The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women and Girls and COVID-19

Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and particularly domestic violence, has **INTENSIFIED**.

In **France**, reports of domestic violence have increased by **30%** since the lockdown on March 17.

In **Cyprus** and **Singapore** helplines have registered an increase in calls of **30%** and **33%**, respectively.

In **Argentina** emergency calls for domestic violence cases have increased by **25%** since the lockdown on March 20.

Increased cases of domestic violence and demand for emergency shelter have also been reported in **Canada**, **Germany**, **Spain**, **the United Kingdom** and the **United States**.

The surge in COVID-19 cases is straining even the most advanced and best-resourced health systems to the breaking point, including those at the front line in violence response.

National responses to COVID-19 must include:

- **Services to address violence against women and girls**, including increased resources to support shelters, hotlines and online counselling. These essential services should be expanded and adapted to the crisis context to ensure survivors’ access to support.

- **Psychosocial support** for women and girls affected by the outbreak, gender-based violence survivors, frontline health workers and other frontline social support staff must be prioritized.

- **A strong message from law enforcement that impunity will not be tolerated**. Police and Justice actors must ensure that incidents of VAWG are given high priority and care must be taken to address the manifestations of violence emerging in the context of COVID-19.

The global cost of violence against women had previously been estimated at approximately **US$1.5 trillion**. That figure can only be rising as violence increases now, and continues in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

The number is likely to **INCREASE** as security, health, and money worries heighten tensions and strains are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.

Globally, **243 million** women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

Violence against women and girls is pervasive but at the same time widely under-reported. Less than **40%** of women who experience violence report these crimes or seek help of any sort.

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As stay-at-home orders expand to contain the spread of the virus, women with violent partners increasingly find themselves isolated from the people and resources that can help them.

Domestic violence shelters are reaching capacity, or unable to take new victims due to lockdown and social distancing measures. In other cases, they are being re-purposed to serve as health centers.

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