Amsterdam University Medical Centre,
Meibergdreef 9, 1105 AZ Amsterdam,
Netherlands

t.j.roseboom@amsterdamumc.nl

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;369:m2327

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2327>

Published: 15 June 2020

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women in the covid-19 pandemic: we need upstream approaches to break the intergenerational cycle

Tessa J Roseboom *professor of early development and health*

The increased levels of violence reported during this pandemic are alarming.¹ Not only because of the lasting consequences for the physical and mental health of the women and (unborn) children affected, but also because of the risk of intergenerational transmission.

The environment in which a person develops, from the very earliest stages of life, has a fundamental influence on their growth and development and affects their behaviour and susceptibility to disease.² Domestic and family violence is widespread and often begins during pregnancy, or increases in severity if already present.³ Women who experience violence during pregnancy are more likely to deliver prematurely and have a baby with poorer neonatal outcomes.⁴ After birth, these children more often have internalising problems, and infants exposed to violence show insecure attachments, increased aggressive behaviour, reduced prosocial behaviour, and poorer health.^{5,6} Adverse childhood experiences such as child maltreatment or domestic violence increase the risk of mental and physical illness, substance abuse, and violence, perpetuating a vicious cycle of stress and adversity.⁷ Consequently, the current outbreak of violence not only harms the health and wellbeing of those affected now, but also affects their future health and wellbeing as well as that of their children.

If we do not take upstream approaches to prevent any further escalation of violence (which do exist), we will not only witness increasing numbers of victims but also increasing numbers of potential perpetrators of domestic violence in the future. Preventing violence now will break the intergenerational cycle of violence and improve the lives of generations to come.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1712/rr-2>.

- 1 Roesch E, Amin A, Gupta J, García-Moreno C. Violence against women during covid-19 pandemic restrictions. *BMJ* 2020;369:m1712. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1712 pmid: 32381644
- 2 Fleming TP, Watkins AJ, Velazquez MA, et al. Origins of lifetime health around the time of conception: causes and consequences. *Lancet* 2018;391:1842-52. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30312-X pmid: 29673874
- 3 Unicef. Violence against women. 2015. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter6_t.pdf
- 4 Shah PS, Shah JKnowledge Synthesis Group on Determinants of Preterm/LBW Births. Maternal exposure to domestic violence and pregnancy and birth outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analyses. *J Womens Health (Larchmt)* 2010;19:2017-31. doi: 10.1089/jwh.2010.2051 pmid: 20919921

- 5 Martinez-Torteya C, Bogat GA, Levendosky AA, von Eye A. The influence of prenatal intimate partner violence exposure on hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis reactivity and childhood internalizing and externalizing symptoms. *Dev Psychopathol* 2016;28:55-72. doi: 10.1017/S0954579415000280 pmid: 25851078
- 6 Cameranesi M, Lix LM, Piotrowski CC. Linking a history of childhood abuse to adult health among Canadians: a structural equation modelling analysis. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2019;16. doi: 10.3390/ijerph16111942 pmid: 31159325
- 7 Hughes K, Bellis MA, Hardcastle KA, et al. The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet Public Health* 2017;2:e356-66. doi: 10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30118-4 pmid: 29253477

This article is made freely available for use in accordance with BMJ's website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may use, download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.