



THE CASE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN WESTERN SOCIETIES DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE ROLE OF THE VICTIM

Georgios Angelidis

Degree Project in Criminology
30 Credits, Two-year Master
Criminology: Degree Project

Malmö University
Faculty of Health and Society
May 2022

The case of domestic violence in western societies during the last two years of the pandemic and the role of victim

Georgios Angelidis

Abstract

Over the course of the last two years governments around the world have passed and enforced new and, in some cases, strict laws in order to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, such as lock-downs, limitations to outdoors activities, recommendations to stay and work from home and so on. This new reality, combined with the aforementioned regulations, has also had a negative impact on the phenomenon of an ongoing social issue, the issue of domestic violence. The perpetrators, mostly men, have taken advantage of this situation and have escalated their delinquent behaviour towards their victims. The aim of this paper is to illustrate and examine the case of domestic violence within the frame of the newfound Covid-19 world we live in, based on Routine Activity Theory. The findings show that there has been an alarming increase of rates regarding domestic violence incidents in western societies due to the stressful environment we experience, triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper will also explore the implications of domestic violence to the victim's mental health, safety and financial status as well as the inadequacy of social services and law enforcement agencies that support victims of domestic abuse, to effectively intervene in order to prevent the crime. Finally, the reasons on why the frequency and violence of such acts, that have been on the rise since the beginning of the pandemic, will be examined.

Keywords: domestic violence; Covid-19- restrictions; abuse; routine activity; intimate partner violence;

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Defining Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.....	5
Aim and Research Questions	6
Previous Research.....	7
ethical Considerations	10
Theory Selection	10
Methods.....	12
Findings.....	13
Discussion	19
Limitations	21
Conclusion.....	21
References	22
Appendix: Selected Studies for the Analysis.....	26

Introduction

There is no argue that every aspect of our everyday lives has been affected more or less during these two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, be it in economy, health, education and of course criminality (Khalifa et.al, 2021). In addition, governments around the world, in an effort to tackle the effects of the pandemic, took a series of measures and even modified their own legislations in order to do so (European Parliamentary Research Service 2020). However, not all countries have enforced the same legislations. For example, Austria declared a total pandemic lock-down in November 2021 (Euronews, 2021) while at the same time the Swedish government had already removed almost all the Covid-19 related restrictions from the 29th of September (Regeringen.se, 2021). In addition, the cases and deaths from Covid-19 vary from country to country (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control,2022). Be that as it may, the fact remains that everything around us has changed: from the way humans interact with each other, as social distancing has become the new norm, to the way people use social media. This new reality has revealed both its pros and cons; on the one hand numerous reports of misleading information have seen the light of day, while on the other hand this realty facilitates more and more people which are now capable of using electronically social media for medical purposes, vaccine or recovery certifications. (Khalifa et.al, 2021).

Another aspect of human activity that could not be unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic is crime, be it petty crimes (such as shoplifting, vandalism) or violent crimes (such as rape, murder, kidnapping) (U.N Office on Drugs and Crime Report, 2020). Similar to the different measures governments around the world have taken, crime statistics and more importantly, types of crime vary from country to country. During the first quarter of the pandemic for example, the collection of data from 11 European countries showed that there was a decline in the rates of homicides in countries like Italy, Republic of Spain and Moldova while at the same time these rates in Mexico remained approximately at the same level as they were before the pandemic (ibid). Surprisingly enough and always according to the same source,

while examining property crimes (theft, robbery and burglary) in the same country (Mexico), the statistics showed a surprising decrease of 37.5 % during the first semester of 2020 in comparison to the same period back in 2019. However, there is a type of crime whose statistics have been constantly rising during the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, that of domestic violence. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) has described domestic violence as the shadow pandemic and that *'7 in 10 women think domestic violence has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic'* (UN Women/Women Count Report,2021). In the following chapter we will provide some definitions regarding violence against women and domestic violence. Prior to that though, it should be mentioned here that this paper will be a systematic literature review. This systematic literature review will interpret and analyse sources and other data collected mostly from the beginning of the pandemic (March of 2020, where Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic from the World Health Organization) up to the present day, (2022). Finally, the theory that was selected for this review is the Routine Activity Theory by Cohen and Felson (1979).

Defining Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence

Before we dive deeper into the interaction of domestic violence incidents and the Covid-19 pandemic, a proper definition and content of violence against women and domestic violence should be firstly given. Initially, it should be noted that domestic violence is only a smaller derivative of the broader concept of Violence Against Women (also including rape, stalking, sexual assault etc.) which is described as *'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'* (United Nations, 1993). While domestic violence is a sub-form of Violence Against Women (VAW), the element that differentiates it from the other forms of VAW is that the abuse takes place within the frame of private life and individual relationships (Ali et.al, 2020). According to the non-profit organization National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, domestic violence (also cited as domestic abuse or intimate partner violence) can be described as *'the wilful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive*

behaviour as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other' (Finley, 2020). Another interesting definition of domestic violence is given by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence in the United Kingdom (2016) *'an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional'*. Moreover, as reported by the U.S Department of Justice, domestic violence *'includes felony or misdemeanour crimes of violence committed a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse or intimate partner, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grand monies, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction'* (U.S.D.O.J, 2018). Another important note here before moving forward is the fact that there is not a unique universal definition of the term domestic violence and, as mentioned earlier it could be also interpreted as Intimate Partner Violence, Domestic Abuse or Family Violence. These terms, depending on their usage's context sometimes could have the same meaning while other times they could mean something different.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this paper is to illustrate how and why the incidents of domestic violence have dramatically risen during the last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic in comparison to previous years and the consequences on its victims on western societies, like Europe and the U.S.A. More specifically the paper will be divided in two parts: The first part will explore how the effects that the new Covid-19 pandemic situation has birthed, correlate with domestic violence and have led to a

worrying increase of such incidents. More and more women have become victims of domestic violence in these societies due to the pandemic restrictions different western countries have passed. This literature review will be based on the Routine Activity Theory by Cohen and Felson (1979). The second part of this paper will examine the victim's reaction, if any, to this escalation of domestic violence and the consequences on three different aspects. Finally, the paper will conclude by summarizing the findings based on the research done and by posing some questions for the future. Thus, the research questions to be answered are the following:

- How the new Covid-19 reality has contributed to the increase of cases of domestic violence in western societies?
- Did the victims report the abuse and seek for help?
- Has there has been an increase of incidents and why some victims chose not to report the abuse?
- Why have the abusers intensified the frequency and violence of their criminal behaviours?
- What is the impact of domestic abuse on the victim's finance, mental health and safety?
- What is the role of law enforcement agencies and other support groups?

