

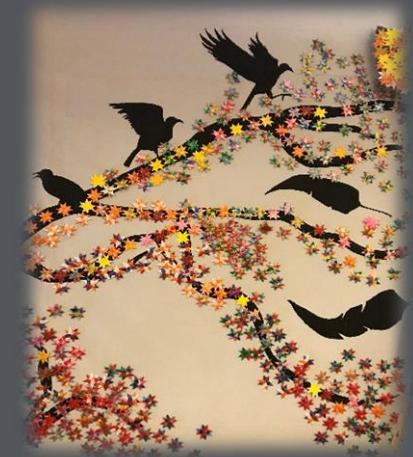


GNWS COVID-19 Webinar #4:

# Using Technology to Support Victims During a Public Health Crisis: Singapore

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Asian Network of Women's Shelters  
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**Lawyers Who Lead**

# Overview

- Some undesirable of social isolation as a result of COVID-19:
  - Xi'an, China: increase in divorces filed
  - China, US, Singapore: reporting spike in no. of victims reaching out to hotlines and agencies
  - In Singapore: NGO AWARE's Women's Hotline saw 33% increase in calls in February 2020 over same period last year.
  - Increased number of family violence cases being reported by social workers
  - 60 per cent of recent daily referrals had been family violence related, up from 30 per cent last year for same period

# Reasons for Increased Family Violence

- 3 reasons closely associated with family violence's roots in power and control:
  1. Pandemics: situations in which people's lives may seem out of control. Trigger abusers to lash out against their victims, to regain semblance of control. Unemployment and economic hardship at the household level often positively related to abusive behaviour.
  2. Social support – from family, friends or other sympathetic allies – is critical in helping family violence victims heal and build hope. Containment measures (WFH or enforced leave) increase social isolation. Victims may feel they can no longer seek refuge at the home of a friend or relative, especially those with elderly residents or children, for fear of exposing families to the virus.
  3. Coronavirus crisis: likely going to push the world economy into recession, more difficult for victims to leave abusive relationships. Leaving an abusive partner often involves establishing financial independence – for example, by keeping a secret savings account that the abuser cannot access – but this will be more difficult if victims begin to lose jobs. Low income families more vulnerable.

# Social Services

- Singapore currently under a partial lock-down or “Circuit breaker” with restrictions on movement and enforced safe distancing for the period between 7 April 2020 and 5 May 2020.
- Increased time spent at home
  - increase the incidence of family violence, as abusers and victims find themselves in close proximity 24/7.
  - impact a victim’s help-seeking behaviour (victims call helplines and services when they are away from their abusers, such as at work, whilst on an errand).
  - Home-based learning (HBL) and closures of child-care facilities mean children are home.
  - With more people spending time indoors, victims may be afraid to reach out for help, assessing that their abusers have a higher chance of finding out.
  - Services impacted as a result of COVID-19, e.g., crisis shelters and divorce support service agencies taking necessary precautions to close their doors if they deem the risk of infection to be high.
  - General strain on helplines and social services

# Legal and Judicial Remedies

- Partial lock-down: Family Justice Courts will only hear essential and urgent cases
- Matters which are time-sensitive, constitute a threat to life and liberty and/or involve urgent needs of the family. Conducted by video conferencing to the maximum extent possible, including for cases involving litigants-in-person (“LIPs”).
- Family violence proceedings:
  - (a) Proceedings will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks and where an expedited order (“EO”) has been granted, the EO will be extended without the need for an application.
  - (b) Matters involving a higher risk of imminent danger will continue to be heard. Hearings will be conducted by video conferencing as far as possible.
  - (c) Reviews for Mandatory Counselling Orders and show cause hearings for bailors will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks.

# PROTECT WHAT'S YOURS.

## Presenter Contact Information

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