



# COVID-19 Year in Review

The COVID-19 pandemic brought change and tragedy to many of our lives. For survivors of domestic violence, it was a time of increased challenges and compromised safety. We know that survivors are incredibly strong and resilient, but COVID-19 made our mission of shifting power back to those affected by relationship abuse even more important.

In the media, some referred to domestic violence during COVID-19 as the shadow pandemic. Abuse is about power and control. When social distancing and quarantining were encouraged by the CDC (for good reason), our advocates knew that partners who choose to abuse would take advantage of an already stressful situation to gain even more control.

At the start of the pandemic, when survivors were forced to be in closer proximity to their partner who is abusive, we didn't experience an increase in our contact volume – something that concerned us, but we also knew, from previous natural disasters, that survivors may not have the safety they needed to reach out for support. Initially 7% of our incoming contacts expressed that COVID-19 was a condition of their experience.

[thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org) ■ 1.800.799.SAFE ■ “START” to 88788

The average annual rate of change was examined for the past five years to examine the compound effect of growth for identified abuse trends noted within user victim details, contact needs, and abuse types.

MAR 16, 2019

PRE-COVID

MAR 15, 2020

COVID

MAR 15, 2021

## Contacts Defined

**Pre-COVID Contact:** Someone contacting The Hotline prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**COVID Contact:** Someone contacting The Hotline who mentioned COVID-19 as a condition of their experience. This means that the person contacting us was impacted by COVID-19 in some way, whether that means they or their partner was sick with COVID-19, they could not get access to resources due to COVID-19, or COVID-19 impacted them in some other way.

**Non-COVID Contact:** Someone who contacted The Hotline, but did not mention COVID-19 as a condition of their experience. However, they contacted The Hotline during COVID-19, so their situation still may have been impacted by the pandemic without explicitly naming it.

## Contact need for individual professional counseling



Since 2016, individual professional counseling as a contact need has grown by an average of 5% annually.

**In the case of any natural disaster such as COVID-19, many of us faced external factors that added stress, isolation, and financial strain in our lives. All of these factors also further compromise a survivor's safety.**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. adults reported considerably elevated adverse mental health conditions associated with COVID-19. Younger adults, racial/ethnic minorities, essential workers, and unpaid adult caregivers also reported experiencing disproportionately worse mental health outcomes, increased substance use, and elevated suicidal ideation.

The impact of adverse mental health conditions paired with experiencing domestic violence made for an extremely challenging time for survivors. We saw a 17%\* increase in requests for individual professional counseling during COVID-19 year over year. With some counselors and therapists decreasing their availability or only being able to speak remotely, it still may not have been possible or safe for survivors to reach out for support.

\*individual counseling increased by 5,943 requests.

JUL 12, 2020

From our lines

A survivor reached out over chat to talk about the abuse they were experiencing. Due to COVID-19, the survivor could not see their counselor in person and had to do counseling sessions via telemedicine. The survivor felt they were not able to speak freely with their counselor since the partner who was abusing was nearby.

MAR 24, 2020

From the news

“We started getting on this as soon as we started seeing the handwriting on the wall,” said Patti Giggans, executive director of the nonprofit Peace Over Violence in Los Angeles.

Before the statewide lockdown, the nonprofit began preparing online counseling sessions, and reaching out to clients to suggest ways to keep in contact — perhaps phone calls to counselors from a bathroom or during a walk, if an abuser is in the home.”

- Associated Press:  
With isolation, abuse activists  
fear an ‘explosive cocktail’

## Financial abuse

27%

PRE-COVID CONTACTS

35%

COVID CONTACTS

23%

NON-COVID CONTACTS

Since 2016, financial abuse as a condition of a contact's experience has grown by an average of **13%** annually.

**Ask any of our advocates – it's one of the least known forms of abuse, but nearly every survivor experiences financial abuse in some way.**

Whether an abusive partner is monitoring a survivor's purchases or taking their stimulus checks, financial abuse can be difficult to identify. There are many reasons why this is—for one, finances can be deeply uncomfortable to discuss, even in a healthy relationship. There are also various gender stereotypes that show up in heterosexual relationships that may make it seem normal that one partner would have total control over the finances.

During COVID-19, we may have seen an increase in survivors mentioning financial abuse as part of their experience for a variety of reasons. According to [Pew Research Center](#), 51% of non-retired American adults said the economic impact of COVID-19 will make achieving their long-term financial goals harder, and one in ten surveyed didn't think their finances would ever recover. This precarious situation is only amplified for survivors who are experiencing financial abuse.

JUL 25, 2020

From our lines

A survivor contacted us after they lost their job due to COVID-19. The survivor was disabled with no transportation and was financially dependent on their partner who chose to abuse. Their partner would take the survivor's disability check, as well as their medication. The survivor was working with a local agency but those services had to close due to COVID-19.

AUG 4, 2020

From the news

“While millions of Americans have saved, spent or invested their stimulus checks, some domestic-violence survivors have found themselves deprived of the financial lifeline and often saddled with the knowledge that their abuser has the money.”

