**COVID-19 & Domestic Violence**

**Presented by Mercy Roberg and Professor Luz Nagle**

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**Mercy Roberg >>** Hello Professor Nagle! Thank you for joining us in our COVID webinar series. We're really happy to have you here to talk about this really important topic involving domestic violence during COVID in quarantine around the world. thank you for being here and I would love to just start off with if you want to give us some general thoughts and things that you're seeing happening internationally regarding COVID and domestic violence.

**Professor Nagel >>** Well first of all thank you to Stetson for organizing webinars and talk about these important and pressing issues. One of the things that I want to clarify from the beginning is what do we understand by domestic violence. When we talk about domestic violence, we talk about abuses that are committed against individuals within a household. And the abuses vary; they can be physical, sexual, emotional, economical, psychological threats, stalking and even cyberstalking. The victims of these, what I would call household abuses, could be spouses, intimate partners, children, any family members, even roommates. What we know is that they are vulnerable groups to this type of violence within the household. And among those groups, we have women, children, individual with disabilities, and the LGBT community. Domestic violence is described as an attempt to exert control over the abused power. They have suggested that women and girls in particular are facing a greater risk from this pandemic as they are systematically disadvantage and often suppressed by poverty, violence equality, and marginalization. So, prior to the pandemic, prior to all the countries going into the lockdown we already knew that we had a domestic violence that constituted a global emergency. And let me just give you some statistics prior COVID-19, 1 in 4 American women experienced domestic violence and on average more than 3 women were murdered by their intimate partner daily. This is what we call femicide just in the United States. According to data collected by the United Nations, that 40% of women who experience violence report these crimes or even seek help. 243 million women and girls between the ages 15 and 49 worldwide were subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner in the last 12 months. 1 in 3 women has experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their life. Just in 2017, 87,000 where intentionally killed by an intimate partner or family member of the victim this prior to the pandemic today. So, what we have COVID-19 and all the nations decided to go into lock down is that the victims were trapped with their aggressors and unfortunately all the countries without exception failed to take into consideration a gender approach to the lockdown. Leaving all of these individuals living in the household being exposed to abuse. So, what we have now is emerging data that shows that, I’m just going to address, the domestic violence in regard to women and girls just because they are the most disadvantaged and the ones that seemed to have been faced the most amount of violence due to the – yes - inequality and marginalization. So, I'm just going to be talking about that. that doesn't mean that yes men are also abused and yes men also have been victims of domestic violence during the pandemic. So, the statistics that have emerged what they are showing us is that it has been epidemic, out of control. In most of the countries what we have seen is an increase in a number of calls reporting conjugal violence. In the United States, just in the first week of April the national domestic abuse helpline reported an increase, out of control with their abuses. In the UK, in the UK, the report increased the 120% so yes even if we seem to have certain data the data is not it's not very clear. Why? Because we cannot reach all the victims and the victims can nor reach the World outside. What we have seen is that the victims have been able to use the technology something to be able to communicate with the outside world. this morning I was just looking at Instagram and I saw they posting of a female up that had been beaten by her husband with her eyes all black and this call because her husband abused her the day before, so the only way that she was able to seek out help was by sharing the posting with her sister who then shared the posting on Instagram and immediately a lot of people started reposting it and that has been one outlet. But having said that it, the governments lack infrastructure. The Governments lack any policy or any strategy to be able to help domestic violence victims. We had a huge increase because the data is coming from either report from these papers, Facebook postings, Instagram, people who are able to go out. But there are many that are not able to go out. Let me just address another statistic that seems to be a little a bit concerning, and it is concerning. Is the amount of femicides, this is the killing of women and why femicides. We’ve reached the point of femicides the kills when women don’t have an outlet, where they cannot communicate or even if they can communicate, they are ignored. So the increase among femicides in pretty much all countries from Pakistan to Chile. Has been - let me just give you the statistic, in France, 1 femicide every 3 days. In Mexico, almost 1000 women were murdered in the first three months of the year, and according to an NGO in April there were 163 femicides. In Peru, after 8 weeks of confinement there were 12 femicides. 226 rapes were registered of which 132 were minors. And the femicides have been taking place in Spain and Italy and so and so forth. So, this is the situation that we had prior to the lockdown - after the lockdown. And again, it’s because we just don’t have – we didn’t have an infrastructure.

