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The Pandemic Within a Pandemic

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Introduction

Since April of 2020, we have endured a time of confinement within our families due to the restrictions implemented from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this is not the first pandemic that has drastically increased violence. For instance, scholars, such as John Neetu, Sara Casey, Giselle Carino, and Terry McGovern, that are affiliated with the doctorate program of public health from Columbia University have shown that whenever quarantine measures are enforced, such as during the Spanish Flu, Ebola, and the Zika virus, it has had extreme impacts of the rates of domestic violence occurrence in the homes. In that case, why is that when disasters strike and individuals must stay at home with their significant others, violence typically increases? In this review, I will be exploring the factors that influence this increase in domestic violence since it has impacted our generation today and in the past. Many organizations, such as the Center for Disease Control and the American Psychological Association, have conducted numerous studies about the reasons why this alleged increase occurred, so this topic was chosen to combine these pieces of literature, as well as research studies done by scholars worldwide, to help understand more deeply the role that quarantine has in the violence increase. If for some reason, the articles studied factors of domestic violence before the pandemic or included previous relationship issues beforehand, they were excluded from my project, but otherwise, keywords such as factors, COVID-19, and domestic violence were used to identify existing studies. With these keywords in mind, my research question driving this study is: What factors have allegedly increased domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic? This question is essential in discovering ways we can help with future pandemics to help immobilize the damaging effects that victims may experience after. The relational turbulence theory, unemployment and stress, social isolation and lack of sexual interest, barriers to resources, and

substance abuse are all relevant concepts that can help us discover the link between COVID-19 and the increase in domestic violence.

Relational Turbulence Theory

Many sociologists have proposed the Relational Turbulence Theory that has been studied across previous pandemics. Nonetheless, the same concept became explored during this historic pandemic too. Essentially, this theory explains how, “the external change to the relational environment compels romantic partners to navigate transitions by establishing new routines as interdependent couples” (Goodboy, et al., 2021, p. 1800). As with the pandemic, changes happen within each relationship, as his research study shows. They measured college students in relationships using a Likert scale that measured their relationship changes during COVID-19’s time frame, and found that it “affected their interdependence, experience of negative emotions, and stability” which ultimately signifies that this theory rings true (Goodboy, et al., 2021, p. 1810). Due to this study’s results of negative emotions and instability, we can generalize that this can cause major changes to any relationship, whether marital or dating, that can heighten the risk for domestic violence to occur. Further implications should become researched regarding this theory, so we can effectively identify interventions to help individuals transition to new routines easier.

Unemployment, Stress, and Financial Constraints

According to the Council on Criminal Justice, there has been an “8 percent increase in domestic violence since the government mandated stay-at-home orders” (2022, para. 1). One of the sources for this increase “is unemployment, financial insecurity, and the stress that accompanies childcare or homeschooling”, as the Criminal Justice Council addressed (2022, para. 3). Due to these financial stressors, relationship satisfaction can decrease which could cause

domestic violence to occur. A research study, by Schmid, et al. addressed this concern when they correlated the partners' employment situation, whether it was home-office or short-term work, with the impact on relationship satisfaction. They took many factors into consideration, such as children living with them and the satisfaction before and found that "satisfaction decreased for respondents experiencing home-office and short-time work who lived without children compared to those living with children" (Schmid, et al., 2020, p. S753). It was noted that the couples without children experienced more conflicts and had higher satisfaction beforehand than the ones with children. In that case, children may not influence domestic violence during the pandemic as other scholars, such as the Council of Criminal Justice stated above. With that being a major difference between these two studies, we may need to determine the actual impact that children have on a parent's relationship during COVID-19. On the other hand, we can see these unemployment effects across the globe, as researchers in Bangladesh discovered similar results. The study, done by Doza-Bodrur, et al., became administered through a perception-based questionnaire in which a random sample of over one thousand respondents answered. The participants stated that the government did the right thing by quarantining, but that many families and necessities became affected, "such as the low-income population, the price of basic products, and the possibility of severe socio-economic and health crises" (Doza-Bodrur, et al., 2020, p.1). With this research study, we can see that unemployment is a tremendous consequence accompanied by the pandemic, which can hinder many families to be able to afford the necessities such as health and basic needs for living. They may, then, opt for violence as a result since their needs are not being met.

Social Isolation and Lack of Sexual Interest

Because of confinement mandates and individuals either losing their jobs or working virtually, social isolation became enhanced as they could not continue with their social lives like normal. An online health survey on social isolation completed among Belgian residents in relationships asserts this association as their results showed that “from April 2020 to March 2021, victims had higher odds of being unsatisfied with their social contacts which led to weaker social support systems and loneliness” (Drieskens, et al., 2022, p. 1). In other words, they depended solely on their spousal relationship to meet their social and emotional needs, eventually leading to burnout, and lashing out of the opposite partner. Not only that, but a study done by Luetke, et al. correlated changes of intimate and sexual behaviors due to dependency and eventually conflict from being socially isolated. Luetke’s team of researchers collected data from a cross-sectional survey in which she observed their social and intimate relationships as well as their sexual behaviors. They found that, “34 percent of respondents reported some type of conflict with their partners due to COVID-19 and its restrictions and that many of their escalations were due to their sex lives changing” (Luetke, et al., 2020, p. 747). These correlations between social isolation and sexual interests can be a key reason for domestic violence to happen in the home because they do not have anyone to rely on or get in touch with besides their perpetrator. As professionals in this field, we should lead further research studies on how to ensure that everyone has some type of social support or friend they can reach out too, despite the limitation of a pandemic.

