

# Domestic Abuse During the Pandemic:

## Making sense of heterogeneous data

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### Abstract

From the onset of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, experts and frontline responders alike warned of the detrimental impact these measures may have on the prevalence and intensity of Domestic Abuse. Early statistics issued by police and social sector organisations did not always, however, paint a clear picture corroborating this assumption. Data collected during the early stages of the pandemic for a special report to the European Commission by the EU-IMPRODOVA project, indicated similar divergent trends in the effect of lockdown measures on Domestic Abuse. This paper compares data from four countries involved in the IMPRODOVA project (Austria, Finland, Hungary and Portugal) and develops three hypotheses to make sense of heterogeneous data on Domestic Abuse during the pandemic. After identifying possible statistical artefacts, as well as socio-legal and sector specific influences on detection and enumeration as probable causes, this paper discusses the centrality of differentiating among types of Intimate Partner Violence as the key to making sense of such heterogeneous data. Pointing to the structural analogies between lockdown-settings and *Coercive Controlling Violence*, we argue that divergence between the stagnation or decline in police data and the universal increase of calls to the social sector, must be understood as the strengthening of perceived control by perpetrators over victims of Domestic Abuse in the short-term during lockdown. By the same logic, service uptake in the medium and long-term can be explained by a perceived loss of control by perpetrators as lockdown measures are relaxed. Finally, we argue that identifying this dynamic of risk and delayed reporting is central to the development of adequate interventions and responses by frontline responders in the ongoing pandemic.

**Keywords:** Domestic Abuse, COVID-19 Pandemic, Coercive Controlling Violence, Lockdown, Domestic Violence Data

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## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

From the onset of lockdown measures and shelter-in-place orders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, academic scholars and expert practitioners alike, warned of the detrimental impact such measures were likely to have on the prevalence and intensity of Domestic Abuse. In early April of 2020, with over ninety countries worldwide in lockdown, first reports of sharp rises in Domestic Violence and Abuse began to emerge, prompting the Executive Director of UN Women to issue a statement on what was termed *the shadow pandemic* of violence against women and girls. (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2020) Despite the urgency of the issue, particularly in the face of the spread of the Delta variant, the unequal distribution of vaccines, and their implications for the persistence of the pandemic on a global scale, large gaps remain in the empirical analysis of the effects of pandemic response measures on Domestic Abuse.

In an effort to contribute to addressing this gap, the IMPRODOVA project launched an impromptu investigation during the early stages of the pandemic, relying on established cooperation with frontline responder networks to compile the most recent publicly available, sector specific data. This investigation was submitted as a special report covering all eight IMPRODOVA consortium countries to the European Commission<sup>3</sup>. Mirroring the focus of the IMPRODOVA Project, this report covers data on Domestic Violence and Abuse in general, focusing mainly, however, on different types of Intimate Partner Violence within one household. While the term Domestic Violence (DV) covers a wide range of violent acts between any two people within the same household, its colloquial understanding mainly refers to acts of physical violence. In recognition of the detrimental effects and centrality of the non-physical forms of violence in abusive relationships, the term Domestic Abuse (DA) is often employed to emphasise the importance of power and control, as well as the use of tactics of subjugation such as “threats, intimidation, stalking, destruction of personal property, psychological abuse, economic oppression and restrictions on liberty” (Burman & Brooks-Hay, 2018, p. 68). The data

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collected, as well as the analysis presented in this paper, predominantly concern physical violence and different forms of abuse occurring between intimate or romantic partners sharing the same household (Intimate Partner Violence - IPV).

Against the backdrop of the unanimous warning by frontline responders and experts in the field at the beginning of the pandemic, the data collected by the IMPRODOVA consortium yielded unexpected results: While the informed assumption (based on theoretical considerations, research on other epidemics and social crises, and early surveys) that lockdown measures would correlate with an increase in Domestic Abuse was broadly confirmed in our findings, the data collected using different indicators across eight countries encompassed several conflicting trends. Maintaining the assumption that the effects of lockdown are most likely to have a generally homogenous (negative) effect on Domestic Abuse (despite national differences and varying lockdown settings), the following paper explores the heterogeneous elements of the data on Domestic Abuse during early lockdown settings. The comparative exploration of four cases – Austria, Finland, Portugal and Hungary – will serve to develop three hypotheses that may be used to make sense of heterogeneous data on Domestic Abuse during the pandemic. The first two hypotheses, relating to heterogeneous data as statistical artefacts and the impact of socio-legal and sector specific organisational aspects, seek to explain divergences as issues of enumeration and detection. The third hypothesis posits, that in order to explain this heterogeneous data, it is necessary to differentiate between different types of Intimate Partner Violence and employ an analysis informed by the internal dynamics of abusive relationships.

