**LOCKDOWNS, ISOLATIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH: THE INCREASE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE CASES IN 2020/21**

Luke Hutchinson

364 more cases of domestic abuse were recorded through the lockdown periods, significantly more towards women than men.

When lockdown regulations were set into place at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people raised the question to how those who suffer with mental health issues will cope without getting the care that they routinely receive. It was suspected that the number of domestic abuse cases could rise due to people being deprived of any care, alongside of spending long and isolated periods in the house with their partners.

Vicc Kennedy of Coleraine said, *“I feel those already categorized as vulnerable are further segregated from society due to social distancing measures, plus due to lockdown many services were severely restricted leaving them more isolated.”*

*“Those suffering in an abusive relationship have no free tie away from the relationship, further intensifying the abuse. People in a rocky relationship that hasn’t reached the stage of abuse, isolation could exacerbate the issue to lead to the threshold of abuse.”* says Vicc.

Domestic abuse towards men has always been downplayed; “how can men be abused by women?” The general conception of this was to if men spoke out about being domestically abused it would forfeit the ‘tough macho’ image, but this is entirely not the case. As time has went on men have slowly been coming out and speaking about their own domestic abuse incidents.

Figures taken from the PSNI database of incidents throughout Northern Ireland for the comparison of domestic abuse cases show that an increase of 364 incidents occurred amidst the lockdown periods of 2020/21. The total amount of cases recorded for women are over double that of men.



Craig Dunlop of Castleroe said *“With mental health issues you’re going to isolate yourself, even without Covid happening you might not be even talking about it. The increase of domestic abuse cases, I could see why there could be an increase due to both Covid and mental health.”*

*“Who knowns the actual number of people who didn’t speak up about their ordeal. For the number of men I’m actually surprised, but there are obviously going to be men who aren’t afraid to speak up, but I wasn’t expecting 5000 plus”* said Craig. *“I could see why and why not you would report it, but can you get justice by not reporting it?”* Craig added.

Anonymous calls that were reported stand at 18 which is an increase by five, this could show that victims are more willing to speak up about their abuse but aren’t ready to identify themselves or identify the person who is also the abuser. This comes from the perspective that the victim doesn’t want their abuser to get into trouble.

William Smyth, a community care worker in Coleraine said *“None of our calls got any less because of Covid, In general I’d say there was probably more incidents especially for the patients with routines maybe with other places.”*

*“Men are more open to talk about domestic abuse now than they were in the past five years. He anonymous calls I’d say are mostly women, women have more chances of getting abused. A lot of the time they don’t actually want their partner to get into bother.”* says William.



Out of the 18,106 cases in 2020/21 it shows that women are the 69.23% of all of the incidents that were reported throughout the year. With men taking up a much smaller margin of 30.67%. The difference in the amount of cases between women and men is a total of 6,982. This was an increase of 74 incidents from the year of 2019/20.

Women’s Aid in Coleraine stayed open and vigilant throughout the lockdowns to help women who were victims of domestic abuse, keeping their refuges open for shelter for victims who fled from their home.

Lynne Moody from Women’s Aid said *“The mental health issues just skyrocketed for us really. A lot of depression and anxiety. Completely anxious because they’re not able to go anywhere. We were open, and we had to work completely differently. The emotional abuse, that’s massive. That is so bad for your mental health. That’s almost the worst part of it.”*

*“The majority of our refuges are communal living. People were moving, to move in that climate, it must have been bad. It was so difficult for them. For somebody to go to the police and then the court thing that can be really scary for people, it could even make it worse.”* Lynne said.

If you have been affected by the issues raised in this story, help is out there. Log onto <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/> for more details or call 0808 2000 247