



The Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM)

Measures to be taken to put a stop to the sudden rise of domestic abuse cases in post-pandemic times and to provide adequate assistance to the victims.

STUDY GUIDE

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1. Welcoming letter

Dear delegates,

We are pleased to be the Chairs of the Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM) in ArcMUN 2024. MUN is always a great opportunity to meet new people and debate over topics you are passionate about, such as this year's topic, which we are excited to discuss with you.

In this year's ArcMUN we are going to discuss the matter of domestic abuse cases and how they have severely risen in post - pandemic times. The goal of our committee is to find ways to provide satisfactory assistance to victims and ensure the prevention of more cases from happening.

Even though this guide will introduce you to the key points of the issue at hand, you are highly encouraged to also conduct your own research on the topic as well as your countries' stance on it.

Looking forward to meeting you all,

Ioanna Tsalampouni,
Georgia Liakaki,
Chairs of SOCHUM
Tonia Nakou,
Junior Chair of SOCHUM

2.Introduction to the committee

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is the third of the six committees that participate in the United Nations General Assembly. This committee is one of the main commissions, as it is responsible for the discussion of several social matters and humanitarian affairs. Such topics are the preservation of human rights, the protection of vulnerable people (women, children, people with disabilities), the support of refugees and the combat of racial discrimination.

3.Introduction to the topic

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse or intimate partner abuse, is a serious threat for many people around the world. Domestic abuse is defined as an incident or pattern of incident controlling, coercive, threatening and violent behavior including sexual violence. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women from their partner, ex-partner or even a family member (1 in 4 women, 1 in 9 men and 1 in 6 children experience domestic abuse, according to data from the USA). All types of violence, especially domestic abuse, tend to increase in any emergency, including epidemics and pandemics. Stress, disruption of social and protective networks, increases economic hardship and creates new psychological issues while decreasing access to services .In the case of COVID-19, the isolation, restricted movement and quarantine put in place to limit the spread of infection, forced victims of domestic abuse to remain in their homes. Thus, the chances of the victim being exposed to violence increase dramatically as family members spend more time in close contact and household stress intensifies. This risk increases even more when families also have to deal with possible financial or job losses.

4. Definition of key terms

Domestic abuse: An incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behavior, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. This term is also known as Intimate partner violence.

Perpetrator: This is the abuser, also sometimes referred to as the batterer. In court, this person is the defendant, or the person accused of a crime. The victim is the plaintiff, or the person who is accusing the defendant of a crime.

Survivor: A person being abused—physically, verbally, sexually or in another harmful manner—is referred to as a survivor. He or she can also be called a victim, though survivor is the preferred term.

Vulnerable groups: Population groups that are more likely to experience (or to have experienced) family, domestic and sexual violence, or who face additional barriers in coping with and recovering from family, domestic and sexual violence.

Victimization rate: The number of victims per 100,000 of the Estimated Resident Population (ERP).

Advocate: An advocate is a person whose main purpose is to provide victims and survivors with not only emotional but also practical support. This support is usually provided to those who have already reported the case to the police or are thinking about it, but is of course available to anyone who needs it.

Financial abuse: This is when the abuser uses finances to exert power and control over the victim. This can include stealing the victim's money, forcing the victim to beg for money, giving the victim an allowance, opening credit cards in the victim's name to destroy the victim's credit, preventing the victim from accessing bank accounts, or preventing the victim from getting a job.

Emotional abuse: Using a victim's emotions or manipulating their mental state in order to control them, is referred to as emotional or psychological abuse. The abuser tries to tear down a victim's self-esteem through mind games, insults, humiliation, or by trying to convince the victim that they are mentally unstable or that they are to blame for the abuse. This can also be known as verbal abuse.

Sexual Violence: Sexual violence is the broad term used to refer to all kinds of unwanted sexual acts. Sexual violence is not limited to, but includes rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, indecent exposure, and flashing. Due to underreporting of this crime, sexual violence is categorized as covert violence.

Coercive behavior: Examples of coercive behavior are when one partner demands the other to have sex or go out in the car or stay at home and forces them to comply with pressure, threats or physical restraint.

Gender based violence: Gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls.

Honor Based Violence (HBV): Honor based violence or HBV refers to abuse which is carried out to enforce the rules of various beliefs, cultures, values,

and/or social norms. Perpetrators of this form of abuse claim upholding these rules as a justification for their actions.

Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) :IRIS is a training, support and referral programme for general practitioners (GPs), which aims to train them to better identify victims of abuse and know how/when to intervene.. IRIS has been incredibly effective in increasing the general well-being of those who have suffered DVA.

Stalking Protection Orders (SPO):A Stalking Protection Order is issued by the court in order to subject a person to requirements or restrictions. Usually, this is done to protect the victim of harassment from the harasser. The perpetrator does not need to be found guilty of an offence to be granted an SPO.

