

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.

The government has revealed that its welfare hotline saw a 57 percent spike in calls since the nation's movement restrictions began in mid-March, although it has maintained that not all these calls were to do with domestic violence – financial and marital problems were also aired. The Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) reported a 44.4 percent increase in calls and enquiries between February and March.

2. Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The non-governmental organisations mostly have extended their helpline operation hours. However, the government had initially suspended the crisis hotline when the lockdown began, reversing the decision after widespread criticism. Throughout the restriction movement order, There are up to 9 hotlines available including Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Telenisa, BeFriends KL, Women's Centre for Change (WCC), Talian Kasih, Malaysian Emergency Response Service (MERS), Talian Sokongan Psikologi KKM/MERCY/WAO, and SOLS Health.

3. Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence?

Yes, they have the right to immediately leave the house and make a police report at the nearest police station. However, in practice victims faced difficulties to reach out for help. Some victims might not have the transportation to drive to their nearest police station, especially cases in the remote area of Sabah.

4. Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

Shelters are open and available. However, for NGOs that provide shelter, they are at full capacity during this pandemic. The Department of Social Welfare also provides shelters during this pandemic but their capacity is not known or reported. Some shelters have also closed their doors due to the possibilities for potential clusters.

5. Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Since the courts were not operating in the early stage of restriction movement order, the protection orders are limited to no availability.

6. What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

Malaysia moved into Restriction Movement Order starting 18 March 2020, but not until in early May that the Syariah Courts for certain states started to partially operate, the court only took on trials regarding Fasakh cases involving domestic violence. In this unprecedented time, many women are struggling with solving disputes on the execution of visitation rights and custody orders. Also, women are facing difficulties solving disputes on maintenance arrears since the courts are not fully operating.

Only recently, when the government announced Recovery Movement Control Order on 10th of June 2020, has the courts started to fully operate.

During the earlier stage of restriction movements order, only Emergency Protection Order (EPO) issued by welfare officers were available. Court issued Interim Protection Order (IPO) was not available.

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.

Due to the focus on treating patients with Covid-19, many monthly appointments and checkups have been postponed. The priorities are given to pregnancy cases, cancer and Covid-19 patients. Services by The National Population and Family Development Board were stopped for a while and later on resumed when pressured by women NGOs.

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

Reaching out to victims is tougher due to restrictive measures. Being confined in the same house with the abuser and having to spend the time around the abuser being observed and controlled made it very hard for victims to reach out to get help. Difficulties to leave home especially for those in rural areas.

9. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments.

The government should recognize domestic violence helplines as an essential service. Providing services for domestic violence cases, i.e: opening more shelters for domestic violence victims, announce a proper SOP for domestic violence cases and allocating sources and manpower for victims.

10. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRIs or equality bodies.

Due to the political changes in Malaysia, access to negotiate good policies and practices is limited to certain NGOs only. Furthermore, due to the same reason, public messaging did not go far enough or started early enough to outreach women and girls who are potentially vulnerable. All women's NGOs extended their operation hours and days. Pushed the government to establish a SOP for domestic violence during our Restriction Movement Order (RMO). Pushed for IPO and EPO to be available for victims during the RMO.

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.