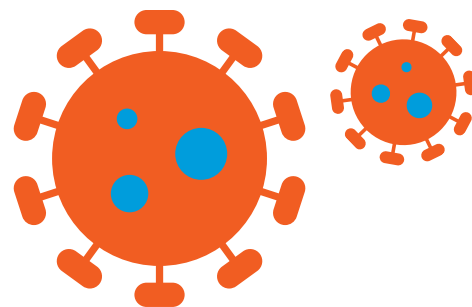


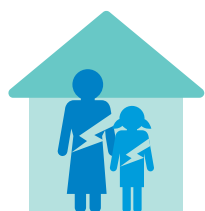
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND COVID-19: KEY ISSUES AND ACTIONS FOR TIMOR-LESTE



Violence against women is a pervasive human rights violation around the world and in Timor-Leste. Women and girls face even more violence in times of humanitarian crises, such as this moment with COVID 19. We continue to see reports of increased VAWG from countries affected by COVID-19 and past outbreaks of Ebola¹ and Zika when movement is restricted. Violence against women has been called a “shadow pandemic” because it has huge consequences on the health and well-being of women and girls, but they often suffer in the shadows². The increased violence faced by women and girls also has socio-economic costs that will last beyond the pandemic.

The 2016 Demographic and Health Survey report shows that 29% of women aged 15-49 experienced physical violence within the 12 months preceding the survey³. In other countries experiencing COVID, reports of domestic violence have increased between 20 – 30% in just a few months.

FACTORS INCREASING WOMEN AND CHILDREN’S RISK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Changes in everyday life and household tensions

Restrictions on movement, isolation and staying home places many women and girls at greater risks of abuse, as they may be confined with their abusers. There will be more tension and stress in households due to movement restrictions, crowded living conditions, health concerns and financial concerns. Women and girls will have additional caregiving burdens with family members home from school and work and if family members become ill.^{4,5}

RESPONSE There must be attention to helping individuals and families manage increased tension and risk for violence, including counselling services, information on how to cope with stress, and quick responses if violence takes place. To report the case and for further assistance, Please contact MSSl at 3310501/3310219 or Fatin Hakmatek at 77254597/78041671.

Click here to access all the available referral number: <https://hamahon.tl/>



Women’s economic dependence

Women’s loss of employment or reduced access to informal work as a result of COVID-19 can increase their financial dependence on abusive partners and isolate them from accessing vital social support systems to cope and escape an abusive situation. Transactional sex may increase, which increases women’s risk for violence.

RESPONSE Economic assistance and recovery programmes must be adapted to ensure they are responsive to women’s economic reality, including seeking ways to ensure that women who work informally or do not work outside the home for cash have access to supports. Appropriate messaging about the risks of transactional sex should be developed for both perpetrators and victims.

1. For example, women and children experienced greater risks of exploitation and sexual violence due to the economic impacts of the 2013-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa UNGA A/70/723. Protecting Humanity from Future Health Crises: Report of the High Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises; UNICEF Helpdesk, “GBV in Emergencies: Emergency Responses to Public Health Outbreaks”

2. Statement by UN Women Executive Director, April 6, 2020 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

3. Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2016. Dilli

4. IASC (2015) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Food Security and Agriculture

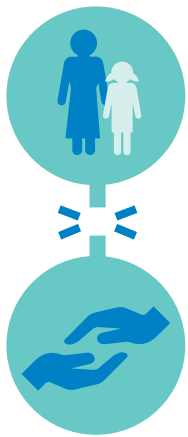
5. Spotlight initiative (2020) ‘Key messages: Violence Against Women and COVID-19’



Age and Disability Increasing Risk

Older persons and people with disabilities are more vulnerable to the more severe effects of COVID-19 and lack access to support for maintaining their health and well-being. They may be dependent on other members of their family, which can make it difficult for them to seek help or treatment. Women and girls with disabilities may have challenges communicating with other people or being believed if they disclose abuse.⁶

RESPONSE All responses must consider the needs of older people and people with disabilities and particularly how to limit their isolation for example through home visits and communication methods which are adapted to disabilities.



