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.

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

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.

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.

87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. The majority of these killings were committed by an intimate partner or family member of the victim.

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.
- 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.
- 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.

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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