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COVID-19 PANDEMIC: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women in the covid-19 pandemic: we need upstream approaches to break the intergenerational cycle

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The increased levels of violence reported during this pandemic are alarming.¹ Not only because of the lasting consequences for the physical and mental health of the women and (unborn) children affected, but also because of the risk of intergenerational transmission.

The environment in which a person develops, from the very earliest stages of life, has a fundamental influence on their growth and development and affects their behaviour and susceptibility to disease.² Domestic and family violence is widespread and often begins during pregnancy, or increases in severity if already present.³ Women who experience violence during pregnancy are more likely to deliver prematurely and have a baby with poorer neonatal outcomes.⁴ After birth, these children more often have internalising problems, and infants exposed to violence show insecure attachments, increased aggressive behaviour, reduced prosocial behaviour, and poorer health.^{5,6} Adverse childhood experiences such as child maltreatment or domestic violence increase the risk of mental and physical illness, substance abuse, and violence, perpetuating a vicious cycle of stress and adversity.⁷ Consequently, the current outbreak of violence not only harms the health and wellbeing of those affected now, but also affects their future health and wellbeing as well as that of their children.

If we do not take upstream approaches to prevent any further escalation of violence (which do exist), we will not only witness increasing numbers of victims but also increasing numbers of potential perpetrators of domestic violence in the future. Preventing violence now will break the intergenerational cycle of violence and improve the lives of generations to come.

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Full response at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1712/rr-2>.

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