

COVID-19 and domestic violence against women and girls

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With 90 countries in lockdown, four billion people are now sheltering at home from the global contagion of COVID-19. It's a protective measure, but it brings another deadly danger. We see a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women and girls. The COVID-19 pandemic is causing untold human suffering and is likely to heighten gender-based inequalities around the world. COVID-19 pandemic has changed our daily routines, has altered entire systems of living and working that we had assumed were indispensable to modern society.

As more countries report infection and lockdown, more domestic violence helplines and shelters across the world are reporting rising calls for help. Governments all over the world are struggling to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. While some voices have flagged the impacts on women, gender concerns are not yet shaping the decisions that mainly male leaders are making, we are lucky in Uganda our National task force has been fully fringed by women and men which is not common with other countries.

This has created domestic violence against women and girls, Gender violence, including physical and sexual abuse, is widely used to intimidate, oppress, silence and subjugate girls, women, disabled and the most marginalizes people across the globe. It devastates those who are targeted and destroys the social fabric of families, communities and societies. In short, gender violence is one of the most significant barriers to women, girls and marginalized indigenous people in accessing their human rights. This include increase in rape, torture, physical fights, child marriages, unwanted pregnancies, denial ones right to medication access, Child marriage is a complex issue rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are somehow inferior to boys. These harmful gender norms also affect women's and men's vulnerability to infection, exposure, and treatment responses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic, and government measures to contain the spread of the virus, will be most devastating for those who depend on daily informal economic activities for their livelihood. Those who cannot isolate themselves, including slum-dwellers and those living in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, will also be disproportionately affected. In Uganda we have witnessed the presidential directive through office of the prime minister to offer relief aid to over 1.5M people in Kampala and Wakiso district for families that were depending on a daily income or less than a dollar per day, of which most of this population are women and Girls.

We need to fight the crisis, prepare for recovery and move towards fundamental reform. As noted from some social media updates, 'periods don't pause for pandemics'. This therefore means that the community work and efforts to ensure that the menstrual health needs of women, girls and all people who menstruate are not compromised has become even more critical. And yet we are not sure how long the pandemic will last, or what the long-term impact will be. We do know that we need to work together as a collective to make sure that girls at risk of child marriage and married girls don't get left behind. Please remember to pray for those who have succumbed to death due to COVID19 pandemic, their relatives and all health workers that have sacrificed and put their lives at risk to protect and save humanity.

Lets check on our neighbours Neighbours helping neighbours StayHome StaySafe BeSafe: by taking precautions BeSmart: By staying informed, BeKind: By supporting each other