



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Gender and Pandemic URGENT CALL FOR ACTION

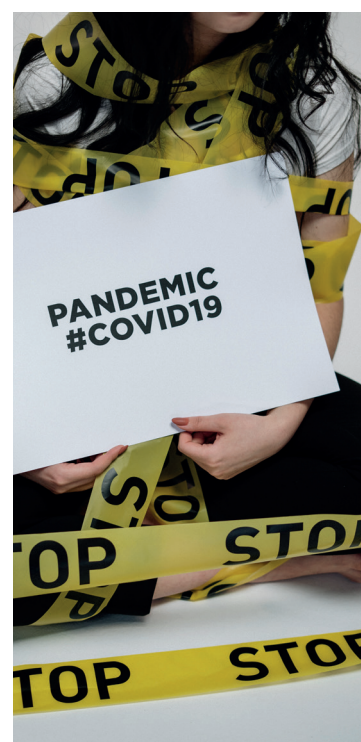


COVID-19

"I urge governments to put women's safety first as they respond to the pandemic."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (5 April 2020)

Domestic violence is a pattern of patriarchal hegemony. In Pakistan, 70 to 90 percent of women experience some form of physical, emotional or psychological abuse from an intimate partner.



Zero tolerance for domestic violence.

Home is not a safe place for victims of domestic violence.

The pandemic has amplified existing barriers to access help in abusive relationships.

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A pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, increasing gender-based violence exponentially.

1. Introduction

Unlike any other crime, the manifestation of domestic abuse or Violence Against Women (VAW) remains intensely personal, making it difficult for a majority of women to report on the level and impact of domestic abuse on their lives. Often, the fear of reprisal by the offender, threat from the abuser, honour and social stigma prevent women to report on domestic abuse and violence, encompassing emotional, physical, psychological, sexual or any other form of coercion and abuse. As a result, there is often insufficient evidence for the criminal justice institutions to prosecute an offence in cases of domestic abuse and VAW.

One out of three women in the world experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, according to WHO 'making it the most widespread but among the least reported human rights abuses'. When women experience violence, entire families and communities suffer. In fact, violence against women impacts entire economies and countries. Increased abuse is a pattern repeated in emergencies, natural disasters, wars, economic crisis or during disease outbreaks. This also holds true for the coronavirus pandemic.¹

The objective of this advocacy brief is to improve understanding of stakeholders, particularly the institutions from the Criminal Justice System (CJS), about the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of women with respect to escalation of domestic violence resulting from self-isolation and confinement of women within their households during the lockdown. The analysis can help to direct the ongoing strategic, operational and policy efforts to include gender-sensitive preventive measures to address forms of domestic abuse and violence against women as the nature of pandemic evolves in the province of Punjab.

Irrefutable global evidence demonstrates that epidemics like COVID-19 is bound to exacerbate existing multidimensional gender inequalities. While highlighting a 'horrifying global surge' in domestic violence during the ongoing coronavirus crisis, the United Nations Secretary-General has forewarned the member states to step up timely policy responses and urged them to take targeted administrative efforts to prevent violence against women.

A new report by the UN Women reveals that the COVID-19 crisis has intensified gender inequality and gender discrimination around the world. Titled as **"The First 100 Days of the Covid-19 Outbreak in Asia and the Pacific: A Gender Lens"**, the Report confirms disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. The report observes that lockdowns and quarantine measures placed by many countries mean that millions of women are confined with their abusers, with limited options for seeking help and support.

In short, the trajectory of domestic violence can present complex challenges to core institutions of the state particularly the 'Criminal Justice System'. 'In some cases, adolescents engage in violent behaviours in the home. Women (mothers) are disproportionately targeted by this violence. Despite the prevalence of this form of violence it is not always recognised by the CJS.'²

The financial, domestic and health pressures during the lockdown compound domestic abuse.

1 <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/04/domestic-violence-amid-corona-pandemic-is-increasing-manifold/>

2 https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/GBVAW_and_UNODC_in_COVID19_final_7Apr2020.pdf

2. COVID 19 & VAW: The Global Trends

Mounting evidence from the global data suggests that 'Violence Against Women' particularly of domestic nature is tantamount to yet another 'Public Health Crisis' as domestic torture, abuse and insult serve to act like an additional infection. UN is calling it as a 'Shadow Pandemic' with serious consequences for the health, protection and safety of women.

As distancing measures are put in place and people are encouraged to stay at home, the risk of intimate partner violence is likely to increase. (For specific examples and more information, see the WHO fact sheet on COVID-19 and violence against women <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>).

