Violence Against Women and their children in the context of COVID-19
What the Health Sector/System Can Do

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Why does it matter?

- Globally, 1 in 3 women have experienced lifetime physical and/or sexual violence.
- Most common form of violence against women is intimate partner violence.
- Health consequences are substantial (physical, mental, reproductive, sexual etc).
Why does it matter?

- In the case of COVID-19, isolation and physical distancing measures have a particularly acute impact on women and their children experiencing family violence.

- Risk factors (e.g. stress, economic worries, alcohol) increase, while protective factors (e.g. social support, access to protection services) decrease.

Violence against women tends to **increase** during every type of emergency, **including epidemics**.
What can the health sector do?

1. **Government and policy makers:** include essential services to address violence against women in preparedness and response plans for COVID-19, fund them, and identify ways to make them accessible in the context of physical distancing measures.

2. **Health facilities:** identify and provide information about services available locally for survivors, including opening hours, contact details, and whether services can be offered remotely, and establish/update referral linkages.

3. **Health providers:** be aware of the risks for increased VAW during this time, identify survivors of violence and offering first-line support and relevant medical treatment.

4. **Humanitarian response organizations** need to include services for women subjected to violence and their children in their COVID-19 response plans and gather data on reported cases of VAW;
Examples of action in countries

1. Framing VAWC services as essential services that must continue during the COVID19 response

2. Strengthening online service delivery – including mHealth and telehealth

3. Trialing new emergency alert systems e.g. in pharmacies, supermarkets etc.

4. Addressing risk factors of violence

5. Strengthening information and mobilizing communities
Messages for providers

• Know the risks and consequences of violence in the context of COVID19 and how to identify women and children subject to violence

• Provide first line support and appropriate medical treatment

• Consider mental health assessment and care
Messages for survivors

• Be aware that social isolation, quarantine, and distancing can affect you and your family’s psychological well-being. Violence is never acceptable.

• As much as possible, consider:
   Seeking information from reliable sources and reducing the time spent consuming news.
   Seeking support from family and friends via phone, email, text, etc.
   Trying to maintain daily routines and make time for physical activity and sleep.
   Using relaxation exercises (e.g. slow breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding exercises) to relieve stressful thoughts and feelings.
   Engaging in activities that in the past have helped with managing adversity.
   Developing a safety plan for their and their children’s safety in case the violence gets worse.
   Collecting information on support mechanisms (e.g. hotlines, shelters, contact points) - be discreet so that your partner or family members do not find this information.
Messages for communities

• Be aware of the increased risk of violence against women during this pandemic and that violence is never justified.
• Reach out, keep in touch and support women and their children at risk of violence
• Be aware of the risks i.e. ensure that it is safe to connect with survivors when the abuser is present in the home.
• Make sure you have information about where help for survivors is.
#HealthyAtHome
Messages and resources for parents

1. One-on-one time
2. Keeping it positive
3. Structure up
4. Bad behaviour
5. Keeping calm and managing stress
6. Talking about COVID19
Additional resources

**Violence against women:**

- Violence against women remains a major threat to global public health and women’s rights.
- Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence.
- Women who are displaced, deprived of liberty, living without parental care, living on the street, and children who are internally displaced are particularly vulnerable.
- COVID-19 can exacerbate risks of violence for women.
- The health impacts of violence, particularly intimate partner/domestic violence, on women and their children, particularly women with disabilities, must be considered.
- Reproductive health, including contraception and abortion services, must be available and accessible.

**COVID-19 and violence against women:**

What the health sector/system can do:

- Violence against women is a major threat to global public health and women’s rights.
- Women bear the brunt of increased care work during this pandemic.
- School closures further exacerbate this burden and place more stress on them.
- Violence against women can result in injuries and serious physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems, including sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and chronic conditions, as well as threatened or interrupted pregnancies.
- Violence against women can increase the risk of child abuse and neglect.
- Women may have limited access to health care, food, and shelter.
- Women may have limited access to essential services such as hotlines, crisis centers, shelters, legal aid, and protection services.

**Child maltreatment guidelines:**

It is important to integrate age appropriate and gender sensitive measures to protect all children from violence, neglect, and abuse.

Working with and supporting governments, our collective response must include:

- Maintaining essential services, including health and social welfare services, including mental health and psychosocial support.
- Providing child protection services and workers with the necessary resources.
- Integrating age appropriate and gender sensitive measures to protect all children from violence, neglect, and abuse.
- Ensuring social protection and health during emergencies.

Governments have a central role to play. They must ensure that COVID-19 prevention and response plans integrate age appropriate and gender sensitive measures to protect all children from violence, neglect, and abuse.

We must act now. Together, we call on governments, the international community and leaders in every sector to urgently respond with a united effort to protect children from the heightened risk of violence, neglect, and abuse.