

How COVID-19 Could Impact Victims/Survivors of Violence

Our Bergen County community is going through a difficult time. COVID-19 is a serious global public health threat and our county is taking appropriate steps to contain the virus and keep everyone healthy and safe. We are very thankful that our leaders are taking COVID-19 seriously, but we are also concerned that victims/survivors in Bergen County may be cut off from the resources and support they need.

Crisis situations always have a heavy impact on victims/survivors of violence, especially those who are also members of marginalized communities (such as people of color, LGBTQI+ folks, people with lower incomes). Likewise, we expect that COVID-19 will increase risk factors for violence and isolate and endanger victims/survivors.

In order to effectively advocate for victims/survivors during COVID-19, it's crucial to understand how they are being uniquely affected by it. Below are just a few examples to consider as you seek to support victims/survivors and raise awareness about lesser known consequences of this emergency.

1. Social isolation means staying at home, but homes can be unsafe.

The practice of social distancing can be dangerous if a person's home is unsafe. If a victim lives with an abuser, they may be at risk for sexual/domestic violence at home. Due to COVID-19, victims may have less access to outside resources/help and tangible support from their family and community.

Additionally, heightened stress and tension in the home may contribute to an increase in controlling and abusive behavior. Abusers may seek to limit information about COVID-19 or use the virus as an excuse to control finances, police a victim's body and behavior, cut off contact with friends and family, and make threats to withhold vital resources.

2. Vulnerable people may be forced to engage in survival sex.

As pressure to stay at home mounts and more businesses/organizations close, many people are being left without paychecks and shelter. They may be forced to engage in survival sex, which means they are exchanging sex to meet a basic survival need. This might mean access to food, a place to live, or another necessity.

3. Loss in income may force victims to continue living with abusers.

Leaving abusive situations often takes money. Many people in abusive situations save for months and even years to afford an apartment or some kind of exit strategy. If they experience a reduction in income due to COVID-19, they may be forced to postpone their exit strategy and continue living in an abusive situation.

4. Extreme stress in emergencies can trigger trauma.

People who have experienced a violent trauma such as domestic violence or sexual victimization may be triggered by high levels of stress due to COVID-19. Crises can open old wounds and increase anxiety. Further, social distancing can increase a sense of isolation from others, making them feel like they are alone and far from help.

5. There may be more barriers for victims to access sexual and domestic violence services—but those services are still available!

In Bergen County, call -

For Domestic Violence:

ADV – Alternatives to Domestic Violence: (201) 336-7575

Center for Hope and Safety: (201) 944-9600

For Sexual Assault:

YWCA HealingSPACE: (201) 487-2227

6. Children are more likely to witness and experience violence.

Now that K-12 schools are closed in Bergen County and daycare options are limited, many children must stay at home during the day. This added stress can increase risk factors for violence in a home. Further, children in abusive situations will be spending more time at home, and they may be more likely to witness or experience abuse and less able to report abuse to an adult who can help.

Help us raise awareness about how COVID-19 is impacting victims/survivors and increasing risk factors for violence.

Covid-19 has closed Bergen County facilities, but the ADV – Alternatives to Domestic Violence Hotline is operating and available to take your call 24 hours a day, every day. ADV Hotline: (201) 336-7575

Stay Healthy *and* Safe!



James J. Tedesco III
Bergen County Executive

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