



RECOMMENDATIONS

**from the series of webinars on
psychosocial support and GBV issues
during COVID -19**

Introduction

Public health outbreaks such as COVID-19, produce several negative consequences on people's social lives, psychological health, and emotional wellbeing. Evidence and experience across the world showed that during the pandemic women and girls, because of their pre-existing vulnerabilities, were more at risk of facing all forms of gender-based violence¹.

In order to address the psychosocial needs of communities during COVID-19, Rozan with support from UNFPA, expanded its tele counseling services, raised awareness on the importance of mental health and built capacities of private and state-run helplines to improve their response. In this context a series of six webinars was organized during August – September, 2020. Key objectives of the webinars were:

- a) Understand the gender impact and vulnerabilities of women and girls during the public health crisis of COVID-19.
- b) Increase understanding of stakeholders on the importance of necessary protocols for prevention and response to GBV during the pandemic.
- c) Learn from GBV prevention and response experiences during the COVID 19 and suggest recommendations for future course of action.

The webinars provided a platform to the practitioners, policymakers, researchers and other relevant stakeholders to learn from each other's experience of working on the issues of gender-based violence during the pandemic. Around 600 participants (65% women, 35% men) and 22 panelists took part in the discussions during the webinars. The discussion underscored the impacts of COVID-19 on, women, children, and person with disabilities. The need for adopting a multi-sectoral approach to address the issue of GBV was highlighted.

Based on the discussion during the webinars the recommendations are divided into three categories:

1. Emotional health and psychosocial services during the COVID-19
2. Improving GBV response mechanisms in the pandemic
3. Addressing specific needs of girl child and women with disabilities during the pandemic

¹<https://www.who.int/health-cluster/about/work/other-collaborations/gender-based-violence/en/>
<http://www.mohr.gov.pk/Detail/ODZhNzY4M2YtYWUwOC00OWFiLWI3ODItMWQ3NzYzYjFhMDM3>

Emotional Health Needs and Psychosocial Services in COVID-19

Following recommendations emerged from the discussion on emotional health needs and psychosocial services during COVID-19.

- The need to increase the number of virtual platforms such as hotlines, helplines on psychosocial support was highlighted.
- Establishing tele-medicine and tele-psychiatry facilities for clients with psychiatric needs is urgently required. One example of such service is the Tele-Psychiatry helpline Lahore.
- There is a need to make a comprehensive plan, to enhance the capacity and scope of existing helplines to address the psychosocial needs of communities.
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) training be arranged for all service providers.
- Medical front line staff (such as lady health workers, nurses, ward boys, staff) should be trained on identifying the psycho-social needs of women and girls and referring them to appropriate services.
- Academia should be engaged, to raise awareness on the emotional health needs of communities and train them to provide psychosocial services voluntarily.
- Budget for mental health be increased and mentioned separately in the annual health budget to ensure provision of quality psychosocial services.
- Ensure provision of psychosocial services to the community during pandemics along with other health services.

Improving Response to Gender based Violence in the Pandemic

Following recommendations emerged from the discussion on GBV trends in the Pandemic and response services.

- Mass awareness-raising campaigns should be organized on the services available for survivors of GBV.
- Availability of counsellors, mental health professionals and social workers be ensured to address psycho-social needs of GBV survivors.
- Develop and disseminate mobile applications, providing information on safety measures, services available for GBV survivors, friendly spaces for women, safe journey planner, information on women's rights, cybercrimes and harassment law and legal procedures.
- Use of digital media (magazines, blogs, pages, social media platforms) and electronic media (Radio, Television) to disseminate information about prevention and response to GBV cases. The information should be in Urdu, English and local languages.
- Build the capacity of existing professional and non-professional staff to deal with GBV cases with gender sensitivity.
- Ensure availability of safe centers, shelters, Darul –Amans for survivors of GBV in every major district and main city. Shelter and women protection centers be declared as essential services.
- Initiate hotline, helpline, emergency numbers to facilitate individuals with GBV concerns and refer them to the available resources as per their needs and situation. There should be a strong referral system and updated referral pathways in all the helplines.
- GBV response strategies and interventions must focus on women, who don't have access to mobile phones, or who are not allowed to go out of their homes.
- Capacity building and training of community health workers on identifying, dealing with and referring the GBV survivors. Ensure the accessibility of services to far-reaching areas.
- Initiate platforms to redirect energies and potentials of women and girls to recreational and productive tasks especially those who are not able to continue their jobs or studies. The Punjab government e-commerce certification program for women is a good example in this context.