Previous Research

The concept of domestic violence is neither new nor has it been linked to turbulent times like those of the current pandemic for the first time in human history. If we take a closer look in the past, we will find that the rates of domestic violence incidents rose again when western societies faced the challenge of the most recent financial crisis of 2008 and its impact on them (Kyriakidou et.al, 2021). However, as it will be shown soon, not all countries were affected the same way by the crisis and as a result not all of them experienced a rise regarding incidents of domestic violence at the same level as others; on the contrary, in some countries the rates either remained the same as they were before the crisis or they declined. This explanation derives from a plethora of different factors (ibid). The authors, in an effort to shed light on the rise of cases of domestic violence (or domestic violence contacts according to them) indicated that since Cyprus is a small nation, it was affected more by the financial crisis of 2008 than other European countries were.

This in turn led to both higher unemployment rates and domestic violence incidents, having as a point of reference the month of January of 2011 when the nation entered a period of financial recession. According to the graph below, it is strongly suggested that the instance of rising unemployment rates and domestic violence escalation are strongly correlated.

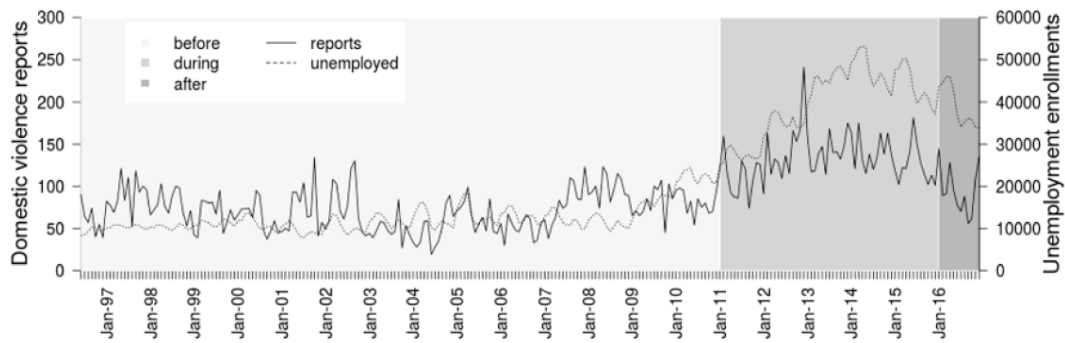


Figure 1: Correlation between domestic violence and unemployment (Kyriakidou et.al, 2021)

On the other hand, and according to other studies, high unemployment, as a direct result of the financial crisis, does not always lead to also high levels of domestic violence cases. Research that was conducted In England and Wales in 2013, concluded not only that unemployment and domestic violence do not always go hand in hand, but additionally it challenged the theory of whether or not unemployment itself is the key-factor that contributes to the escalation of domestic violence incidents (Anderberg et.al,2013). While examining the findings, a new element was added at this research, the role of gender. The authors of this research supported the fact that unemployment among the two sexes has had different implications on the issue of domestic violence and the reasoning behind it is the following: *‘When a male with a violent predisposition faces a high-unemployment risk, he has an incentive to conceal his true nature by mimicking the behaviour of non-violent men as his spouse, given his low-expected earnings, would have a strong incentive to leave him if she were to learn his violent nature. As a consequence, higher male unemployment is associated with a lower risk of male violence. Conversely, when a female faces a high-unemployment risk, her low-expected earnings would make her less inclined to leave her partner even if she were to learn that he has a violent nature. Anticipating this, a male with violent predisposition has no incentive to conceal his true nature. Thus, high female*

unemployment leads to an elevated risk of intimate partner violence'. The same group of authors published their findings and arguments and presented two figures depicting male and female unemployment and domestic violence incidents in England and Wales from 2005 to 2011 (Wadsworth et.al, 2013/2014). In figure 2 one can see that the rates of unemployment for both sexes were significantly high in 2008 (with a slight precedence for men) when the recession started affecting England and Wales. If we examine the incidents of domestic violence reported by working women the same year (2008) on figure 3 it is depicted that such incidents not only did not rise but they also slightly declined in comparison to previous years. To conclude this chapter, unemployment as an outcome of the financial crisis, does not always constitute the common denominator between financial troubles and domestic violence.

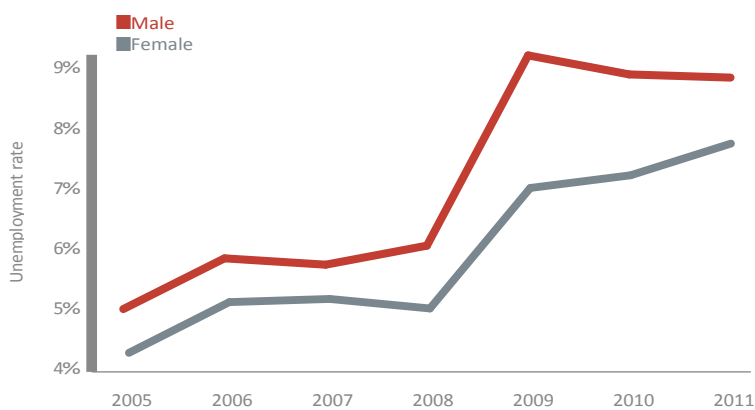


Figure 2: Unemployment amongst males and females (Wadsworth et.al, 2013/2014)