## Domestic Abuse in the context of the pandemic and lockdown measures

### The expected effects of the pandemic and lockdown measures on Domestic Abuse

The informed assumption that the pandemic and lockdown measures will negatively affect the prevalence and intensity of Domestic Abuse is based, on the one hand, on risk factors that are shown to negatively affect perpetrator behaviour, and, on the other, the increased vulnerability of victims in the context of the pandemic. Factors negatively affecting perpetrator behaviour include increased economic insecurity, psychological

stress, as well as increased alcohol and substance abuse. Simultaneously, the vulnerability of victims is increased through social isolation, the reduction of opportunities to report abuse or leave an abusive relationship, as well as the increased risk of violence against children.

A number of early studies and meta analyses of data from different countries (Piquero et al., 2021) support these assumptions. A study employing victimization surveys shortly after lockdown measures came into effect in Argentina, for example, showed a positive link between lockdown restrictions and Intimate Partner Violence. The study compared responses by women whose partners were exempt from complying with quarantine, with those whose partners were not, finding evidence that the impact quarantine measures have on the time couples spend together, as well as the stress on income, correlate with increases in intimate partner violence. (Perez-Vincent et al., 2020) Similar results were reported in Tunisia, where a study found a strong positive correlation ( $p < 0.001$ ) between lockdown and an increased risk of violence for women who had experienced abuse before the onset of such measures. (Sediri et al., 2020) mental health concerns linked to the lockdown have quickly risen. This study aims to assess the effect of the COVID-19-related lockdown on Tunisian women's mental health and gender-based violence. An online survey was conducted, using the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21 Alcohol and substance abuse, which number among the strongest predictors for increased violence, were also shown to increase as risk factors during lockdown. (Campbell, 2020) Indicating an increased vulnerability of victims, Sediri et al. (2020) reported that women experiencing abuse during lockdown, experienced more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress than before such measures entered into force. A study conducted in Buenos Aires also reported an increase in psychological violence by 76% relative to pre-lockdown results (Perez-Vincent et al., 2020), findings that were corroborated in the Tunisian survey (Sediri et al., 2020) mental health concerns linked to the lockdown have quickly risen. This study aims to assess the effect of the COVID-19-related lockdown on Tunisian women's mental health and gender-based violence. An online survey was conducted, using the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21.

The situation is likely to be exacerbated in most countries by a reduction in the availability of front-line responder services including restricted or limited

access, strained resources, shifts in priorities by front-line responders and delays in processing. Equally, the inaccessibility of social infrastructure is likely to have decreased detection of Domestic Abuse, as well as interventions and support by the social environment of victims and perpetrators.

### Expectations for Domestic Abuse data

These informed assumptions on the negative affect the pandemic and lockdown on Domestic Abuse go hand-in-hand with expectations for how these developments should present in corresponding data collected by different sectors. Understanding Domestic abuse as a crime of opportunity which increases in prevalence with a rise in exposure to perpetrators (Chin, 2012), and taking into account the exacerbation of risk-factors (Campbell et al., 2003; Walby et al., 2017; Campbell, 2020) during the pandemic, the expectation is, that corresponding indicators for Domestic Abuse would generally rise in a relatively homogenous way. An increase in Domestic Abuse prevalence should be mirrored by a general increase in restraining orders, arrests and emergency calls. The increased severity of violence and abuse should be mirrored in crime reports and emergency room admissions. At the same time, it can be expected that the barriers to accessing services may be artificially lowering the case numbers, presenting as disruptions to the detection of Domestic Abuse. Similarly, these statistics need to be analysed against the background of a general drop in reported crime across all countries during lockdown. Nevertheless, and particularly when measured proportionally to an overall drop in reported crime, the overall trend is expected to rise.

It is also important to note, that this expected rise in Domestic Abuse cases should present relatively homogeneously across data collected by different institutions, sectors, and countries. It is unlikely, that the effect of pandemic response measures on Domestic Abuse will vary dramatically between different countries employing comparable lockdown strategies, despite significant geographical or socio-economic differences. This assumption is supported by studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses comparing data from multiple countries such as Argentina, Australia, China, Cyprus, France, Greece, India, Singapore, South Africa, Tunisia, UK, and the USA. (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Pentarakki & Speake, 2020; Perez-Vincent et al., 2020; Roesch et al., 2020; Sediri et al., 2020; Piquero et al., 2021) Irritations to detection and enumeration, such as barriers to ac-

cessing services, may vary in the long-term between countries and individual institutions, depending on the availability and possibility to adapt infrastructure to overcome access issues. Particularly the data currently available, however, stemming from the early months of the pandemic, is most likely to reflect countries and institutions which were comparably unprepared for the immediate switch to service provision under lockdown settings. The assumption of a relatively uniform effect of the pandemic and lockdown on Domestic Abuse, therefore, is accompanied by the expectation of a relatively homogenous representation of this trend in the data stemming both from different countries and institutions.