- [MarketWatch](#):  
[Domestic abusers are taking survivors' stimulus checks—and lawmakers want the IRS to do something about it](#)

## Children involved

44%

PRE-COVID CONTACTS

44%

COVID CONTACTS

41%

NON-COVID CONTACTS

Since 2016, children involved in a survivor's experience has grown by an average of 5% annually.

**Due to COVID-19, schools were forced to transition to remote education options over in-person learning.**

UNICEF reported that schools for more than 168 million children globally had to close due to COVID-19 lockdowns. The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline also reported significant increase in contact volume during the pandemic.

Having both survivors and their children in closer and more frequent proximity to the partner who chose to abuse due to at-home working and school added just one more factor that could further compromise a survivor's safety and that of their family. Our advocates continued to hear survivors mention their children during the pandemic as a condition of their experience, making emotional safety planning with children even more essential.

SEP 19, 2020

From our lines

A survivor wanted to leave with their five children, one of whom has special needs. The partner who is abusive has become increasingly abusive with them since working from home. The survivor was homeschooling their children, and their partner would shut off their Wi-Fi periodically so it was difficult to reach out for help or create a safety plan.

DEC 23, 2020

From the news

“If a client comes to us and discloses concerns about an abusive response upon telling their partner there will be a separation, we make sure they have family, friend or professional resources for when that conversation takes place,” said Bach.

The lawyer suggested making sure their kids are at a different location when telling an abusive spouse of the intention to leave. COVID restrictions can make this more complicated than usual, so it would be worth contacting an abuse survivors organization or shelter in your area for advice on how best to go about this.”

- HuffPo:

Domestic abuse: What people with kids need to know to plan their exit

## Housing instability

8%

PRE-COVID CONTACTS

11%

COVID CONTACTS

8%

NON-COVID CONTACTS

Since 2016, housing instability as a contact concern has grown by an average of **20%** annually.

According to the **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau**, 11 million renter and homeowner households were significantly overdue on their regular housing payments as of December 2020 and at heightened risk of losing their housing.

According to the **National Network to End Domestic Violence**, domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness for survivors and their children. We know from our conversations with survivors that the lack of safe and affordable housing is often a huge barrier when a survivor is considering leaving their relationship.

Even with pauses on evictions, housing instability adds a great amount of stress to a survivor's experience. During COVID-19, we saw an increase in survivors requesting access to a domestic violence shelter. With social distancing and other COVID-19 protocols in place across the country, we heard from shelters and other resources that they were stretched thin due to COVID-19. While every shelter has consistently been working hard to keep their residents safe and do what is best for their local communities, there were some survivors who were unable to gain access to emergency shelter. With lockdowns in place, it may not have been possible for a survivor to stay with friends or family as well, making safety planning even more complicated.

DEC 15, 2020

From our lines

A survivor reached out because they had lost their job due to COVID-19. The survivor lived with their partner who chose to abuse and wanted to leave, but they were hesitant to go to a shelter due to fears of contracting COVID-19. After speaking for a bit, the survivor changed their mind. Unfortunately, all shelters in the area were closed down or at maximum capacity due to COVID-19.

SEP 22, 2020

From the news

“The study showed that some victims were met with various challenges and barriers -- including a lack of food, shelter, transportation, childcare, and opportunities for employment -- that pressured them to live in communities near their abusive partners. Others were forced to move back in with their abusers after finding themselves having to choose between being abused or being homeless.”

- CNN:

**The Coronavirus is making it harder for domestic violence victims to find a place to live, a study shows**

## Looking forward

Here's what we know to be true: survivors are incredibly brave and resourceful. We find ourselves inspired by their strength and bravery every single day.

And while we are thankful that many more people and companies have gained greater familiarity with the signs of domestic violence and how to help, the long-term effects on the health and safety of survivors must be a priority for us all.

So how can you support survivors in your life?

- **Learn how to safety plan:** safety planning is an essential part of shifting power to a survivor and empowering them to make the choices that are best for them.
- **Join us in advocating for policies that empower survivors:** elected officials play a huge role in the movement to end domestic violence. Efforts to end domestic violence have established important protections for survivors, but there's still more work to be done.
- **Donate to help make our work possible:** help us continue to provide confidential support to every survivor who needs us by making a donation today.

Total contacts answered

353,635 374,640

PRE-COVID

March 16, 2019 - March 15, 2020

COVID

March 16, 2020 - March 15, 2021

23,056

Total contacts who cited COVID-19 as a condition of their experience from 3/16/20 - 3/15/21

When COVID-19 first came into our lives, we knew survivors were in closer proximity to their partner who chose to abuse and likely unable to reach out for support safely. As the only national 24/7 hotline for those impacted by relationship abuse, our advocates empower survivors to make life-changing decisions with dignity and respect. Our organization uses technology, enhanced at-home safety planning, and increased outreach to best meet the rapidly changing needs of survivors during COVID-19.

- Katie Ray-Jones, CEO



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