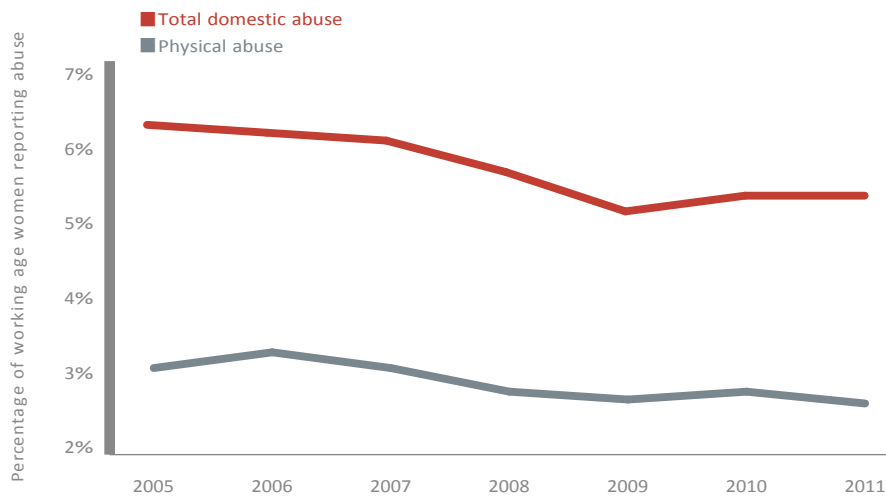


Figure 3: Decline of domestic violence incidents (Wadsworth et.al, 2013/2014)

thical Considerations

The literature review for this paper did not deviate from any regulation(s) regarding the chosen topic. The concepts analysed here were people’s actions and reactions regarding cases of domestic violence on western societies. Since it is a literature review, an ethical approval from Malmö University was not a requisite for this research and as result no specific permissions, documentations or consents were required for it. As this paper follows the path of literature review, the survey conducted is based on already existing literature regarding the topic.

Theory Selection

This systematic literature review conducted in this paper is based on the theory of Routine Activity. According to the founders of the theory ‘*Most criminal acts require convergence in space and time of likely offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians against crime*’ (Cohen and Felson, 1979). Regarding the first two components of the theory (motivated offender and suitable targets) ‘*the offender’s motivation may come from a variety of factors, both internal and external*’ (Brent, 2014). ‘*A targeted victim is the primary object of the offense, resulting directly from the offender’s motive for committing the crime. The victim may be in a relationship with the offender (spouse, parents, family member etc.)*’. The concept of the suitable target is defined as ‘*victims that the offenders perceive to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is the offender’s perception of how susceptible a*

particular victim is to their modus operandi and sufficient enough to successfully complete a particular criminal act which results in an increased exposure toward the victim (ibid). Finally, the third component of the theory, capable guardians, can be defined as follows: ‘those *individuals whose presence or proximity discourages offenders from committing crime (such as police officers, family members etc.)* (ibid).

This theory was selected because all the three aforementioned elements/components align in space and time simultaneously and they fit perfectly within the frame of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. An additional reason for choosing the Routine Activity Theory, is that it does acknowledge other important ingredients such as the existence of a suitable target, a motivated offender and the absence of a capable guardian where all three of them interact with each other and lead to a rapid increase of violence from the part of the offender (mostly men) towards the victim (mostly women). The world we live in today has become a stressful environment for most people in western societies (Brooks et.al,2020), the alignment of the three key factors has made the issue of domestic violence a matter of routine nowadays (ibid) and therefore the Routine Activity Theory applies best in this case. Finally, experience from the past has shown that in times of extreme hardship, like when natural disasters occurred (such as the Katrina hurricane that devastated many cities in the US in 2005) or other catastrophic events (like earthquakes and tsunamis) the scope of everyday life was turned upside down (Weitzman, 2016). Tensions among family and partner members rose to such a degree where domestic abuse became the normal trend. It is in this frame where the three basic components of the Routine Activity Theory seem to be largely fulfilled.

We chose to exclude other theories from this paper and the motivation for doing so is the following: Upon trying to explain the phenomenon of domestic violence, numerous criminological theories have been applied over the years: from Cycle of Violence theory (Widom 1989), to different feminist theories (from the early 1970s) and from Social Learning Theory (Akers and Burgess, 1966) to Victim-Blaming theory (Ryan, 1971). While all these theories have rightfully raised the fact that domestic violence has become an alarming issue, they do not include though other important factors that could help us comprehend the motives of the perpetrators of such acts and the reaction of the victims, while other theories focus only on the gender as a catalyst for such violent acts or others simply shift the blame entirely to

the victim. This deficiency is partly understandable, as most criminological theories started to emerge over the course of the last seventy/sixty years whereas the Covid-19 pandemic situation is rather new and unprecedented in the annals of modern history.

Methods

The paper's objective is to interpret the reasons behind the increase of domestic violence incidents in western societies during the Covid-19 pandemic and how the victims responded to them, if at all. As mentioned earlier, in the effort of illustrating the connection between the rise of such incidents and the current pandemic the approach of systematic literature review was chosen for this topic. As mentioned above and in order to provide proper answers to the aim questions, the research method used in this paper is systematic literature review. In more detail, the paper has emphasized on systematic literature review as such reviews '*are particularly useful to integrate the information of a group of studies carried out separately about certain therapeutics/ intervention which may present conflicting or coincident results, as well as to identify themes that need evidences, helping the orientation of future investigations*' (Mancini and Sampaio, 2007). The main purpose of this research is to depict the interaction between the concept of domestic violence and the current Covid-19 pandemic situation on western societies based on existing data. The most used search engine was MAULibsearch. To locate the existing research some basic search terms were applied and afterwards for the chosen theory different key words were applied.

The basic search terms that were used in relation to all of the studies were the following: *domestic violence, Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions*

For the *Routine Activity Theory* aspect, the search terms, besides the basic terms were: *routine activities and criminality, lock-down restrictions, domestic violence and abuse, Cohen and Felson Routine Activity Theory*

Delving in more detail, the initial results regarding domestic violence and Covid-19 from Malmö University's online library were 2,484. Of those results, 54 sources were ultimately selected because we wanted to limit the research within the borders of western societies while the initial results examined these two issues on either

global or local scale (e.g Tomoko Suga's article: Protecting Women: new domestic violence counter-measures in Japan). Other sources did not include any criminological theories while others referred to the subject from a political and/or economic point of view which is not the issue here (e.g Sharma's and Borah's article: Covid-19 and Domestic Violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis) or they were simply irrelevant to the topic or others were simply repetitive. The selected 54 sources are used here to firstly introduce the reader to the subject then give a preview of the subject (the previews research chapter) and then focus on the topic itself by having the Routine Activity Theory as a guide in order to answer to the research questions. The findings chapter focuses on the results gathered from the selected sources and then we break down each component of the Routine Activity Theory and examine it separately always through the lenses of the topic to provide answers to the questions posed. Much emphasis is being given to the second component of the theory, the suitable victim, because it is the second and most important parameter of this paper (the role of the victim, as it is mentioned on the title). From the 54 sources we use 32 for the analysis of the components of the theory (motivated offender, suitable victim and the absence of a capable guardian) which lead to the conclusion that the cases of domestic violence have indeed increased during the last two years of the pandemic with the offenders taking advantage of the situation and the victims finding themselves unable to react properly or defend themselves against this violence with serious ramifications on their mental health, financial status and safety.