**Mercy Roberg >>** So those statistics are pretty staggering and that's just what's actually being reported right so as you mentioned there is a lot of unreported abuse happening. A. because people are still quarantined and lock down and so they're not able to go out and talk to their support system that might normally help guide them to resources so with that you touched a little bit on this sort of a you know a lot of times we think of technology being in the negative but you talked a little bit about how social media in some ways is becoming a resource and you saw that and what else have you kind of seen internationally in that regards to on kind of the pros of technology to help victims and then also you know I've heard of you know abusers use technology and take it away to also stop the spread of information or control the phone to control the messaging. Can you speak on that a little?

**Professor Nagel >>** Yes, and uh if you're showing that in Australia the did a survey and they have a pretty good result on how technology facilitated abuse and the domestic abuse of women and girls. And this statistic is staggering the technology that facilitated abuse was present in 98% of all domestic and family violence cases. So yes, technology is negative, and technology is a positive and let me just give you both sides. Technology is to be negative because it provides new opportunities for the abuser to control, arise and stalk their victims and this is what we call Technology Enabled Coercive Control it is a way to make the victims more vulnerable. Today’s technology offers new ways to fit the traitor for them to abuse. But they behavior and the reasons for it are not new, they are the same. Abusers want power and control over the person and technology is just one more way for them to get that. We home cameras victims lack privacy, the abuser can check the websites, the victim … We go also to the issue as to whether or not the victims, know technology, know how to handle their own computer, do they know how to get rid of the websites they have been in. The abusers can also check the cell logs, well do the victims know how to get rid of all of the information in their cellphone. The abusers share intimate photos, they monitor their partners, they see their internet history, they see their text and mail. And some of them deploy spyware and camera-based surveillance. They also sometimes recall access to technology, which during a pandemic its crucial, it will cut the partners off from work, it will cut the partners off from friends, and even access to medical care. Perpetrators also use the find my iPhone app to track at partners location without them knowing. Now we have systems through which Alexa and all these devices will allow us to have an integrative home where we have the lights, the electricity, the tv everything interconnected. Well the perpetrators also refused and have used it during the pandemic to cut off the victims from the electricity, from air conditioning so yes that is a negative aspect of technology. But technology also has some positives things. Advocates, tech companies, centers, everyone had to think of innovative ways to protect and reach out to victims without the abusers knowing. So, what we have with technology is that social media has been used by neighbors and friends to report abuses, like the one I was talking about on Instagram. And every country has seen different hashtags, so they created different hashtags so the people can trace and help the individuals who need help. Also, technology has allowed a lot of governments and political institutions to put out webinars to train a variety of people on the diverse issue. In the United States for example, we have the Safety Net Team, that presented several webinars training more than 5,000 advocates and created pandemic specific tips and many resources. We also have Cornell University, Cornell’s Tech Clinic, to end tech abuse. They created an innovated remote program to help victims use their devices without fear of monitoring or stalking. Also, here in the United States home security company, ADT, is releasing a so secure mobile app for free. That app is designed to be helpful to those who are facing domestic abuse. For example, they can silently SMS chat with ADT’s 24/7 professional monitors. They can discreetly trigger an emergency alarm which allows ADT to pinpoint the users GPS coordinates. The users can also designate friends or family members to receive alerts when alarm is triggered, and the app also allows the client period to present after which emergency contacts will be notified if the user is unresponsive. Similarly, to that in France they 19:09 an application that allows women victims of filings to discreetly alert 3 trusted contacts when they are being attacked and that will allow them to call the police if necessary. It also has a GPS alert, and what is interesting about this one is it records the attack in real time on the victims and the contacts phones. The other thing that I see that it's just very creative and very good is the therapy sessions with counselors that are now then to video conferencing apps or phone calls and that is done in New York. The victims for them to be able to reach out to counsellors, they will have to tell their abuser that they are going shopping, or they are going somewhere that they can remove themselves, maybe in the car and being able to call from the car. So, all this is wonderful all this is great. However, when you have an abuser that sometimes that doesn’t allow you to even learn how to get rid of a lot of this mapping that the technology has, it’s very difficult.

