



14.04.2020

Smt Rekha Sharma,
Chairperson,
National Commission for Women,
New Delhi

RE: Urgent recommendations on addressing Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Rekhaji,

We are writing to you on behalf of **Aman: Global Voices for Peace in the Home**, a Network of over 146 women's organisations and individuals across 18 states in India, working on the issue of violence against women. We wish to bring to your urgent attention our concerns regarding domestic violence faced by women in these difficult lockdown times and are giving below our collective recommendations on how to respond to these concerns.

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic is not merely a public health issue, but one that has huge social, economic and psychological impacts on people, particularly women, with loss of livelihoods, reduced access to food, health and social services, increased burden of care work and stress in taking care of the needs of the family, and so on. The nature of isolation is also leading to mental health concerns and depression.

As a result of lockdown and quarantines that have pushed people into their homes, we are also witnessing an increase in the number of cases of abuse and domestic violence (DV) faced by women within their homes, and DV is estimated to have increased globally by almost 30%.

In these very difficult times, women and children are the most vulnerable as they have the least power with no coping mechanisms to address domestic violence. The National Commission for Women (NCW), which receives complaints from across the country, has recorded more than a twofold rise in gender-based violence. The complaints by women have risen from **116** in the first week of March (March 2- 8, 2020), to **257** in the last week of March (March 23-April 1, 2020). Complaints of sexual assault, rape or attempted rape have risen sharply from **2** to **13**, while cases of DV have increased from **30** to **69** over this comparative period. *(Please refer to Appendix 1 for first-hand information, as shared by network partners working in different states).*

In this context, we request that the Ministry of Women and Child Development urgently adopt necessary measures to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with human rights standards and upholding principles of equality and non-discrimination.

National Secretariat: Swayam, 9/2B Deodar Street, Kolkata 700075, Ph: 2486 3409/9830020030

Local coordinating members: **Breakthrough**, Plot 3, DDA Community Centre, Zamrudpur, New Delhi- 110048
Jagori, 114- B, Block B, Shivalik Colony, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi, Delhi 110017



As feminists, women's organisations and networks committed to feminist principles and human rights, we urge the Ministry of Women and Child Development to immediately issue guidelines to all state governments to adopt the following measures in the immediate and long term.

IMMEDIATE MEASURES

A. Institutional Support

1. Women's helpline numbers in all States like **181, 103, 1091 etc.** must be made functional and responsive to women's calls for help. States which do not have functional helpline numbers can activate **100** or any other number for this purpose.
2. All these helplines and available resources and support services for women facing violence must be publicized and disseminated widely through visual and print media, just like other COVID advisories are being disseminated. Survivors must know that they are not alone and that there are services available to help them.
3. Protection Officers (PO) across the country must be declared as emergency service workers and provided with necessary resources and power to provide women protection from violence with the help of the police and support services including access to shelter homes, medical assistance and make themselves accessible to the last woman in the district. PO's should be directed to record a Domestic Incident Report based on complaints made through the helplines.
4. Helplines and Protection Officers must be linked to ONE STOP CENTRES and organisations that can provide services including transport, shelter, protection from abuse, legal support, economic support, health services as well as specialized mental health counselling both for women and their children. OSC's should also increase their capacity to provide shelter to more women during this time. The government should treat this as part of the relief measures under the Disaster Management Act and ensure prompt and timely relief for victims of DV.
5. Women's organisations and other civil society groups, including SHGs providing services like counseling/legal aid/shelter and other similar services for victims/survivors of domestic violence must be provided with service passes to reach out to victims/survivors.
6. There is an urgent need to increase the available resources for NGOs that provide support and assistance to domestic violence survivors for shelter, counselling, and legal aid. Nirbhaya Funds may be allocated and utilized for this purpose.
7. In cases of severe domestic abuse during the lockdown, the police/PO can consider getting the perpetrators to move to an alternative space as applicable under the DV Act and ensure that the woman victim/survivor and her children are safe in their own home. Further, transport and shelter must be made available to women victims/survivors who wish to leave abusive homes.

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8. Shelter Homes (irrespective of the schemes they run on), must be authorized to provide shelter to any aggrieved women and their dependents affected by or escaping violence. The list of functional shelter homes must be shared widely.
9. In Kashmir Valley there are currently no shelter homes under PWDV Act. We would request that a designated temporary shelter which be created, which can be a hotel in Srinagar, where a woman can stay for as long as an alternate arrangement is made..
10. Frontline grassroots workers like ANMs, Anganwadi, village defence parties, village council development committee in autonomous districts (VCDC), village headman/women, Panchayats, Block Officers, ASHAs must be given special instructions, mobility, protection and service passes to report DV and extend immediate help to any aggrieved woman.
11. The Government must ensure availability of food for all survivors and their children who do not have the means to support themselves, when they approach the police for help.
12. The Government must issue special directives to destigmatise women with psycho-social difficulties and provide rehabilitation for women with psycho-social difficulties who have been abandoned by their partners/families
13. Trans women, migrant women, disabled women, are especially vulnerable groups with absolutely no access to support services. Special protocols must be developed and measures taken to provide support to them during this time.

B. Legal services

1. District Legal Services Authority (DLSAs) must be entrusted with special responsibility to continue with ongoing cases. This means women must have passage to mobile courts or ensure that their empaneled lawyers are able to reach out to women. There must be steady flow of funds to DLSAs to facilitate such processes.
2. A panel of lawyers who can provide legal support to women over the phone and information disseminated to women must be instituted.
3. The Police must be specially instructed to treat cases of Domestic Violence on a priority basis and they should not deny registration of any case. There must be immediate action when women approach the police station either over the phone or in person.

C. Health related services

1. Victims/survivors must also be supported to access reproductive and other health services during the lockdown particularly since they suffer injuries as a result of the violence they face. Ensuring women's timely access to necessary and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services during this crisis, such as maternal health services, safe abortion etc is critical.
2. Sanitary napkins must be made available for women as part of rations in vulnerable communities.

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D. Knowledge and Information Dissemination

1. All Advisories to combat COVID must include measures undertaken by government to address violence on women in this complex situation.
2. Social Welfare Departments must develop special advisories to prevent violence of any form on women and girls.
3. Government should strongly consider playing the Breakthrough “Bell Bajao” advertisement in all their regional government owned TV channels and radio stations and provide a Helpline number for women & girls to reach out to.
4. All data relating to domestic violence cases from the State helplines and OSCs must be made available publicly to enable shaping further responses.

E. Effective Coordination

1. Effective co-ordination between government services and NGOs on the ground must be facilitated so that women receive the best possible support services.

LONG TERM MEASURES

1. Protection for victim/survivors for job retention, proper compensation if services are discontinued and loans for women who are self-employed to restart businesses must be provided.
2. Pan India Helplines must be set up for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse.
3. Schools must be directed not to victimise children of survivors who may, due to the violence at home, not perform well in studies or have behavioural problems. Schools must be supportive and sensitive to these children.

We look forward to your intervention in this regard and are available to extend our support to strengthen the Government’s efforts to reach out to women and children facing domestic violence at this time. We hope to hear from you in this regard at the earliest.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of Aman,

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<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/covid-19-lockdown-spike-in-domestic-violence-says-ncw/article31238659.ece>

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