## Comparative Exploration of Domestic Violence Data: Austria, Finland, Hungary, Portugal

### Types of data, sources and limitations

In order to explore the impact of COVID-19 measures on the prevalence and response to Domestic abuse, members of the IMPRODOVA Consortium collected publicly available data from organisations in different frontline responder sectors. The types of data available per sector vary between countries. Most commonly, Domestic abuse is counted and compared via the restraining orders issued by police. This often is complemented with crime reports linked to a domestic context (summary crimes). Here countries vary in their operationalisation of Domestic Abuse, whether via documenting the existing victim-perpetrator relationship status or their household status. In addition, Hungary, Portugal, and Scotland have Domestic Abuse as singular criminal offense in their Criminal Code (indicator crime). The strategies of estimating reported Domestic Abuse vary between countries whether they aggregate all relevant crime reports linked to a domestic context as summary crimes or establish a trend via a singular offence (indicator crime). In addition, some countries (such as Finland or Scotland) record the number of emergency calls linked to Domestic Abuse as a useful indicator.

These differences in operationalizing Domestic Abuse make cross-national comparisons of prevalence numbers only limitedly useful. However, trends of reporting crimes (not their prevalence) within the country over time can be traced.

Due to the different country traditions of which types of data are made available and usually referred to in the internal discourse on Domestic Abuse, as well as the urgency of a timely investigation (within the IMPRODOVA project), we had to rely on a scattered insight of sector-specific data, which allowed us partial glimpses and snapshots into the phenomenon within the emerging situation. Against this background, the interpretation of available data must be conducted carefully and contrasted with other studies and publications to ensure the reliability of trends observed. The exploration in this article focusses on the data for 2020 and, where possible, differentiates monthly or quarterly from the onset of lockdowns.

### Austria

Any development of specific types of crime during the lockdown must be analysed against the background of the overall decline in reported crime in this period: Comparing the lockdown (First lockdown in Austria: 18.03.-03.05.2020) with its corresponding period in 2019, a stark decline of 46,6% of all forms of reported crime can be observed (2019: 52.618; 2020: 28.208). (Rauth, 2020) Comparing the years 2019 and 2020 in total, this decline is reduced to 11,3% (2019: 488.912; 2020: 433.811). In this context, it is noteworthy that police-issued restraining orders do not follow the overall crime trend, but keep consistent over the first half of 2020. A comparison with the restraining orders issued in 2019 in the same period is not available for investigation, as the new *Protection Against Violence Act* (Gewaltschutzgesetz, 2019) changed the mode in which restraining orders are recorded by law enforcement. Prior to the law which entered into force on 01.01.2020, the indicator for Domestic Violence consisted of the number of restraining orders ('cases') issued. Since 2020, the statistic counts the number of 'victims' protected by the restraining order, rather than subsuming these under a single case. However, comparing months within 2020, the daily average number of restraining orders rises from 30 (Jan, Feb), to 36 (Apr), and declining to 34 (May). A 14% increase of victims affected by registered DV offences in the lockdown period (Mar-Jun) compared to the time pre-lockdown (Jan, Feb) can be observed, totalling 126 more cases within a mean-comparison.

Several media reports and press releases from social sector victim organisations reported an alarming increase of calls to services of 71% for the first lockdown period. Despite this increase in calls to Violence Protec-

**Table 1.** Overview of available data per country

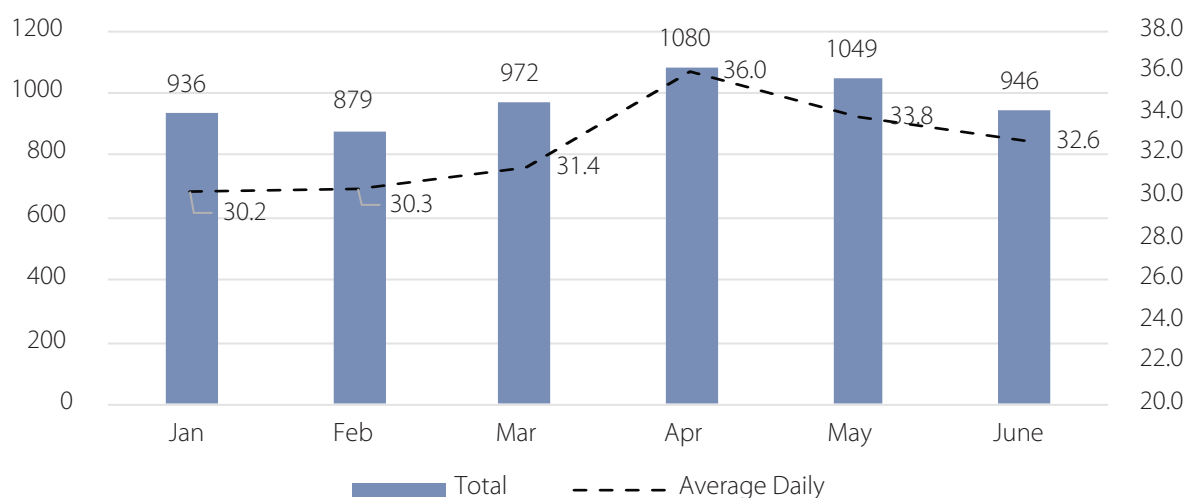
	Austria	Hungary	Finland	Portugal
<b>Police sector</b>				
Emergency calls	Not Available	Not Available	Available	Available
Crime reports	Available (summary)	Available (indicator/ summary)	Available (summary)	Available (summary)
Restraining orders	Available	Available	Available	Available
<b>Social sector</b>				
Calls to service	Available	Not Available	Not Available	Available
Shelter demand/referrals	Available	Not Available	Available	Available

