

Women and children have nowhere to go from the abuser during the lockdown and self-isolation period.

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Illustrative picture

25-year-old Z.R. was constantly abused in her marriage. Her husband, who worked at the military unit, used to humiliate and offend her. On March 21, husband dishoused the woman with three children, one of whom is disabled.

Mehrjon Centre for social support and adaptation of women and children in Fergana Valley came to her help.

“Unfortunately, the centre has no conditions to accept the victims of gender-based violence during the lockdown,” the message of the Gender Equality Commission [read](#).

Z.R. said to the employee of Mehrjon Centre that she was going to get divorced from her husband and recover alimony. According to the Centre, the woman lives with her father now, the centre helped her to find a job and provided her with necessary foodstuffs.

According to Khurshida Ibragimova, head of the centre, 270 people turned to Mehrjon during the lockdown in Uzbekistan, including 12 people who suffered from domestic abuse. The centre provided legal and psychological support to the rest.

On March 16, the first coronavirus case was identified in Uzbekistan. One week later, public transportation stopped working and self-isolation became mandatory from April 6. Only on April 10, the Gender Equality Commission together with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, and Centre for Civil Initiatives Support launched a domestic abuse hotline.

“The lockdown period has become a serious test for many families. These days, family conflicts and divorces tend to grow in all countries of the world,” the Senate [reported](#).

Gender Equality Commission [publishes](#) scattered data, which cannot give a full picture.

According to the ministry of interior affairs, 527 protection orders were issued from January to April 2020. By the way, when the protection order mechanism was activated, [no](#) protection order was issued from September to December 2019.

Psychologist **Liana Natroshvili** speaking to CABAR.asia said that the number of people turning for help during the lockdown did not rise.



“It is vice versa, women suffering from abuse cannot get help now because all family members stay at home and they cannot find even one hour to make a video call,” Natroshvili said. “To be honest, psychotherapy does not help in acute situation, so there is no need to spend resources on it. At first, all efforts should be made to find a way out of domestic abuse, and then a psychologist/psychotherapist should be consulted. Let’s be honest here: those who are in an acute situation may not always have access to telephone or internet, and they cannot even know there is an option to write or call for help.”

On April 28, the UNDP in Uzbekistan [launched](#) a campaign to support survivors of domestic abuse. Pharmacies of Tashkent and Tashkent region started to distribute posters and brochures with places where a survivor of domestic abuse can go. The brochures also contain information about how to continue strengthening family relations during the lockdown by getting closer to each other as family members in hard times.

“We see violence tends to grow in other countries - by 30 per cent in France, 18 per cent in Spain. We can suppose that domestic violence will grow in our country, too,” psychologist Liana Natroshvili said. “People facing hardships often take it out on their relatives, it is even a cultural tradition when we bring our bad moods home. But now all processes take place at home and there is no opportunity to go outside, so the energy is being saved and realised in quarrels, scandals and manhandling.”

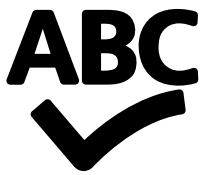
“Parents can mistreat children, husbands can mistreat wives and so on. Aggression always finds a way out against a vulnerable, weak and unresponsive person if the aggressor cannot control it. And the majority of people cannot control it,” she added.

The psychologist believes there need to be more shelters, anonymous and without signboards. “Moreover, shelters must be focused on protecting the victims and helping them to recover, not on reconciliation in the family where a woman risks her life and health,” she said.

In Uzbekistan, every makhalla has a conciliation board. On March 19, the president of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev recommended to organise short-term courses of family life in makhallas and to involve psychologists, respected representatives of the older generation and to hold the contest “A model family”.

The author of NeMolchi.uz project, Irina Matvienko, [said](#) they could use positive experience of other countries. Responsible bodies need to contact women who earlier suffered from domestic abuse to know if they need help, if they suffer from violence again, and to offer them temporary shelter, if necessary. Besides, domestic abuse during the lockdown must be condemned at the highest level just like in the United Kingdom. Also, a unified service should be launched to report domestic violence cases via short messages. It can help cover remote regions where it is difficult to access internet.

This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project



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