Here is a quick overview of global trends in some select countries around the world:

China	Domestic violence cases reported to the local police tripled in February at the height of the coronavirus crisis
Tunisia	Calls to a hotline for women abuse increased fivefold
UK	Calls to the national abuse hotline went up by 65 percent. (The UK's largest domestic abuse charity, Refuge, has reported a 700% increase in calls to its helpline in a single day, while a separate helpline for perpetrators of domestic abuse seeking help to change their behaviour received 25% more calls after the start of the Covid-19 lockdown. ³)
Spain	Calls to a state-run hotline has seen increase of 12.5% while online consultations grew by 270%
Cyprus	Reports of domestic violence have witnessed 30 percent increase in calls in the first weeks of stay-at-home measures
Turkey	Police's emergency line is overwhelmed with outbreak emergencies, and many women fail to get through to a responder or receive adequate assistance
India	The National Commission for Women (NCW), which receives complaints of domestic violence from across the country, recorded a more than two-fold rise in gender-based violence during the initial lockdown period ⁴
France	French police reported a nationwide spike of about 30 percent in domestic violence. ⁵

Keeping in view the seriousness of the crisis, the United Nations has called for urgent action to combat the worldwide surge in domestic violence. *"I urge all governments to put women's safety first as they respond to the pandemic,"* Secretary General Antonio Guterres wrote on Twitter on April 5. He has asked all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for coronavirus crises.

3 Revealed: surge in domestic violence during Covid-19 crisis: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/12/domestic-violence-surges-seven-hundred-per-cent-uk-coronavirus>

4 Blame It On COVID-19: Domestic Violence On The Rise, Are Men Putting More Pressure On Women? <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/india-news-a-monster-at-home/303071>

5 A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

UN Secretary General said that pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls that reverse limited progress towards gender equality made over the last 25 years.

UN Secretary General also noted that nearly one in five women worldwide experienced violence in the past year and many of those women are now trapped at home with their abusers, struggling to access services that are suffering from cuts and restrictions. He also said that nearly 60% of women around the world work in the informal economy earning less, saving less and at a greater risk of falling into poverty.

The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women and Girls and COVID-19

Globally,

243 million

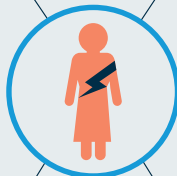


women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

The number is likely to INCREASE as security, health, and money worries heighten tensions and strains are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.

Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and particularly domestic violence, has **INTENSIFIED**.

In **France**, reports of domestic violence have increased by **30%** since the lockdown on March 17.



In **Cyprus** and **Singapore** helplines have registered an increase in calls of **30%** and **33%**, respectively.

In **Argentina** emergency calls for domestic violence cases have increased by **25%** since the lockdown on March 20.

Increased cases of domestic violence and demand for emergency shelter have also been reported in **Canada, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom** and **the United States**.

As stay-at-home orders expand to contain the spread of the virus, women with violent partners increasingly find themselves isolated from the people and resources that can help them.

87,000 women

were intentionally killed in 2017. The majority of these killings were committed by an intimate partner or family member of the victim.

Violence against women and girls is pervasive but at the same time widely under-reported. Less

than **40%** of women who experience violence report these crimes or seek help of any sort.

The global cost of violence against women had previously been estimated at approximately.

US\$1.5 trillion

That figure can only be rising as violence increases now, and continues in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The surge in COVID-19 cases is straining even the most advanced and best-resourced health systems to the breaking point, including those at the front line in violence response.



Domestic violence shelters are reaching capacity, or unable to take new victims due to lockdown and social distancing measures. In other cases, they are being re-purposed to serve as health centers.

National responses to COVID-19 must include:



Services to address violence against women and girls, including increased resources to support shelters, hotlines and online counselling. These essential services should be expanded and adapted to the crisis context to ensure survivors' access to support.



A strong message from law enforcement that impunity will not be tolerated. Police and Justice actors must ensure that incidents of VAWG are given high priority and care must be taken to address the manifestations of violence emerging in the context of COVID 19.



Psychosocial support for women and girls affected by the outbreak, gender-based violence survivors, frontline health workers and other frontline social support staff must be prioritized.



As the world continues to battle the coronavirus crisis, those living in dangerous situations must not be forgotten. Anyone experiencing domestic violence should be able to access immediate and appropriate support since they are trapped with their abusers for weeks.

The government, NGOs and people should consolidate their efforts in the fight against the social risks the pandemic is creating at many levels.⁶

Following infographic portrays updated situation as regards some key places where the problem of violence against women and girls is causing untold suffering.⁷

⁶ <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/04/domestic-violence-amid-corona-pandemic-is-increasing-manifold/>

⁷ In many countries there have been calls for legal or policy changes to reflect the increased risk to women and children in quarantine. Several governments are trying to address rising need by allotting further funds for services as economic pressure grows. Safety advice and planning for those experiencing domestic abuse are being included in the national government recommendations on COVID-19.

