

## COVID-19 AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



A silent pandemic other than that caused by the coronavirus has taken over many homes. This is the pandemic of domestic violence. One in three women has been a victim of violence in their lifetime. The worst is when it happens in your home, by your loved ones and continues constantly.

Violence against women remains a major global threat to public and women's health during emergencies. Violence against women is common, and intimate partner violence is the most common form. Every third woman in the world has experienced physical and / or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by another perpetrator. In most cases, it is violence from an intimate partner. Violence against women tends to increase during emergencies, including epidemics. The effect of violence on the health of women and their children is also significant.

Organizations that operate violence hotlines report a strong increase in alerts. The cases for which help is currently being sought are much more serious. Children who cannot stand them and their mothers are subjected to harassment, beatings and sexual abuse.

"In 2020, the problem with my ex-husband began. Whether the COVID crisis or something else provoked a terrible aggression in him, which he had not shown until now ", one of the victims told NOVA and added:" It so happened that he started a relationship with another woman and became aggressive towards me and the child ”.

"To be honest, I experienced sexual harassment. His words were in one of our scandals "do you want me to strip you naked and take you to your parents". There were other troubles as before, but that was the turning point when I decided I had to move out now because things were getting worse.

The child, I can't say it was affected. It didn't really understand what had happened just then, but it was detrimental to me. For the next few months, I just didn't know

where I was, what was happening to me. It was as if I were living in a nightmare. Everything was new to me. I didn't know where to go or what to do. How to save yourself. And all this against the background of the fact that I was unemployed. And without income ", the woman says.

The experience of Sofia is not a precedent. On the contrary, victims of domestic violence are invisible in most cases.

They are among us and very few of them dare to speak openly about the problem or seek help from institutions. And sometimes the consequences are fatal.

**Pinar Gultekin studied economics in Mugla, western Turkey.** After not picking up her phone for days, on July 16 this year, her family signaled that she had disappeared. Five days later, the half-burned body of the 27-year-old student was found. Her ex-boyfriend is accused of the crime. During the interrogations, the man admitted that he killed Pinar after a scandal between them, Deutsche Welle writes.

Killings of women in Turkey are not uncommon

He first strangled her and tried to burn her body in the woods, but when he failed, he stuffed the remains into a garbage can and flooded it with cement. At the same time, nothing foreshadowed such a tragic development. Moreover, both are from the more educated circles of Turkey - she is a girl from a good family, he - a successful manager of a restaurant in an Aegean resort, said "TAC".

### **Indulgent attitude on the part of the police and the court**

Protesters in Istanbul, Ankara, Mugla and other major cities in the country are determined to fight violence against women. Clashes between citizens and police even broke out in Izmir. In recent years, police have increasingly responded with violence against protests by organizations fighting violence against women, according to the Neue Zürcher Zeitung. On International Women's Day, March 8,



Violence against women is rarely the focus of the government-controlled Turkish media. Human rights activists say that despite laws against him, perpetrators of such crimes often enjoy leniency in the police and judiciary.

*protesters were sprayed with tear gas*

**How COVID-19 may increase the risk of violence against women**

Stress, difficulties with public safety nets and reduced access to services can increase the risk of violence against women. As social distancing measures are introduced and people are encouraged to stay at home, the risk of intimate partner violence is likely to be higher. For example: Women in abusive relationships and their children are more likely to be abused as family members spend more time in close contact and families face potential economic or job losses. Women may be less likely to come into contact with family members and friends who provide them with support and protection from violence. During a pandemic, women bear the brunt of household responsibilities in the family. The closure of schools further aggravates the situation and increases stress levels.

Termination of employment, including for women (many of whom are informal workers), will reduce access to basic necessities and services and increase stress on families with the potential to exacerbate conflict and violence. When resources are scarce, women may be at higher risk of becoming victims of economic abuse. Perpetrators of domestic violence can use measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 to justify exercising power and control over their partners, as well as further reducing their access to services, assistance and psychosocial support from formal and informal networks.

Violent practitioners may restrict access to necessities such as soap and hand sanitizer.

They can also exercise control by spreading false information about the disease and stigmatizing their partners.

Access to vital sexual and reproductive health services, including for women who have been abused, may be more restricted. Other services, such as hotlines, crisis centers, shelters, legal aid and protection services, may also be limited. This will further reduce access to the few sources of help that women suffering from domestic violence have access to.

The risks faced by women and their children during the current COVID-19 crisis cannot be ignored. Health systems play an important role in keeping services for women survivors of violence safe and accessible during the COVID-19 epidemic?

**We realize that COVID-19 is a huge burden on health systems and health professionals, but there are still things that can help mitigate the effects of violence on women and children during this time:**

👤 Everyone involved in the response to COVID-19 should be aware of and raise awareness of the potential impact that physical distancing, staying at home and other measures to deal with the pandemic can have on women who have been abused and their children.

👤 Healthcare workers, most of whom are women in many places, may be at risk of violence in their homes or workplaces. Violence in the workplace is a serious problem

that can be exacerbated when health systems are under stress. Managers of health



care facilities or administrators must draw up plans to ensure the safety of their employees. Those who fight COVID-19 on the front lines may be stigmatized, isolated, or socially excluded. There needs to be a plan to provide psychosocial support, non-results-based incentives, additional transport benefits and support for raising children.

