

COVID-19 and the Increase of Domestic Violence Against Women

Portland Oregon – USA

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1. To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis.

In Oregon, 37.3% of women experience domestic violence from their intimate partner in their lifetimes (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, n.d.). In this state, the percentage is more than in the United States, 1 in 4 women (25.1% or 30.0 million) experience domestic violence (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2019).

During COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, compared to the eight-week prior period from March 2020, the police office in Portland-Oregon reported an increase of 6% of arrests due to domestic violence, (Portland Police, 2020).

In 2019, there were five homicides of women reported in Portland (The Oregonian, 2020). In 2016, more women than men were killed by intimate partners. There were 45% of female homicide victims. (Oregon Health Authority, p 2, n.d.). Around 80% of female victims of intimate partner homicide were killed by their husbands or boyfriends (Douglas, 2018). In Portland, there are no cases reported of femicides between March and April 2020 (COVID-19 period).

Critical data about the effects of violence against women are suicides. Unfortunately, in 2019, "Females in Oregon committed suicide at a rate of 9.2, which is 2.9 times higher than the national average of 6.3..." (The Corvallis Advocate, 2020). Women are more likely to commit suicide in the range of 45-64 years old; the rate is 14.4 (The Corvallis Advocate, 2020). It is necessary to take into account that female suicide is concerning with intimate partner violence (Brown, 2019). A spokesman from Oregon Health Authority, according to preliminary data,

mentioned that was not an increase in suicides in the COVID-19 period. On the other hand, it is unclear the link between suicides and COVID-19.

2. Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

There are local helplines from Government and civil society, to help women, including Latinas women. For example, the National Domestic Violence Hotline (KGW8, 2020), (Crombie, 2020), and the 911 line, seven days for 24 hours. There has been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Parafiniuk-Talesnick, 2020) (Dorsey, 2020). One of these services in Portland is Call to Safety. Executive Director mentioned that they received about twice calls in this pandemic period (Crombie, 2020). According to the executive director, Raphael House also has an increase in calls. In her opinion, "For those who live with domestic violence, staying home and isolated with an abuser can put the whole family at great risk" (KGW8, 2020).

3. Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence?

Women victims of domestic violence as the same as the population in Oregon don't have restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation. In general, people stay at home in quarantine, it is forbidden large gatherings, and it is a must physical distance (Governor Brown, March, 2020a). The propose is to reduce person to person interaction to slow the transmission of the pandemic. It is possible to go out if this is necessary, taking into account preventive health measures. Most restaurants, public spaces, schools, offices between other services, and businesses are closed. Governor Kate Brown announced in May 2020 that the State of Oregon would begin the process of reopening (Governor Brown, April 2020). Since March 2020, the order is "Stay Home Save Lives" (Governor Brown, March, 2020b), this became the slogan of a campaign. In general, people are following the rules. In the case of women, victims of domestic violence, as mentioned before, staying at home with their perpetrators makes worst their vulnerable situation.

4. Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

According to the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, shelters are working. However, they decreased their capacity because they need to reorganize their services to maintain the requirement of social distancing. Additionally, most of their workers are moms who must take care of their children at home because schools are closed; for this reason, they have to work with little personnel (Dorsey, 2020). On the other hand, some shelter's offices are closed. They only make appointments or facilitate services online, by phone, and texting.

The executive director of the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence said that something to highlight is that although they receive more calls, they don't register more people coming into their domestic violence shelters (Dorsey, 2020).

A relief in this period of shelter's restrictions is Women's Crisis Line because they refer women in immediate need to domestic violence shelters and local programs (Crombie, 2020).

5. Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In Portland, according to the Multnomah County Chief Probate Judge, emergency protection orders will have appointments and be set for an appearance, which includes protection orders for women that need them. Unfortunately, the process can take more time than usual (Circuit Court of the State of Oregon, 2020).

6. What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

In Oregon, courts are available for victims of domestic violence (Dorsey 2020). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in Portland, the court is only developing essential functions and has restricted resources available to the public (Multnomah County Circuit Court, 2020).

Unfortunately, this situation means that women victims of violence have to wait more time and can be affected by delays getting justice.

