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COVID-19 IMPACT ON DIFFERENT CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically disrupted our lives, radically changing every aspect on a global scale. It has not only brought about a health crisis but also led to changes in economic activities, employment, education systems, communication methods, mobility, and more. The impact of this pandemic on crime has been significant. According to the latest data from the Ministry of the Interior, there has been a drastic decrease in police reports across all categories of crimes during the period of confinement.

The confinement measures adopted by most countries have significantly reduced violence and homicides worldwide, as well as other street-related phenomena such as robberies, sexual assaults, drug trafficking, and violence in general. However, criminal activities have skyrocketed in other environments, such as the cyber environment or within homes and closed spaces, leading to higher rates of gender violence and child abuse.

Regarding gender-based violence during the pandemic, it is important to understand that it encompasses three fundamental elements that distinguish it from other types of violence. These elements shape its manifestation and the response to it within the framework of control strategies: the aggressor leverages structural elements at the societal level and exercises individual control.

Due to these factors, the confinement measures have created ideal conditions for the escalation of gender-based violence by:

- Further isolating women,
- Increasing control through formal confinement within the home
- Facilitating impunity by raising barriers for women to escape from violence
- Creating a context that enables the use of any form of violence triggered by the slightest stimulus.

According to Ana Isabel Cerezo Domínguez, there was an increase in calls and online inquiries to 016 and the WhatsApp service (18,700, an increase of 61.5% compared to the previous year) and a decrease in complaints and breaches of security measures distance from the beginning of the confinement.

In regards to digitization, Fernando Miró Llinares explains that cybercriminals have moved, but within cyberspace itself, adapting, taking advantage of new circumstances, new social interests, new concerns, to find new victims and achieve success in the usual frauds, as demonstrated by:

- The rise of domain names related to COVID-19
- The creation of web pages and online advertisements for the sale of medical devices such as masks.
- The rise of Remote Desktop Protocol attacks
- Fake apps and websites, posing as legitimate video conferencing apps that install malicious software, among other crimes.

According to José R. Agustina, Aina M. Gassó, Esperanza Gómez-Durán, and Katrin Mueller-Johnson, the pandemic has compelled people to practice social distancing, resulting in significant changes to their daily routines. An anticipated consequence of this situation is a potential increase in the practice of sexting, along with various forms of coercion and sexual victimization conducted through electronic means. The authors emphasize that the psychological effects on the victims can vary and may include:

- Decreased self-esteem.
- Impaired performance or sleep disturbances.
- More severe implications such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

They explain that these circumstances present interesting challenges in terms of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

Elisa García-España highlights the impact on the agricultural sector and the migrant population, where the following conditions have become apparent: instances of labor exploitation, precarious living conditions preventing seasonal workers from maintaining necessary safety distances to prevent COVID-19 transmission, and confinement in irregular settlements following a resurgence. Moreover, there has been an increase in hate speech directed towards temporary immigrants, unjustly accusing them of being carriers of COVID-19.

According to Andrea Gimenez-Salinas Framis, the current global pandemic has also affected criminal organizations in the legal business world. Specifically, within the field of sanitary products, governments and public administrations struggled to meet the necessary supply demands. Opportunists took advantage of this gap by producing fraudulent or non-existent products to scam both authorities and consumers. Criminal organizations utilized existing infrastructures, such as the Internet and home delivery services, including open or clandestine networks like the Deep Web, to facilitate online sales.

Lastly, Gema Varona focuses on the restorative justice. The primary challenge lies in adapting existing restorative justice programs to the context of COVID-19, where prolonged confinement and strict security measures hinder physical encounters. The combination of the relational distance created by the crime and the need for physical distancing due to public health concerns poses a significant obstacle.

Finally, this report delves into the impact on each specific area, potential medium and long-term changes, future challenges, and prospective lines of research to further investigate the effects and transformations brought about by the pandemic.



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