



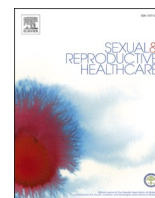
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## Domestic violence at “home sweet home” – More education and technology-based solutions needed in pandemic

Globally, COVID-19 pandemic has affected peoples' lives in many ways almost two years now. While the new pandemic threatens our health globally, another challenge to our public health has emerged alongside it – domestic violence. In the spring 2020, when the pandemic was at its worst, people were directed to stay at their homes. Family members stayed all at home, working and schooling remotely to protect their health. People could not use the help of grandparents, because they were requested to keep elderly people at home and well away. As a result of these isolation and quarantine measures, turned many homes into a scene of domestic violence, a trap from which it was difficult to get out. The reports of domestic violence have increased remarkably worldwide since the pandemic started. In Europe, it has been reported up to 60% increase in emergency calls due to domestic violence [1]. However, it is known that many cases stay unreported, and the actual numbers are even higher [2,3].

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse and intimate partner violence, is a broad term, which includes the wide range of violations perpetrated by current or ex-partner in heterosexual or same-sex relationships or the violence is against children, parents or elderly. The forms of domestic violence can be emotional bullying, repressing, defacing and criticizing, which can also occur as physical, financial, sexual or religious violence. It can result in injuries and serious physical, mental and social consequences, which may be long-lasting but also sexual and reproductive health problems, such as sexually transmitted infections as well as unplanned pregnancies [4,5]. Domestic violence is not always visible outside, and others may not be aware of it since it takes place inside the home. It is described as a hidden crime, which effects on the well-being of the whole family in all socioeconomic and education levels. A victim of domestic violence can be a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker regardless of gender, age, occupational group or income level [4]. Nevertheless, domestic violence is largely perpetrated against women [6]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) [7], as many as one in three women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner, and especially pregnant women and mothers of young children are at risk of being subjected to domestic violence [8].

The consequences of the domestic violence will cost society enormous costs. It is particularly alarming, since the costs can only be rising as domestic violence increases and continues in the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been shown that the prevention and early intervention of domestic violence is a comprehensive and profitable investment for the society, where the health care professionals have an important role to play [2,7,9]. Especially, the sexual and reproductive health sector, which most women will access at some point in their lives,

have an excellent option to deal with domestic violence. However, all health care professionals need more knowledge, skills, and education to identify and intervene in domestic violence. Identifying domestic violence is challenging and all too often it is overshadowed even by health care professionals. When a concern about domestic violence arises, the professionals must dare to broach the question, intervene, and support the victim [5]. Professionals should ask questions directly, but in many cases, there is fear and shame experienced which prevents them to act. The professionals may not have the answers, but the most important is to have the courage to listen what the victim has to say and to give emotional and psychosocial support to them. Health care professionals have the responsibility to refer the victim to assistance in the face of domestic violence. The victim must not be left alone with the crisis.

Several European countries offer already different systems, such as coding messaging, helplines, tele-health systems, shelters, for to help the victims of domestic violence. Though, the increased incidences of domestic violence and the need for new, innovative and easily accessible methods for the prevention and early intervention of domestic violence has been widely recognized in Europe. The use of digital technologies can bridge social distance, even while physical distancing measures are in place. A secure and efficient way to address domestic violence, in current circumstances, is to offer the different services remotely and utilizing and exploring technology-based solutions [3,5]. In order to address the needs for the prevention of domestic violence, with early detection and early intervention, a European initiative has been recently developed. Erasmus+ funded project, DOMINO – Educational mobile application for prevention of Domestic Violence (<https://domino.turku.amk.fi>), is aiming to provide knowledge and education for current and future social- and healthcare professionals for prevention and early intervention of domestic violence by developing an educational DOMINO mobile application.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already challenged us in the ways we have never previously experienced. The vaccination programs around the world will give us a hope for the surveillance of the new coronavirus. Yet, we still need to fight against the consequences of the pandemic, such as domestic violence. By enhancing the accessibility of knowledge and education of early intervention and prevention of domestic violence among current and future health care professionals, the care of victims as well as their physical and mental wellbeing will be improved in the longer time during the pandemic as well as beyond.

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