

Domestic violence in NSW in the wake of COVID-19: Update to December 2020

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SUMMARY

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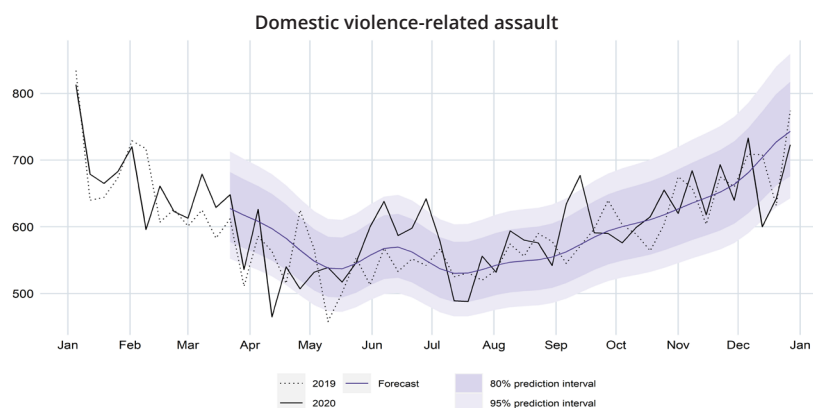
BACKGROUND

Following the declaration of the global pandemic in March 2020 unprecedented social restrictions were implemented in New South Wales to curb the spread of COVID-19. This brief examines changes in domestic violence in New South Wales, Australia, between April and December 2020 following the implementation of these restrictions. We examine multiple indicators for domestic violence, including recorded criminal incidents, non-criminal domestic episodes recorded by police and calls to a specialist state-wide telephone crisis, counselling and referral service. It follows on from previous reports examining indicators of domestic violence in the early stage of the New South Wales Government's response to the pandemic, presenting additional analyses and examining data over a longer period.

KEYWORDS

- COVID-19
- Coronavirus
- domestic violence
- family violence
- intimate partner violence
- social isolation
- social distancing
- crime trends
- forecasting

KEY FINDINGS



- The observed number of domestic violence related assaults is consistent with predictions from the forecast model for most weeks of 2020, meaning that the actual number of incidents recorded in 2020 was not statistically different from expected variation with few exceptions (Fig 1).
- The observed number of *domestic episodes-no offence* recorded by police were higher than the predictions from the forecast model for most weeks from April to mid-July 2020. From mid-July to December 2020 observed incidents were within the expectations forecast for this period.
- NSW Domestic Violence Line calls were higher in 2020 than 2019, however this increase commenced pre-pandemic and show no obvious association with COVID-19 related restrictions.

CONCLUSION

There is no evidence of an increase in domestic violence related assault coinciding with the introduction of strict social isolation requirements coming into effect in the last week of March 2020 and throughout April; or even beyond this as restrictions eased up to December 2020. However, there is evidence for an increase in non-criminal domestic conflict from the commencement of COVID-19 restrictions continuing into the middle of 2020. While these findings do not support the suggestion of a 'spike' in domestic violence during the period that stay-at-home orders were in force in New South Wales, the results provide evidence of an increase in domestic discord from the time COVID-19 restrictions were introduced until well after the most stringent travel and social restrictions had been eased.