90%
of women in Pakistan have experienced some form of domestic violence, at the hands of their husbands or families.

47%
of married women have experienced sexual abuse, particularly domestic rape.

Most common forms of abuse



50%
of women report that violence either increases or does not change when they are pregnant.

0.4%
of women take their cases to courts.

50%
of women who experience domestic violence do not respond in any way and suffer silently.

Sources: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences

3. Overall Situation in Pakistan

Irrespective of COVID 19 context, incidents of domestic violence have been occurring across Pakistan at an alarming rate. *'While we do not yet have official data of this nature related to the lockdown in Pakistan, existing data on gender-based violence paints a grim picture as shown by the given statistics on the left.'*⁸

In Pakistan, mental health professionals providing online therapy sessions also report that they have seen a rise in the cases of domestic abuse in the wake of the COVID 19 lockdown in Pakistan. *'Domestic abuse has already been a haunting problem in Pakistan; more cases are surfacing in this time of anxiety and depression for all.'*⁹

A pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, increasing gender-based violence exponentially. Evidence suggests that financial, domestic and health pressures during the lockdown increase domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. Pakistan is no exception where incidents of domestic violence have been occurring at an alarming rate.

'In a developing country like Pakistan with already very low indicators of socio- economic development, an epidemic is likely to further compound pre-existing gender inequalities.' 28% of women aged between 15-49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and 6% have experienced sexual violence. 7% of the women who have ever been pregnant have experienced violence during their pregnancy and 34% of ever-married women have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence. The most common type of spousal violence is emotional violence (26%) which is followed by physical violence (23%). 5% of the married women have experienced spousal sexual violence.¹⁰

The following infographic released by the

⁸ <https://images.dawn.com/news/1182318>

⁹ The News, 02 April, 2020, "Mental health professionals report rise in domestic abuse cases"

¹⁰ Pakistan Federal Ministry of Human Rights 'Policy Brief: Gendered Impact & Implications of Covid-19 in Pakistan'

Ministry of Human Rights depicts trends across age underlining the severity of the problem in three categories of VAW namely emotional, physical and sexual violence.¹¹

Incidence of Violence



It is important for policy makers to understand and recognise that the impact of COVID-19 is not gender-neutral. The integration of a gender perspective is imperative for a holistic, inclusive and non-discriminatory effective response to COVID-19.¹²

Past epidemics such as Zika and Ebola reveal that gender analysis and equity consideration can be a vital factor in preparedness, prevention, outbreak management and rehabilitation during the spread of infectious diseases. **Recognising that Covid-19 is affecting women and men differently can be a key for creating effective, equitable programme interventions and policies.**

Data also reveals that epidemics have inequitable effects on all vulnerable groups. In the case of women, this can include: increased burden of unpaid care work, increased gender-based violence and social protection risks, increased vulnerability of female healthcare providers working on the frontlines, challenges in accessing necessary information, and reduced access to quality reproductive health and family planning services, as well as precarious employment.¹³

The Demographic Health Survey 2017-18 finds almost one-third of women between 15 and 19 years of age reported facing physical violence, with older women facing comparatively less violence. For almost all women, regardless of age, the perpetrator was someone in the immediate family. It is also alarming that over half the women who reported having experienced violence never sought help or told anyone.

Apart from the stigma and patriarchal notions of privacy attached to violence within the home, a lack of sensitisation of frontline officials and police or a proper referral system in this regard discourages women from reporting cases of domestic violence, resulting in non-reporting and inhibiting women to seek help. **In a lockdown, the increased exposure to the perpetrator makes women and children more vulnerable, with even less means of reporting due to curbs on mobility.**¹⁴

If anything, the current pestilence afflicting Pakistan and rest of the world has yet again reinforced a troubling fact about the way public sector prepares and responds to issues concerning the most to citizens i.e. lack of evidence-based compassionate responses from the state to ameliorate the suffering of the most deserving. In other words, the data quantifying domestic violence is missing but it is clear that the scale of domestic violence is bound to heighten given the rigid social hierarchies and patriarchal hegemony present in the society.

Social distancing and self-isolation are being used as tools of coercive and controlling behavior by perpetrators and continuing lockdown provides limited access to safety and support. Women and children who live in domestic violence have no escape from their abusers during quarantine, especially in countries where social services are poor or nonexistent and where housing situations are deeply insecure. Children are also suffering in these circumstances as

11 In a humanitarian emergency these numbers will worsen if not at least remain the same as mobility of the women will further decrease their access to these financial empowerment instruments.

