calls has increased by 60%, according to the UN's regional director of Europe (WHO, May 07, 2020). In the Hubei province of China, a police department reported three times as many DV cases in February 2020 compared to the same month in 2019 (Axios, March 2020). In El Salvador, 95% of local and government DV support services closed due to the pandemic, while reports show that the demand for such services among women increased by 70% (IRC, 2020). Reduced social interaction and mobility, high rates of unemployment, and restricted access to support services are just some indirect consequences of the pandemic that are likely to exacerbate DV.

At the same time, data from other countries have suggested the opposite trends. In the Italian region of Lombardy, the number of women requesting support services decreased, although the region was one of the most severely hit by the pandemic (Giussy et.al., 2020). While DV hotlines in the US anticipated increases in calls for support, some regions experienced a 50% decline (The Guardian, April 2020). Many have stressed that these trends have a much darker side - underreporting. Measures aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19, as well as the fear of getting infected, force victims to stay at home in direct contact with their abusive partner, limiting their ability to report on the violence, and restricting access to support services such as women's shelters.

As much as pandemic-related trends in DV have heightened the concerns about the well-being of

victims and increased the need for sufficient and adequate policies, the unique settings created by the pandemic have offered new opportunities for researchers to better understand the underlying causes of DV.

This policy brief is the second in a series of two briefs summarizing the papers presented in the workshop entitled "**Economic Perspectives on Domestic Violence**". The workshop was organized as a part of the Forum for Research on Gender Economics (**FROGEE**) supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (**SIDA**).

Domestic Violence and COVID-19

While studying different research settings, all the papers summarized in this brief examine the relationship between COVID-19 and DV. Most of them are focused on the effects of lockdown measures and highlight the need of combining measurements of DV in order to get an encompassing picture of the phenomenon.

Damian Clarke presented evidence on the DV-implications of quarantine in Chile. To rule out the possibility that an increase in DV was caused by other factors brought about by the pandemic, Clarke and co-authors take advantage of Chile's rolling quarantines (i.e., regional quarantines implemented at different points in time) and compare municipalities that imposed lockdowns with those that did not. At the start of the pandemic in March, the nation-wide number of calls to domestic violence hotlines increased by 250%, and by 350% for municipalities that imposed quarantines. Police reporting on DV decreased by 11% nation-wide, and by around 27% in quarantined areas. The sharp increase in distress calls may have several explanations. It could be due to an increase in instances of DV and/or increased anxiety, or reduced tolerance. Moreover, the decline in DV reporting to the police may be explained by limited access to DV support services during quarantine, or to the fact



that the victim's opportunity to report is constrained by the abuser's presence at home. The authors are exploring these channels in current work, including the implementation of a nationally representative survey, aiming to identify key determinants of observed patterns, as well as how they may evolve with the removal of quarantines.

Melissa Spencer offered an analysis of the pandemic's impact on domestic abuse in Los Angeles, US. Spencer and co-authors investigate the immediate effect of the pandemic by using data on DV incidents and arrests, DV calls for service, and hotline calls. During the initial lockdown in March, they find significant effects on both crimes and calls, but in opposite direction: calls for service and hotline calls increased while DV crime and arrests for those crimes declined. During the re-opening period at the end of May, both DV crimes and arrests, calls for service and hotline calls decreased.

Ria Ivandic presented findings from a study on the pandemic's effect on DV in the Greater London area. Using data on DV calls for service and DV crime/incidents the study shows that, for service calls, there was a 35% increase in third-party reporting in densely populated areas, whereas in low-density areas there was only a 15% increase. This effect was particularly strong in areas of high deprivation and suggests substantial under-reporting in households where abuse cannot be reported by an outsider. As for DV crimes, the study finds an average increase of 4.5% during the lockdown and a significant shift in abuse composition: current partner abuse crimes increased by 8.5%, DV by family members rose by 16.4%, while ex-partner crimes decreased by about 9.4%.

Much like England, the US, or Chile, most countries around the world adopted some kind of lockdown policy to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but how would the pandemic affect DV in the absence of lockdown, if at all? **Maria Perrotta Berlin** presented her findings on the case of Sweden, a country that has had a significantly

softer policy response to the pandemic. By utilizing data on DV-crime and mobility, the preliminary results show that the pandemic reduced individuals' mobility, even in the absence of a formal lockdown. Further, Berlin finds that an increased presence in residential areas is associated with a significant increase in non-battery crimes committed by an intimate partner, whereas a reduction in mobility in retail and recreation areas is associated with an increase in other crimes. A more detailed summary of this research is presented in a recent **FREE policy brief**.

The workshop has offered insights into a problem that has been in urgent need of effective policies for a long time, and that has attracted renewed attention during the pandemic. Not surprisingly, it has created a large interest among the participants. **FROGEE** and **SITE** would like to thank the speakers for their contributions to the workshop and **SIDA** for their generous funding.

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