

Women's rights and COVID-19

Supervisors: [Dr Olga Jurasz](#) and Dr Kim Barker, The Open University Law School.

Project Description:

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent periods of lockdown across Europe have highlighted the fragility of women's rights protection and, in many cases, insufficient responses at a state level to tackle peaking violence against women amid the global pandemic. This has significant ramifications for women's (human) rights as well as for ensuring their safety, dignity, and equal treatment at all times.

According to the Council of Europe, '[i]ncidents and evidence are increasingly reported showing that the policy of isolation and confinement leads to increased levels of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence – and therefore to a heightened need of protection against this' (CoE, 2020). Furthermore, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) highlights the limited recourse to support mechanisms for women subjected to gender-based violence, the de-prioritisation of key services needed by victims, whilst noting a number of key actions that States and other stakeholders should take to secure and protect women's rights during the pandemic.

Whilst the media reports have largely highlighted the increase in domestic forms of violence – including domestic abuse killings of women more than doubling in England and Wales (Guardian, 2020) – other issues concerning or otherwise affecting women's rights during the pandemic have received significantly less coverage in the mainstream media. The predominant focus has fallen on reporting of domestic violence, yet there are 'untold' narratives about other forms of violence against women and the long-term implications of COVID-19 measures for women's rights, including socio-economic rights. There has also been very little focus on women's activism and agency in the context of protecting and campaigning for their rights online in spite of the pandemic.

We welcome PhD proposals which address the theme of this call. In particular, we welcome proposals exploring (albeit not limited to) the following perspectives:

- COVID-19 and technology-facilitated violence against women (including online violence)
- Feminist perspectives on women's rights and COVID-19.
- COVID-19 and gendered aspects of platform regulation
- Women's online protests in time of crisis
- International law and policy responses addressing women's rights and the pandemic

The primary methodology for the proposed project should be a legal one. That said, in line with the OU's mission ('open to methods'), we are open to receiving proposals that draw on other disciplinary methodological approaches which complement the legal methodologies chosen.

About the Supervisors:

Dr Jurasz's research focuses on international law, human rights, and legal responses to violence against women specializing in feminist perspectives on law in these areas. Her research explores various aspects of legal regulation of online abuse, including consideration of online misogyny & online violence against women as a hate crime.

Dr Barker's research focuses on internet law, and regulation, exploring the control of multi-user platforms including online environments and the intersection between user & platform responsibility. Her research explores online abuse, in particular, online misogyny, online violence against women, and online hate alongside legal responses to such societal problems.

References:

[Council of Europe \(2020\) 'Women's rights and the COVID-19 pandemic'](#)

[J Grierson, 'Domestic abuse killings 'more than double' amid Covid-19 lockdown' The Guardian \(15 April 2020\)](#)

[UNOHCHR \(2020\) 'COVID-19 and women's human rights: guidance'](#)