

brisbane times

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

'Dangerous time for women': Ticking time bomb locked inside Queensland homes

Millions of Queenslanders are being told to stay home, but for some, home is the most dangerous place they can be.

By Lydia Lynch and Matt Dennien

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Domestic violence victim Hannah Clarke with children Laianah, 4, Aaliyah, 6, and Trey, 3.



Last month Hannah Clarke and her three children were buried together inside a single white coffin as the country vowed to do more to protect domestic violence victims.

The Brisbane mother and her young children - Aaliyah, Laianah and Trey - were doused in petrol and set alight by Ms Clarke's estranged husband, Rowan Baxter, on February 19.

The nation wept for the young family, taken in such a horrific act of violence.

It wept, just as it had done for the [Hinder children](#) in 2015.

Nyobi and River Hinder were murdered by their father, who rigged his caravan with explosives stolen from a Mount Isa mine.

In the coroner's report [released this week](#), it became clear the killer-dad had tried to murder his estranged wife too.



Nyobi and River Hinder were killed by their father at Mount Isa in 2015.

Just like Hannah Clarke, the Hinder children's mother Kath had taken out a domestic violence order against her estranged husband.

The two women had done everything right and the system failed them.

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and Prime Minister Scott Morrison stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the Clarke family funeral, heads bowed.

Both promised to do more to stamp out abuse inside living rooms across Queensland.

And then the pandemic hit.

People were told to stay home, and for some, home is the most dangerous place they can be.



Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Queensland Pposition Leader Deb Frecklington are seen during the funeral for Hannah Clarke and her three children
DAN PELED

At the weekend, Mr Morrison [pledged](#) \$150 million to support the national domestic violence hotline and provide counselling for victims.

The Palaszczuk Government is yet to commit any extra funding for domestic violence services during the pandemic and won't pass emergency laws to ramp up protection measurers.

Queensland Women's Legal Service CEO Angela Lynch says her organisation is in desperate need of funding to help victims seeking court orders to escape their abusers.

"Before [coronavirus outbreak] we already could not meet demand – 40 per cent of our calls go unanswered," she said.



Hannah Clarke and her young children - Aaliyah, Laianah and Trey - were doused in petrol and set alight by Ms Clarke's estranged husband. DAN PELED/AAP

"We are calling on the government to take a preemptive response, increase funding and not wait for the wave to hit because we all know the conditions are there for a crisis in the domestic violence sector."

Domestic abusers often isolate their victims from their friends, family and community so strict gathering rules combined with financial anxiety is fostering a prime breeding ground for rampant violence.

Ms Lynch said domestic abuse in France, China and some states in the United States had increased three-fold during the pandemic.

"It is a very dangerous time for women," she said.

"Women are going into survival mode as they try to live out the next few months in conditions of constant surveillance and abuse."

Breaches of domestic violence orders increased 8.3 per cent last year, Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said, and those numbers are set to go up as more people are isolated at home.

But many victims are not able to report violence when they are locked up with their abuser.

In the past three weeks since restrictions have ramped up, domestic violence order breaches have dropped by 5.6 per cent and the number of victims seeking protection orders has plummeted by 20 percent.

"We are watching this and monitoring this very, very closely," Commissioner Carroll said.

"What concerns me is there has been a slight decrease; is that because people are at home, because they can't take out orders or report breaches?"

She said police would be rolling out a new online reporting system soon for those concerned about making phone calls from within their homes and hoped that would give police a clearer picture on rates of violence.

"Please, if you have concerns, get a friend to call, get anyone to call – just let us know, if you can get an email out to a friend – do that.

"Try any way to get into contact with us. I am concerned it is trending downwards because more people are at home and I worry that there may be more impacts."

Brisbane Times understands internal QPS scenario planning in recent weeks has included modelling of a likely increase in reports of domestic violence and sex crime over the next few months.

Premier Palaszczuk had planned to hold a bipartisan Queensland [family violence summit](#) at the end of March to map out a new wave of reform.



Hannah Clarke's nephew Tyler reaches to the coffin during the funeral for Hannah and her three children Aaliyah, Laianah and Trey. AAP/DAN PELED

That summit, like most things these days, has been postponed.

Ms Palaszczuk has yet to say whether the summit would go ahead online instead.

"It is still a big issue. Like I said, reform never ends," she said.

Ms Palaszczuk said parliament would return at the end of April but made it clear, "the only legislation that will come before the parliament will be COVID-19

related".

"That is the urgent issue we are dealing with, and I think the people of Queensland would understand that."

While Queensland has put the breaks on any new domestic violence prevention legislation, Western Australia's Labor government [passed emergency laws](#) on Thursday to protect victims who are at an increased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Lydia Lynch is a reporter for the Brisbane Times



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