



Women's Multicultural Resource & Counselling Centre

COVID-19 and Safety Risks Young Women

From speaking with a number of young females since the “social isolation” restrictions it has become apparent that a number of mental health concerns are taking place in relation to the heightened risk of violence in the home and the changes of access from essential protection services and social networks.

Economic stress on families due to the outbreak can put children, and in particular girls, at greater risk of exploitation and gender-based violence. It is becoming clear that quarantine measures should be accompanied by easy and consistent support for affected households.

Global lockdowns also lock down girls’ autonomy, potentially reinforcing the attitudes and practices that regard girls as second class and hold them back.

Schools were once sanctuaries, where youth with lived experiences of violence and abuse can temporarily seek peace, safety and be able to find emotional and mental support. Currently, with everyone at home, these youth have no escaping zone, no place to go. There is no privacy to even make a phone call. COVID-19 has resulted in diminished community support and heightened levels of distress, which are factors that can worsen abuse and violence. Social distancing means an increased risk for these young women. Seeking safety, relying on the community, and attending support groups are more difficult during this quarantine.



Before the pandemic surfaced, a survivor could flee a violent situation by staying with a family member, going to a shelter, or filing a protective order with the police. For many, these options are no longer available.

Research shows that increased stress levels among parents due to financial strain, the extra burden of having their children at home, and the inability to deal with their child's signs and symptoms of mental health problem are significant predictors of physical abuse,

verbal abuse, and neglect of children and/or youth. These youth are perceived by some parents as "problem or difficult to deal child". They tend not to receive the full support that they need from their parents or care-giver because they lack an in-depth understanding of depression and mental health issues.

During these trying times parents are unable to rely on extended family, child-care and schools, religious groups, and other community organizations, due to the "stay at home" orders. Many child-protective organizations are experiencing strain with fewer workers available, so they may be unable to conduct home visits in areas with stay-at-home orders. In addition, all schools are virtual, thus teachers and school counselors are unable to witness the signs of abuse and report to the proper authorities. As a result, child abuse reports are "going down" when, in reality, an increase in child abuse is occurring, but is going unreported.

****A note for young girls and adolescents. Be aware of "Trauma Bonding" as it is tightly related to codependency and occurs when an individual is continuously abused by their partner or parent but mistakes this abuse for "love." If you are an individual experiencing abuse from a caregiver who also expresses love, then you can learn to associate love with abuse. The victim often justifies the abuse, blames himself or herself, or minimizes the abuse and eventually is unaware that he/she is being abused. Victims of "trauma bonding" are less likely to report their abusers because they feel as though they deserved it due to the fact their parents or partners still love them.

So, what to do? Remember shelters are deemed an "essential services," and therefore are still open. Still, many violence prevention service providers are not seeing as many service recipients in person because of the COVID-19 Social Distancing new practices, and are pivoting their services to hotlines, phone consultations, and virtual sessions. So still feel free to reach out to organizations for support.

Develop a Safety Plan

- Set up a time to speak via phone or video call with someone from our agency.
- Have a list of local domestic violence shelters in your area and find out if they are accepting walk-ins. This should be the first step in your action safety plan.
- Have a trusted friend or family member who you can "temporary stay with" if you are in imminent danger.
- Communicate with your friends and family daily for support.
- Develop a code word with friends or family if you are in danger and need to get out quick.
- Find the safest place in your house where you can escape if an argument or violence breaks out.
- Please, also note that the Victim Services and the Ontario Works have both received emergency COVID-19 funds to assist individuals needing accommodation by putting them in the hotels.
- Always keep your cell phone with you, in case you need to call a friend, an emergency service, hotlines; Youth Hotline, Assaulted Women's Helpline, Distress Helpline near you or 911.



We are a call or text away. Remember we are here to serve you. Reach out if need be (905-427-7849) Monday-Friday 9:00 am-5:00 pm. OR email: info@wmrccdurham.org

Sincerely,

WMRCC team