12 'Gender and Virus' by Dr. Farzana Bari, The News, 12 April 2020

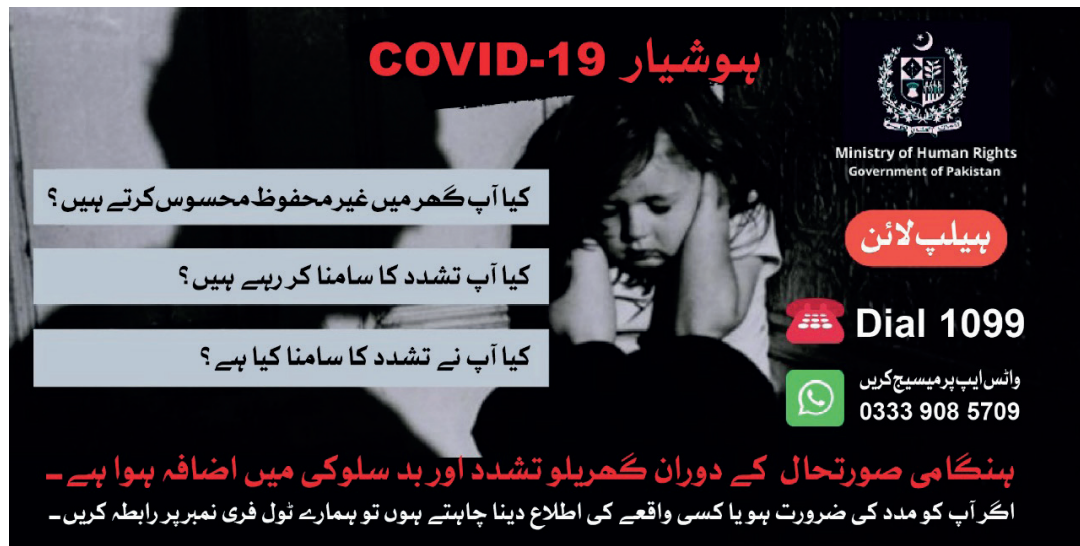
13 Ensuring Equity in Emergency Response, DAWN 12, April 2020

14 Ensuring Equity in Emergency Response, DAWN 12, April 2020

witnessing abuse can take the same toll on young people's mental health as actually being abused themselves.¹⁵

There is no factual evidence or an informed narrative that can reliably be constructed in the absence of credible and quality data. Amidst the dismal challenges, Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Human Rights have taken an affirmative step through issuing a COVID-19 Alert that provides a **helpline 1099** and a **WhatsApp number 0333 908 5709** to report cases of domestic violence during the lockdown.

The following poster depicts the key messaging around an otherwise important initiative. It invites women and girls who experience violence to contact the toll-free helpline if they need help or would like to report an incident.



The initiative is timely and expected to generate data and evidence to inform decision making at the policy level.

*'Women are the sufferers and are subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse in their home by partners, in-laws and in some circumstances by their brothers and parents.'*¹⁶

Pakistan does have a fairly progressive legislative framework in place. Sindh enacted its Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act in 2013. Balochistan passed a similar law in 2014. Punjab Passed its 'Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act' in 2016. Unfortunately, there is no law in KP at the moment that protects survivors of domestic abuse due to push back from religious authorities.

The Sindh and Balochistan laws criminalise domestic abuse, so they set forth criminal penalties including imprisonment or fines. Under the Punjab legislation, it is treated as a civil infraction, but it prescribes certain preventive and remedial measures such as protection orders, financial compensation; those exist in Sindh and Balochistan laws also.

While it seems that penalising the crime would be a better form of justice, our criminal system is in dire need of reform considering there is negligible rate of convictions to address crimes of VAW. All institutions like police, judiciary, Bar need to make a collaborative effort in order for the legal tools to be effective.¹⁷

15 <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/04/domestic-violence-amid-corona-pandemic-is-increasing-manifold/>

16 Journal of Pakistan Medical Association "Strategies and Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence against Women in Pakistan"

17 What are your options if you are a victim of domestic abuse in Pakistan? By Anum Rehman Chagani, DAWN, 28 May 2019

3.1 Key takeaway

Governments are responding under huge pressure to act fast, and this sometimes means that they may act without considering diverse perspectives, including gender. For instance, stay-at-home orders limit the spread of the virus, but can potentially result in dangerous situation for women with violent partners.

Decisions that are not informed by accurate data or informed by inclusive gender perspective are more likely to be ineffective. That is why, there is urgent need for cooperation with decision-makers to ensure gender is integrated in national and sub-national COVID-19 response plans, not only to achieve better outcomes for women and girls, but to achieve better outcomes for the society at large.

