

A Pandemic in a Pandemic: Gender Based Violence and COVID

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“If we are to fight discrimination and injustice against women we must start from the home for if a woman cannot be safe in her own house then she cannot be expected to feel safe anywhere.”

Aysha Taryam

A snapshot of the situation

As the COVID -19 crisis rages, the impact on women and girls has been devastating, it includes rising rates of domestic or intimate partner violence and forced marriages. The lockdowns and social distancing have taken their toll survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). They become more isolated, with few avenues to turn to for help, and many of them may be financially dependent on their abusers as a result of being unemployed. Unfortunately, as many of us are aware, these lockdowns in personal spaces such as homes are far from being safe havens. Research by the United Nations Population Fund UNFPA indicates [at least 15 million more cases of domestic violence](#) around the world in 2020 for every three months that lockdowns are extended. It is no exaggeration to refer to this silent pandemic of GBV as “*A Pandemic within A Pandemic.*” Globally, women and girls are in the fight of their lives, trying to survive the pandemic of COVID and the violence they are subjected to daily. It is alarming to note that prevalence of [domestic violence has increased](#) by 25% in many countries and this increase has been attributed to the various shelter in policies which have been instituted since the past 3 months.

Survivors of GBV, especially behind closed doors are facing a third challenge of not having access to the support they need including legal services and social protection. The pandemic has resulted in a shortage of both monetary and human resources across many sectors as they are being diverted to strengthening public health measures needed to address COVID-19.

Global Strategies to address the Silent Pandemic

A recently released [UN Women report](#) mentions the various strategies put into place globally for addressing this silent pandemic . For example, Countries such as Kenya and

Trinidad and Tobago are making use of technology in their judiciary to address the issue of GBV. Pharmacies and supermarkets in France and Spain are a part of a safety network and have put into place [emergency warning systems](#) to provide counselling services to victims of GBV and assist with reporting abuse during the current crisis. In another move, almost 20,000 hotel rooms across [France](#) have been designated as safe spaces. The Police department in an Indian state called Odisha is using telephone services to reach out to those women who lodged complaints about abuse pre COVID crisis.

Role played by UN agencies

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Somalia has partnered with local communities to implement neighborhood watch initiatives in local communities and to make them alert to any incidents of GBV in their area.

Similarly, in Mexico, UNDP, is working with a another UN agency namely UN women to use phones and online platforms to support vulnerable women via the [LUNA centers](#), which have been created as safe spaces for women and girls.

In the Dominican Republic, UNDP and [BHD Bank](#) recently created a partnership to facilitate referral services of domestic violence cases that are reported by the bank's customers. This is a great illustration of public-private partnership in addressing the silent pandemic of GBV.

In addition, UNDP is coordinating with other UN sister agencies, development partners, and governments on [Spotlight Initiative, a joint EU-UN partnership](#) to end violence against women and girls. This global, multi-year initiative aims to assist 50 million direct beneficiaries across five regions and more than 25 countries.

Recommendations

Increasing partnerships between UN agencies, academia, and civil society to address GBV is vital. Using the various social media platforms to spread advocacy and awareness about the silent pandemic of GBV and also to create a channel for abused women and girls to seek assistance and support. We have to use timely and effective communication ([Handbook for Coordinating GBV in Emergencies](#)) to address this severe societal problem. The effective communication strategies foster a positive and trusting environment for the victims as well as for the workers. By sharing information about it and providing a safe platform for the victims, we can slowly create a long-term solution. It is crucial that we come together as a united global community to pool our resources to tackle COVID 19 and Gender Based Violence.