Call for Submissions: COVID-19 & the Increase of Domestic Violence Against Women – UN SR VAW

Deadline: June 30, 2020

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, is following closely the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's right to a life free from violence. As she warned in a recent [statement](https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2FEN%2FNewsEvents%2FPages%2FDisplayNews.aspx%3FNewsID%3D25749%26LangID%3DE&data=02%7C01%7CHennes_Doltze%40can.salvationarmy.org%7Cfb1ffd58649143049a2008d7e1465da8%7C6d08a372d98a49f380efca826293a473%7C1%7C0%7C637225564639704362&sdata=%2FCtS1RAuOWyfmIMduYDfR2BDBs%2FmI%2BUgXxPvDzfKLDo%3D&reserved=0) in 27 March 2020, the efforts to deal with the current health crisis may lead to an increase in domestic violence against women.

As initial police and hotline reports suggest, domestic violence has already surged in many countries, as measures imposing isolation compel a number of women to be kept at home under the same roof with perpetrators, thus exacerbating women's vulnerability to domestic violence, including femicides. The risk is aggravated by fewer police interventions; the closure of courts and limited access to justice; the closure of shelters and services for victims, and reduced access to reproductive health services.

Special Rapporteur on violence against women wishes to receive all relevant information on the increase of gender-based violence against women and domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic from civil society, States, National Human Rights Institutions, international organisations, academia and other stakeholders on the following issues:

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.

*In Manitoba there has been a drastic decrease in the amount of women accessing shelter and a decrease in the number of crisis calls. We are starting to see an increase the first week of May but only in Winnipeg. The rest of the province is still significantly below average for intakes and calls. No real changes at the beginning of June. With the potential for increased housing evictions we feel that shelters may see an increase when that starts. Manitoba has had 2 domestic violence murders since COVID lockdown.*

1. Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? *Yes, the crisis line is operated by the provincial government and a caller is directed to the closest DV shelter.*
2. Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? *NO – steep decrease in calls and as of June 1st there is only a slight increase but still not back to the levels pre-COVID.*
3. Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence? *YES, except for women who are living on a federal aboriginal reserve as most reserves have locked down, meaning no one in or out. The reserves are working with a number of groups now to allow women to leave if they are in an abusive situation.*
4. Are shelters open and available? *YES*
5. Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity? *First step would be to refer and transport a woman to a shelter with openings, if all shelters are full then we would access hotels to take women or possibly Homeless Shelters. It is not an issue in Manitoba*
6. Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? “*Yes. Courts are still taking Protection Orders. The courts remain open in this regard. However, how clients find their way to the court (accessibility), is different now. But once they get to court and say they are there for a Protection Order, they will have access to a JJP. Applications to set aside Protection Orders have become more restricted procedurally than they were before covid-19”*
7. What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

*“The general population's access to justice (A2J) has been impacted. I cannot say that A2J for women in general or A2J for women who have experienced domestic violence in particular has been impacted more than others without some data.*

*However, by applying trauma informed law, I can venture that women who have experienced trauma may be impacted with these restrictions much more strenuousness than the general population. This in turn can lead to much harsher repercussions in their A2J endeavors. But this is an anecdotal observation based on my professional experience and my adherence to trauma informed law.*

*I further acknowledge, that the courts in Manitoba have worked diligently at ensuring that important fields of the law remain as open as possible. Accessibility in all domains of law has been hindered, however the courts are prioritizing issues where violence is a factor.  That includes Protection Orders and emergent cases in family law (i.e. there are safety concerns for the children or the parties). It also includes criminal law and child protection law.”  – the legal information came from the lawyer for A Women’s Place in Winnipeg.*

1. 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. *– I have not been able to get someone to give me accurate information for your question. Most health services in the province have been restricted to some degree but what was closed have started to open up, I’m sorry I do not have specifics.*
2. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns. *Lack of transportation all across the province. Surprising complication: Women do not want to abide by the COVID 19 safe practices in shelter and often leave shelter shortly after arriving or will not go to the shelter once they learn they may have to self isolate or be tested if they are showing symptoms. Another situation reported from several shelters is that the women coming in did not believe that the pandemic was real. The province locked down travel to north of the 53rd parallel, in an attempt to keep the virus from moving north, which impacted women’s ability to travel but DV situations were allowed to travel. Aboriginal reserves all locked down, if someone left then they would not be allowed to return until they proved they self-isolated for 14 days.*
3. 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. *Providing timely information to the media and getting information out to everyone quickly would have helped. Declaring shelters an essential service would have let people know that they were open. Even if they had of advertised that shelters were considered critical service and open and told women they could go to DV shelters would have helped.*
4. 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. *Having emergency plans in place for pandemics would help.*
5. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above.

All submissions should be sent to vaw@ohchr.org as soon as possible, and will be received until **30 June 2020**. You are kindly requested to provide your submissions in English, French or Spanish. Kindly indicate if you DO NOT wish your submission to be made publicly available.