**Call for submissions: COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence against women**

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://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25749&LangID=E) 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.

The 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 since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

{In Singapore, it has set up a system which at all times as well as during this pandemic, first contact of victims of domestic violence is the police or family service centre As such, they would turn to the Social Workers in the family service centres for help first when their Social Workers will call us for availability of room space in the Shelters

As such, at our Crisis Shelter, we receive referrals from the police or/and social service centres to provide accommodation and related services for women and their children who need a safe place to go to when faced with abusive situation at home. .

In March and April this year, our calls for enquiry for bed space doubled but the referrals were not all about violence against women. We also received calls for referrals on homelessness (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and foreign domestic helpers who were abused in the household of the employers.

1. 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?

Yes, helplines are available. It was reported in the media that there was an increase in the number of calls regarding family violence.

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

They could leave their home and seek alternative shelter. There have been cases being referred and placed in our shelter during this pandemic.

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

Yes, shelters are open and available. The Covid-19 situation presents us with a very dynamic situation, so there are many changes made in the Shelters to create a safer space for women and their children staying with us. As of 25 April 2020, it was mandated that women who are in our Shelter and going out to work in the essential services move out of our Shelters to stay in vacant rental units provided by Housing Development Board.. The rational being that the workforce who are in essential services are more vulnerable to being in contact with Covid-19 victims and might bring in the virus to the Shelters. So that would free up space for new referrals of women who are not working and their children facing family violence.

Ref: The Straits Times, Singapore : 13 April 2020

“There is sufficient space in crisis shelters to house victims of violence, and there are contingency plans to ramp up capacity if necessary, to cope with the expected rise in domestic violence as circuit breaker measures are in force.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) said it is constantly monitoring the "utilisation of the capacity in each crisis shelter". "If necessary, MSF will activate contingency measures to provide alternative accommodation for family violence survivors."”

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

6. What are the impacts on women’s access to justice? Are courts open and providing

protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

Yes, the Family Justice Court is still open in the mornings from Monday to Friday for people applying for Personal Protection Orders.

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

Capacity of space in Shelters are reduced to maintain social distancing. The number Staff are separated into at least two teams and no crossing over is an issue in attending to all the relevant specialized needs.

1. 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.

Ref: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/national-care-hotline-now-open-manned-by-300-volunteers>

Family justice court leverages on Technology using video and teleconferencing in general to sustain access to justice. Only in urgent matters, attendance in court is allowed with limited number of lawyers/litigants and staggered hearings.

A 24-hour National Care Hotline has been set up to attend to all issues of individuals and families during the covid-19 pandemic. (Government initiative whilst enlisting collaboration of NGOs)

Family / domestic violence is included for professional counselling and referrals.

Alternative shelters such as vacant state-run rental units are being used for women who are already in shelters as the capacity is ‘reduced’. The reason for women being moved to alternative shelters is also as a safety measurement by reducing movements of these women who are working in essential services.

1. 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.

NGOs special family service centres and shelters remain opened during this time even though to maintain social distancing the capacity of shelters are reduced.

NGOs work In partnership with the GOs.

https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/national-care-hotline-now-open-manned-by-300-volunteers

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

In Singapore, just before the Circuit Breaker (another term for lockdown) was put in place, residents in the Shelter were informed earlier that there would be restrictions in their going out, and that they would not be able to see their children (for those who did not come with their children). The situation was presented to them and one of the women decided to go back to her matrimonial home where her two daughters were with her husband. She did not want to be separated from her daughters for too long. She took up a Personal Protection Order (PPO) against her husband and her hope was that with the PPO, he would not be physically abusive towards her and her youngest daughter. With that she felt, she could face the constant nagging by him.

In another case, this mother of 4 decided to go back to her matrimonial home where her abusive husband lives. She shared that he would get violent when he was drunk. With the circuit breaker, he would not be able to go out drinking with his friends, so she was confident that there would be no violence during the circuit breaker period. With a safety plan in place, she decided to go home with her children. And her feedback was that it was safer now that he could not go for his drink.

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.