4. Punjab Context

Ever since the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's constitution of 1973 that has empowered provinces, the province of Punjab has undertaken important steps towards women empowerment and gender equality. This includes following key initiatives:

- Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act, 2016
- Punjab Protection of Women against Harassment at the Workplace Act, 2012
- Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, 2014
- CM Task Force for facilitating coordination of women's empowerment initiatives and scaling up activities and awareness campaigns across various women development frameworks in Punjab.
- Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act, 2014
- Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2015
 - » Punjab Women Protection Authority etc.
- Punjab Family Courts Act, 2015

Before analysing current status, statistics, trends including provincial government's response to address issues of domestic violence in the context of COVID 19, it is worth discussing a bit about the prevailing institutional realities.

The police **Helpline 15** is taking all sorts of calls including reports against crime, no specific helpline is available for responding to the cases of VAW/GBV.

Rozan, a women rights organisation working on the issues of GBV, shared that the state-owned **Women Shelters (Dar ul Amaan)** in Punjab are not prepared to take up new residents. They request the courts to refer as less women to them as possible. It is due to their lack of financial, infrastructural and technical capacity to deal with asymptomatic COVID positive victims/survivors of violence. Rozan's women programme manager shared that their case workers are reporting the incidences of GBV in communities during the lockdown.

The **Women and Juvenile Facilitation Center (WJFC)** that is also a temporary shelter set up by Gujrat Police has been converted into a quarantine facility by the district administration. The staff of WJFC have been given a temporary place in the district police lines. The WJFC should be restored to facilitate women and juvenile survivors of violence.

The WJFC dealt with approximately 16 in-person cases of Violence against Women (VAW) per month before the imposition of lockdown. Since the lockdown, only 4 cases had been reported at the time of compilation of this report.

The **National Toll-Free Helpline 1099** of the Ministry of Human Rights, functional from 10 am to 10 pm, is receiving a smaller number of Domestic Violence (DV) related calls from across Pakistan. The number of calls against DV have reduced from approximate 3 calls a day to around 1 call a day. Majority of the callers are complaining about non-availability of food and financial packages announced by the provincial and federal governments along with health-related issues.

The head office of Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) is closed for public due to lockdown but their **Helpline 1043** is functional. The number of calls that PCSW is receiving regarding cases of DV is almost the same as they used to receive before the outbreak of COVID-19.

A Lahore-based helpline by the Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) shared that their helpline is not functional due to the lockdown. Thus, they are receiving less number of complaints regarding cybercrimes against women however there is more active reporting of crimes through their SMS and email service

The **Nationwide 24/7 Helpline 9911** of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), to report cybercrimes, is working for 6 hours a day only due to the lockdown.

The staff of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in Lahore is working from home thus the commission is not functioning on its full capacity due to lockdown.

The helplines and departments, owned by the state, responsible for responding to the cases of violence should be made functional and must be considered as essential services.

The government should encourage and facilitate that helplines run by the non-governmental sector also function proactively during lockdown.

5. Key Issues and Challenges

In summary, following are the main policy, legal and operational constraints;

- Absence of clearly defined policy and strategic response framework on how to tackle issue of domestic violence
- Lack of coordination among institutions and stakeholders
- Limited availability of disaggregated data
- Inadequate oversight mechanism
- Deficient capacity of societal watchdogs
- Lack of awareness of general public and societal barriers
- Resource constraints and outreach capacities
- Lack of targeted training and orientation plans for first responders
- Need to update legal framework including development and enforcement of new SOPs, Rules, Procedures, and Guidelines.

More details on the key issues and challenges are provided below;

5.1 National Action Plan for Preparedness & Response to Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

The National Action Plan for Preparedness & Response to Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) of Pakistan does not have any provision for responding to the issue of VAW during the outbreak of the pandemic.

5.2 Patriarchal mindset of the society

Traditionally, the society at large is governed by patriarchal mindset that justifies various kinds of violence against women and children in Pakistan. The issue of GBV in the country is considered as a private and domestic matter and discouraged to be reported to any government or non-government institution. Reporting of VAW is taken as an attempt to defame honor of the family and is often dealt with aggressively. COVID-19 and its related financial and mental health problems are expected to be presented as an excuse for perpetrators to commit violence against women and children.

5.3 Limited Availability of Data

The data quantifying the true scale of domestic violence is neither documented nor present and hence, it is clear that the issue of domestic violence, which is generally under-reported and undocumented, is bound to heighten given the rigid social hierarchies present in the society.

