



Family Digest 29

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The Hidden Menace of Domestic Violence

On Sunday, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announced that there has been a sharp rise in domestic violence amid the global coronavirus lockdowns. He called on governments around the world to address the issue as a key part of their response to the pandemic. Guterres urged all governments "to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19."¹ Many activists warned that the increased threat to women and children was a predictable side effect of the coronavirus lockdowns, and that "increased abuse is a pattern repeated in many emergencies, whether conflict, economic crisis or during disease outbreaks, although the quarantine rules pose a particularly grave challenge."² Over 2 300 gender-based violence reports had been received during the first week of the lockdown, according to Police Minister Bheki Cele³, who confirmed that the number of complaints remained high and therefore concerning.⁴

The recently released crime statistics reflect a dramatic decrease in crime, including violent crime such as murder, over the same period of last year. This has been attributed to the ban on the sale of alcohol. However, there has not been a concomitant decline in the incidence of domestic violence. Domestic violence is an underreported crime and the regulations of the lockdown make it more difficult to do so. In an effort to make it easier to access protection it has been suggested that victims can alert pharmacists and grocery stores to their plight, who could in turn alert the police or social services.⁵ It is important to be mindful that "domestic violence is a crime against society; it is not a private matter."⁶ A climate of zero tolerance toward such violence must be fostered and social censure has an important role to play, especially during this period of the lockdown. Guterres emphasises that "together, we can and must prevent violence everywhere, from war zones to people's homes, as we work to beat COVID-19."⁷

<https://city-press.news24.com/News/bheki-cele-i-wish-alcohol-ban-could-be-extended-beyond-lockdown-20200405>

<https://ewn.co.za/2020/04/06/un-chief-urges-govts-to-protect-women-during-virus-lockd>
www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/06/827908402/global-lockdowns-resulting-in-horrifying-surge-in-domestic-violence-u-n-warnshtt

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

<https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2020-04-06-lockdown-is-when-fight-against-domestic-violence-is-needed-most/>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-04-06-hunger-poverty-and-lockdown-adds-up-to-domestic-violence-crisis/>

<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/gender-based-violence-reported-during-lockdown-cele/>

<https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/cele-welcomes-drop-in-crime-but-gender-based-violence-cases-still-high-46262416>

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¹ <https://ewn.co.za/2020/04/06/un-chief-urges-govts-to-protect-women-during-virus-lockdown?%40wrEISNQcrdr>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

³ <https://city-press.news24.com/News/bheki-cele-i-wish-alcohol-ban-could-be-extended-beyond-lockdown-20200405>

⁴ Various reports have given different, and very high, numbers for incidents of domestic violence but it is difficult to verify these reports. The likely number of actual assaults is much higher than the 2 300 that have been officially reported thus far.

⁵ Pharmacies are open during the period of the lockdown and their accessibility make them an important resource.

⁶ Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998

⁷ <https://ewn.co.za/2020/04/06/un-chief-urges-govts-to-protect-women-during-virus-lockd>