Improving Response to Gender based Violence in the Pandemic

- Building a mutual platform where cases can be reported and discussed among the multi-sectoral team for gender-sensitive, age-specific, and locally relevant responses. Government departments such as Social Welfare Department (SWD), Provisional Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Women Welfare Department (WWD) , and INGOs, NGOs, and community stakeholders should have regular online meetings to share the responsibilities, be aware of their roles in providing these services and sustainability of the available services. Strong coordination among the departments, institutions, and organizations will provide a window for women and girls to seek legal, medical and other support services.
- Involving women parliamentarian in policy and law-making pertaining to women survivors of violence. A specific quota for their inputs in decisions and resolutions will serve the purpose more.
- With the increased risk of GBV during the pandemic, number of shelters services accessible to women and girls, must be increased.
- There should be clear SoPs for case management in women shelters during the Pandemic.
- The emphasis should be to eradicate barriers hindering women's and girls' access to services, including mobility constraints, limited opening hours, lack of female staff, service providers' safety concerns and child care responsibilities etc.
- There should be scheduled activities for women and girls at the shelter to make their stay constructive and productive and address their psycho-social needs.
- Dignity kits should be provided to women and girls living in centers. Provision of much needed supplies in dignity kits will enable women and girls to use their limited resources to purchase other important items needed in an emergency.
- Relevant government service providers such as the social welfare department, Health, and Police should lead all interventions in shelters to prevent and respond to GBV survivor's needs.
- Well structured, updated GBV referral pathways must be established to help the survivor and their access to multi-sector teams. Mechanisms such as WhatsApp group, direct numbers, CLOUD space to share reported cases with other shelter homes, Dar-ul-Amans, and government departments including health and police force while ensuring survivors confidentiality and privacy, must be established.
- To the extent possible, special social protection programs should support women who are single

Improving Response to Gender based Violence in the Pandemic

parents or are the main breadwinners in their families.

- The standards and capacity of shelters to deal with the specific needs arising from pandemics should be increased. For instance, in COVID 19, when keeping the survivors in quarantine was the major challenge, having larger space in shelters and Darul-Aman could help in accommodating more survivors. Schools, hotels, wedding halls can also be turned into temporary shelter places to ensure the availability and accessibility of shelter services.

Improving the Role Criminal Justice to Respond to GBV Cases During the Pandemic

- Setting up better and online systems to report and register complaints / cases related to GBV.
- Up-gradation and implementation of gender-sensitive SOPs to interview GBV survivors at the police stations level. There should be a separate complaint desk for women at all police stations supervised by women police personnel to facilitate women survivors.
- Increasing the number of female officials in the police service through strengthening systems of recruiting and retaining women, expanding the female quota and offering special perks.
- Gender awareness and sensitization of police personnel to dealing with survivors of GBV especially domestic violence.
- Establishment of GBV cases database to develop baselines, monitor progress as well as capturing changes in trends before and after the crisis and/or pandemics.
- Analyze the services that are being provided to the survivors to evaluate whether these are aligned with the survivor's needs and requirements.
- Initiation of e-courts to resolve cases timely and provide justice without any delay.

Addressing Specific Needs of Girl Child and Women With Disabilities During the Pandemic

In any pandemic, the marginalized populations, women, girls, person with disabilities, and minorities become more vulnerable due to their limited access to available resources and services. Following recommendation emerged from the discussion on the issues of girl child and women with disabilities, during COVID -19.