Findings

Routine Activity Theory Aspect

As mentioned earlier the concept of domestic violence is neither new nor has it been acknowledged as an alarming issue only during these last two years of the pandemic. The sad truth though is that such incidents have only intensified (Wagers,2020) as strict lock-downs, enforced by different governments in order to tackle the effects of the pandemic, and stay-at-home policies seem to have trapped the victims of domestic violence with their abusers (Townsend,2020). These policies have given the perfect opportunity to the abusers to escalate their delinquent behaviour as the pandemic reality offers little to no opportunities to the

victims to leave their abusive environment and seek for help (Godin,2020). These abusive practices tend to be more and more repetitive, thus becoming a routine. Cohen and Felson's Routine Activity Theory, which was introduced in 1979, is the one that illustrates such criminal opportunities provided by daily routines. As mentioned earlier, according to this theory, three key elements should be aligned in time and space: 1. *A motivated offender* 2. *A suitable victim* and 3. *The absence of a capable guardian* who can prevent the crime from happening (Cohen and Felson, 1979).

Firstly, the element of the *motivated offender* will be examined. In both cases of natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic the perpetrators of the violent act experience high levels of stress and anxiety (and in some cases even depression) as they need to adapt to the new life conditions. When governments imposed lock-downs as a countermeasure to the pandemic, there have been many occasions where the perpetrators resorted to a systematic alcohol abuse, before manifesting their violent urges as a means to 'escape' from reality. The situation only worsens when the offenders face unemployment or lose their jobs and have the need for money to buy alcohol. They become more dependent on their victims and they force or threaten them to stay with them (Silverio-Murillo et.al, 2020). In addition, the offenders of domestic abuse are more than certain that their victims will not abandon them. Lock-downs and stay at home policies have made life even more difficult for the victims as they feel helpless and unable to leave the violent environment and either report the incident or simply ask for help from their relatives or friends. It is this feeling of insecurity and fear which the offenders tend to abuse. This reassurance has provided them with the opportunity to abuse their victims more and more often (Boserup et.al, 2020). As mentioned above, the offenders have taken advantage of the pandemic situation and as a result they have intensified their violent tendencies. In some cases, though, the victims did find the courage to leave them and ask for help. Given the new pandemic conditions they did not find proper shelter being victims of domestic violence and they were forced to return and live again with their abusers. This practice of leaving and coming back has been the trigger factor for the offenders. This could explain the increase of the violence and subsequently the lethality of domestic violence incidents since stress, close confinement and the absence of a de-escalation period, due to lock-down and 'stay home' policies have led to an extensive rise of sexual assault, strangulation and

possession of weapons. New evidence has shown that during the period of the pandemic in the United States there was an increase of sales regarding guns and ammunitions, which was related to an alarming rise of homicide related to domestic violence incidents (Campbell,2020). Finally, there is another method that the offenders used in their advantage so that their victims would have no other choice but to stay with them: Covid-19 and health issues have become a tool of control for the offenders in order to establish their sense of superiority over their victims. They want to ensure that they are the dominant figures within the relationship and in many instances the abusers used the virus as a means of display of power, thus rendering the victims more helpless (Leigh et.al, 2022). There have been many occasions where the offenders prevented their victims from visiting a doctor (by hiding the victim's insurance card), set obstacles to their victims to help themselves (by denying them access to hand sanitizers, masks), they refused to give the victims access to proper information (regarding the Covid-19 pandemic) or they just did not care for their victims' health and well-being (by bringing people home) (ibid).

The second component, of a *suitable victim* will now be analysed. In the beginning of this study, we focused mainly on women who are the victims of an abusive partner, be it in a relationship or within a family environment, with or without children. Violence against women and domestic abuse existed before the outbreak of Covid-19, but during the two years of the pandemic, domestic violence incidents have been constantly on the rise (Wagers, 2020). In France for example, a significant increase of 30% in occasions where women fell victims of domestic violence was reported in March of 2020 (Euronews, 2020). The age group of women who fall victims of this abuse and therefore are more vulnerable, range mostly from 18-19 (UN Women, 2021) and the UN Women's former executive director described this condition as a '*shadow pandemic*'. Life during the pandemic combined with the escalation of domestic abuse has become worst for the aforementioned group of women (according to police data, violence against women hotlines, social service providers etc.) and there have been growing concerns regarding the victims' security, health (both physical and mental) and financial status (UN Women, 2020). As many western countries introduced lockdowns and stay-at -home policies to limit the spread of Covid-19, women found themselves trapped at the same environment with their abusers (Bettinger et.al, 2020) In other words, they were forced to live with the perpetrators for a more extended period, is

some cases even days or weeks. As a result, they lacked the ability to leave their abusive partners. Moreover, following the stay-at-home orders, a new important factor appeared which, while it boosted the rise of domestic violence incidents, resulted to a remarkable decline of calls from the victims to ask for help. Since both the victims and their abusers were confined at the same environment for a long period at the peak of the lock-downs, women were even more reluctant to ask for help as they feared for their lives and were not able to leave their homes, which led to a significant drop of calls to social services or support groups for victims of domestic abuse. (Leigh, 2022). Apart from the increased fear and vulnerability, the victims might have other serious concerns before making the decision of abandoning their abusers: Domestic violence occurs within family environments as well, so in this case a mother would have to think twice before leaving, as their responsibilities towards their children could possibly increase during the times of the pandemic, or they might not want to leave their children behind with an abusive father who would probably mistreat them as well (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). We should also keep in mind that during the period we are examining and as mentioned earlier, at the peak of lock-downs, the offenders are even more able to constantly control every move of their victims, or they can use the children, if it is a family environment, as an excuse or plea to their partners to persuade them to stay with them (David et.al, 2021).