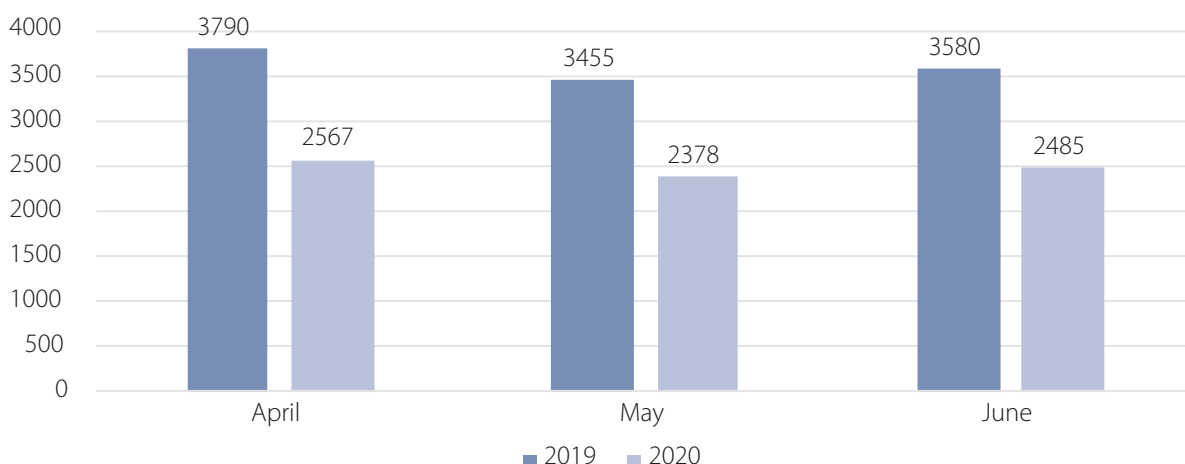
tion Centres and Women’s Shelters, the latter saw a decline of service uptake by women (-9,92%) and children (-9,16%) in 2020. (AÖF, 2021) The women’s shelter organization AÖF (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser) argues that the COVID-19 lockdown measures negatively affected the opportunities for women to leave their partner.

**Hungary**

In Hungary, Domestic Abuse is counted in two ways within the public crime statistics. First, it is represented as summary crime of Domestic Abuse related offences. Second, it is counted as singular Domestic Abuse offence according to the Criminal Code as indicator crime. Comparing the months of the first lockdown in 2020 with the respective time period of 2019, crime reports for Domestic Abuse related offences have declined drastically, making no exception to the overall decline of reported crime. Each month a decline of about 30% is observed for reported Domestic Abuse offences. Correspondingly, there is a decline of 32,2% of police measures in Domestic Abuse cases for the same period (2019: 10.337; 2020: 7010).

**Figure 1:** Restraining orders (Jan-Jun 2020), Source: Austrian Ministry of Interior (2020).



**Figure 2:** Domestic Abuse crime reports (Apr-Jun 2019/20), Source: Hungarian National Police Headquarters (2020).**Table 2.** Restraining orders (Jan-Aug 2020), Source: Hungarian Ministry of Interior (2020).

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
156	146	125	142	121	161	134	126

However, looking at Domestic Abuse as individual offence according to the Criminal Code<sup>4</sup>, a difference to the aggregated number above can be observed. Between March and August 2019, a total of 201 Domestic Abuse cases were registered nationwide, while for the same period there are 330 cases in 2020. The discrepancy between the trends of Domestic Abuse related crime reports and Domestic Abuse cases is significant, however seem to stem from the ways data are included in the crime statistics. On the one hand, cases are only included after the investigation process has finished, rather than at the time of reporting. On the other hand, shortcomings in the legislative framework produce a high latency of Domestic Abuse cases. Only in cases of aggravated battery (Section 164 (3))<sup>5</sup> police act ex-officio. Otherwise, the victim is burdened with the task of filing a criminal complaint, regardless of whether it has been reported to the police or the police has mandated any measure. As such, the number of DV cases reported to the police and the number of police measures deviate drastically in the volume of Domestic Abuse cases from the registered crime statistics. Looking at police issued restraining orders, there is a slight increase in 2020 over the number issued in 2019. In 2019, there were a total of 1461 restraining orders issued (arith. mean = 121,75)<sup>6</sup>, while in 2020 the monthly average is 138,9 tem-

4 Data provided by the Hungarian Ministry of Interior (2020).

5 Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code, Section 164 (3).

