

People Are Getting Busted for Affairs in Coronavirus Lockdown

Spouses are uncovering secrets like cheating, porn and alcohol addictions, and money problems, divorce attorneys say.

by Carter Sherman



Stock image of couple. Getty Images

Over the last few weeks, as the coronavirus pandemic left millions stranded indoors, Chicago divorce attorney Mitch Gordon has started getting calls from people who've just learned some unwelcome information: their spouses are having affairs.

"The people who are juggling affairs are getting caught right now," Gordon said. "I've had multiple calls from people who are like, 'Alright, before this I wondered,

but figured no. And now it's clear it's happening.'"

With spouses spending much more time together, it's far tougher for people to hide their secrets from the partner they once pledged to love in sickness and in health, divorce attorneys told VICE News. So skeletons are coming out of closets, and some people are finding out that even in the midst of a devastating pandemic, they really don't want to live with their spouses.

Ever again.

“When you’re together 24 hours a day with people and when you’re spending that much time, there’s more of an opportunity to uncover things,” said Robert Wallack, a New York attorney. “And whether it’s infidelity or whether it’s some type of financial impropriety, I would imagine that could cause someone to say, ‘I’ve had enough and I want out.’”

Some attorneys have clients who are now reckoning with the fact that their spouses have addictions, or that their addictions are getting worse. They say when you can’t drink outside the house, it’s harder to hide just how many drinks you’ve had. When you’re cooped up with your partner all the time, it’s harder to hide just how much porn you watch, said New York divorce attorney Karen Rosenthal.

“People are under a lot more scrutiny,” said Laura Sell, law practice managing partner at McKinley Irvin Family Law, which has offices in Oregon and Washington, one of the earliest epicenters of the U.S. coronavirus outbreak. Some attorneys in her firm have also had cases where the pandemic helped reveal an affair. “They’re more aware of how people are spending their time.” One prospective client who called Gordon said their husband kept on claiming that he had emergency

“‘They’re snooping,’ she said. ‘They’re overhearing, they’re listening. Affairs are gonna come out more because, ‘Why are you locking yourself in your bathroom for so long?’ You know what I mean? People aren’t stupid,’ said NY Attorney Karen Rosenthal.”

meetings in his office.

Spouses also now have more opportunities to check out their partners’ electronic devices — even accidentally, as families share computers or watch screens over one another’s shoulders. Gordon said one caller said their kid was fiddling around with an iPad when some incriminating texts, including a kissy-face emoji, popped up.

Wallack dubbed this phenomenon “cross-pollination.”

“People are jumping on the computer after their spouse and seeing what the spouse was doing online,” Wallack said. That’s how one of his clients recently glimpsed her partner’s online banking records — and realized the family had far less money than she’d originally believed.

Rosenthal, however, put it more bluntly.

“They’re snooping,” she said. “They’re overhearing, they’re listening. Affairs are gonna come out more because, ‘Why are you locking yourself in your bathroom for so long?’ You know what I mean? People aren’t stupid.”

Most lawyers, though, said that they weren’t seeing a big surge in calls from prospective clients. People are already consumed by the struggle of navigating the uncertainty and changes of COVID-19; embarking on a lengthy, expensive legal battle is daunting.

Plus, trying to get a divorce right now creates another secret: the fact that you’re trying to get a divorce right now. It’s not exactly easy to sneak in a call to your lawyer while you’re supposed to be isolating at home with your unwitting soon-to-be ex.

“I had somebody call me about a new divorce, and he was clearly calling me and hiding in his own home. I don’t know if he was in the closet,” Gordon recalled. “He was just whispering.”

Divorces have also been largely put on pause. Seattle courts are not holding trials until at least June. Across the country, in

New York, nonessential filings — like a request for a divorce — are prohibited entirely.

But once those restrictions are lifted and the pandemic ends, every lawyer who spoke with VICE News said they anticipate a boom in divorces. They don’t expect couples to go from happily married to arguing over alimony in the span of a few weeks, no matter how much time they may be forced to spend together, but relationships that were already on the rocks may end.

“We sort of joke a little bit around the office that this is either gonna bring couples closer, said Seattle lawyer Lucia Levias, “or have them running to the courthouse as soon as it opens.”

Not every lawyer has clients who’ve discovered secrets due to the pandemic. New York attorney Scott Orgel, in fact, told VICE News that the affairs he’d known about have ended; everyone involved was housebound. ■