Shadow pandemic: The phenomenon of combating cases of domestic violence in the COVID-19 crisis, mostly targeted towards women and girls. Experts and advocacy groups are reporting that incidences of domestic abuse have intensified under COVID-19, triggered by the social and economic impact of the public health emergency.

5.Discussion of the topic

Although cases of domestic violence have worsened during and after the quarantine period, not many measures have been taken to address this issue. From 2022 to 2023 the NSPCC helpline handled the highest number of domestic abuse contacts in the summer period from July to September.

Beyond national borders and socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, and class divides, domestic violence is a worldwide problem. This issue is widespread both

geographically and in terms of occurrence, which indicates that it is a common and accepted practice. The prevalence and deep-rooted nature of domestic abuse has detrimental effects on women's health and wellbeing. Its prolonged existence cannot be justified morally. It comes at a huge cost to society, health institutions, and individual patients. However, no other major public health issue has received so little attention and understanding.

The issue of domestic violence against women has always existed. Women have traditionally been seen as weak, vulnerable and a resource to be exploited. For a very long time, violence against women has been accepted. Domestic violence may be initiated and sustained by cultural mores, religious customs, economic situations and political systems, but ultimately, an individual chooses to use violence from a wide range of options. The development of gender-based violence in each country is heavily influenced by macro system-level factors like cultural and social norms. However, individual-level factors such as parental violence during childhood, absence or rejection by the father and association with delinquent peers also play an important role.

In addition to causing physical harm, violence endangers the entire social, economic, economic, psychological, spiritual and emotional well-being of the victim, the perpetrator and society. A key factor contributing to women's poor health is domestic abuse. It negatively affects women's physical and emotional health, as well as their ability to reproduce and participate in sexual activity. These include among several others, injuries, gynecological issues, short- or long-term disability, depression, and suicide. These physical and mental health problems have social and emotional consequences for the individual, the family, the community and society at large.

However, while there is a general perception that the pain of domestic abuse is something that only women suffer, domestic abuse and violence against men is also more common than is often realized. Official statistics and surveys reveal what some would consider a surprisingly high percentage of women who inflict physical harm as well as emotional, psychological and coercive control on their male partners. The same is true in same-sex relationships.

The startling truth is that one third of domestic abuse victims are men. The Office for National Statistics estimates that 1.6 million women and 757,000 men reported abuse in 2020. Despite the fact that they represent such a significant proportion of victims, men are silenced by the hostility and mistrust they encounter when they talk about their experiences to the police and protection services. Support agencies often fail to recognize the abuse of men and overlook cases involving female abusers.

Recent studies of Homicide Reviews highlight a lack of training and support in the recognition and handling of male domestic abuse: ManKind Charity reports that in 2021, of the 238 shelters for victims of domestic abuse, only 58 were dedicated to supporting male survivors. Another study conducted by Bristol University details how male victims are rarely asked about their domestic relationships by health professionals.

In addition to men and women, children are also seriously affected. Children who witness domestic abuse are at risk of short and long-term physical and mental health problems. Each child is affected differently by the trauma of domestic abuse.

Domestic violence has occurred at least once in the households of over 15 million children in the United States. These children are more likely to become

perpetrators themselves or to relive the cycle as adults involved in violent relationships. For example, a young boy is ten times more likely to attack his female partner as an adult if he sees his mother being abused. A girl is more than six times more likely to experience sexual abuse as a child if she grows up in a family where her father abuses her mother. In this way, the cycle of domestic abuse continues.

There is new evidence that young children who have suffered domestic abuse score lower on cognitive measures, even when maternal IQ, birth weight, birth complications, quality of mental stimulation at home and gender are taken into account.

In situations where a child's stress levels are high, such as in situations of domestic abuse, persistent elevations of stress hormones and altered levels of key brain chemicals produce an internal physiological state that disrupts the structure of the developing brain and can lead to difficulties in learning, memory and self-regulation. As a result, children who experience toxic stress in early childhood may develop a lifetime of greater susceptibility to stress-related physical illnesses (such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes) as well as mental health problems (such as depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse). They are also more likely to engage in health-damaging behaviors, such as smoking and adult lifestyles, such as drug taking, that undermine well-being and subsequently lead to premature death. Children living with domestic abuse do not 'get used to' or feel the effects less acutely. It is the duration of exposure to abuse that can cause the most damage.

But apart from being a witness, the child is often the victim. Physical indicators of child abuse in the home: repeated injuries, often reported as an accident, absence from school, the child never invites friends to stay at home, extreme fear, depression, low self-esteem and frequent crying. Unfortunately, it is often

the case that children seeking help to escape a violent environment are not taken seriously and their safety is not taken into account.

6. Actions already taken

Increased availability of hotlines and information exchange.

