



**KALEIDOSCOPE**  
INTERNATIONAL TRUST



**The Commonwealth  
Equality Network**

# **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**DOMESTIC ABUSE, COVID-19, AND LGBTI+  
PERSONS IN THE COMMONWEALTH**



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# INTRODUCTION

On 31 December 2019, cases of COVID-19 were first reported from Wuhan, China.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the next few months, the virus spread across the world, resulting in the largest pandemic seen in generations. Legislation, policies and public health guidance were rapidly drawn up and subsequently enforced by national governments in a bid to curb the disease.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent reports published by international organisations, media reports, and academic studies have revealed that the social environment created by the pandemic — as well as policies that have been implemented to tackle the disease — have rendered many LGBTI+ persons vulnerable to increased levels of violence, including within domestic and familial settings.<sup>3</sup> Given LGBTI+ people's historical experience of already disproportionate levels of violence within the domestic space on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE), this intensification is not surprising.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will begin by laying out the disproportionate levels of domestic abuse LGBTI+ people experienced before the onset of the pandemic. It will then examine the influence of the pandemic on exacerbating the vulnerability of LGBTI+ individuals who have been affected by domestic violence.

As part of its analysis, this paper adopts an intersectional approach to better understand some of the ways in which LGBTI+ persons are made more vulnerable to greater levels of domestic abuse, through a variety of lenses. The paper then concludes with some examples from across the Commonwealth of domestic abuse that LGBTI+ persons have been subject to during the pandemic.

## A NOTE ON DEFINITIONS: DOMESTIC ABUSE

**This paper relies on the United Nations' definition of domestic abuse, also called 'domestic violence' or 'intimate partner violence' (IPV), that can be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions — or threats of such actions — that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorise, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone.**

<sup>1</sup> Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Update. (2021, April 26). Retrieved from World Health Organization: [https://www.who.int/bangladesh/emergencies/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-update](https://www.who.int/bangladesh/emergencies/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-update)

<sup>2</sup> Henley, J., Giuffrida, A., Jones, S., Ellis-Petersen, H., McCurry, J., Phillips, T., . . . Graham-Harrison, E. (2021, January 30). From Lockdowns to Pool Parties: how COVID Rules Vary around the World. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/30/from-lockdowns-to-pool-parties-how-covid-rules-vary-around-the-world>

<sup>3</sup> McAuley, J. P. (2020, July 6). Covid-19 and L.G.B.T.+ Victims of Domestic Abuse: Suffering in Silence. Retrieved from University of Oxford, Faculty of Law: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/centres-institutes/centre-criminology/blog/2020/07/covid-19-and-lgbt-victims-domestic-abuse>

<sup>4</sup> Blondeel, K., Vasconcelos, S, Garcia-Moreno, C., Stephenson, R., Temmerman, M., & Toskin, I. (2017). Physical violence based on SOGIE among sexual and gender minorities: a systematic review. *European Journal of Public Health*. 27. 10.1093/eurpub/ckx187.330.

# BACKGROUND

In order to understand the ongoing experiences of LGBTI+ domestic abuse during the pandemic, it is important to situate the discussion within the prevailing lived conditions of LGBTI+ persons prior to the outbreak. In particular, it is important to accurately understand the levels of domestic abuse that LGBTI+ people often already encounter, in order to clarify the escalating effects of COVID-19.

## DOMESTIC ABUSE AGAINST LGBTI+ PERSONS

LGBTI+ individuals are made vulnerable to and experience extremely high levels of violence in both the public and the private domains, a fact that the evidence bears out. Violence at the hands of family members and intimate partners – including in same-gender relationships – against LGBTI+ people has been documented as global,<sup>5</sup> abuse which the former chair of the South African Human Rights Commission has identified as an indicator of the proliferation of wider societal violence and the historical enforcement of discrimination against marginalised groups.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the pandemic, LGBTI+ communities across the Commonwealth experienced elevated levels of domestic abuse. For example, in Fiji, as many as 84% of 645 LGBTI+ respondents to a survey stated that they have experienced violence within the domestic setting.<sup>7</sup> And in the United Kingdom, statistics gathered by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released in 2016 suggest that over one quarter of gay men and lesbian women and over one third of bisexual people reported experiencing at least one form of domestic abuse from families or intimate partners since the age of 16.<sup>8</sup> The numbers for trans people are thought to be even higher, though data is less available.<sup>9</sup>

Certain types of violence against LGBTI+ people are also tacitly accepted in certain contexts, such as sexual violence as a means to ‘rectify’ an LGBTI+ person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>10</sup> As with any person, LGBTI+ people have multiple identities and, as such, may belong to multiple marginalised groups, further compounding the risks they face.

