Young women, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit people (ages 15-24) are more likely to experience gender-based violence than any other age group. Females, people of colour, Indigenous peoples, newcomer communities, single parents, non-binary individuals, and children are experiencing the largest increase of pre-existing and new forms of gender-based violence.

In a study conducted by Statistics Canada, almost 50% of people aged 15-24 reported that COVID-19 would or has put them in a place where they are unable to meet financial needs. Women aged 15-24 were more likely to be very or extremely anxious about violence occurring in the home during COVID-19. Young people are at increased risk for violence, COVID-19 contraction, and financial strain as they make up the majority of service-sector positions.

Impacts of Gender-Based Violence

Among other things, there has been an increase in cyber violence, sexual abuse, racism, domestic violence, and the severity of intimate partner violence. With summer and school closures, limited social interactions, and limitations in available in-person services, many are experiencing undetected gender-based violence.

Abusive people may also be using COVID-related threats and trauma-bonding to keep a woman or child from disclosing abuse. Young girls and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to these manipulation tactics from their abusive partner or caregiver. This leads to self-blaming, downplaying, and justifying the abuse.
Service providers should keep young people informed of the risks associated with isolation, such as virus-related threatening, trauma-bonding, and online sexual exploitation.

More frequent contact may need to be made with groups that have historically been more vulnerable to gender-based violence. Risk assessments may need to continuously occur so support needs can be appropriately met.

Service providers may need to assist in developing a safety plan should there be a need to flee a violent situation. Depending on the situation, a safety plan may include:
- creating and sharing a safe word or signal with a friend, family member, or service provider with the intent that typing or saying this word via text message, phone call, or video chat will imply a need for immediate help;
- communicating with others on a daily basis with the intent that if communication does not occur one day, trusted people will know to further investigate safety;
- making note of safe places to escape, such as unlocking a window in the basement; and,
- memorizing the name, number, or location of an involved case worker and/or local crisis shelter should emergency assistance be required.

Possible Responses

- Women and youth are most likely to have jobs in the essential service industry, health care industry, or to have lost their jobs because of COVID-19. This puts them at greater risk of gender-based violence from strangers and the job loss creates financial insecurity. This may mean needing to move in with harmful individuals; face sexual exploitation in exchange for rent, substances, or other resources; or risk becoming homeless.

For original sources and documents, please visit: www.childtraumaresearch.ca