

Monitoring changes in domestic violence in the wake of COVID-19 social isolation measures

Karen Freeman

SUMMARY

NUMBER 145 | APRIL 2020

BACKGROUND

The Australian and NSW Governments' health response to the COVID-19 outbreak has included minimising the number of people infected with COVID-19 through the use of social distancing measures and enforced isolation. The initiatives to achieve these goals have ratcheted up from March 2020 through to April 2020. On 15 March 2020 NSW Health advised NSW residents to adopt social distancing measures including working from home where possible, avoiding indoor gatherings and crowds and reducing public transport use. On 23 March NSW parents were encouraged to keep children home from school and non-essential activities and businesses were closed including gyms, cinemas, pubs, cafes and churches. On 31 March 2020 an order was made under the NSW *Public Health Act 2010* requiring that people not leave their place of residence without a reasonable excuse. Breach of orders made under the *Public Health Act 2010* is a criminal offence and attracts penalties.

KEYWORDS

domestic violence family violence
 intimate partner violence
 social isolation social distancing
 Covid-19 Coronavirus

AIM

To monitor changes in the incidence of domestic violence in NSW in light of the unprecedented societal changes in response to the global pandemic COVID-19.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Police recorded crime data for March 2020 shows no evidence of an increase in domestic violence since social distancing was implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing measures commenced in NSW in mid-March 2020. Recorded incidents of DV-related assault for the month of March 2020 are equivalent with those for March 2019 (2,678 recorded DV-related assaults in March 2020 versus 2,632 in March 2019).

It is possible the figures are stable because isolation strategies have affected the willingness or ability of people experiencing domestic violence to seek assistance from police. Were this to be the case, we would still expect the most serious forms of physical domestic violence (ie. murder and assault resulting in grievous bodily harm) to come to police attention as these offences are not sensitive to discretionary reporting. Trends for the most serious DV offences mirror those for DV-related assault generally in that the incidence in March 2020 is comparable to that of the previous year.

Domestic violence may yet increase in response to social isolation measures but we have not seen an impact in the first month of operation. We will continue to monitor this data over time.