

Guest editorial

Roxanne Khan

Domestic abuse and family violence in the UK: the impact of COVID-19

In recognition of the many efforts made to increase our knowledge about experiences of domestic abuse during the pandemic, the *Journal of Aggression, Conflict, and Peace Research (JACPR)* is publishing this Special Issue on Domestic Abuse and Family Violence in the UK: the Impact of COVID-19.

This collection of papers is published three years after the first national lockdown and stay-at-home orders in March 2020. This unprecedented governmental response, to restrict the spread of virus, had a devastating impact on innumerable people, for myriad reasons.

In what [UN Women \(2020\)](#) termed a “shadow pandemic”, the already epidemic levels of domestic abuse spiked rapidly. For many victims living in the same home or community as their abusers, all known ways of coping, surviving or escaping were instantly lost. The sanctuary of the workplace, or respite when an abuser was at work, was no longer an option. Almost immediately, reports of violence in family settings caused alarm across the domestic abuse sector; in the first three weeks of lockdown, domestic killings in the UK doubled and at least 14 women, 1 man and two children were murdered ([Khan et al., 2020](#); [Smith, 2020](#)).

As weeks turned into months, the impact of COVID-19 on domestic abuse and family violence intensified. Enflamed by adopting, then easing, lockdown measures to restrict movement, 24-h news reports of risk of contagion and increasing death rates, and widely publicised protests and riots. Having endured over two years in the throes of a public health crisis, victims' lives were further strained by family, social and economic tensions.

While research studies during this period have explored the impact of COVID-19 in many facets of social life, none have brought these together in one volume of work to focus specifically on domestic abuse in the UK.

Due to the broad range of issues covered, this collection of papers adds new dimensions to our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on domestic abuse, in post-Brexit, pandemic-weary UK. Purposely a mix of research studies, reviews and opinion pieces, these papers are authored by academics who research, and professionals who work, in the criminal justice system:

- Appointed just prior to lockdown, the first Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs (2023), shares her viewpoint about the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill 2021, and holding agencies and government to account in tackling domestic abuse at a time of national crisis.
- Rowland (2023) discusses the complexities of delivering Domestic Homicide Reviews during the pandemic – on overcoming the challenges of keeping victims at the heart of the process, while managing the emotional toil of conducting reviews while working remotely, and from home.
- A commentary by Franklin-Corben and Towl (2023) provides insight into the measures adopted in the Higher Education sector in response to Gender Based Violence. They explore the impact of the early stages of the pandemic, and the changes since made to the provision of specialist service delivery, over two years on.

Roxanne Khan is based at the Department of Psychology, UCLAN, Preston, UK.

- Proudman and Lloyd (2023) present an evidence review on the impact of domestic abuse and family violence on women's lives during COVID-19 and emphasise the strain this had on family court hearings.
- A multinational perspective is offered by Bellini and Westmarland (2023), who explore how domestic violence perpetrator programmes in the UK, the USA and Australia adapted during the pandemic.
- Magill (2023) examines the experiences of staff at a women's organisation specialising in supporting ethnically minoritised and migrant women, specifically, the inequality in how domestic abuse was experienced, and the unique barriers they encountered when seeking help.
- In an interview study with African-heritage women affected by female genital mutilation (FGM), Mulongo *et al.* (2023) report their findings on the trauma associated with FGM and receiving specialist mental health support during the pandemic.

As a collection, these papers indicate avenues for future research and offer suggestions on how developments in policy and practice may best advance. My hope, as Guest Editor, is that this Special Issue is a useful resource for researchers, policymakers and practitioners across a range of expertise and experiences.

My final words are of thanks to those involved in the production of this Special Issue. I am grateful to all authors who submitted articles for this issue and the meticulous eye of reviewers. I extend my gratitude to the supportive publishing team who ensured this final publication was delivered on time, and is, I believe, a unique multi-perspective insight into domestic abuse during a period of national crisis.

References

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