Title:
The impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and children in Germany

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Abstract:
To contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly a quarter of the world’s population is currently under lockdown or practicing physical distancing. These measures may have inadvertent consequences. In this project, we study the implications of the shutdown and social distancing policies across German states (”Bundesländer”) for violence against women and children. The economic uncertainty and social isolation that are associated with COVID-19 are presumed to deteriorate individuals’ mental health and thus increase the risk of conflict and violence. At the same time, the ability to eschew perpetrators and to seek social and professional support is restricted. We will conduct a representative online survey with 4000 households across Germany to quantify the prevalence of violence against women and children and examine whether being quarantined at home along with poor mental health, economic insecurity, changes in partners’ relative earnings and employment status, and increased childcare responsibilities exacerbate the risk of domestic violence. We will use variation in state laws on social distancing and home quarantine behaviour to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women and children. We will triangulate our survey data with administrative data from telephone helplines and counselling services for survivors of domestic abuse as well as from police records. The administrative data will be collected retrospectively over 12 months, thus allowing us to determine how the pandemic affected the risk and prevalence of domestic abuse. The quantitative results will be further complemented by qualitative interviews with social workers and police officers to unpack various mechanisms leading to violence against women and children. Findings from this study can help inform policy programmes to alleviate these risks and more effectively protect women and children in times of crisis.

JEL Codes: I12, J12, J16, I18

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