5.4 Challenges faced by police, prosecution services, the judiciary and other parts of the criminal justice system during the COVID-19 outbreak

- Resources are being diverted away from the criminal justice system towards more immediate public health measures to deal with COVID-19.
- Already highly under-resourced police and other law enforcement agencies have less time and human resources to respond to incidents of Gender Based Violence Against Women and Girls (GBVAWG) and may lack specific plans on how to respond to such incidents during the emergency. The situation is likely to shift priorities towards enforcing quarantine, monitoring social distancing and other related measures. In countries with weak rule of law and existing economic constraints, the focus may also shift towards responses to public and civil unrest, and other crimes that may increase as a result of economic and social consequences of the responses to COVID-19.
- Less attention is given to preparedness of the police in terms of appropriate equipment and training. No well-defined national or provincial Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) exist to protect the police from the novel virus and also to deal with complainants during the outbreak, especially for the cases and victims of VAW.
- The conventional lack of trust between the police and community is hindering the imposition of lockdown in true sense. The communication gap between the two is broadening due to lack of police's preparedness to deal with the general public, specifically during worsening situation of COVID-19.

Self-quarantine can be manipulated by abusers to further their control over women.

- In many countries, judicial proceedings are suspended and/or postponed, which impedes immediate judicial protection (e.g. issuance of emergency or interim measures like protection and restraining orders) and creates a backlog of cases that affects the effectiveness and quality of criminal justice responses to GBVAWG in the long run.
- There is no helpline established by the police to facilitate the victims/survivors of violence. There is only one helpline '15' to take all sorts of complaints that is often overburdened due to capacity gaps within the police.
- Other services, such as hotlines, crisis centers, shelters, access to a lawyer including through legal aid support, and victim protection services may also be scaled back or closed, further reducing access to the few sources of help that women in abusive relationships might have.
- Due to the lockdown policies in place, women and girls may have more difficulties in accessing police stations for promptly reporting cases of GBVAWG and seeking judicial and other forms of protection. They will also find it more difficult to place phone calls to report violence or access hotlines as they live 24/7 with their abusers and have no privacy to make such phone calls.

5.5 Gaps in Policy, Planning and Implementation Responses

Despite number of progressive laws, Pakistan hasn't been able to tackle the problem of domestic violence or gender-based violence. Part of the reason is lack of implementation coupled with significant gaps underpinning governing structures in relation to addressing domestic violence.

5.6 Lack of Awareness and Outreach

Rampant poverty, exclusion and ignorance multiply the plight of marginalised women. Illiteracy especially lack of awareness of legal rights by the citizens is a key challenge. Existing and old laws are written in alienating language that widens the knowledge gap. Civil society has limited outreach and resource capacities to ensure effectiveness and scale of outreach.

5.7 Budgetary Constraints

Pakistan's economy has been facing severe constraints recently due to massive debt, inflation and over-spending on non-development items. Traditionally, the country has been allocating limited finances to improve socio economic conditions of women. This is a lingering public sector issue which needs rationalisation.

5.8 Social Media and Challenges of Digital Divide

The proliferation of new media platforms has opened up new opportunities but at the same women are not literate enough to fully utilize and benefit, while a majority also lack means of accessing digital media due to further marginalisation. There is need for targeted policy action in this respect.

6. Recommendations¹⁸

A: IMMEDIATE

6.1 Policy Makers in Political Government and Bureaucracy

- The National Action Plan for Preparedness & Response to Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) of Pakistan should be revised by integrating GBV services as essential services into national and provincial response strategies and plans. This should specifically include agenda for transitioning to remote and technology-based support.
- The plan needs to provide for strategies and measures for all the concerned federal and provincial departments, including the police, to curb the incidences of GBV/VAW during the lockdown due to the outbreak of COVID-19.
- Relevant state authorities (e.g. Ministries of Interior, Justice, Social Welfare) should clearly and publicly indicate that preventing and responding to GBVAWG, even in times of pandemic and lockdown, should be a priority for relevant criminal justice officials and specific warning and sanctioning measures should be in place for not following this policy.
- Prioritise resources and efforts to ensure continuity and access to essential services to address violence against women and girls, including to prepare for an increase in demand for emergency hotlines/helplines, shelters and other essential housing options, legal aid and other essential police and justice services. (Please refer to UN Women Essential Services Package)¹⁹
- As a minimum, criminal justice institutions should be able to identify, protect and provide remedies to victims who are at risk.
- Any measures/policy packages that follow after declaration of state of emergency should include this budget line.
- Recognise the risks to children in instances where interrupted shared care arrangements may result in a child or children being forced to reside with an abusive parent. Irrespective of whether movement between parents is permitted, in all cases involving the shared care of children, parents should be offered additional supports, including access to free legal services, measures to ensure that children are not residing with an abusive parent during the lockdown period and, in instances where this is identified to be the case, children should be provided with support to ensure their safe return to a non-abusive parent.
- Direct police departments to respond to all domestic violence reports and connect survivors with appropriate resources during the pandemic.
- All frontline workers should be sensitised to existing and expected protection risks including GBV and be trained to respond to disclosures of GBV, especially domestic violence, as well as to guide individuals through the existing referral mechanisms, particularly in the wake of COVID-19.