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<sup>5</sup> Stonewall. (2020). Out of the Margins: LBT+ exclusion through the lens of the SDGs. Available at <https://outofthemargins.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Out-of-the-Margins-report-2020.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2011). “We’ll Show You You’re A Woman:” Violence and Discrimination against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men in South Africa.

<sup>7</sup> Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality. (2019). Unjust, Unequal, Unstoppable: Fiji Lesbians, Bisexual Women, Trans Men, and Gender Non Conforming People Tipping the Scales Toward Justice.

<sup>8</sup> Galop. (2020). Galop, SafeLives and Stonewall briefing: The LGBT+ community and domestic abuse. Available at <https://www.galop.org.uk/galop-safelives-and-stonewall-briefing-the-lgbt-community-and-domestic-abuse/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> McAuley, J. P. (2020, July 6). Covid-19 and L.G.B.T.+ Victims of Domestic Abuse: Suffering in Silence. Retrieved from University of Oxford, Faculty of Law: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/centres-institutes/centre-criminology/blog/2020/07/covid-19-and-lgbt-victims-domestic-abuse>

<sup>11</sup> Collier, K. L., van Beusekom, G., Bos, H. M., & Sandfort, T. G. (2013). Sexual orientation and gender identity/expression related peer victimization in adolescence: a systematic review of associated psychosocial and health outcomes. *Journal of sex research*, 50(3-4), 299–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.750639>

Homophobic and transphobic legal and social environments make it more difficult for an LGBTI+ victim of violence, including of abuse at home, to seek help.<sup>11</sup> For example, a perpetrator may threaten to 'out' their victim to their community or employer if they report the abuse, thereby threatening their social ties, housing or income. And LGBTI+ victims of crime frequently encounter structural impediments to reporting abuse, seeking protection and accessing justice, such as being discriminated against when they approach the police.<sup>12</sup> This leaves LGBTI+ people vulnerable to further violence.

Evidence from New Zealand has shown that family violence (including child abuse and elder abuse) and sexual violence can escalate during and after large-scale disasters.<sup>13</sup> As such, the consequences of COVID-19 on domestic abuse have been referred to as a 'pandemic paradox' whereby staying at home as was required for the greater collective good left many individuals in vulnerable and dangerous circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McAuley, J. P. (2020, July 6). Covid-19 and L.G.B.T.+ Victims of Domestic Abuse: Suffering in Silence. Retrieved from University of Oxford, Faculty of Law: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/centres-institutes/centre-criminology/blog/2020/07/covid-19-and-lgbt-victims-domestic-abuse>

<sup>13</sup> New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (NZFVC). (2020). Preventing and Responding to Family, Whānau and Sexual Violence during COVID-19. Available at <https://nzfvc.org.nz/COVID-19/preventing-responding-violence-COVID-19>

<sup>14</sup> Bradbury-Jones, C. and Isham, L. (2020). The pandemic paradox: The consequences of COVID-19 on domestic violence. *J Clin Nurs*, 29: 2047-2049. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15296>

# ANALYSIS

## INTERSECTING IDENTITIES AND OPPRESSIONS

In order to understand the lived experience of LGBTI+ persons as it pertains to domestic abuse, it is important to use an intersectional approach which highlights the situation of individuals from marginalised groups and shines light on how these intersecting identities can make them more vulnerable.

In proposing the theory of intersectionality, Crenshaw used the diverse experiences of Black and white women within feminism to demonstrate that the failure to realise the intersectional experiences of vulnerable groups within larger marginalised communities can lead to ignoring the needs and perspectives of these vulnerable groups, as they are subsumed under the needs, perspectives, and experiences of the larger community.

In this regard, it is vital to recognise that, although LGBTI+ persons overall face a higher risk of domestic abuse within the larger society, LGBTI+ people who also belong to other marginalised communities face greater risks. In the following section, specifically vulnerable communities within the wider LGBTI+ community will be identified and their elevated risks of domestic abuse as a result of the pandemic will be reviewed.