Another serious impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the victims of domestic violence reflects on their *financial status* (Chen et.al, 2020). Since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, the economies of many western societies were severely affected by it as the economies of many nations plummeted into recession and the catastrophic consequences soon came to the surface: Many individuals saw their incomes dropping significantly, others faced the prospect of losing their jobs, while others ended up unemployed since private sector positions were shut down as a direct result of the lock-downs (Falk et.al, 2021). From this financial decline related to the pandemic, the incomes of many households were also swayed (Almeida et.al, 2021) where one or both partners either lost their jobs or resulted in unemployment. Previous studies have shown that there is a strong connection between gender and domestic violence (Aizer,2010). According to this research, unemployed women or women in low earning positions face a high potential of becoming victims of domestic abuse; they lack the resources to walk away from the abusive

environment, they become more dependent on the perpetrators or they are being blamed for the ill-being of the household. However, the current Covid-19 situation exacerbated women's fear of being unemployed and consequently being abused by their partners for two additional reasons (Alon et.al, 2020): Numerous sectors of the economy that faced economic decline due to the pandemic employed mostly women as the majority of the workforce (for example restaurants, travel or hospitality industries). This particular workforce of women suffered a remarkable raise of unemployment rates. The second reason is associated with the concept of childcare (Hupkau et.al, 2020). Plenty of schools and childcare centres were shut down when the period of the lock-downs was at its peak and children had no other choice but to stay at home. This led to an increased level of stress and anxiety since families had to focus more on their children and take care of them. In this occasion, it was largely women who shouldered this burden as they spent more time with their children than the fathers, regardless if they were married or not, or if they were single moms. Therefore, since they dedicated more time with their children, they were not able to work (in case they were already unemployed) and had to stay at home with their abuser. One final and rather new concept regarding the financial condition of the victims of domestic violence during the pandemic, is that of the economic abuse (Cameron et.al,2021). This concept refers to a condition where the victims find themselves unable to use their finances in order to leave their abusers, who in such cases tend to hinder their victims' economic stability and independency (for example by hiding their bank cards, or denying access to their bank accounts or even refusing their victims from buying the very essentials of everyday life, such as food). This control over the victim's financial status can be shaped by restriction, exploitation and sabotage (ibid)

The final feature of the suitable victim/target component, while examining the field of Routine Activity Theory, deals with domestic violence victim's *mental health* implications during the pandemic. Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, domestic abuse as a determinative key-factor for the mental health of its victims was taken into serious consideration, with the most typical mental health disorder symptoms that women manifested being Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (commonly known as PTSD) and high levels of depression (Howard et.al,2010). While a considerable number of women that were abused also expressed suicidal thoughts, aside from these symptoms, studies suggested that abused women face higher chances of

developing a strong dependency on drugs and alcohol (Becker et.al, 2002). Other symptoms in relation to women's mental health especially during the times of the current pandemic may incorporate '*negative emotions (such as fear, shame, guilt and low self-esteem), stress-related medical conditions (such as headaches), mental health conditions and disorders (such as anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive, disassociation, sleep and eating disorders) and harmful behaviours (such as self-harm)*' (Ali et.al, 2021). The mental condition though of women as victims of domestic abuse has only deteriorated during the two years of the pandemic (Sediri et.al,2020). Social distancing, isolation, home confinement, increased responsibilities at home (like taking care of the children), limited access to proper sources (like the basic needs for every-day life, or making phone-calls) and being forced to cohabit with their abusers for a significant amount of time, which can last for days, have paved the way for serious ramifications for the mentality of women (Gulati et.al, 2020). The mental health of women who have fallen victims of domestic abuse may depend sometimes on the actions of the perpetrators themselves (Lyons et.al, 2021). There have been many cases where the perpetrators used the social distance/isolation policies during the pandemic for their own advantage in order to enact systematic *coercive control strategies* over their victims (Newnham et.al, 2022). These strategies may include intimidation, forced isolation at home, shaming of the victim, infusing the victim with emotions of low self-esteem, protractive control of the victim's moves; from the victim's daily activities to a non-stop check of the victim's financial bank moves (as explained in more detail on the previous chapter) or social media accounts to a constant surveillance. These strategies work as a beneficial factor for the perpetrators as they establish the feelings of control and dominance and allow them to practice their abusive behaviours with a higher frequency (ibid). From the victim's point of view though, this coercive control could cause serious psychological trauma that may result in the appearance of one or multiple of the aforementioned symptoms (Chandan et.al, 2021). As the frequency and the violence of domestic abuse incidents rise with catastrophic consequences regarding the mental health of women as victims, sometimes with fatal results for them, western societies have started to seek ways to ease their psychological suffering, the French government for example took measures so that domestic violence centres would stay open during the pandemic to offer refuge and support to the victims of domestic abuse on a daily basis (Su et.al, 2021).