Barriers of the Pandemic and Access to Available Resources

Due to social isolation experienced, there are pronounced barriers that many victims had a difficult time finding. From perspectives of social service workers on their experiences of treating domestic violence victims during the pandemic months, they were able to tell a

difference between before and after the pandemic started. For instance, this research study conducted a semi-structured qualitative interview on 32 different social service providers where the majority said, “there was a decrease in the amount of calls they got at the beginning of the pandemic most likely due to safety concerns, their need to balance other priorities, and miscommunications about what resources were available to them” (Leigh, et al., 2022, para. 1). According to a report conducted by the American Psychological Association, “shelters were closed or under-resourced, emergency rooms were full, and people did not want to go out in public and risk getting COVID-19” (2020, para. 8). This presents a conflict because how can we effectively present resources that are available, if there were only a couple around their area in which may be closed or understaffed. This provides future implications for research as researchers in this field. After the pandemic picked up though, Leigh, et al. measured that the calls increased which is likely because of “their ability to return to normal activities, a greater need for support resources, increased levels of stress, and lack of a de-escalation period” (2022, para. 1). Through this research study, we can generalize that many relationships ended in violence, with a lack of available time and resources to reach out for help. It is important that if this happens again, we educate families about the resources and organizations that can help them balance their priorities, while also seeking help for themselves personally. Also, the providers reported that many perpetrators used COVID and quarantine as a coercive control technique to persuade them that they could not get help and were stuck in these conditions. As one victim said, “the abuser hid my insurance cards, so my child nor I could go to the doctor despite showing symptoms and would take away access to masks and disinfectants so I could not leave nor protect myself” (Leigh, et al., 2022, para. 46). This research study and article by the American Psychological Association is influential in discovering new themes that perpetrators

use during confinement as well as expressing concerns regarding the lack of resources and social support systems available for victims.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Lastly, drug and alcohol abuse rates increased as well, which can be correlated to the rise in domestic violence during the pandemic. In one study conducted, researchers surveyed alcohol drinking throughout the pandemic to see if there were changes in the rates of alcohol use. They used an in-house questionnaire as well as several different tests such as AUDIT and GHQ-228, to sample subjects randomly. The results indicated that, “more than 30% changed their drinking habits because of the pandemic, with 16 percent drinking less, and 14 percent more, with alcohol being the most commonly used of the psychoactive substances (almost 73%)” (Chodkiewicz, et al., 2020, p. 1). Even though many use alcohol less, there was still a huge percent that used it more, which they found that their mental health was worse due to not knowing how to cope with daily functioning. In this case, COVID-19 can be a tremendous problem with the increase in alcohol use, likely resulting in an increase in family violence. Through social media, we can also see this factor as a catalyst for domestic violence. Xue, et al. used Twitter to see nine ways that vulnerabilities were expressed. His team of researchers analyzed over one million tweets and were able to find common themes represented. Some of the frequent key words they found on Twitter regarding substance abuse was “overdose, drug abuse, and addiction” which all led to individual’s reports of risk factors for violence (Xue, et al., 2020, para. 16). One sample tweet was, ““March 2020 saw a surge in reported cases of domestic violence. Alcoholism increases chances of abuse manifold on women and children as well as the coworkers or friends cannot see the bruises or addiction”” (Xue, et al., 2020, para. 20). They also found other tweets regarding some of the factors already discussed, such as social isolation, employment stresses, and lack of

available help from resources. Being able to confirm the other reasons for this increase and seeing first-hand what people have actively discussed on Twitter is an instrumental way to start a social support intervention as well as provide insight for future research.

Conclusion

From these research studies, my research question was verified as the factors listed above did increase domestic violence worldwide during this infamous pandemic. While there are many other reasons that domestic violence increases in the home during stay-at-home orders, these were the most significant that were found. Besides some research studies counteracting each other, such as the impact of children and whether they were a positive or negative association, there were no other obvious gaps in the research. One of the conclusive reasons that we can draw from all research studies is the stress that can accompany confinement, such as unemployment, lack of social support, and the emotions that arise when transitions occur. Due to these stressors, domestic violence is increased due to the lack of ineffective intervention approaches. Further research should be done on interventions we can use to reach out to the public and offer the appropriate organizations and support they need including ways to navigate stressful transitions in life based upon the relational turbulence theory and ways to fund our organizations more since most are grant-based. Professionals, in this field, also can use social media as a proactive tool to help address the victims and provide reliable resources for them to get help, as can be implicated for future research as well. By using social media and the resources around, we can help intervene and prevent this hidden pandemic from happening in the future.

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