

Forum: UN Women Council

Issue #UW-01: Instituting legal protection from the rise of domestic, sexual, and economic violence due to COVID-19

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Introduction

The UN Women Council is an organization that aims to deliver policies and programmes that uphold and protect women's human rights. It is dedicated to the empowerment of women and achieving gender equality. The global pandemic of covid-19 has created a multitude of problems for everyone in the world. Some problems that might go unnoticed are the rise of domestic, sexual, and economic violence. Due to this the UN Women Council has the objective of instituting legal protections to solve this issue. Delegates have the responsibility to come up with solutions that lead to the resolution of this issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Domestic Violence

According to the United Nations, Domestic Violence is “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner” (United Nations, 2022). This behavior may include various types of abuse to threaten and influence another person. Domestic Violence can occur to anyone of any gender, religion, age, race, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, etc. It typically includes an abuser that controls and exerts power toward a victim. It can have various natures, for example: sexual, economic, mental or physical.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence entails that someone manipulates or forces another person into unwanted sexual activity without the person's consent. Sexual violence can happen to anyone regardless of gender, age, race, sexual orientation, etc. Those that force or manipulate a victim are referred to as sexual abusers.

Economic Violence

Economic violence refers to when an individual or a group of individuals abuse their power over economically disadvantaged individuals. This type of violence might present itself in a variety of situations. In the case of a work environment, it might refer to undocumented workers being underpaid. In domestic cases, it might refer to spouses. Economic violence may also include any action or behavior that leads to the economic harm of an individual.

Disaster-related instability

A disaster or crisis includes human distress and can cause an increase in violence in both the short and long term. The trauma experienced during a crisis can lead to mental distress. This includes depression, PTSD, anxiety, etc. During a crisis of mental distress, anger can be expressed inwardly, through self-directed violence, or might be expressed outwardly, in the case of interpersonal violence.

Issue Overview

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can have many shapes and forms. It is often difficult for a victim trapped in this situation to recognize the problem. This is caused by certain cycles of violence that lead to the abuser manipulating the victim into believing that it is their fault. These behavioral problems will continue to occur and escalate through time unless they are intervened effectively.

The rise of domestic violence is related to the global pandemic for various reasons. The main reason is lockdowns. Many countries have had to lock down meaning people had to remain in their houses and were not allowed to leave with the objective to prevent the further spreading of the virus and rise in COVID-19 cases. The problem with this is that it limits a victim's possibilities of leaving a domestic violence situation.

Being constricted to one's home can lead to many factors that might trigger or worsen a situation of domestic violence. The isolation leads to prolonged and uninterrupted contact between an abuser and a victim. Meaning that outside support, for example, extended family, might not be reachable. This diminishes the possibilities for help and support.

On the other hand, the pandemic causes a lot of stress. Due to economical problems caused by the pandemic a person might develop economic stress that might lead to abusive behaviors. Another element to be considered is disaster-related instability. This refers to when a crisis or disaster leads to mental distress. Anger might be expressed inwardly or outwardly. In the case of it being expressed outwardly, this might include interpersonal violence. Therefore the Pandemic can cause a rise in domestic violence.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence refers to when a sexual abuser forces or manipulates a victim into unwanted and nonconsensual sexual activity. Sexual violence may present itself in various forms. Including but not limited to: rape or sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, child sexual assault, and intimate partner sexual assault.

Evidence has shown that there is a rise in the rates of sexual violence during states of emergency. For example, during Hurricane Katrina and its recovery, sexual assault increased by 45%. Due to the increase of stress, there is a rise of violence that leads to more sexual violence, this is related to the disaster-related instability previously discussed.

During the pandemic one population that has been at risk for sexual violence are minors. Data from a US National Sexual Assault Hotline showed that half of the calls were made by minors. It also showed that 80% of sexual assaults were perpetrated by someone known to the victim.

This supports that during lockdowns there is a great percentage of children that are not safe within their homes. The risk also increases in the case of children that may be living in foster care. Research has shown that people suffering from mental illness, physical disabilities or substance abuse are more vulnerable to sexual violence.

Economic Violence

Economic violence may be present in a variety of situations. It mainly refers to when an action or behavior leads to the economic harm of an individual. One form in which it may present itself is with a partner or spouse. In the case that one of the partners provides for the relationship economically, this might lead to a behavior of economical violence where one partner has control over the other. In the case of domestic violence, if the abuser also has economical control, it will make it extremely difficult for a victim to leave since they do not have the monetary resources.

Due to the fact that the pandemic has caused economic stress on various countries, people are having financial problems. This contributes to the rise in economic violence during this pandemic. The additional stress also contributes to the rise in domestic and sexual violence.