**Mercy Roberg >>** So uhm that was really informative um especially about ADT and some of the things that have been very creative during this time to help abuse. One of the things I saw that I thought was really interesting in teachers kind of had to jump into this realm when we went to virtual schooling a lot of minors I heard teachers talking about how they came up with code words to check on their students and I thought that ties into what you were talking about with social media and stuff in the hashtags because when you don't have a visual every day on a student or a friend you don't see the signs as much or they're not as obvious and so I thought that was really interesting where teachers were coming up with code words to help.

**Professor Nagel >>** Yeah and to add to what you just said in France, the government partnered with a different surgical companies and pharmacies. And in the partnership, they decided that they needed to designate the pharmacies as the place where the victims could go, and they designed also a code system for the victims to be able to communicate. So when they were in distress and they had a problem because the victimizer was it that they will ask pharmacies for a COVID -19 mask, so that was the code for them to say I'm in trouble, I'm with my abuser and that's safe system was replicated in Spain. So, it just it just is it's fascinating to see how people in organizations, informants have had had been crafted innovative ways to be able help of domestic violence.

**Mercy Roberg >>** Well we just have a few minutes left Professor Nagle this has been really informative and so just with kind of your final thoughts on what you see happening as the as we you know go out of quarantine what do you see shelters doing, what do you see maybe the court system doing, because I think that as you talked about the statistics might end up being higher as we move forward. So, what do you predict in the next six months?

**Professor Nagel >>** You know here in the United States we are back to normal but in many other countries they are not back to normal, they still have a full lockdown. So, what I see is that we need to have a system in place. The governments need to give enough money to the NGOs and to all those groups that are helping domestic violence victims. Certain informants in the European Union have done so and I think that that is going to be crucial try to help individuals. So, what do I see for now is that we were not prepared for this lockdown. Many other countries are still in lockdown and they were not prepared either and I think that what needs to happen is governments need to put a budget to try to help all these groups that are helping domestic violence victims. The only thing that I think is going to be important these may just do emulate the Paris borrow they had 200 lawyers volunteer to do pro bono work online and they received specific training to understand domestic violence and after they were able to pass the training on a webinar then they were able to help the victims and they were even using their cell phones to be able to advise the victims, I think we should have more of that. But having said that the ABA has partnered with a justice tech company called Pilate, and what they're doing is helping lawyers find pro bono opportunities. My desire would be for those lawyers that are going to work to take a course maybe even the ABA could design a course on domestic violence and so that the lawyers are well tooled to be able to help victims.

**Mercy Roberg >>** I think that's a great call to action Professor Nagle and you know for our alumni listening to this webinar maybe there's some alum that you know would love to reach out to you and figure out how we can, Stetson, yourself, and partnering with the ABA to create something like that or to help with something like that because I think this is just sort of the beginning of what was already a global pandemic with women and children and really now since quarantining and COVID even more important for us as a global community to look at.

**Professor Nagel >>** Yeah, I really hope that a lot of our alumni and even students could get the tools to be able. Because I think that this is not going to go away anytime soon and again I think that way that a lot of these women and children were abandoned in a way because we designed the lock down without even thinking about the consequences of locking down the victims of domestic violence with their abusers. So, I think that it’s – it will be important for the whole community to have something already in place – just in case we have something coming up again.

**Mercy Roberg >>** Well thank you Professor Nagle for joining us in our series and then this really important topic we really enjoyed having you and we look forward to working together in the future!

**Professor Nagel >>** Thank you so much! Have a great afternoon!