Disruption in support services

At the same time, as more women and girls may be experiencing violence, essential services to assist them may be faced with limited resources and challenges to operate. As a result, life-saving care and support to VAWG survivors (psycho-social support, clinical management of sexual violence and mental health) may be disrupted if health service providers become overburdened with handling COVID-19 cases or if essential services workers cannot function⁷. Workers may face limited access to Personal Protective Equipment, making their front-line work even more risky in the face of COVID-19.

Economic assistance and recovery programmes must be adapted to ensure they are responsive to women's economic reality, including seeking ways to ensure that women who work informally or do not work outside the home for cash have access to supports. Appropriate messaging about the risks of transactional sex should be developed for *both* perpetrators and victims.

RESPONSE All Uma Mahon and Fatin Hakmatek must be considered as essential services and provided with: 1) additional resources to meet increased requests for service and the need to ensure physical distance between clients; 2) support from security officials to move freely and meet with victims; 3) protective equipment appropriate to their role.

WOMEN AND GIRLS AT RISK OF OTHER FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)



Sexual Harassment and Violence

Women who need to access public spaces for collecting water, purchasing food or selling products may experience increased fear, harassment and violence and are likely to be blamed for abuse they face when alone in public. Women are less likely to drive and be in public freely due to restrictive gender and social norms. Women are providing frontline health, social service, security and facility support services among other roles in the COVID-19 response. Women's lack of representation in leadership and decision-making positions, combined with power imbalances and harmful gender norms, increases their risk of violence in the workplace and means that their needs are not fully considered in policies and programming.

RESPONSE Structures to plan COVID responses must involve women, use gender-sensitive approaches, collect data about the impacts on women and girls, and consult with women and girls. For further assistance, please contact 77254597/78041671.

Click here to access all the available referral number: <https://hamahon.tl/>

6. UN Timor-Leste: COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Response Plan

7. UN Women (2020) The COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Key Advocacy Points from Asia and the Pacific.



Sexual exploitation and abuse

Restrictions in movement, loss of livelihood and educational opportunities can lead to increased sexual exploitation and abuse, in particular for adolescent girls. Girls living with relatives or in domestic work are particularly at risk given the power imbalance with their caregivers due to financial dependency and age.

RESPONSE Community members and officials must be provided with information about sexual exploitation and abuse, including complaints mechanisms such as PDHJ and the Commissioner on the Rights of the Child and consequences must be enforced for people who engage in exploitative behavior. For any further assistance from PDHJ, please contact 77131982/77584238 or contact Fatin Hakmatek at 77254597/78041671. Click here to access all the available referral number: <https://hamahon.tl/>

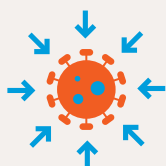


Cyberbullying and technology-related violence

As women are relying on technology and online platforms for working, studying and communicating, these tools can create new channels for harassment and violence. Young women, women and girls with disabilities and elderly women are particularly at risk of such forms of abuse.

RESPONSE The community should be informed about actions that they can take to prevent and respond to technology-related violence.

OTHER KEY ACTIONS TO ADDRESS VAWG IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19⁸



Allocate resources for addressing VAWG into all COVID-19 Response Plans.



Put women at the centre of policy change, solutions and recovery through support for grassroots women's rights organizations, especially those that provide essential services and ensuring women's community groups are represented in COVID-19 decision-making.



Ensure sex-disaggregated data is collected and reported as part of COVID-19 monitoring and to inform the response, including data on reports of violence and services provided.



Strengthen capacities of key health, justice and security services to prevent and respond to domestic violence and improve quality and speed of response.



Utilize the National Action Plan on Gender Based-Violence coordination mechanisms for strengthening government and civil society partnership to respond to domestic violence during COVID-19.

8. UN Women (2020), COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

