

Title: Understanding the rise of Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence from Spain.

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Abstract: Domestic Violence can have serious negative consequences, with wide-ranging psychological, economic and physical effects for women and children over their lifetimes. Early evidence from most affected countries (China, Italy, Spain) suggests that domestic violence has dramatically increased during the current COVID-19 pandemic. In Spain, the number of emergency calls reporting domestic violence increased 18% in the first fortnight of March, just when the lockdown started.

Household stress and domestic violence is expected to increase during a pandemic due to forced coexistence, economic uncertainty, and fears of contagion. The pandemic also affects the access to support services in the health, police and justice sector. The aim of this project is to understand the mechanisms through which a pandemic increases domestic violence. In particular, we aim to isolate the impact of forced coexistence from other factors. To this, we exploit geographical differences in the timing of mandatory lockdown exposure. Also, lockdown effectiveness varies across regions depending on the sectoral distribution of economic activities. The correlation between the intensity of the lockdown and the resulting economic impact is imperfect, which allows to separate the effect of the two channels on domestic violence.

An understanding of these mechanisms can inform policy and program responses to mitigate the increase of domestic violence during the pandemic and reduce its long-run effects on women and children.

Data description: emergency calls reporting domestic violence at province level; number of contagions and deaths at province level; number of Temporary Employment Regulation files (known as ERTes) by provinces, sectoral distribution of economic activities across provinces; Google mobility reports by type of activity and across different regions in Spain.

JEL codes: J12, I12

Keywords: COVID-19, domestic violence, lockdown, economic stress, mobility.