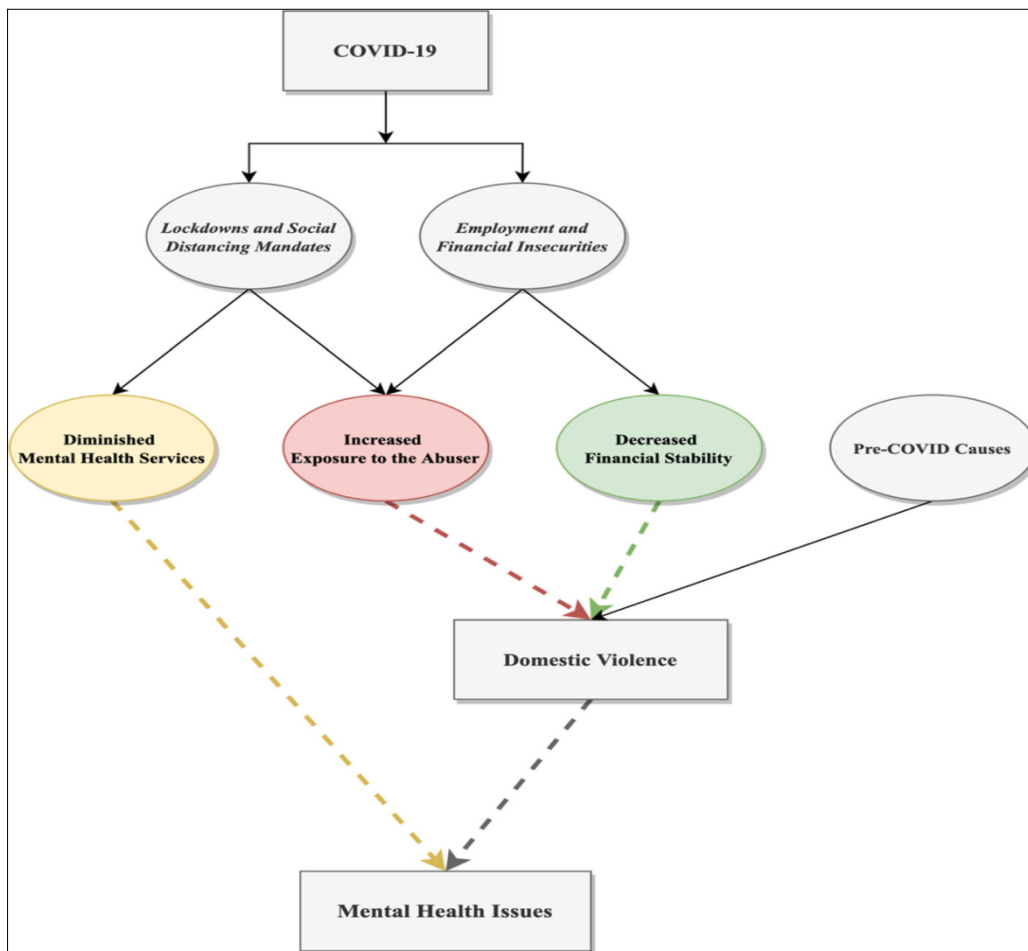


Fig. 4: Factors shaping domestic violence victim’s mental health (Su et.al, 2021)

Discussion

The main purpose of this paper was to shed light on the cases of domestic violence that have been occurring in western societies since the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic with a main focus on the perspective of the victim. The aspect of the domestic abuse victim plays a significant role both as a key component of the Routine Activity Theory and as the epicentre of the abusive act itself. The research was conducted in order to explain the concept of domestic violence through the lenses of individual routine activities.

It is well known that human routines are of great significance in regards to action and activities that we are determined to participate in. The more time couples spend

with one another in confinement during the pandemic, the higher the chances are that tensions will rise between them and can lead to intimate partner violence, if escalated (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et.al,2022). The extended period of time where the offenders spend in confinement with their victims and the knowledge that the access to proper support groups and the inability of law enforcement agencies to intervene immediately (given the circumstances) offer them the perfect opportunity to not only abuse their victims but also to escalate their criminal behaviour, thus the policy of staying at home and social distancing have become an unsafe option for the victims (Kofman et.al, 2020).

Unemployment and especially unemployment regarding women during periods of crisis (including of course the Covid-19 pandemic) is also important if we want to understand better the escalation of domestic violence incidents since the offenders have no longer the need to hide or oppress their violent urges knowing that the victims will hesitate (since they are afraid) to report the occurrence (Usher et.al, 2020). This escalation in frequency and violence of the incidents was cited in more detail while examining the aspect of Routine Activity Theory as it is very decisive if we want comprehend the concept of domestic violence during these turbulent times that we live in.

Another important element that explains the selection of the Routine Activity Theory is the *absence of a capable guardian*. The offenders have been using the pandemic conditions to their advantage. The reason why they do so is because governments of many western societies were forced to shut down many facilities (or they decided to put a temporary halt to their activities themselves) that could help victims of domestic violence (Slakoff et.al, 2020). Moreover, other law enforcement agencies (like the police force) were overwhelmed with newfound policing duties, as they focused more their efforts on patrolling the streets to ensure that the new pandemic-related measures were properly enforced (Piquerro et.al, 2022). It makes sense as a result that, less service was able to be dedicated in other serious crime deterring duties.

Even so, when inspecting the close family environments, friends or family members found themselves unable to help, by being unable to self-visit the victim, or by not having the ability to have a face-to-face discussion. (An elder member of the family is forced to stay at home and cannot leave due to the pandemic restrictions) (Campbell, 2020). It is thus evident that all these three elements of the Routine

Activity Theory (motivated offender, suitable victim, absence of a capable guardian) occur simultaneously and establish a proving ground for contemporary ground for behaviours regarding domestic abuse.

Limitations

This research's purpose was to examine the concept of domestic violence in western societies during the two years of the pandemic and its consequences on the victim's safety, financial status and mental health. It was conducted through the scope of literature review based on the theory that mirrors people's daily routines. It is quite difficult to provide one universally accepted definition of domestic violence. In the chapter where we defined domestic violence, we used indeed other interpretations of this concept, such as intimate partner violence, domestic abuse and family violence in an attempt to interpretate this phenomenon. Another limitation regards to the number and variety of sources; the Covid-19 and domestic violence onset is rather new, the available scientific data is limited and more importantly, it is by far certain that new, better-founded data will emerge in the future.

Conclusion

This study has been an effort to delve into a newly emerged social aspect, that of domestic violence within the reality of a global health crisis. In an effort to cope with this problematic issue, victims have been searching for new solutions, for example women have been coded words at pharmacies in Spain and France in order to alert the authorities that their partner abuses them (Kottasova et.al, 2020). But this practice is not adequate enough to give the victims of domestic abuse the proper treatment or to end their suffering. Other countries like Italy have taken another initiative: the launch of an app that will help women to alert the authorities without making a phone call, thus the offender will be unaware and it will be easier to be brought to justice (Talmazan et.al, 2020). Criminologists and other experts within the field of Sociology and Criminology should and most notably are already studying more in depth the causes of this escalation and frequency of such violent incidents. That will for sure help interpret and try to prevent delinquent behaviours, while advancing the science of criminology in its ability to describe, analyse and provide pathways for risk mitigation and social justice.