6 For 2019, there is no monthly statistic available.

porary preventive measures. The following table shows the monthly number of restraining orders in 2020 between January and August (total 1111).

While there are no exact numbers available of social sector frontline responder services, expert interviews and media reports (Kersten *et al.*, Forthcoming) indicated a doubling of phone calls to the National Crisis Telephone Information Service not for March, but April 2020, decreasing by the end of the first lockdown. Similarly, the demand for shelter places increased in the first weeks of the lockdown reportedly.

### Finland

Finland presents an interesting discrepancy between reported Domestic Abuse crimes and emergency calls in a Domestic Abuse context. While reported crime decreased by 12% comparing the first half of 2019 and 2020 during the pandemic, calls to police which were classified as Domestic Abuse-related increased significantly by 30%. Whereas several other Member States observed a decrease in overall and street crimes, Finland shows the heightened attention of police to private residencies most starkly. (National Police Board, 2020)

Additionally, violence between married (20%) and unmarried (67%) couples increased during Jan to Jun of 2020, although the stark increases were reported



**Table 3.** Domestic Abuse crime reports and Emergency calls (Jan-Jun 2019/20), Source: Finish National Police Board (2020).

	01-06/2019	01-06/2020	Diff. N	Diff. %
DA crime reports	2493	2193	-300	-12%
Emergency calls (DA context)	34643	44864	+10221	+30%

before the COVID-19 lockdown measures were implemented. From Apr to Jun there was only an increase by 5.4% observed. On a positive note, the violence between ex-spouses reduced drastically by 70% during the first lockdown period. Finland recorded the number of cases of violence against children during the lockdown which increased by 21%.

Looking beyond reported crimes to police interventions, data of restraining orders have not yet been made available by the Ministry of Interior. Media reports suggested a decrease of restraining orders issued by the police in 2020, as they already dropped by 40% in 2019. However, this may not be due to COVID-19 or the lockdown measures, as the Finish Government introduced a fee for rejected restraining order applications in 2016. Subsequently, the number of applications has decreased annually deterring applicants from requesting the measure.

Within the social sector, data of women's shelter suggest that the uptake by women during the lockdown measures in 2020 decreased significantly from March to July 2020. While there is a slightly higher availability of shelter spaces in January 2020 compared to 2019, the numbers are matched in February until the first weeks of March. In 2019 the number of available spaces was consistently below 60 from March to end of May, with the beginning of the lockdown measures the number rose linearly in 2020 to over 100 spaces until mid-May. Only in July did the number of women in shelters level to the rate seen in 2019 again. The communication of the lockdown measures together with the limited access to different social welfare services which are crucial in referring women to shelters, seem to have impacted the ability to use women's shelters in Finland. (THL, 2020)

### Portugal

Comparing reported Domestic Abuse crimes for the first three quarters of 2020 with the corresponding period in 2019, a decrease in crime reports can be observed, which is -10% for the first quarter, -6% for the second, and almost at the level of the 2019 com-

parative period with -1%. Looking beyond the annual comparison, overall Domestic Abuse offences had increased by 10% between 2018 and 2019. A general high fluctuation of crime reports limits a further reaching interpretation of the data available. In addition, the decrease of 10% is observed for the first quarter of 2020, predominately before the lockdown measures were implemented.

In Portugal, the number of reported Domestic Abuse crimes follow the general trend in reported crime which decreased by 5,22% overall.<sup>7</sup> Unlike other Member States, the trend for Domestic Abuse is not deviating from the general decline. However, comparing the numbers of restraining orders issued by police - police interventions, rather than reporting to police - the third quarter of 2020 (n=785) shows an increase by 26% compared the corresponding quarter of 2019 (n=570).

In line with trends in other countries, the number of support requests received by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) increased significantly in 2020, especially during the lockdown. Between March and June more than 200% of support requests were registered compared to 2019 (854 vs 253)<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, during the lockdown a decrease of attendances by the specialised services under the National network for supporting victims of Domestic Abuse was observed (30th March - 12th April: 2789; 13th - 26th of April: 2080). The rise in numbers occurred delayed during lockdown (27th April - 10th May: 2192 and 11th - 24th of May: 4530). The significant increase towards the end of May, doubling the previously recorded bi-weekly numbers, suggests a high latency of service uptake by victims of Domestic Abuse.

### Comparative outlook

Across all four countries overall decrease in crime reports and decrease of cases of Domestic Abuse could be observed within reported crime between 2019 and

<sup>7</sup> Source: data made available by the Portuguese Government (quarterly reports).

<sup>8</sup> Source: Intervention of the Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality in 15th of July.

