

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19 INTERVENTIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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Botswana: Dumiso Gatsha, Success Capital NGO

As Botswana eases lockdown restrictions, the respective states of violence and emergency remain in effect. Under normal circumstances, teenage pregnancies far exceed defilement cases and domestic violence is largely underreported. The increased complexities of distancing measures add hurdles to administratively cumbersome processes to report cases. This includes the psychological implications of triggers from historical abuse, gender norms and bias against LGBTIQ+ individuals. In part, this can be attributed to the marriage between the state and religion: as entrenched with the government's support to religious umbrella bodies to provide counselling to public service employees. Leaving violent and discriminatory systems to perpetuate against vulnerable groups and invisible conditions in COVID-19 response and recovery measures.



Brazil: Ana Addobbati, Women Friendly Brasil



Brazil, as one of the most dangerous countries for a woman in the world, could not avoid following the domestic violence increase rate global trend during the social isolation. As a country drowned in a political crisis and challenging due to its large territory, we could see how the increase in the number of reported cases varied from state to state and from the sort of mechanism in place for supporting victims and activating the infrastructure of support. The case of the state of Rio de Janeiro, where the police report can be filed online demonstrated that technology can play an important role to make these women in danger visible. In that state, the Police reported an increase of 50% in the cases of domestic violence in that period, whilst the federal 1911 toll free line reported only 9% of increase. This fact has made Civil Society take action and find means of offering support and channels of reporting and ask for help by using accessible technology such as the Internet, Whatsapp and apps. Domestic violence is often under reported as usual. Amidst a pandemic and a situation of social isolation, these women in risk are even more invisible. Providing visibility to this risk, raising up our voice among a health crisis and make this urgency stand out can save lives and will support the reconstruction of this post-pandemic world

Uganda: Lucky Kobugabe, GBV Prevention Network Uganda

Times of emergency and/or conflict in general worsen the already devastating situation of Violence Against Women. In Uganda, the pandemic has exposed more women to violence. It is sad to know that at home, where women are supposed to be safe, is one of the places where most violence occurs, perpetrated by people closest to them. With the lockdown, women now more than ever are at risk of being trapped at home with abusive partners, with limited access to external help or even close-by response services. Civil society organisations working around VAW Prevention and response have had to adapt. Trying to shift their services to virtual spaces, develop new strategies to work with community leaders and volunteers for areas with no connections. The role of Civil Society Organisations during this period cannot be underplayed especially since most actors and resources have been redirected to COVID-19 Response leaving the hinge of VAW on these organisations.



Tunisia: Rami Khouili, ATFD

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the *Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD)* issued a warning to the Tunisian authorities stating its concerns about the period of



lockdown when women have to stay at home with the potential perpetrators and aggressors of violence. Reports show that the numbers kept rising since the beginning of the lockdown. The Ministry of Women Affairs reports that the government's emergency line received five times more calls. ATFD counselling centres witnessed a peak in the number of women who are victims of violence. Access to services are limited because it

is much more difficult to go to the police station or to get health services. Government had to be lobbied to open up a number of services that are essential for women during lockdown, such as the need for courts to hear violence against women cases and access to sexual and reproductive health during the pandemic. In addition, socio-economic rights of women have been further impacted by the pandemic as many women lost their jobs, or are not getting paid. Many women in Tunisia work in the informal sector and thus cannot continue with their work and do not have any sort of income. Furthermore, the measures provided by the government only target the formal sector and ignore the informal sector, which represents a large part of the economy. While governmental aids were given to families, in Tunisian law the man is regarded as the head of the family so the money is paid to them. If there is a conflict, violence or separation in the family then women won't have access to governmental aids. The ATFD had to

do a lot of work in terms of advocacy towards the authorities, as the response coming from the Tunisian government failed to consider the gendered aspects of the pandemic.

India: Uttanshi Agarwal, One Future Collective



Gender-based violence is not a new phenomenon that has only appeared in the background of the COVID-19 pandemic. If anything, the pandemic has brought the issue of domestic and forms of violence against women, gender and sexual minorities to the forefront. India is soon going to be easing the lockdown related restrictions in a phased manner. However, given the fact that the country is still seeing a massive increase in the number of COVID positive cases daily, it seems unlikely that the judiciary, the police system and the health infrastructure will be able to run at full capacity in the near future. Access to these spaces has always been traumatic and difficult for those who are most likely to be subjected to gendered violence and the pandemic has made

the most obvious avenues of support more inaccessible than ever before. Civil society organizations within the country are working tirelessly towards collating, collaborating and building a support infrastructure to the best of their ability but are falling short given the lack of any formal support and direction from the government.

Fiji: Roshika Deo, One Billion Rising

Domestic violence and sexual assault remains prevalent in Fiji with the pandemic further aggravating women's safety and well being. The lack of comprehensive training, no accountability, limited awareness of the law, and poor coordination among police, judiciary, health care providers and other support systems, increases the risk of harm and undermines the autonomy of women. Civil society organisations are limited in what they can do, as governments have access and resources to implement permanent and urgent changes within institutions and systems. In fact it is not enough to produce policy and action plans but this has to be sufficiently resourced, implemented and monitored in order to make an impact on the lives of girls and women. For example, the availability of adequately funded and readily available shelters and social welfare support for women can make a whole world of difference however this remains non-existence with very limited transitional housing access by some civil society organisations.



The lack of priority to mental health support and failure to recognise it as an integral part of COVID19 response with adequate budgeting and provision of psycho social support has had strong repercussions, not only for vulnerable communities but for the greater public.

Lebanon: Hayat Mirshad

Following months of protests on economic and social injustice in Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic has only made things worse. Among the measures imposed to curb the pandemic was a lockdown, in which hundreds of women, girls and children were locked up behind closed doors. Their stories revealed pain, violence and fear during the mandated quarantine, which at times led to suicide and murder. The pandemic has led to an increase in domestic violence reports. In March 2020 domestic violence reports to Internal Security Forces increased by



100%, and calls to The Lebanese Democratic Women's Gatherings' (RDFL) hotline increased by 180% compared to the previous two months. Of these new cases, 12% of the cases were very serious, and 13% of the people involved left their homes and needed shelter. In addition, Social Development Centres closed their doors due to the spread of the virus, leading to a lack of shelters to receive women survivors of GBV. This is in addition to the fact that many women are unemployed due to the global health crisis and national economic crisis and they need

additional help and support. Moreover, under the pandemic women's and girls' unpaid domestic and care labor has increased. And women are the majority on the frontlines of health care and social work and they are thus disproportionately vulnerable to contagion. Under this crisis, the system has shown that it is incapable of protecting the most vulnerable and marginalised, from a social, economic or health perspective, including women, children, elderly people, domestic workers and refugees. However, civil and women's rights organisations are playing vital roles mainly through providing psycho-social and legal support to women and girl survivors of GBV violence, raising awareness on the gendered impact of the current crisis, mainly through online and social media, advocating for better measures and commitment from the government and officials to protect women's rights, support in distributing and providing food assistance and in-kind or cash support to families and women in need.