Historical Background

The global pandemic started in December 2019 and has continued until the present day. The first human cases of COVID-19 occurred in the People's Republic of China in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on January 30th 2020. People have been urged to wear face masks to prevent infection and the spread of the virus. As well there have been multiple vaccines developed during 2020 and various vaccination programs have been carried out during 2021 in most countries. The focus during 2021 was to end the pandemic through the distribution of vaccines. Up until January 20th 2022, "60.2% of the world population has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. 9.79 billion doses have been administered globally. 30.15 million are now administered each day. Only 9.4% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose" (Our World in Data, 2022). This global pandemic has led to many changes within people's everyday life. These changes have led to the rise of domestic, sexual, and economic violence. Even though the world is working to solve the pandemic, this rise in violence must be stopped with the implementation of legal protection to help and assist victims.

Latest Events

The main event that has set in motion the rise of domestic, sexual and economic violence has been the global pandemic of COVID-19. The most predominant reason behind the rise of domestic violence are lockdowns. The forced close proximity that it entails creates a difficult environment for victims of domestic abuse. In states of emergency, like a pandemic, there is a rise of sexual violence due to the stress it causes. Due to the pandemic there have been economic crises in various countries leading to the incrementation of economic violence. The global pandemic has set in motion various events that lead to the rise of domestic, sexual and economic violence.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Women (UN Women)

This is a UN organization that aims to deliver policies and programmes that uphold and protect women's human rights. The organization is dedicated to the empowerment of women and achieving gender equality. UN Women was created by The United Nations General Assembly in July of 2010. The current executive director of UN Women is Sima Bahous who became the third executive director on the 30th of September 2021.

COVAX and Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT)

COVAX is an organization led by WHO (World Health Organization), CEPI (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) and Gavi (a global Vaccine Alliance). The objective of COVAX is to provide vaccine equity by providing vaccines to countries that are not able to buy vaccines, most of which are located in Africa. The ACT is a global collaboration that contributes to accelerating the production of COVID-19 tools, such as: tests, vaccines and treatments. Both of these organizations are working toward the goal of providing resources to everyone in the world so that the Pandemic can be controlled.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
December 20th, 1993	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women
February 19th, 2004	General Assembly adopted resolution 58/147 on the Elimination of domestic violence against women
July 6th, 2006	In depth study on all forms of violence against women, Report of the Secretary-General
December 1st, 2019	First registered case of COVID-19
January 31st, 2020	WHO Issues Global Health Emergency
March 11th, 2020	WHO Declares COVID-19 a Pandemic
March 20th, 2020	Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing, Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW)

The DEVAW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. It establishes international laws that protect women and girls against sexual and gender-based violence. It recognizes that violence against women does not allow equality to be achieved. The DEVAW states that violence against women is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is

likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”(A/RES/48/104).

Elimination of Domestic violence against women (A/RES/58/147)

This resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the 19th of February 2004, recognizes that Domestic Violence is a human rights problem that has serious short and long-term implications. It calls for the elimination of violence within a family and condemns violence against women and girls. This resolution included various actions that countries should adopt to eliminate domestic violence. Including but not limited to: strengthening legislation, providing training to public officers, improving police response, and creating educational campaigns. (A/RES/58/147)

In-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1)

This is a report of the Secretary General published on July 6th 2006. It includes research on the context and causes, casual and risk factors, consequences and costs of violence against women. It also covers forms of violence against women that are under-documented. Concluding with promising practices and challenges for implementations of legal actions to decrease and fight violence against women.

Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2020/3)

This is a report of the Secretary General published on March 20th 2020. 171 governments from all around the world provided national reports with the objective of combining data and analysis globally. This report is based on an extensive examination of progress and obstacles in the rights of Women since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted in 1995.

Past Action

International Community

According to UN Women, “at least 158 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, and 141 have laws on sexual harassment in employment. However, even when laws exist, this does not mean they are always compliant with international standards and recommendations or are implemented and enforced” (UN Women 2021)

Possible Solutions

Support Organizations

It is a starting point to get victims out of their domestic violence situation, but what needs to be taken into account is what happens to these victims once they leave their abusers. One element that can contribute to solving the problem is creating organizations to help victims recover. This can include psychological, physical and/or economical help. These types of organizations can help victims that might not have the resources to leave their abusers.

Education

One important aspect of solving this issue is educating people on the problem. This should include an understanding of what domestic, sexual, and economical violence is. Educating people on certain behaviors that might go unseen but are actually very relevant to the violence. By helping people understand the problem it is making it easier for victims and people close to victims to be able to recognize the problem and offer help. It is also vital to make people aware of their options, for example: phone numbers they can call in case of an emergency, ways victims can reach out.

Helplines

There have been many helplines established in various countries. Some may be nationwide and others are specific to a region. A possible solution might be to establish a worldwide helpline managed and funded by the United Nations. This might provide a viable option for reaching out to victims that might reside in countries that do not have helplines of their own.

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