¹⁸ Many of these recommendations have been sourced from UNODC global advocacy brief which can be found here https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/GBVAW_and_UNODC_in_COVID19_final_7Apr2020.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/essential-services-package-for-women-and-girls-subject-to-violence>

6.2 Criminal Justice Institutions

- Assess the likelihood and magnitude of the existing and expected backlog in GBVAW cases in light of the COVID-19 emergency.
- The police should come up with their doable plans to prevent and respond to the cases of GBV during the pandemic.
- The police should take the cases of GBV as importantly and urgently as any other crime even during the lockdown. The officers responsible for delay in lodging of GBV cases should be held accountable and the ones taking these cases seriously should be awarded.
- A new helpline should be established particularly to take complaints with regard to GBV. An aggressive promotional campaign should be launched to aware women and children about the helpline even in case the police decides to continue using the same helpline number '15'.
- The helpline should be propagated widely by using all the available sources e.g. social media, SMS, cable TV, electronic and print media, billboards, banners etc. so that the vulnerable segments could access them even during the lockdown.
- The post of AIGP-Gender Crimes in Punjab remains vacant. Active status would have enabled authorities to take charge in responding to the issues of GBV/VAW in the wake of COVID. The post mandates to collect relevant and detailed gender segregated data on various forms of GBV/VAW. Police authorities will do well in gathering evidence so that it can be used to determine allocation of resources and preparing strategies to deal with the cases accordingly.
- The promotional and awareness campaigns should give clear messages to victims as well as the perpetrators. The perpetrators should be oriented on the techniques of alternate dispute resolution to avoid physical or psychological violence against women and children. They should also be made aware of the consequences committing any crime against women.
- Ensure continued availability and accessibility of judicial protection measures by using flexibility in existing procedures, for example by:
 - allowing remote applications for protection and restraining orders;
 - automatically extending existing orders;
 - enabling submission of statements and other evidence through electronic means;
 - adequately involving lawyers to represent and protect victims to explore all available legal options, particularly in cases where the victim may be charged with a crime due to action taken to resist the offender that may have resulted in physical harm;
 - allocating sufficient public funding to enable the justice system to reduce the expected backlog of criminal cases and protection procedures, prioritising cases of violence against women and girls and other serious crimes.

The perpetrators should be oriented on the techniques of alternate dispute resolution to avoid physical or psychological violence against women and children.

6.2.1 Evidence-based policy process (Criminal Justice System)

The virus does not discriminate. In order to respond effectively to the crisis, we need a whole-of-society approach to understand how it affects women and men in different ways. Supporting gender analysis, sex-disaggregated and categorised data should be an integral part of a strong COVID-19 response.

Evidence needs to be collected, in any format, about levels and trends of violence in the domestic sphere, with a focus on femicide and physical/sexual assault. This can be done through gathering of police record, data/reports/articles from national focal points and field offices; furthermore, consider the possibility to harvest data through web-scraping tools, which is currently being tested.

Organise electronic surveys, interviews and virtual focus group discussions with relevant criminal justice professionals (police, prosecutors, judges and magistrates, lawyers and legal aid providers, etc.) and CSOs to document the specific impact of COVID-19. This would help to devise targeted measures to curb its spread on victims through adequate CJ responses to GBVAW, as well as to create baseline data and discuss interventions to ensure effective criminal justice responses in the short and longer term.

6.3 Provincial Women Welfare Department

- Lead on coordinated relief and protection measures in collaboration with planning commission, PDMA and other concerned authorities.
- Gender-based violence or GBV referral pathways should be set up from the district level in collaboration with Police, District Administration, and other related institutions working towards 'Gender Equality & Women Empowerment'
- Expand services for shelter and women crisis centers in close coordination with Women Protection Authority even during the pandemic.
- The shelters' capacity and financial resources are required to be enhanced for COVID-19 response as they are part of essential services for the survivors of violence.
- Institutions should make arrangements for providing psycho-social support to women and girls who may be affected by the outbreak as violence survivors
- Direct designated public services and shelters to remain open and accessible.
- Shelters for survivors of violence should remain operational but with observance of specific protocols to avoid the spread of the virus.
- Keeping hotlines for GBV crisis response open and working is also essential.
- Increase resourcing for civil society organisations that respond to GBV and provide assistance - including shelter, counselling and legal aid - to survivors, and promote those that remain open.
- Develop a protocol for the care of women who may not be admitted to Shelters/ Women Crisis Centers due to exposure to the virus, which includes safe quarantine and access to testing. Sensitize against the stigmatization related to COVID-19.

