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Брила О.,

здобувач ступеня вищої освіти бакалавра
Національної академії внутрішніх справ
Консультант з мови: Василенко О.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND COVID19 MITIGATION MEASURES

Because Gender-Based Violence Against Women (GBVAW) is still happening every day, everywhere, UNODC is implementing several initiatives around the world in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, through trainings with police, reviewing legislative initiatives, promoting essential services for survivors, or coaching judges to improve criminal justice systems, to name a few.

About 1 in every 3 women worldwide has experienced sexual and other form of violence, and women are more likely than men to being killed by intimate partners or family members.

GBVAW consists of several types of abuse, including physical, sexual, physiological, and economic abuse, consequently harming families and communities on a socio-economic scale.

Women struggle accessing justice whether they are victims, witnesses, alleged offenders or prisoners, a true key challenge because of discriminatory criminal laws and procedures. This is also portrayed in the lack of gender diversity among criminal justice professionals and the presence of gender bias, highlighting the importance of developing methods to strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice responses to violence against women [1].

Violence against women is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography. This type of violence has far-reaching consequences, harming families and communities. Gender-based violence not only violates human rights but also hampers productivity, reduces human capital and undermines economic growth. Although rates of women exposed to violence vary from

one region to the other, statistics indicate that violence against women is a universal phenomenon and women are subjected to different forms of violence both within and outside their homes [2].

The gendered implications of COVID-19 for women's subsistence, workload and access to reproductive health services, among others, are likely to contribute to, or aggravate, GBVAW and its consequences. A report released by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in October 2020, based on interviews of more than 800 women from refugee, displaced and post conflict settings, living in 15 African countries, indicates that 73 per cent of women interviewed reported an increase in intimate partner violence, 51 per cent cited sexual violence and 32 per cent observed a growth in the levels of early and forced marriage during the pandemic [3].

A recent review by UNODC of available criminal justice data on homicide found that, in some countries there was no notable change in the number of gender-related killings of women and girls during COVID-19 related restrictive measures, while in others there was a decrease.

For example, the Chilean National Prosecutor's Office observed a reduction of intimate partner killings of women during the lockdown period.

One explanation for this reduction may lie in the fact that many of these killings occur when the woman leaves or threatens to leave the relationship, a situation that has been impossible during lockdown, and increasingly difficult or unlikely as the economic crisis deepens. Reduced levels of physical violence could be hiding increased levels of psychologic violence (that tends to be less visible and less reported) as aggressors do not need to use physical violence to ensure their power.

Greater dependency of women towards their abusers prevents women from leaving abusive partners. It should be noted that in humanitarian crisis settings and in the majority of contexts where IRC conducted safety audits, the worsening economic conditions were mentioned as a factor contributing to violence within the household and community. In any event, the number of gender related killings remained significant during the pandemic.

A recent review by UNODC of available criminal justice data found that the number of rape and sexual assault cases reported to authorities has decreased during COVID-19-related restrictive measures, suggesting a reduction in reporting violence to criminal justice institutions and/or a possible decrease in the number of incidents during COVID-19. It should be noted that often such a decrease has been followed by an increase of reported sexual violence to previous levels once confinement measures were relaxed. (UNODC (2020c)) The experience of some criminal justice practitioners confirms that confinement or movement restrictions may

decrease - de facto - certain forms of GBVAW, such as physical or sexual violence, committed by people who do not live with their victim.

It is important to note that levels of specific forms of GBVAW are not always captured by administrative data. This is true in particular for sexual violence in the domestic sphere and marital rape, crimes that even in non-emergency times are among the least reported to authorities. As one respondent in Uganda pointed out, this can be inferred from higher levels of unwanted and teenage pregnancies. According to this view, more men being at home in poverty due to unemployment has increased the rate of rape, leading to unwanted and teenage pregnancies. This is consistent with the WHO's indication that access to vital sexual and reproductive health services, including for women subjected to violence, will likely become more limited as a consequence of the pandemic. 53 In North East Nigeria, although there is a lack of specific data on the impact to COVID-19 on GBVAW, some research indicates an increase of this type of violence in all six geopolitical regions. As a result of multiple obstacles, reports received do not reflect changing dynamics of incidence as, for example, the indications of increase in marital rape incidence.

In addition, there are further risks of gender-based sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls who desperately look for ways to survive amidst the economic crisis. As the IRC states, in the context of humanitarian crisis settings in Africa, the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns on the ability to meet basic needs also forced women and girls to undertake more risky activities, such as venturing outside of refugee camps in search of firewood to sell, and created additional opportunities for men to sexually exploit women and girls in exchange for food, sanitary pads and other essential items [4].

As indicated by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the potential spread of COVID-19 in refugee and internally displaced people settings may exacerbate the already high risk of sexual violence in such situations, including increased intimate partner violence, potential of trafficking, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation, as quarantine and other physical distancing measures affect economic and livelihood activities and impede basic humanitarian service delivery. Among other cases, UN agencies have already expressed concern over increased risk of trafficking as a consequence of the pandemic, including in locations such as Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh where almost one million Rohingya refugees face acute vulnerability [5].

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Бринзя В.,

здобувач ступеня вищої освіти бакалавра
Національної академії внутрішніх справ
Консультант з мови: Гіпська Т.

CYBERSECURITY IN SINGAPORE

Singapore's cybersecurity strategy from 2016 identified 3 areas of development: building a sustainable infrastructure, creating a more secure digital space, dynamic development and strengthening international cooperation. The leitmotif of the document was the cybersecurity ecosystem, which is based on three pillars: government agencies, academia and industry, where the first violin, of course, is played by the government. The network of state profile institutions consists of CSA, the Cybersecurity Agency, which is part of the Prime Minister's Office and is managed by the Ministry of Communications and Information [1].

Singapore's 2018 Cyber Security Act obliges the Agency to prevent and respond to attacks. The NRF, the National Science Foundation, is an office of the Prime Minister's Office that focuses on capacity-building for research and development, and which sets the vector for research and