**Insert Table 4.** Reported Domestic Abuse crimes (1.-3. Q 2019/20), Source: Portuguese Ministry of Justice (2020).

	2019	2020	Diff. N	Diff. %
1Q (Jan-Mar)	6980	6347	-633	-9%
2Q (Apr-Jun)	7382	6928	-454	-6%
3Q (Jul-Sep)	8228	8137	-91	-1%

2020, particularly in the period during the first lockdown measures. Discrepancies are evident in Hungary, where Domestic Abuse is also recorded as singular crime for which an increase was recorded compared to its corresponding period in 2019, not following the trend of overall reported crime.

While, with few exceptions, a decline in the reporting of Domestic Abuse cases to police can be observed, police interventions into Domestic Abuse cases with the preventive temporary restraining order have not followed the overall crime trend (with the exception of Finland). Restraining orders were issued at the same rate as the 2019 comparison period, and even increased during or after the first lockdown measures in three of the countries studied. However, Finland's exception seems to be linked rather to its changed policy of charging a fee to rejected restraining orders, which seems to deter victims from applying for it, rather than a direct link to the COVID-19 lockdown measures - a trend preceding the 2020 lockdown measures.

Emergency calls (data for the police sector only available for Finland) in the police or social sector increased, not following the downward trend of reported crime. While all countries experienced increases to Domestic Abuse service lines in the social sector or emergency calls to police linked to a Domestic Abuse setting (AT: +71%; HU: +100%; FI: +30%; PT: +100%) (Kersten *et al.*, Forthcoming), this increase is not matched with crime reports, though this increase *is* visible within in police interventions.

Available shelter places increased with lockdown measures in Austria and Finland. While the use of shelter places followed a similar trend pre-lockdown in 2020, there was a decline of shelter use of 9% in Austria for the whole year, and about a 50% increase of available shelter places in Finland for the months of the first lockdown. Only after some weeks after the lockdown measures had been lifted, the number of shelter places used by women rose to the levels of 2019.

The development of different types of data (emergency calls, crime reports, restraining orders, shelter uptake) for different types of frontline responder services (police, social sector) do not mirror the aforementioned expectations at the onset of the pandemic self-evidently. Increased risk factors for perpetrators and vulnerabilities of victims do not lead to an increase in reported crime. Calls to services increase across all countries within the social sector, however not to result in an increase in cases immediately or impacting crime reporting. Also, uptake of women's shelter reduces during lockdown and only increase again within the weeks after the lockdown. Against this background, however, police interventions into Domestic Abuse cases do not vanish during the pandemic with services struggling to cope with new and additional challenges of the lockdown measures, reducing face-to-face interventions, and resorting to virtual consultations. Police officers do make use of restraining orders, sometimes with increased frequency in the cases of Austria, Portugal, and Hungary.

These heterogeneous trends reveal that the different "snapshots" provided by the respective data types respond to crisis conditions dissimilarly. They do not present a clear link to an (unknown) "actual" prevalence of Domestic Abuse, but reveal how the use of existing services by victims, witnesses and modes of intervention by frontline responder organisations is changed in the pandemic situation.

### Making Sense of heterogeneous data

In attempting to explain the heterogeneous trends visible in the data collected, three hypotheses will be developed below. The first two relate to detection and enumeration, discussing the divergence of trends as possible effects of socio-legal and sector specific aspects or statistical artefacts. The third hypothesis relates the heterogeneous data to the internal dynamics of Domestic Abuse itself, positing that differentiating among types of intimate partner violence, and analys-



ing the structural analogies to lockdown settings, are key to understanding the divergent trends in the available data.

### **Heterogeneous Data as a result of detection and enumeration: Statistical Artefacts, Socio-legal and sector specific aspects**

In order to make sense of the in-year or year-to-year comparisons of trends across the different data types, countries, and sectors, it is important to exclude and correct for statistical artefacts, such as changes of practices in measuring and quantifying, as well as the surrounding policies guiding the documentation of cases to avoid biased conclusions. The limitations of comparing short periods are additionally problematic as they necessarily exclude long-term trends, and cannot be reduced to mono-causal explanations. Depending on the type of quantitative indicator selected, the "Law of small numbers" has to be taken into account where intuitive patterns and trends are a solely random product of small samples.

*Within the country comparison, the following are examples of such statistical artifacts, which need to be differentiated from trends which do indicate a change of behaviour of victims, witnesses, or frontline responder organisations:*

Reviewing the data such examples can be found in Austria, where a year-to-year comparison of restraining orders was not possible as the quantification of restraining orders (RO) had changed with the inception of the new Violence Protection Act 2019 on January 1, 2020. Shifting the count of restraining orders from cases (perpetrator and victim(s)), to the number of victims (not perpetrators) protected by the order.

In Hungary, crime reports are only included in the national crime statistics after the investigation has been concluded resulting in a high latency of cases to be represented with the bureaucratic documentation.

