

The Shadow Pandemic of COVID-19: Intimate Partner Violence

[Family & Community Health](#)

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Starting in March 2020, COVID-19 containment measures, including shelter-in-place orders, the closing of schools, and widespread financial insecurity, led public health experts and advocates to warn of “shadow pandemics” within the social determinants of health. With upended local resources, fractured community networks, and rapidly changing family life, it was easy to envision how new tensions and ongoing stressors would lead to adverse social outcomes.

One of the largest areas of concern was the increased risk for violence in the home, especially intimate partner violence (IPV).

Now, 19 months later, scientists are still investigating the scope of the IPV pandemic. Past studies looking at changes in IPV within communities that experienced disasters (like hurricanes or flooding) suggested increased severity of abuse-related injuries, as well as increased rates of violence, sometimes as much as [50% higher than before the disaster](#). With the prolonged and shifting trajectory of COVID-19, comparison to past disaster events is imperfect, and many worry that the impact of increasing social isolation, financial stressors, and loss of access to community-based services may drive current rates of IPV even higher.

That said, even prior to 2020, we were experiencing an IPV crisis. Before the pandemic, it was estimated that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men in the United States would experience IPV in their lifetimes. And every year [more than 5 million children](#) were exposed to IPV in their homes. The lifelong mental, physical, and financial impact of these events is well studied, multi-faceted and deeply concerning.

This October, as we acknowledge Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we highlight the lifesaving services and resources available to survivors on both a local and national level, and programs working to create accountability and support change with people who act abusively. IPV agencies faced similar and unique challenges during the pandemic as we were limited to virtual engagement options. It is critical for providers and our community to know that IPV agencies have adapted to our new virtual space and offer services, information and evaluations in secure online platforms. Shelters have expanded capacity while still maintaining COVID-19 safety measures.

If you need help you can reach out to the Philadelphia Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-866-SAFE-014 [1-866-723-3014]; or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

If you are seeking ways to help support those at risk for IPV, you can donate to local IPV service agencies (see local Philadelphia agencies below); vote for representatives who advocate for models of empowerment, upstream drivers of risk, and individual and family supports; recognize the prevalence and your role in leveraging clinical resources to better identify and respond to the needs in our community; and support research that helps us define best practices.

<https://www.lutheransettlement.org/get-involved/how-to-donate/>

<https://www.helpwomen.org/donations-support>

<https://www.womenagainstabuse.org/donate>

<https://www.congreso.net/get-involved/donate/>

<https://www.courdea.org/>

Regardless of the future of COVID-19, services are still here and have found ways to adapt to both virtual and in-person access. If you or someone you know is experiencing IPV, you are not alone.

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