6.4 Provincial Commission on the Status of Women

- Consider the commission as part of government's essential services and its head office must be opened as soon as possible after taking necessary steps of social distancing.
- Coordinate policy response, including data collection and data sharing in close collaboration with the police and social welfare department.
- Plan and conduct fresh analysis, research and public opinion surveys.

6.5 Provincial Assembly

- Review and update legislative instruments in the wake of COVID-19.
- Ensure proactive oversight of executive-led initiatives, including accountability mechanisms.

6.6 Civil Society and Media

- Sustainable funding for NGOs is crucial, particularly where they provide essential services to victims and survivors.
- Invest in awareness campaigns to inform the public that: dedicated hotlines for women and for girls are still working; judicial and other protective measures are operational; the shelters are open and are complying with health recommendations relating to COVID-19; and that women and girls seeking protection can leave the house even in lockdown situations without the fear to be stopped, sanctioned and/or punished by the authorities.
- Disseminate campaigns via multiple channels (e.g. TV, radio, internet, social media, including WhatsApp) and in all major languages spoken in the community.

B: POST-LOCKDOWN

6.7 Policy Makers in Political Government and Bureaucracy

- At a systems level, efforts are also needed to institutionalise gender budget monitoring to track investments to tackle violence against women and girls, and to enhance the transparency and accountability of service providers across sectors.

C: POST-PANDEMIC

6.8 Policy Makers in Political Government and Bureaucracy

- Institute necessary legal reforms and implementation of
- legal frameworks in line with international conventions against gender-based violence.
- Executive and legislature should prioritise how to criminalise certain 'Intimate Partner Violence' behaviours (e.g. marital rape and dowry-related violence), in line with recommendations by the Committee on the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to better align provision for the prosecution and sentencing of IPV perpetrators.

- It is also vital to ensure that more women are employed in formal service institutions (particularly police forces and courts of justice) and to embed widespread sensitivity training for police officers to remove an important barrier to justice for survivors.²⁰
- Relevant authorities and institutions should come up with guidelines regarding 'Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' to ensure safety of female doctors against any incident.²¹

6.9 Criminal Justice Institutions

- Enhance capacity of VAW cell or focal points within all stakeholders of criminal justice system with a mandate to coordinate effort towards reporting, implementing and monitoring mechanism. A common and integrated platform with members from CSOs/ community should work in a collaborative manner to identify and report GBV issues. Existing police entity can be augmented for this purpose and can be used as the coordinating cell.

6.9.1 Capacity-building (Criminal Justice System)

Preparation and coordination of training programmes for criminal justice professionals, especially the police being first responders, and other technical assistance activities to be started as soon as possible. Where possible, an initial phase of training can be started, using relevant e-learning modules and/or webinars. The training should be tailored to specific existing needs and gaps, based on the issues covered by existing UNODC tools and manuals on violence against women and violence against children.

6.10 Provincial Women Welfare Department

- Upgrade existing policy framework on 'Punjab Gender Equality and Women Empowerment'

6.11 Provincial Assembly

- Hold public hearings and issue a statement on behalf of electorate.

6.12 Civil Society and Media

- Women cannot access justice unless provided with means and ways to protect their rights. Therefore, availability and accessibility of legal representation is a serious issue. Institutions and civil society need to ponder why free or affordable legal aid is virtually absent in Pakistan. That is one major challenge that we face when it comes to the enforcement of our laws. Ab Aur Nahi <https://abaurnahin.pk> is a directory for women looking for pro Bono legal representation and psychological counselling regarding gender-based violence. This website links survivors to the resources that they may not have access to otherwise such as experienced lawyers and professional counsellors to combat sexual harassment, violence or abuse.

20 Understanding intimate partner violence in Pakistan through a male lens, The Agha Khan University, 2017

21 Ensuring Equity in Emergency Response, DAWN 12, April 2020



This advocacy brief is prepared by the UNODC's Criminal Justice and Legal Reforms Sub-Programme-II (SP-II).

The Criminal Justice and Legal Reforms Sub-Programme-II (SP-II) works as a strategic partner and advisor to the Government of Pakistan, delivering reforms across the criminal justice chain of institutions. The objective is to promote evidence-based programming to enhance the effectiveness, coordination and capacity of the criminal justice institutions towards administering fair, efficient and transparent access to justice and rule of law for the citizens. The SP-II also promotes robust and preventive measures to foster effective AML/CFT regimes in Pakistan to disrupt and prosecute financial crimes. A gender-sensitive approach cuts across the criminal justice reforms led by SP-II to empower the vulnerable and the less privileged groups through awareness of legal rights and access to justice.

The comprehensive approach of UNODC is aligned with Pakistan's vision 2025. Striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice and Institutions: *"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."* Also contributing to the SDG Goals 3, 5, 8, 11, 15 and 17.



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