## LBT WOMEN, NON-BINARY AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE

It can be challenging to monitor and understand the true scale of the issue, since domestic abuse usually takes place behind closed doors, away from the public eye. However, there is a growing body of evidence that the onslaught of the COVID-19 crisis has led to women, including those who are members of the LGBTI+ community, experiencing higher levels of domestic abuse.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

Research has shown that living in close constrained quarters, as is the case during lockdowns, increases risk for women – including LBT women – in abusive situations, and an overarching correlation between lockdown measures and an increase in domestic abuse has been identified.<sup>19 20</sup> Likewise, trans and non-binary persons face further risks of domestic violence stemming from disproportionate poverty, homelessness, or transient living arrangements.<sup>21</sup> Such conditions can leave them vulnerable to domestic violence as they may have no choice but to continue to live in abusive living arrangements due to a lack of financial resources and/or safe housing alternatives.

<sup>15</sup> Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine", University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139-167. Retrieved from <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>

<sup>16</sup> Roje Đapić M, Buljan G, Prijatelj K. (2020). Children Behind Closed Doors Due to COVID-19 Isolation: Abuse, Neglect and Domestic Violence. Arch Psychiatry Res. 15;56(2):181-192.

<sup>17</sup> Bradbury-Jones C., Isham L. (2020, May 15). The pandemic paradox: The consequences of COVID-19 on domestic violence. J Clin Nurs 2020 Jul 22;29(13-14):2047-2049.

<sup>18</sup> Salerno, J. P., Williams, N. D., & Gattamorta, K. A. (2020). LGBTQ populations: Psychologically vulnerable communities in the COVID-19 pandemic. Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12(S1), S239–S242.

<sup>19</sup> UN Women, IDLO, UNDP, UNODC, World Bank and The Pathfinders. (2020). Justice for Women amidst COVID-19. New York.

<sup>20</sup> International Bar Association. (2020). IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor.

<sup>21</sup> Fraser, B., Pierse, N., Chisholm, E., & Cook, H. (2019). LGBTIQ+ Homelessness: A Review of the Literature. International journal of environmental research and public health, 16(15), 2677. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152677>

The pandemic has not only exacerbated the scale of the problem, it has also resulted in new barriers to reporting domestic abuse and therefore to accessing justice for individuals seeking protection from and redress of domestic violence.<sup>22</sup> Restrictions in physical access to support services, first responders, and housing relief structures, and the deprioritising and/or closing down of such services, are just a handful of examples of how this has manifested.<sup>23</sup> Online support may not always be a possible alternative, for the same reasons as other reporting barriers, as well as due to insufficient IT infrastructure, especially in rural settings or inaccessibility in low-income conditions.<sup>25 26</sup>

## YOUTH

LGBTI+ youth have been left in a particularly vulnerable position over the past year. In order to comply with stay-at-home and lockdown rules, many LGBTI+ youth have had no choice but to remain in close quarters with or return to parents and families who may engage in practices that condemn diverse sexualities and gender identities.<sup>27</sup> Lockdowns have placed limitations on LGBTI+ youths' access to support and external outlets where they could express themselves, such as their social networks, schools, and safe spaces like youth clubs or LGBTI+ affirmative school programmes, have had negative effects, including on mental health.<sup>28</sup> And trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming LGBTI+ youth in particular who live with parents and families who are not supportive of LGBTI+ are at greater risk for psychological and verbal abuse, such as by being deadnamed, misgendered, and prevented from wearing clothes that affirm their gender identity.<sup>29 30</sup>

## OTHER MARGINALISED IDENTITIES:

### SEX WORKERS AND PERSONS LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

LGBTI+ individuals with other intersecting marginalised identities, such as sex workers, indigent persons, and those living with HIV are all at a greater risk of domestic abuse. LGBTI+ people at these intersections experience enhanced overall levels of stigma and violence, and are often also disproportionately affected by poverty, which limits their access to justice and access to alternate housing arrangements when they are subjected to violence within a domestic setting.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> International Bar Association. (2020). IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor.