Finland has witnessed an increase of couples' violence before the onset of the lockdown measures, after which it still increased but at a much lower level. Portugal witnessed a 10% reduction of Domestic Abuse crime reports in the first quarter of 2020, however approaching the same level of 2018, after a 10% increase in 2019.

*Similarly, the following are examples for changes to the socio-legal policy framework, which affect the inclusion*

*of cases in documentation or the willingness-to-report or use-of-services by victims. As such, they influence reporting; however, they cannot be taken as indication of a change to Domestic Abuse prevalence or response.*

In Hungary, the limitation of ex-officio crimes of requiring the police to act without the victims consent in cases of Domestic Abuse to cases of aggravated battery (Section 164 (3))<sup>9</sup> delays and reduces the inclusion of Domestic Abuse cases in the official statistic, putting the burden on the victim to file a criminal complaint.

Another example of changes to the legal framework of Domestic Abuse policy affecting the development of police interventions is Finland's introduction of a policy of feeing rejected applications of restraining orders in 2016, which has decreased the number of applications as well as restraining orders issued since then continuously. Such changes cannot be confused with changes to police activation or Domestic Abuse incidence rates.

### **Heterogeneous Data as a result of internal dynamics of Domestic Abuse: Coercive controlling violence in lockdown settings**

#### **Differentiating between types of Intimate Partner Violence**

While the composition and availability of indicators, as well as socio-legal and sector specific aspects affecting detection, are likely to play a causal role in the heterogeneity of data, the most fundamental influence on such heterogeneity may lie in the internal dynamics of Domestic Abuse itself, rather than its enumeration. In order to understand divergent trends in Domestic Abuse data during Lockdown, it is imperative to distinguish between different types of intimate partner violence in general, and take into account the structural analogies between coercive controlling violence and lockdown setting in particular.

For the discussion of this third hypothesis it may suffice to briefly review the differentiation between four types of intimate partner violence as described, for example, by (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Only in differentiating between these types, can appropriate screening instruments, processes, and responses, sensitive to the central dynamics, context and consequences of partner violence be developed. (ibid.) A central distinction, for example, must be made between *Situational Couple Violence* and *Coercive Controlling Violence*. While

<sup>9</sup> Act C of 2012: Criminal Code of Hungary, Section 164 (3).

the former describes “partner violence that does not have its basis in the dynamic of power and control [...] [but rather] results from situations or arguments between partners that escalate on occasion into physical violence” (ibid., 479), the latter describes “a pattern of emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control coupled with physical violence against partners”. (ibid., 478) Understanding the dynamics of *Coercive Controlling Violence* is not only central to understanding heterogeneous data during lockdown, but also imperative for the proper assessment of the threat to victims, as this type of Intimate Partner Violence correlates most strongly to high-risk cases of Domestic Abuse. In *Coercive Controlling Violence*, perpetrators employ intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying, and blaming; use of children; male privilege; economic abuse; and coercion and threats to exert power and control over their victims. (Pence, Paymar and Ritmeester, 1993). This is a fundamentally different dynamic than that found in *Situational Couple Violence*. Another central difference lies in the fact that *Situational Couple Violence* tends to be gender-symmetrical, while *Coercive Controlling Violence* is predominantly perpetrated by men against women (Frieze & Browne, 1989; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Johnson, 2006) male and female students (N=208. Gender-asymmetry is also found in *Violent Resistance*, where predominantly female victims of abuse employ violence in an attempt at resistance against coercively controlling, physical violent partners in acts of self-defence. (ibid. 478) Finally, in the context of lockdown, it is important to identify *Separation-Instigated Violence* as “violence that first occurs in the relationship at separation”. (ibid.) As the point of separation is one of the most high-risk moments for victims of abusive relationships, it is important to differentiate between violence that occurs for the first time in this context and violence that is exacerbated by it.

#### Structural analogies exacerbating Coercive Control in lockdown settings

One of the central divergences in the trends shown by our data, lies in the universal rise in calls to social sector organisations across all countries, while reporting and arrests in police data stagnate or drop in several cases. The strongest factor explaining this divergence may lie in the structural analogies between *Coercive Controlling Violence* and lockdown settings. The structure of lockdown and stay-at-home orders fundamentally privileges the opportunity to - and perception of - control by perpetrators over victims.

“It’s not uncommon for domestic violence abusers to isolate their victims as an act of control or to reduce opportunity for disclosure of abuse, and the current societal conditions are likely furthering the impact of these actions” (Campbell, 2020).