7. What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health.

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has a webpage specifically to address COVID-19: healthoregon.org/coronavirus. They also promote their online bulletin regarding this issue. They have on their web a section regarding Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Resources, though we didn't find something specific about COVID-19 and domestic violence (OHA, 2020 May). Additionally, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) has a section about Domestic Violence Victim Services but again not linked with COVID-19 (ODHS, 2020 May).

On the other hand, pharmacies are open. They provide many products useful for sexual and reproductive health. Additionally, primary health care, including sexual and reproductive health, is working through video visits (talk face-to-face), (Legacy Health 2020).

Oregon is considered a friendly abortion state. Abortion clinics are working in Oregon, though during this pandemic is hard to get an abortion. This situation has a negative impact on women with an unwanted or unintended pregnancy. It is expected that the demand will increase when the lockdown finish (Riski, 2020). On the other hand, abortion and reproductive health needs, are considered essential in Oregon, that is very helpful regarding to provide services for women victims of violence. Planned Parenthood's health centers, pharmacies, and laboratories are working. Because the pandemic will have adverse economic effects, Planned Parenthood considers that they will have a significant increase in the demand for their services (Stenvick, 2020).

8. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

For many women, home is not the safest place to live and self-isolation because Covid-19 has forced women into risky conditions and prevent them from speaking with their counselors and visiting friends who can help them. The pandemic also prevents women's exit plans that they developed for many months. Services are struggling to help women due to the social distancing measure (KDRV.COM, 2020).

Due to COVID-19, there is more stress at home, and that is an essential risk for violent escalation. There are also more risk factors like unemployment, sickness, alcohol consumption, and buy a gun. According to the assistant dean of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the University of Washington's School of Social Work; Val Kalei Kanuha: "It is the perfect storm for someone who wants to isolate or hurt their partners" (KDRV.COM, 2020).

Ray-Jones, president and CEO of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, mentions that "many victims are relying on hotlines to report their abuse and find help – but only those who are still able to contact them safely" (KDRV.COM, 2020). She considers that once the quarantine finishes, there will be many women that will look for help.

9. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments.

The Police Bureau is using its web page to facilitate information and messages with an emphasis on family and friends to help victims in the context of COVID-19 (Police Bureau, 2020). This is important because family and friends are in better conditions to support women affected by violence.

10. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRIs or equality bodies.

Due to COVID-19, a good practice comes from nonprofits in Oregon. They changed some practices at work to adapt to the new Government's rules and health conditions. For example, shelter staff is now working remotely; they are developing mostly safety planning with the victims, active listening, and talking about their risk factors at home. They also have discussions about how to mitigate those risks. Working with women victims of domestic violence is not a one-time event; it is a process that takes time. On the other hand, some shelters are serving through appointments, to follow the rule on distancing (Dorsey, 2020).

Another good practice is to work in an alliance because this facilitates bringing services and information at once; it also supports member organizations. For example, the Oregon Coalition

Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (OCADSV, 2020a) is an organization that provides essential information for victims of domestic violence through their website. It is also possible to find volunteering opportunities and makes donations. This Coalition can facilitate connections with local programs (Dorsey, 2020). Additionally, OCADSV facilitates support to organizations that provide services on domestic and sexual violence, affected by COVID-19 (OCADSV, 2020a)

OCADSV has 24 organizations and the following mission: Promotes equity and social change in order to end violence for all communities. We seek to transform society by engaging diverse voices, supporting the self-determination of survivors, and providing leadership for advocacy efforts". (OCADSV, 2020b).

Technology and resources online are useful for women who suffer from intimate violence partners. There are some excellent examples, like The Hot Line, Domestic Violence Resource Center, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Project Unica, between others.

There are many communicative resources online. Media like The Oregonian and KGW8 facilitates essential information useful for this report.

11. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above.

COVID-19 has negative consequences for women victims of domestic violence because it breaks the chain to report domestic violence. Due to COVID-19, these victims are isolated; they don't have a social life. Therefore, friends or families cannot call the police and report domestic violence cases (Parafiniuk-Talesnick, 2020).

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