



The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences  
Ms. Dubravka Šimonović

## Central Union for Child Welfare wishes to answer the following questions for the UN Special Rapporteur's Corona survey, in particular, from the point of view of domestic violence:

*Central Union for Child Welfare, founded in 1937, is a central organization in Finland, that works as an active and uniting force in matters relating to children's rights on a national and European level. The CUCW aims for a situation where children's needs are a priority in decision-making and children's rights are implemented in full. The mission of the CUCW is to develop child welfare and to promote cooperation between non-governmental organisations, municipalities and state authorities. The CUCW has 96 organisational members and 38 municipal members.*

- 1. To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis.**

Central Union for Child Welfare is concerned about the increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is indicated by current data on the increase in police home alerts and the concomitant reduction in suspicions of child abuse. In comparison with last year, police home alerts have increased by 30 percent during the lock down (March 16 - June 7, 2020). Home alerts related to domestic violence have increased by 10 percent. During the same period, amount of cases on child abuse that came to the attention of the police, have decreased 45 percent.<sup>1</sup>

There have also been fewer reports of violence against children in child protection, whereas the causes of interpersonal violence have been rising.<sup>2</sup> The lower numbers of victims seeking shelters from domestic violence may also indicate the hidden distress, even though the number of customers in shelters has grown steadily during the previous years.

- 7. What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health.**

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.poliisi.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/intermin/embeds/poliisiwwwstructure/90801\\_Korona\\_rikollisuus\\_vko23\\_2020.pdf?eed109e3790bd888](https://www.poliisi.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/intermin/embeds/poliisiwwwstructure/90801_Korona_rikollisuus_vko23_2020.pdf?eed109e3790bd888)

<sup>2</sup> In Helsinki, for example, child protection reports related to violence against children decreased by 60 percent, and as the lock down progressed, the reasons behind child protection reports related to violence between spouses and home conditions increased. (Presentation by Salla Nummikoski, Director of Child Welfare in Helsinki, at the Child Welfare in Emergency Webinar on 14 May 2020.)

Central Union for Child Welfare used a survey to find out how the services for children and families have been implemented in municipalities during the lock down. 29 municipalities responded to the survey in April 2020. All major cities, provinces, and a few smaller municipalities from across the country were included.

The survey revealed that in many municipalities a policy was outlined to limit inspection and client work in child and maternity health clinics to children under 2 years of age. This policy carries the risk of not identifying children and families in need at a sufficiently early stage. At worst, the situation leads to neglect of young children and increased risk of unrevealed abuse. Concerns about the unrecognized need for support are currently greater than concerns about the adequacy of services.

According to a recent study by the National Institute for Health and Welfare, there have been 10 to 40 percent fewer maternity and child health clinic visits than in 2019.<sup>3</sup> In different regions many different solutions were applied when organizing child and maternity health clinics, school health care and family center services. Those working in different services raised concerns about the situation of children, young people and parents. Following observations on the increase in family distress have emerged: family interaction problems, parenting challenges and relationship conflicts and the chaos of everyday life. Those working in the services were concerned about the increase in substance abuse, mental health problems and domestic violence between spouses. These problems were found to have remained invisible, as the encounter of families in early childhood education, schools and other services had decreased, and assessments on the need for support could no longer be made. According to the study, the dismantling of maternity and child health clinics and school health care services began too early, unnecessarily widely and regardless of the situation in the area. There was an overkill on the part of both the service provider and the customers. Elsewhere in the country, service provision was reduced even more than in Southern district (Uusimaa), where the epidemic situation was worst.

There have been strong signals that much of the need support was unrevealed. Many services were canceled by families on their own initiative, especially in the early stages of problem development. Families took guidance to stay at home seriously, and at worst, it meant no seeking for help, even in situations where it was seriously needed. There is a risk that mild problems accumulate into bigger risks that will later on need broader service entities. These signals include, for example, a decrease in the number of child protection notifications and an increase in the number of home alerts made by police.

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<sup>3</sup> Hietanen-Peltola, M.; Vaara, S.; Hakulinen, T.; Hastrup, A. (2020): Basic services for children, young people and families in the spring of 2020: Results from the data collection of the school health care network and the family center network.

[http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/140127/TY%c3%962020\\_026\\_Lasten%20nuorten%20ja%20perheiden%20peruspalvelut%20koronakev%c3%a4%c3%a4n%c3%a4%202020\\_s.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y](http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/140127/TY%c3%962020_026_Lasten%20nuorten%20ja%20perheiden%20peruspalvelut%20koronakev%c3%a4%c3%a4n%c3%a4%202020_s.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y)

**8. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns.**

The main obstacle to the prevention of domestic violence during the lock down has been the reduction of the provision of preventive services (for example, child and maturity health clinics and school health care). The need for support did not come to the attention of the authorities in time.

**11. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above.**

The financing of NGO services is not in danger now, but the future after pandemic is very worrying. The financial situation of local authorities, who pay for some of the work, is bad – there are lots of cuts of costs ahead. Also, the income of Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations has decreased significantly, and because of that there will be less grants to NGOs, both for the ongoing work and especially for new projects.

We are also lobbying to remind the authorities the NGO's need to be included in the plans and compensations as well as having a role in exiting the pandemic time. 20 NGOs sent a joint letter to the government about this, demanding that resources are also allocated to NGO work.

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Central Union for Child Welfare