The (almost) complete isolation of victims from wider social settings, the literal omnipresence of the controlling abuser, the increased financial insecurity, the permanent exposure of children to the abuser, and the overwhelming barriers to - and fear of - separation, all play into a sharp rise in the control abusers have over their victims in lockdown settings. (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; van Gelder et al., 2020) This privileging of control through the structural analogies of lockdown and *Coercive Control* is very likely to reduce the prevalence and intensity of physical violence in the short term. Violent acts largely detected by law enforcement, especially those occurring in the context of separation, are likely to drop in the early phases of lockdown where control over the victim is the most holistic. At the same time, the less easily detectable effects of this control, such as fear, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, depression, post-traumatic stress, are likely to intensify. Early studies have shown, that persons experiencing abuse during lockdown reported more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress in the context of lockdown measures than before. Moreover, these studies report that the most frequent type of Abuse reported in this setting was psychological (96%). (Sediri et al., 2020) mental health concerns linked to the lockdown have quickly risen. This study aims to assess the effect of the COVID-19-related lockdown on Tunisian women’s mental health and gender-based violence. An online survey was conducted, using the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21

#### The probable effect on data

The hypothesis of a convergence of higher psychological (and other intangible forms of) violence with a drop in physical violence in the early stages of lockdown, may be the strongest factor explaining the heterogeneity of data. Other studies (Ashby, 2020; Bullinger, Carr & Packham, 2021)2021 found no notable increase of Domestic Violence in police data, interpreting that “concerns of a surge in domestic violence may have been unfounded.” (Ashby, 2020)“properties”:“formattedCitation”:“(Ashby, 2020) However, if data such as emergency room admissions are taking into consideration, or longer-term trends are observed, this interpretation may prove to be false. A study in Sicily (Di

Franco et al., 2020) mostly coming from domestic violence. A good screening procedure in clinical practice is useful, but WHO does not advise universal screening, recommending further research.

(i) recorded a general decrease in emergency room admissions during early lockdown, but noted that the proportion of Domestic Violence cases within these admissions rose, 80% of which were female victims. Moreover, a study conducted by (Hsu & Henke, 2021) comparing official Domestic Violence police incidents, calls for services and Intimate Partner Violence-related crimes in 35 cities across the United States, shows a relative homogenous trend between the *average fraction of people at home all day* and a *standardized measure for Domestic Violence per Capita* before the first stay-at-home order came into effect. The 20<sup>th</sup> of March, when the first such order entered into force however, marks the beginning of divergent trends in these two indicators: With early April the *average fraction of people at home all day* reaches its preliminary peak, while the measure of *Domestic Violence per Capita* drops to its lowest mark since the beginning of March 2020. By mid-April however, these trends invert, with the number of Domestic Violence cases steadily increasing, while the *fraction of people at home all day* is in consistent decline.

The more plausible explanation for the divergence in police data and calls to social services lies in the probable delay of reporting and service uptake. Analysing this data through the lens of different types of Intimate Partner Violence, suggests that these heterogeneous trends are most likely to be expressions of a delay in reporting and service uptake during the early phases of lockdown. While the onset of stay-at-home orders and the resulting intensification of control over victims can be pinpointed to specific dates, the *normalisation* of life in lockdown settings, the *perceived* relaxation of measures in practice, and the resulting perception of lessening or loss of control by perpetrators over victims is highly subjective. In a recent study, (Campbell et al., 2021)(b) showed, that while 78% of calls to police, reporting Domestic Violence, were calls from victims themselves, police officers only encountered the suspect when responding to the call in 7% of cases. Victims of Domestic Violence often report violent incidents only after the perpetrators have left the pre-

ises. Lockdown measures during the COVID pandemic often result in victims being trapped in their homes with the perpetrators over extended periods of time, limiting their opportunities to safely report incidents. (Campbell et al., 2021)(b) This interpretation not only explains the universal rise in calls to social sector organisations within the IMPRODOVA data, but also phenomena such as the delayed uptake in social sector services (such as Women's Shelters) as shown by in the Finish data.

## Conclusion

While the initial assumptions on the detrimental impact lockdown measures were likely to have on Domestic Abuse were shared almost unanimously by experts and frontline responders, early data collected by different sectors painted a more divergent picture. Particularly the short-term period at the onset of lockdown measures saw a stagnation, partially even a drop in data collected by law enforcement and service uptake in the social sector. Simultaneously, calls to social sector organisations surged in all eight of the countries studied by IMPRODOVA. Making sense of this heterogeneous data requires an informed analysis of the modes of enumeration of Domestic Abuse and the identification of statistical artefacts stemming therefrom. More importantly, the sound understanding of the socio-legal influences to, and sector specific mechanisms of, identification are key to explaining divergences in the case numbers reported. Above all, however, all data available on the effects of the pandemic must be analysed through the lens of the internal dynamics of Domestic Abuse. Understanding lockdown as the ideal setting for abusive partners to exert maximum control over their victims and identifying this increase of control as the cause for a reduction in identified cases of abuse is the key to making sense of the heterogeneous data being reported by different sectors. More importantly, however, recognizing the dynamics leading to delayed reporting and the increased risk developing as lockdown is relaxed, rather than implemented, is the condition for the development of appropriate interventions by all frontline responders to Domestic Violence and Abuse.

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