<sup>23</sup> Women are statistically more likely than men to rely on these services in order to report abuse. See UN Women, IDLO, UNDP, UNODC, World Bank and The Pathfinders. (2020). Justice for Women amidst COVID-19. New York

<sup>24</sup> UN Women, IDLO, UNDP, UNODC, World Bank and The Pathfinders. (2020). Justice for Women amidst COVID-19. New York.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Fish, J., McInroy, L., & Pacey, M. (2020). "I'm Kinda Stuck at Home With Unsupportive Parents Right Now": LGBTQ Youths' Experiences With COVID-19 and the Importance of Online Support. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67, 450-452. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.06.002>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Suchitra. (2020, May 8). In Urban Areas, Lockdown Leaves Members of Queer Community Stuck with Emotionally Abusive Families. Retrieved from The Caravan: <https://caravanmagazine.in/gender/urban-areas-queer-people-stuck-with-emotionally-abusive-families-coronavirus-lockdown>

<sup>31</sup> Hunter, L., McGovern, A., and Sutherland, C. (2018). *Intersecting Injustice: Addressing LGBTQ Poverty and Economic Justice for All: A National Call to Action*. New York: Social Justice Sexuality Project, Graduate Center, City University of New York.

For example, social distancing measures and restrictions on movement have made sex work much more difficult. While some sex workers have been able to move their work online, most have had a reduction in income, and some have had to continue working on the streets.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in several cases in different Commonwealth countries, sex workers did not have proper documentation since they are often self-employed and were therefore without the requisite registration or tax records needed to access COVID-19 financial relief.<sup>33 34 35</sup> The already precarious economic position of many sex workers, coupled with a loss of income and in some contexts inability to access income relief, places sex workers in a further dependent position and therefore at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, especially if they are already reliant on an abusive partner.

Persons living with HIV and indigent persons were also generally determined to experience greater financial and housing vulnerabilities during this pandemic,<sup>36</sup> once again making them more vulnerable to domestic abuse. Past research underlines the intersection of domestic abuse against persons living with HIV.<sup>37</sup> While findings do vary by geographic region, there is empirical support for the existence of a complex relationship between HIV risk and lifetime exposure to violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>38</sup> This relationship is further complicated when one considers gender identity and sexual orientation. For example:

- IPV can increase risk of HIV by reducing the ability to negotiate safer sex and/or safer drug use.<sup>39</sup>
- Secondary short- and long-term effects from IPV can lead people to engage in higher-risk behaviours, including sexual.<sup>40 41</sup>
- IPV and HIV disproportionately affect similar population groups, namely the LGBTI+ community.<sup>42</sup>
- People living with HIV can be vulnerable to IPV when they disclose their HIV status to their partner.<sup>43</sup>
- Lastly, people living with HIV can experience more severe or more prolonged IPV than HIV-negative counterparts.<sup>44 45</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Geneva, Switzerland (2020). COVID-19 responses must uphold and protect the human rights of sex workers.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Gauriat, V. (2020, June 26). "Prostitution and the pandemic: Amsterdam's sex workers' struggle to survive under lockdown". Euronews.

<sup>35</sup> Campbell, R., Sanders, T., Hassan, R., Gichuna, S., Mutonyi, M., & Mwangi, P. (2020). Global Effects of COVID-19, Government Restrictions and Implications for Sex Workers: A focus on Africa. LIAS Working Paper Series, 3, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.29311/lwps.202033600>

<sup>36</sup> Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights. (2020). COVID-19 and the Human Rights of LGBTI People.

<sup>37</sup> Campbell, J. C., Baty, M. L., Ghandour, R. M., Stockman, J. K., Francisco, L., & Wagman, J. (2008). The intersection of intimate partner violence against women and HIV/AIDS: a review. *International journal of injury control and safety promotion*, 15(4), 221-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457300802423224>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Finneran C., Stephenson R. (2013, April) Intimate partner violence among men who have sex with men: a systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. ;14(2):168-85.

<sup>40</sup> Coker A.L. (2007, Apr). Does physical intimate partner violence affect sexual health? A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 8(2):149-77.

<sup>41</sup> Overstreet N.M., Willie T.C., Hellmuth J.C. et al. (2015, Jan 1). Psychological intimate partner violence and sexual risk behavior: Examining the role of distinct posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in the partner violence-sexual risk link. *Women's Health Issues*. 25(1):73-8.

<sup>42</sup> Heintz A.J., Melendez R.M. (2006, Feb). Intimate partner violence and HIV/STD risk among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 21(2):193-208.

<sup>43</sup> Pantalone D.W., Rood B.A., Morris B.W. et al. (2014, Jan 1). A systematic review of the frequency and correlates of partner abuse in HIV-infected women and men who partner with men. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*. 25(1):S15-35.