References

1. Aizer A (2010): ‘*The Gender Wage Gap and Domestic Violence*’. *American Economic Review*, Vol. 100, NO 4: 1847–1859
2. Ali P, Rogers M, Heward-Belle S (2021): ‘*COVID-19 and domestic violence: impact on mental health*’. *Journal of criminal psychology* vol. 11 NO. 3, p. 188-202
3. Ali P, McGarry (2020): ‘*Domestic Violence in Health Contexts: A guide for healthcare professions*’. Springer International Publishing AG
4. Almeida V, Barrios S, Christl M, De Poli S, Tumino A, Van der Wielen W (2021): ‘*The impact of COVID-19 on households’ income in the EU*’. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*
5. Alon T, Doepke M, Olmstead-Rumsey J, Tertilt M (2020): ‘*This Time It’s Different: The Role of Women’s Employment in a Pandemic Recession*’. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 27660
6. Anderberg D, Rainer H, Wadsworth J, Wilson T (2015): ‘*Unemployment and Domestic Violence: Theory and Evidence*’. *The Economic Journal*, 126, 1947-1979
7. Becker J, Duffy C (2002): ‘*Women drug users and drugs service provision: Service level responses to engagement and retention*’. Briefing Paper 17–22. London: Home Office
8. Bettinger-Lopez, Bro A (2020): ‘*A Double Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the Age of COVID-19*’. *Council on Foreign Relations*
9. Boserup B, McKenney M, Elkbuli A (2020): ‘*Alarming trends in US Domestic Violence during the Covid-19 pandemic*’, *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*». Vol. 38, p.2753–2755
10. Brooks S, Webster R, Smith L, Woodland L, Wessely D, Greenberg N, Rubin G.J (2020): ‘*The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence*’. *Rapid Review, Department of Psychological Medicine, King’s College London, London, UK*, Vol 395, p:912-920.
11. Cameron H (2021): ‘*The Cost of Covid-19: Economic Abuse Throughout the Pandemic*’. *Surviving Economic Abuse*
12. Campbell A (2020): ‘*An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives*’. *Forensic Science International: Reports* 2,100089
13. Chandan J.S, Thomas T, Bradbury-Jones C, Russel R, Bandyopadhyay S, Nirantharakumar K, Taylor J (2020): ‘*Female survivors of Intimate partner violence and risk of depression, anxiety and serious mental health illnesses*’. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 217, 562–567. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2019.124

14. Chen S, Igan D, Pierri N, Presbitero A.F (2020): '*Tracking the Economic Impact of Covid-19 and Mitigation Policies in Europe and the United States*'. *International Monetary Fund*, Working Paper Research Department
15. Cohen L, Felson M (1979): '*Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Theory Approach*'. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4): 588-608
16. David K, Aborode A, Olaoye D, Enang N, Oriyomi A, Yunusa I (2021): '*Increased Risk of Death Triggered by Domestic Violence, Hunger, Suicide, Exhausted Health System during COVID-19 Pandemic: Why, How and Solutions*'. *Frontiers in Sociology*, Volume 6, Article 648395
17. Euronews, (2020): '*Austria first in EU to fully lock-down and make vaccination mandatory*'. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/11/19/austria-extends-covid-lockdown-and-makes-vaccination-mandatory-from-february-1>
18. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2022): [COVID-19 situation update for the EU_EEA, as of 11 March 2022.pdf](#)
19. European Institute for Gender Equality (2021): '*The Covid-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU*'. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/covid-19-pandemic-and-intimate-partner-violence-against-women-eu>
20. European Parliament (2020): '*European Parliamentary Research Service: States of emergency in response to the coronavirus crisis: Situation in certain Member States*'. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649408](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2020)649408)
21. Falk G, Romero Paul D, Nicchitta I, Nyhof E (2021): '*Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic*'. *Congressional Research Service*, Updated August 20, 2021
22. Finley L (2020): '*Domestic Violence and abuse: A reference handbook*'. Contemporary World Issues Society
23. Godin M (2020): '*As Cities Around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out*'. *Time Magazine*, March 18,2020, <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>
24. Gulati G, Kelly B (2020): '*Domestic violence against women and the COVID-19 pandemic: What is the role of psychiatry?*'. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 71,101594
25. Howard LM, Trevillion K, Agnew-Davies R (2010): '*Domestic violence and mental health*'. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 22:5: 525-534
26. Hupkau C, Petrongolo B (2020): '*Work, Care and Gender during the COVID-19 Crisis*'. *IZA Institute of Labor Economics*, IZA DP, No. 13762
27. Khalifa S, Swilan M, El-Wahed A, Du M, El-Seedi Haged, Kai G, Marsy S, Abdel-Daim M, Zou X, Halabi M, Alsharif S, El-Seedi Helsham (2021): '*Beyond the Pandemic: Covid-19 Pandemic Changed the Face of Life*'. *International Journal of environmental Research and Public Health*, 18,5645. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115645>
28. Kofman Y, Garfin R (2020): '*Home Is Not Always a Haven: The Domestic Violence Crisis Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic*'. *American Psychological Association*, Vol.12, No. S1, S199-S201

29. Kottasova I, Di Donato V (2020): ‘*Women are using code words at pharmacies to escape domestic violence during lockdown*’. CNN April 6,2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/02/europe/domestic-violence-coronavirus-lockdown-intl/index.html>
30. Kyriakidou M, Zalaf A, Christophrou S, Garcia-Ruiz A, Valanides C (2021): ‘*Longitudinal Fluctuations of National Help-Seeking Reports for Domestic Violence Before, During, and After the Financial Crisis in Cyprus*’. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 36(15-16), NP8333–NP8346
31. Langhinrichsen-Rohling J, Schroeder G, Langhinrichsen-Rohling R.A, Mennicke A, Harris Yu-Jay, Sullivan S, Gray G, Cramer R.J (2022): ‘*Couple Conflict and Intimate Partner Violence during the Early Lockdown of the Pandemic: The Good, the Bad, or Is It Just the Same in a North Carolina, Low-Resource Population?*’. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19,2608
32. Leigh J, Pena L, Anurudran A, Pai A (2022): ‘*“Are you safe to talk?”: Perspectives of Service Providers on Experiences of Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic*’.
Journal of Family Violence <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-022-00359-9>
33. Lyons M, Brewer G (2021): ‘*Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence during Lockdown and the COVID-19 Pandemic*’. *Journal of Family Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00260-x>
34. National Institute for health and Care excellence (2016): ‘*Domestic Violence and Abuse: quality standard*’ (QS116). NICE, UK
35. Newnham E, Chen Y, Gibbs L, Dzidic P, Curagain B, Balsari S, Mergelsberg E, Leaning J (2022): ‘*The Mental Health Implications of Domestic Violence During COVID-19*’. *International Journal of Public Health*, Volume 66, Article 1604240
36. Piquerro A, Jennings W, Jemison E, Kaukiken C, Knaul F (2021): ‘*Domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic - Evidence from a systematic review and meta-analysis*’. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 74, 101806
37. Regeringen.se (2021): ‘*Fler Restriktioner tas bort från och med den 29 september*’. <https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2021/09/fler-restriktioner-tas-bort-fran-och-med-den-29-september/>
38. Sampaio RF, Mancini MC (2007): ‘*Systematic Review Studies: A guide for a careful synthesis of scientific evidence*’, *Brazilian Journal of Physical Therapy*. 11(1), 77-82
39. Sediri S, Zgueb Y, Ouanes S, Ouali U, Bourgon S, Jomli R, Nacef F (2020): ‘*Women’s mental health: acute impact of COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence*’. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 23:749–756
40. Silverio-Murillo A, De la Miyear J.R.B, Hoehn-Velasco L (2021): ‘*Families under Confinement: Covid-19 Domestic Violence and alcohol consumption*’.
41. Slakoff D, Aujla W, PenzeyMoog E (2020): ‘*The Role of Service Providers, Technology, and Mass Media When Home Isn't Safe for Intimate Partner Violence Victims: Best Practices and Recommendations in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond*’. *Nature Public Health Emergency Collection: Public Health Emergency Covid-19 Initiative*

