

RESOURCES

COVID-19 increases challenges for combating domestic violence

By Halley Sutton, Editor

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased risk factors for gender-based violence, according to the American Psychological Association. And in the wake of that finding, a national survey has found that the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased challenges for agencies looking to serve survivors.

The survey was conducted by Kellie Lynch, a criminology and criminal justice professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio, TK Logan, professor at the University of Kentucky, and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Professionals who serve survivors of gender-based violence were asked to complete the online survey between September and December 2020.

“Gender-based violence, such as intimate partner violence, child abuse, sexual assault and human trafficking, are crimes that thrive on survivor isolation. The isolation resulting from this pandemic, coupled with financial strain and a myriad of mental health issues experienced by many, creates a perfect storm to enhance the occurrence of gender-based violence,” Lynch said.

Access to resources limited during COVID-19

Other key findings include:

- Most respondents believed that incidents of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and child abuse have increased during the pandemic.
- Respondents reported that survivors of gender-based violence faced an increase in the difficulty in finding safe housing during the pandemic, as many shelters that might have previously provided aid were operating at decreased capacity.
- Nearly 40% of respondents reported that gun sales had increased in their community since the start of the pandemic.
- Nearly 50% of respondents reported that abusers threatening to shoot survivors had become a bigger problem since the start of the pandemic.

➤ One of the key barriers that survivors faced was a lack of information about how resources or agencies that might provide aid were operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

➤ Respondents said that children in particular faced an increased risk of abuse during the pandemic, as more time spent at home and not in school might exacerbate abusive situations.

➤ About two-thirds of respondents reported that abusers had interfered with survivors' workplace or employment as a control tactic during the pandemic.

➤ About a quarter of respondents reported that law enforcement's response to meeting the needs of survivors worsened during the pandemic.

“This study was an initial step in documenting the resiliency of victim service agencies and highlights the creativity, determination, and passion of agency staff to navigate this pandemic. These results can be used to inform strategies and allow coordinated plans for providing services to survivors as this pandemic continues and in future emergencies, such as natural disasters and also highlight important areas of need for agencies so that they may seek funding to support their services during these difficult times,” Lynch said.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/3aycj1w>. ■

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or shooting hoops with students, Hurt said. “If you're the officer who comes by and has lunch in the cafeteria with the students every Tuesday, students are more likely to come up to you and say, ‘Hey, I have a friend experiencing X,’” Hurt said. If you encourage that, you'll be seen as the best supervisor on earth, she added.

The caveat with any of those initiatives, Hurt said, is that officers need to ask permission first to ensure they're welcome in the space and not just assume they are. “I always want to make sure that my presence is respected, that students want me there,” she said.

Email Hurt at hurtj@wsu.edu. ■

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