

Germany: Covid-19 and domestic violence

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It is often claimed that the bourgeois family is a place of security, protection and the closest solidarity in society. But, behind this deceptive façade lies an ugly reality for many children and women. We do not have to look to far distant countries to understand the extent of domestic violence.

Even Government reports show that in Germany 40 percent of all women have had to experience physical and/or sexual violence since the age of sixteen. Every fourth woman is subjected to this crime by her own (ex)partner. In Germany alone, this affects approximately 115,000 women every year. This violence occurs mainly in the victims' homes. Their own living space, therefore, is often not a shelter for women and children, but rather for the perpetrator, whose oppression and violent crimes are hidden from the public.

Imminent increase

During the Corona crisis, people are almost exclusively at home, in cramped conditions and are often frustrated because they are in economic difficulties. The real pressure on the mass of the population is increasing, as is social isolation.

In addition, many businesses and educational and care institutions have currently closed their doors, which further exacerbates the situation. This dramatically increases the potential for domestic violence. The increased consumption of alcohol also increases the potential for aggression.

Even bourgeois-conservative newspapers, such as the Bild or the FAZ, feel compelled to report on this topic in this situation. The real threat of an increase in violence against women is also demonstrated by China's experiences in recent months. According to a Beijing women's rights organisation, the number of women who sought help during the imposed quarantine was three times as high as usual. Similar figures are already known from Spain, Italy and South Korea and are therefore to be expected for Germany and other countries.

What problems do women and children currently face?

Women are particularly often affected by physical violence. However, some women also seek help because they fear imminent physical attacks by family members. Another major problem is control and stalking via the Internet.

The still existing division of labour along gender roles in the family means that women have to do most of the reproductive work. This includes looking after and bringing up the children, cooking, cleaning and washing. Due to the Corona crisis, even more of this work falls into the private sphere, since almost all meals are eaten at home and the children and young people have to stay at home. The closure of educational and care facilities has also meant that female workers are being forced out of their jobs to look after the children at home. Low income houses have to make ends meet with even less money.

In addition, many women are subjected to increased controls and criticism when their partners are also

predominantly at home. In addition, the pressure of suffering increases for women because the crisis means that they cannot meet friends who would otherwise help them.

Similar problems arise for children and young people. They are confronted all day long with their parents, whose regime they have to submit to. They lack any kind of compensation, such as school, sports activities or meeting their peers in their free time. They too are increasingly exposed to physical violence and oppression, which has a massive impact on their physical and psychological condition.

Calling for help?

Another major problem is that affected women have hardly any access to help during periods of strict social constraint by the government. In Italy, for example, only going to work, to the supermarket or to the doctor is allowed. It is also more difficult for women to go to a counselling centre if the offender is at home all the time and knows how long the woman will be leaving the house.

Women's shelters and counselling centres are preparing for a greatly increased demand, especially in the period after the Corona crisis. However, the women's shelters are already completely overcrowded at "normal" times. According to the Istanbul Convention, which obliges the member states of the European Union to combat violence against women and which Germany ratified in October 2017, 21,400 beds should be available in women's shelters in this country. However, the required measures have never been implemented in any way.

At the moment there are only 6,800! It is therefore common practice for women to be sent back to their violent partners. Under these circumstances, adequate psychological care does not usually take place either. In the wake of the Corona crisis, the shortage is also exacerbated by the fact that centres are still likely to be under-staffed

Reasons for violence

The increase in domestic violence when people spend more time in confined spaces is not an unknown phenomenon. Most people are at least familiar with the annual family dispute during the supposedly so contemplative Christmas season. The extreme forms of domestic violence also verifiably increase during this time of the year.

Nevertheless, the deeper cause of domestic violence is to be found in the systematic oppression of women in class society.

Under capitalism, the separation of social production and private housework is fundamental in this regard - at least as far as the situation of proletarian women is concerned. Reproductive work is largely carried out privately. The unequal pay of women workers compared to men manifests itself in the gender pay gap and thus greater financial dependence.

The bourgeois family and gender socialisation are also mechanisms for maintaining the oppressive relationship and for reproducing it in the consciousness of both men and women. Although social, they appear to be "natural". Physical violence used to intimidate and subjugate women is an integral part of this relationship, it is its violent expression.

Demands and perspective of the struggle

The expansion of women's shelters and counselling centres is long overdue and should now be the order of the day. This also includes providing the technology and personnel for an expansion of telephone counselling. In order to achieve rapid success, accommodation, such as underutilised hotels or luxury villas, should be requisitioned and used for these purposes. Women's shelters and counselling centres

must also be immediately included in the list of so-called system-relevant occupations - internationally.

Today's neoliberal dogma has massively increased the pressure on women even before the Corona crisis. In Germany, for example, there are not enough places in day-care centres because the social sector is systematically neglected. The expansion of the low-wage sector, such as the widespread introduction of mini-jobs, has also further worsened the economic situation of women and exacerbated their double burden of work and housework.

That is why political demands must also be supported. Equal pay for equal work is, of course, essential in that regard. Nationwide day care centres and after-school care would make it easier for women to separate from their husbands and live as single parents. Minimum wages, higher unemployment benefits and cheaper housing are therefore also important.

In order to enforce these demands on the state, however, we must not stop at appeals. We must take action ourselves and build up a movement that can achieve these objectives.

An important aspect of this will also be the formation of protective structures, especially for wage-dependent women, to be initiated and supported by the labour movement - by trade unions, workers' parties and organisations. This would be an important step to be able to take decisive action against violent men. Men that show solidarity should of course support such initiatives. After all, you can't rely on a police force that is known to ignore women's calls for help.

The issue under discussion here also shows how important it is for wage earners to stand up for decisive action against the corona crisis and, in doing so, to create their own monitoring structures to implement and oversee these demands. Only if the majority of the population controls them can we ensure that the measures taken will benefit us workers.

The government's main aim, on the other hand, is to use its 600 billion (!) euro rescue package to solve the liquidity problems of companies. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that only a small part of this money is to be used for the expansion of the health system. In addition, political involvement would be only logical, since the money ultimately comes from our tax payments or the loans have to be repaid with our taxes. But, as always, German "democracy" remains a farce. We must therefore actively work to ensure that the Corona rescue umbrella does not benefit large corporations but, for example, women affected by violence.

Ultimately, however, patriarchy and thus violence against women can only be overcome if the reproductive and care work is socialised and undertaken by both men and women. Capitalism, however, benefits when this socially very important task is carried out by women privately and individually within the bourgeois family. Its overcoming and replacement by a higher social organisation of living together must therefore go hand in hand with overcoming capitalism. This would also lead to women being able to focus on their professional careers in the same way as men. For this we need a socialist, proletarian women's movement as part of an anti-capitalist movement.

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