<sup>44</sup> Siemieniuk R.A., Miller P., Woodman K. et al. (2013, May). Prevalence, clinical associations, and impact of intimate partner violence among HIV-infected gay and bisexual men: A population-based study. *HIV Medicine*. 14(5):293-302.

<sup>45</sup> 45 Siemieniuk RA, Krentz HB, Gill MJ. (2013). Intimate partner violence and HIV: a review. *Current HIV/AIDS Reports*. 1;10(4):380-9.



# EXAMPLES:

## DOMESTIC ABUSE AGAINST LGBTI+ PERSONS ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

### AFRICA

In **UGANDA**, Frank Mugisha, executive director of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), reported that LGBTI+ individuals were being blamed for the pandemic, being evicted from their homes, and being forced to return to their homophobic families.<sup>46</sup> In Kenya, there have been several reports of LGBTI+ women being outed, evicted from their homes, and abused by their families and neighbours.<sup>47</sup> Activists have even directly identified COVID-19 related curfews as leading to the creation of a hostile environment where more people stayed at home and as a result had time to identify and attack persons perceived as being LGBTI+.<sup>48</sup>

In **NIGERIA**, where the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act was passed in 2014, many LGBTI+ people have navigated the inherent challenges of living through the pandemic by hiding their identities, self-censoring, and being forced to listen to homophobic rhetoric as they shared the same space with unaccepting family who had previously subjected them to conversion therapy.<sup>49</sup> Some LGBTI+ persons experienced mental health challenges from this stress. As one person forced into a difficult domestic situation stated, 'I often carve out my space away from everyone around me, because to engage too much might tear at the seams of a carefully stitched trauma.'<sup>50</sup>

### ASIA

In **INDIA**, LGBTI+ persons have reported that being forced to live with unsupportive families has led to poorer mental health outcomes<sup>51</sup>; as a journalist who moved from reporting on human rights issues to live with their conservative family observed, 'I went from hearing multiple voices shout protest slogans in different languages to hearing hateful language – a language I never want to learn – from people I'm supposed to love.'<sup>52</sup> There have also been cases of LGBTI+ people in India who had been forced to share a space with families that do not accept their identities taking their lives, including a lesbian woman in a same-sex relationship after her parents arranged a heterosexual marriage for her.<sup>53 54</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Bhalla, N., Alice, M. (2020, April 16). Arrests, Evictions and Scapegoating: Coronavirus takes a Toll on LGBT+ African. Retrieved from Thomson Reuters Foundation: <https://news.trust.org/item/20200416163459-i4xo8>

<sup>47</sup> Ombur, R. (2020, November 24). Kenya's LGBTQ Community Faces Increased Abuse During Pandemic. Retrieved from Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/kenyas-lgbtq-community-faces-increased-abuse-during-pandemic>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Mayor, L. (2020). Covid: LGBT teenagers 'isolated and lonely' in pandemic. BBC. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-56419616>

<sup>50</sup> Nelson, C. (2020, May 20). How Nigeria's COVID-19 Lockdown Affected Queer Folks. Retrieved from Xtra: <https://xtramagazine.com/power/nigeria-covid-19-lockdown-queer-lgbt-172950>

<sup>51</sup> Suchitra. (2020, May 8). In Urban Areas, Lockdown Leaves Members of Queer Community Stuck with Emotionally Abusive Families. Retrieved from The Caravan: <https://caravanmagazine.in/gender/urban-areas-queer-people-stuck-with-emotionally-abusive-families-coronavirus-lockdown>

<sup>52</sup> Kumar, J. (2020, April 27). I'm Stuck with my Conservative Family in New Delhi during the Pandemic. Here's what I've Learned about Myself. Retrieved from Xtra: <https://xtramagazine.com/love-sex/stuck-conservative-family-india-pandemic-171600>

<sup>53</sup> Ranjan, N. (2020, May 18). 21-Year-Old Queer Student Put In Conversion Therapy By Family Found Dead In Goa. Retrieved from The Logical Indian: <https://thelogicalindian.com/news/homophobia-triggers-suicide-of-an-lgbtq-activist-21146>

<sup>54</sup> Express News Service. (2020, May 18). Fearing Separation, Two Women from Tamil Nadu's Namakkal End Lives. Retrieved from The New Indian Express: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2020/may/18/fearing-separation-two-women-from-tamil-nadus-namakkal-end-lives-2145058.html>