- There is a need to build a strong advocacy and awareness on the impacts of COVID-19 on girl child rights and violence against girls, especially cyber-harassment and increased trend of girl child marriages.
- Services like child protection units for girls who experience violence during COVID-19 must be strengthened. However, the services should not be limited to online mode as many of the survivors may not have access to these mediums.
- Special awareness programs for girls on the protection from cyber harassment.
- Continuity of girl's education is going to be a major challenge as schools reopen. Interventions should be planned with the slogan to "send girls back to school".
- Develop policies and plans of actions for women with disabilities. Using the right terminology "Women with Disability" at the policy level instead of a Person with a Disability (PWD) to address the specific issues women with disabilities are facing.
- Ensuring the long-term initiative and actions by the governments and policymakers instead of making quick-fix efforts.
- Developing systematic strategies for solving the issues of mobility and lack of access to care by engaging different stakeholders including NGOs, INGOs, and Government institutions working in this sector.
- Improve health-care coverage and affordability for persons with disabilities as part of global practices in health care.
- Improving research and data to monitor, evaluate and strengthen health systems for women and girls with disabilities.
- Highlight challenges faced by women with disability at a regional and international forum such as National Forum for women with disabilities, Asia pacific women with disability Network, Asia pacific forum on sustainability development.

Addressing Specific Needs of Girl Child and Women With Disabilities During the Pandemic

- The National Action Plan should be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders including women and girls with disabilities addressing the barriers they are facing.
- Support mechanisms, involving women with disabilities to provide psycho-social support to other women with a similar disability as they would be able to have a better understanding of the barriers and challenges, they face.
- Surveys to determine the inclusiveness of police station, EHSAS program, and other government initiatives regarding the needs of women with disabilities. The survey will help to identify the shortcomings in the system to improve the services.

Annexure: List of Webinars

WEBINAR

"Our Role for Women Rights: Taking Action towards Preventing Gender Based Violence during Pandemic"

Wednesday, 30 September, 2020
12:00-2:00 PM (PST)

Guest Speakers

- Ms. Shafiqah Akbar**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Zahara Ghani**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Nigar Akbar**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Zafarullah Khan**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Parvina Sarfraz**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Mehrab Sadiq**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA

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Webinar

"Promoting the rights of women and girls with Disabilities in Covid 19"

Wednesday, September 23, 2020 | 12:00-2:00 PM (PST)

SPEAKERS

- Ms. Abia Akram**
Head of National Forum
for Women with Disabilities
Special Data Exchange
Program (SDXEP)
- Mr. Zulqarnain Akhtar**
Chief Executive Officer
National Health Awareness
Program (NHAP)
- Mr. Muhammad Hassan Mangi**
Deputy Secretary of Federal Ministry of
Human Rights
- Syed Ali Salman**
(Moderator)
Senior Manager of SDXEP

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Webinar

Taking Stock and Setting Way Forward :

Shelter and Police Response on Gender based Violence during COVID-19

Wednesday, September 16, 2020 | 12:00-2:00 PM (PKT)

SPEAKERS:

- Ms. Waheeda Waheed**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Roshan Farooq**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Maria Mahmood**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Mr. Muhammad Ghani Khan-Mansoor**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA

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Webinar

Being A Girl Child during COVID-19

Thursday, September 3, 2020
2:00 - 4:00 pm PKT

Our Speakers

- Ms. Waheeda Waheed**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Mr. Ghulam Ali**
Executive Member Rights Cell
for the Ministry of Human Rights
Government of Punjab
- Ms. Sybilia Saeed**
Head of Child Development
at the British Council Pakistan
- Ms. Shanza Samad**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Mariam Javed**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA

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Webinar

Trends of Gender based Violence amidst Covid-19 in Pakistan State and Civil Society Response: Successes and Challenges

Thursday, August 27, 2020 | 2:00 - 4:00PM

OUR SPEAKERS

- Ms. Ambreen Malik**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Rukshanda Naz**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Rabeeha Kadi**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Shaista Junaid**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Ms. Madeeha Waheed**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA

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Webinar

Community Resilience, Mental Health & COVID 19

Thursday, August 20th
2:00 - 4:00PM

OUR SPEAKERS

- Dr. Ail Madeeh Hashmi**
Psychiatrist
- Dr. Rubeeha Kidwai**
Clinical Psychologist
- Sumbal Gillani**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Fouzia Yasmin**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA
- Moderator: Meerab Lodhi**
Senior Program Officer
UNFPA

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