Much information is disseminated through manuals, databases, and campaigns aimed at friends and relatives. Evidence-based guidelines for safe parenting during quarantine have been compiled by Parenting for Lifelong Health. Online support groups and helplines are growing or being developed. One of the nations most affected by the pandemic, Italy, is averting "an emergency within an emergency" by promoting the 1522 hotline (National Hotline Service of Italy) for harassment and violence. Many other nations have pledged to maintain information lines and hotlines operational both during and after the COVID-19 peak.

Funding shelters and other safe accommodation options for survivors.

Many nations have agreed that additional safe housing is required when in quarantine. Victims (as well as accompanying minors) could temporarily escape from their abusers using secure housing. Canada has provided \$50 million to sexual abuse centers and women's shelters as part of its COVID-19 relief package. 20,000 hotel nights were provided by a €1.1 million funding boost for anti-abuse organizations in France, allowing survivors to leave their abusive partners. A prosecutor in Trento, Italy, declared that the abuser, not the victim, must leave the family home when there is domestic abuse. Germany and Austria have also made similar rulings. While this is a laudable measure, it presents a difficulty in ensuring the protection of survivors staying at home because of the perpetrators' knowledge of where they are and possible access to the house.

Expansion of access to services for survivors.

Certain nations are finding ways to increase access to violence-related services even though quarantine restricts people's freedom of movement and personal mobility. France has started to set up "pop up" centers in supermarkets. A certain "code word" alerts pharmacies to notify the appropriate authorities in several nations, such as France, Italy and Spain. Some nations, like the UK and Italy, have improved or released covert applications that allow the victim to seek assistance without having to call abusers in close proximity. Protection services were regarded as "essential" and it was heavily supported that they shouldn't be restricted because of COVID-19.

Limiting risk factors associated with violence

Some nations face unfavorable coping strategies COVID-19 that could increase the likelihood of violence. In an effort to reduce the likelihood of domestic abuse, Greenland has banned the sale of alcohol in its capital, Nuuk. Similar actions have been taken by South Africa. Although there is evidence linking alcohol abuse and problem drinking to more serious violent incidents, the relationship between the two is complex, and there is little evidence on the impact of alcohol-related policies on violence. However, other nations have not yet taken precautionary measures to reduce the risks involved. For example, limiting access to lethal weapons during times of stress could reduce the likelihood of homicides and deaths. Prudent policy measures can reduce the risk of harm and facilitate positive outlets to reduce stress and promote mental health.

Amendments to family law and justice systems

In order to improve the ability of the court system to handle cases during quarantine, Australia has made a number of changes to family law. First, they

give judges the power to make orders for conditional release from prison and electronic monitoring requirements for bail. They also provide the possibility to submit restrictive measures online. Thirdly, they lengthen the limitation period for restrictive measures, increase the fine and introduce a new offence. However, further innovations and changes are needed as more nations go through long periods of closed justice systems in order to guarantee the safety of survivors in difficult circumstances.

Protection and Prevention for children victims

Violence against children can be prevented. Preventing and responding to violence against children requires that efforts systematically address risk and protective factors at all four interrelated levels of risk (individual, relationship, community, society).

Under the leadership of the WHO, a group of 10 international organizations developed and endorsed an evidence-based technical package entitled INSPIRE: Seven strategies to end violence against children. The package aims to help countries and communities achieve SDG target 16.2 on ending violence against children. Each letter of the word INSPIRE represents one of the strategies, and most of them have been shown to have preventive effects on different types of violence, as well as benefits in areas such as mental health, education and crime reduction.

7. Points to be addressed

- How we can make victims of domestic abuse aware of the services available and access to support services?
- How can we ensure that all domestic cases are taken seriously regardless of age or gender?
- What measures need to be taken to prevent more outbreaks?

- What can be done in order to help victims of intimate partner abuse in situations such as COVID - 19?
- What can be done to help victims of domestic abuse recover from their traumatic experience?
- What is the impact on society?
- What consequences the perpetrators should face to ensure that they do not engage in similar behavior in the future?

8. Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that domestic abuse is a serious and pervasive problem. It has devastating consequences for its victims, their families and friends, as well as the wider community. Given the significant increase in survivors who had experiences of domestic abuse, it is vital that mental health professionals effectively identify abuse and respond appropriately.

Improving the health response to domestic violence is critical to the safety and well-being of victims suffering from mental illnesses. Mental health and domestic violence services, particularly those dealing with survivors and perpetrators, need to collaborate extensively with training and referral programs, among the services supported globally. We must take responsibility for addressing domestic abuse.

With many victims and perpetrators of abuse becoming more and more widespread as a result of the COVID pandemic, it is critical that the SOCHUM committee raise public awareness of these cases and focus its efforts on collaborating with all nations to successfully combat the issue.

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