## THE AMERICAS AND THE PACIFIC

An **AUSTRALIAN** study found that many LGBTI+ persons, particularly LGBTI+ youth, were hiding their identities from their families of origin after being forced to share spaces with them.<sup>55</sup> In **NEW ZEALAND**, there have also been similar concerns that many LGBTI+ persons were forced to live under unsafe conditions.<sup>56</sup>

In **CANADA**, there has been a growth of calls from women, including LGBTI+ women and youth, reporting higher levels of domestic abuse. One domestic violence support organisation, which normally receives about 50,000 calls annually, reported 70,000 calls in eight months of the COVID period, including a 400 per cent increase in calls within the first three weeks of the pandemic.<sup>57</sup>

And in **JAMAICA**, queer and trans persons, and LGBTI+ sex workers, all experienced disproportionate levels of poverty and housing insecurity during the pandemic, making them more vulnerable to domestic abuse.<sup>58</sup>

## EUROPE

In the **UNITED KINGDOM**, many Black and minority ethnic LGBTI+ persons reported being apprehensive at having to share their living space with unsupportive families, and LGBTI+ people overall are facing elevated risks of violence, hate crimes, and homelessness due to violence at home.<sup>59,60</sup> While in **MALTA**, organisations reported receiving calls from queer persons experiencing lack of safety within the domestic space or being evicted and experiencing housing insecurity.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Carman, M., Bourne, A., & Fairchild, J. (2020). COVID-19: Impacts for LGBTIQ Communities and Implications for Services.

<sup>56</sup> Murphy. (2020, April 3). Concerns for LGBTQI People in Unsafe Homes during Covid-19 Lockdown. Retrieved from RNZ: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/413386/concerns-for-lgbtqi-people-in-unsafe-homes-during-covid-19-lockdown>

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, B. (2021, February 19). Helplines for Women, LGBTQ Youth increase Services amid Influx of Calls due to Pandemic. Retrieved from CTV: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/most-recent/helplines-for-women-lgbtq-youth-increase-services-amid-influx-of-calls-due-to-pandemic-1.5315873>

<sup>58</sup> Chappell, K. (2020, June 30). 'Work to Do' as Coronavirus Hits LGBT+ Jamaicans Hard. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-healthcare-coronavirus-jamaica-lgbt-t-idUSKBN2412Z1>

<sup>59</sup> O'Connor, K. (2020, April 16). Coronavirus Lockdown: LGBTQ People Face Hostility and Loneliness. Retrieved from The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-lockdown-lgbtq-people-face-hostility-and-loneliness-135974>

<sup>60</sup> Strudwick, P. (2020, May 2). Under Lockdown, Parents Are Discovering Their Children Are LGBT And Dumping Them On The Street. Retrieved from Buzzfeed: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/patrickstrudwick/coronavirus-lockdown-lgbt-domestic-abuse-teens>

<sup>61</sup> MGRM. (2020, April 4). No One Should be Left without a Home. Retrieved from MGRM: <http://maltgayrights.org/no-one-should-be-left-without-a-home/>

# CONCLUSION

## THE ROLE OF COVID-19 IN INCREASING DOMESTIC ABUSE

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that LGBTI+ persons are experiencing domestic abuse at a heightened rate due to the ongoing crisis and reduction in access to services and external support.<sup>62</sup> As the Office of the High Commissioner of United Nations Human Rights (OHCHR) has stated, LGBTI+ persons have been particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, since measures aimed at slowing the rate of infections (such as lockdown, curfews and stay-at-home orders) have caused LGBTI+ people and youth to be confined in spaces with homophobic and transphobic relatives or co-occupants. Individuals who were already in abusive relationships prior to the pandemic have been left more exposed to the control and actions of their abusers, with less recourse to escape and seek support.

In effect, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed underlying structural inequalities in governmental systems, laws, and policies, and their contribution to the heightened vulnerability to domestic abuse and intimate partner violence that LGBTI+ persons encounter. In order to address this issue, it is vital for Commonwealth governments to listen to the lived experiences of LGBTI+ persons, strengthen existing systems that address discrimination, cooperate with organisations that support marginalised communities, and adopt an intersectional approach towards the enactment of policies that take into consideration how historically oppressed persons and vulnerable groups, including LGBTI+ individuals, will be affected.

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<sup>62</sup> International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association – ILGA World. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on the Human Rights of LGBT Persons, Communities, and/or Populations.