42. Su Z, McDonell D, Roth S, Li Q, Segalo S, Shi F, Wagers S (2021): '*Mental health solutions for domestic violence victims amid COVID-19: a review of the literature*'. *Su et al. Globalization and Health*,17:67. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-021-00710-7>
43. Talmazan B, Sirna L, Ratto H, Ing N (2020): '*European countries develop new ways to tackle domestic violence during coronavirus lockdowns*'. NBC UNIVERSAL. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/european-countries-develop-new-ways-tackle-domestic-violence-during-coronavirus-n1174301>
44. Townsend M (2020): '*Revealed: surge in domestic violence during Covid-19 crisis*', The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/12/domestic-violence-surges-seven-hundred-per-cent-uk-coronavirus>
45. Turvey E. Brunt (2014): '*Forensic Victimology: Examining Violent Crimes in Investigative and Legal Contexts*'. Elsevier Inc, second edition, 2014
46. U.N Nations (1993): '*Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*'
47. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020): '*Research Brief: Effect of the Covid-19 Pandemic and related restrictions on homicide and property crime*'
48. U.N Women (2020): '*Covid-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*'
49. U.N Women-Women Count (2021): '*Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During Covid-19*'
50. U.S Department of Justice (2018): '*Domestic Violence*'. <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>
51. Usher K, Bhullar N, Durkin J, Gyamfi N, Jackson D (2020): '*Family violence and COVID-19: Increased vulnerability and reduced options for support*'. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses Inc.
52. Wadsworth J, Anderberg D, Wilson T, Rainer H (2013-2014): '*Unemployment and Domestic Violence*'. *Centre Piece: The Magazine of the Centre for Economic Performance*, Vol.18, Issue 3, p. 10-13
53. Wagers S (2020): '*Domestic violence growing in wake of coronavirus outbreak*'. <https://theconversation.com/domestic-violence-growing-in-wake-of-coronavirus-outbreak-135598>
54. Weitzman A, Behram J (2016): '*Disaster, Disruption to Family Life, and Intimate Partner Violence: The Case of the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti*'. *Sociological Science*, www.sociologicalscience.com 185, Volume 3

Appendix: Selected Studies for the Analysis

For the table below, we used 26 sources out of 32 (regarding the components of the theory). We excluded 6 sources since 2 of them were online reports from the U.N and the rest were online articles from newspapers.

<i>Routine Activity Theory</i>			
Component 1 - Motivated Offender			
<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Reference Number</i>
Boserup et.al (2020)	Alarming trends in US Domestic Violence during the Covid-19 pandemic	Data Review	9
Campbell (2020)	An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives	Literature Review	12
Leigh et.al (2022)	Are you safe to talk? Perspectives of Intimate Partner Violence during Lockdown and the Covid-19 Pandemic	Interview Data	32
Silverio- Murill et.al (2020)	Families under Confinement: Covid- 19 Domestic Violence and alcohol consumption	Data Review/Empirical Strategy	40
Component 2 - Suitable Victim			
Aizer (2020)	The Gender Wage Gap and Domestic Violence	Administrative Data/Official Records	1
Ali et.al (2020)	Domestic Violence in Health Contexts: A guide for healthcare professions	Literature Review	2

Almeida et.al (2021)	The impact of Covid-19 on households' income in the EU	Statistical aggregated micro-data	4
Alon et.al (2020)	This time it's different: The Role of Women's Employment in a Pandemic Recession	Review of Macro-economic variables	5
Becker et.al (2002)	Women drug users and drugs service provision: Service level responses to engagement and retention	Literature Review	7
Bettinger et.al (2020)	A Double Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the age of Covid-19	Data Review	8
Cameron (2021)	The Cost of Covid-19: Economic Abuse Throughout the Pandemic	Survey and Review Data	11
Chandan et.al (2020)	Female Survivors of Intimate partner violence and risk of depression, anxiety and serious mental health illness	Cohort Study	13
Chen et.al (2020)	Tracking the Economic Impact of Covid-19 and Mitigation Policies in Europe and the United States	Analysis of macro-data	14
David et.al (2021)	Increased Risk of Death Triggered by Domestic Violence, Hunger and Suicide, Exhausted Health System during Covid-19 Pandemic: Why, How and Solutions	Literature Review	16
Falk et.al (2021)	Unemployment Rates During the Covid-19 Pandemic	Official Statistics	21
Gulati et.al (2020)	Domestic Violence against Women and the Covid-19 Pandemic: What is the role of psychiatry?	Discussion based on Literature Review	24
Howard et.al (2010)	Domestic Violence and Mental Health	Literature Review	25
Hupkau et.al (2020)	Work, Care and Gender during the Covid-19 Crisis	Data Review	26
Leigh et.al (2022)	Are you safe to talk? Perspectives of Service Providers on Experiences of	Interview Data	32

	Domestic Violence During the Covid-19 Pandemic		
Lyons et.al (2021)	Experience of Intimate Partner Violence during Lockdown and the Covid-19 Pandemic	Literature Review	33
Newnham et.al (2022)	The Mental Health Implications of Domestic Violence During Covid-19	Literature Review	35
Sediri et.al (2020)	Women’s mental health: acute impact of Covid-19 pandemic on domestic violence	Online Survey	39
Su et.al (2021)	Mental Health solutions for domestic violence victims amid Covid-19: a review of the literature	Literature Review	42
Component 3 - Absence of a Capable Guardian			
Campbell et.al (2020)	An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives	Literature Review	12
Piquerro et.al (2021)	Domestic Violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Evidence from as systematic review and meta-analysis	Systematic Review and meta-analysis	38
Slakoff et.al (2020)	The Role of Service Providers, Technology and Mass Media When Home Isn’t Safe for Intimate Partner Violence Victims: Best Practices and Recommendations in the Era of Covid-19 and beyond	Literature Review	41