

# Hidden Heroes: How Radiologists Can Help Detect Signs of Domestic Violence in Patients

Radiologists can help detect signs of domestic violence in patients. Yes, that's another superpower in their incredibly significant field, now that new research makes it more clear what signs they can look for if they suspect victims of domestic violence. Not just in women, but children and elders, too.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, the number of domestic violence cases has steadily increased due to victims having to be in quarantine with their abusers, without school or work as an escape.

Researchers, led by Simon Matoori, PhD, of Harvard University in Cambridge, MA, says that radiologists have an important role to play in identifying victims of partner violence and steering them toward supportive resources.

"The COVID-19 pandemic led to a marked increase in the number of intimate partner violence (IPV) cases, potentially leading to increased emergency department visits and radiological examinations," the authors wrote. "We believe that as radiologists, we can make a difference by being cognizant of this condition, raising an alert when appropriate and treating suspected victims with care and empathy."

The most important things that a Radiologist can keep an eye on? Partner violence is often found in the face (48.3%), fingers (9.9%) or upper trunk (9.8%). It can be easy to think they are routine traumas. The best protocol is to discuss the cases with the referring physician and evaluate their history

for other signs of abuse. Then, create a safe space for the patient to converse, while educating them on resources, as recommended by Matoori and colleagues.

But talking to suspected victims of intimate partner violence can be extremely challenging. Often, they are made to believe that they are deserving of the violence and it is a fault of their own.

Make sure to inform patients that healthcare providers are under strict measures to maintain confidentiality and that no information will be shared beyond the medical team or recorded against their preference.

Offer them information such as emergency services, hospital programs and domestic abuse support groups.

“As radiologists move beyond the reading room and join the multidisciplinary team providing direct care to the patient, they may choose to volunteer to handle IPV cases, especially if they are trained to handle the complexities of these conversations,” the researchers concluded. “Indeed, radiologists and radiographers are uniquely positioned to engage with IPV victims due to the physical separation between the victim and any accompanying persons in the radiology department.”

Radiologists have the opportunity to further participate in the continuum of care, according to Matoori, and truly change lives.

**On Behalf of all Collaborative Imaging Team, “Thank you” to all the hidden heroes in Radiology.**