

Horrifying Spike in Domestic Violence Worldwide as Lockdowns Continue

A spike in domestic violence caused by the COVID-19 lockdown is sending shockwaves around the globe—and driving victims in some countries to live television chat shows and social media for help, a satellite broadcaster revealed today.

Middle East satellite broadcaster SAT-7 () says interest in its live programs tackling domestic violence has skyrocketed since people have been told to stay home, and viewers' cries for help on social media "never stop."

The lockdown mantra "Stay Home, Stay Safe" doesn't ring true for millions of unseen victims of this silent crisis behind closed doors.

In the Gaza Strip, one agency reported a 30% increase in violence against women and children since the lockdown began. In Lebanon, a domestic violence helpline set up by the Internal Security Forces has seen calls double. And in Iran and Turkey, "many women dare not speak out" for fear of being beaten, according to a report by news organization *Al-Monitor*.

Since stay-at-home orders began, crisis support groups around the world have reported an alarming increase in the number of women and children being abused at home, with U.N. chief Antonio Guterres calling it a "horrifying global surge."

In the U.S., calls and texts to a domestic violence hotline in Chicago have soared since April, reported *The New York Times*, and that could be just the tip of the problem. It's feared many more women and children across America are unable to call for help because they're literally "locked inside" with their abuser always with them.

Partners, Husbands Lash Out

In the Middle East, where victims of domestic violence are often afraid to speak out, women suffer in silence as partners and husbands lash out—physically and verbally—driven by lockdown stress.

But there's hope for those suffering as live satellite television programs offer a unique lifeline, reaching millions in their own living rooms, tackling the taboo topic head-on and giving on-the-spot Christian counsel to viewers and those on social media.

Job losses, stress over bills and cramped living spaces are sending many people over the edge, said Marianne Daou, who co-presents SAT-7's *From Heart to Heart* Arabic language show with her husband, Rawad, in Lebanon. "All this makes them tense, upset and angry ... which can lead them to take their anger out on each other or on their children," she said. SAT-7 workers are responding to a stream of callers and social media messages.

Even if women walk away from an abusive situation, many of them have nowhere to go. "Women are not empowered at all," Daou said.

COVID-19 is a "one-of-a-kind situation that we've never experienced before," said Jessy Tohme, a counselor on the show, who challenges parents to make home a safe place for their children. "It's hard for everybody."

In Turkey—which experienced a wave of domestic killings last year—a live women's show broadcast by SAT-7 is pushing back against the disturbing rise in violence in the home during the current crisis. "Abusing your partner or children will not bring your job, salary or health back," a guest on the show told viewers recently.