## **What can help tackle violence against women during the fight against COVID-19**



We realize that COVID-19 is a huge burden on health systems and front-line health workers, yet there are things that can help mitigate the effects of violence on women and children during a pandemic:

- Governments and politicians must include basic services for tackling violence against women in their preparedness and response plans against COVID-19, and provide resources that are available in the context of social distancing measures.
- Healthcare facilities should have prepared information about the services offered at the local level (eg hotlines, shelters, crisis centers, counseling) for survivors of domestic violence, including working hours, contacts, whether the services are provided remotely, and refer to them. Healthcare professionals need to be aware of the health risks and consequences of domestic violence. They can help women who report experiencing violence by offering first-line support and appropriate medical treatment. First-line support includes empathetic and non-judgmental hearings, inquiring about victims' needs and concerns, respecting their experiences and feelings, increasing safety, and focusing on ways to support them.
- Humanitarian organizations should include services for women victims of violence and their children in their COVID-19 response plans and collect data on reported cases of domestic violence. Community members need to be made aware of the increased risk of domestic violence during a pandemic and the

need to communicate safely with women who have been abused. Have information on which places provide assistance to survivors of violence. It is important to make sure that it is safe to contact women when the perpetrator is at home. Women who are abused can seek support from friends and family, call a hotline or call local services for women who have experienced violence.

- They may also benefit from a safety plan in case the violence escalates. It may include a neighbor, friend or center where they can go if they need to leave their home immediately to ensure safety.

### **Tips for dealing with stress at home and actions to take if you or your family members are abused:**

👂 Keep in mind that social isolation, quarantine and distancing can affect your psychological well-being and that of your family.

👂 As much as possible, reduce sources of stress by:

- look for information from reliable sources and limit watching, reading and listening to news (1-2 times a day instead of every hour);
- seek support from relatives and friends by phone, e-mail, text messages, etc .;
- try as much as possible to maintain your normal daily routine by providing time for physical activity and sleep;
- do relaxation exercises (eg slow breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding exercises) to get rid of stressful thoughts and feelings;
- engage in activities that have helped you deal with difficult situations in the past.

👂 For women who are abused, it may be helpful to:

- turn to relatives and friends who can help them with practical help (for example, providing food or caring for children), including dealing with stress;
- to draw up a safety plan - theirs and that of their children, in case the violence becomes more intense. This includes having the telephone numbers of neighbors, friends and relatives they can turn to for help;
- to prepare basic documents, money, some personal belongings to take with them if they have to leave their home quickly; and have a plan on how to leave the home quickly and seek help (eg transport, location);
- prepare information on hotline numbers for violence against women, social workers, child protection services or the nearest police station, shelters or other available support services. Be discreet so that your partner or family members do not learn and you are safe.



**In many countries, the establishment of an emergency fund to combat domestic**



## violence in the context of a pandemic of COVID-19 has started.



In Bulgaria, the services for prevention and protection of women victims of violence are extremely insufficient in terms of number, capacity and are systematically underfunded. There are only 13 crisis centers that offer temporary shelter for the whole country. Half of the district cities do not have such a social service. For two million Sofia the center is only one - with eight seats. An average of 100 women and their children pass through it every year. These centers are now overcrowded and have increased pandemic management needs so

that they can meet emergency protection needs.

The fund will support victims of domestic violence and their children by supporting front-line organizations that provide legal, psychological and social services to victims of domestic violence, manage crisis centers for women and children, counseling centers and mobile services in the whole country.

### The fund will help with the following urgent needs:

- Newcomer testing for COVID-19
- Separation of premises for temporary quarantine before entering the Crisis Centers
- Protective clothing, personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, helmets) and disinfectants
- Medicines, vitamins, essential medical supplies
- Additional hours of work of psychologists and lawyers in the centers, due to the increase in the required help and the more severe cases that require immediate protection
- Temporary accommodation in a hotel in the absence of vacancies in the Crisis Centers
- Increase mobile services to reach small settlements
- Providing basic technical means for online consultations, as all services currently make consultations mainly remote
- Tablets and laptops for children placed in the services so that they can continue to study remotely
- Emergency humanitarian aid for women and their children - unemployed, without means of subsistence, do not receive alimony or have restrictive orders under the Domestic Violence Act
- Extra beds, installation of partitions and emergency retrofitting of premises
- Educational materials and games for the children of the women accommodated in the centers, who now do not have the opportunity to play much outside.

## **Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**

During the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michel Bachelet made a statement on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights globally (30 June 2020). ).

### **In it, she reveals and calls for the following:**

"... Our concerns are about the human rights associated with COVID-19, which continues to gain momentum - including the many countries with limited medical, social and economic capacity to cope with the effects of the pandemic. Six months after the first cases were discovered, it is clear that this epidemic threatens both peace and development and requires more, not less, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The pandemic must push us to take strong, transformative measures to strengthen the effective protection that human rights-based policies can provide by promoting public health, public confidence in official guidelines and greater social and economic sustainability. This situation urges us to lead on the basis of clarity, evidence and the principle of protecting the most vulnerable members of society and tackling the deep inequalities that accelerate the spread and impact of the pandemic. ”



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