Technical Note: Interrelation between violence against women and violence against boys and girls

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This technical note shares important data derived from “Breaking the Cycle: Understanding and addressing the intersections of violence against children and violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean, [1] as well as a brief description of its implications in the context of COVID-19. Lastly, it contains several recommendations directed to organizations, governments, institutions and service providers in order to adapt and respond to the circumstances derived from the current health crisis.

• The international community has recognized violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) as human rights violations and public health concerns, with implications for the integral development, education and social integration of girls, boys and adolescents. [2,3]
• Violence against women and violence against boys, girls and adolescents often occur at home or within the family group and they are related to unequal power relationships within the family, to being exposed to violence from an early age, to harmful and violent masculinities, and to gender inequalities. [4]
• There are still some social norms, which contribute to condoning violence against women and violence against girls, boys and adolescents, namely: permissiveness of physical punishment; norms of masculinity based on control and violence; prioritizing family reputation over caring for people who suffer violence; and rejecting gender equality.
• Girls, boys and adolescents who live in homes affected by violence against women are more likely to suffer physical punishment than others are. [5]
• Evidence shows that gender equality and the promotion of equitable social norms are protective factors against both, violence against women and violence against boys, girls, and adolescents. [6]
• Individuals and families are often exposed to multiple forms of violence that can be difficult to address in isolation. [4]

IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

• Measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as quarantine and physical distancing may not just generate greater risk of violence against women, but also violence against girls, boys and adolescents.
• During confinement and its resulting consequences, stressful and conflictive situations could arise which could translate into an increase in violence, including physical punishment, neglect and an increased risk of sexual violence by an intimate partner, as well as violence of adults against boys, girls and adolescents.
• Measures like confinement and quarantine may hinder access to care and support services, as well as endanger the maintenance and continuity of such services, leaving women, girls, boys and adolescents more unprotected.
• It is important to take into account that the COVID-19 crisis can affect indigenous boys and girls, children in rural areas, afro-descendant children, institutionalized children or children without parental care, and boys and girls with disabilities in a differentiated manner. They may be left in
isolation, with their schooling interrupted and no access to protection services, which makes them more vulnerable to situations of poverty, child labor, sexual exploitation, child marriage and early unions, among other.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Provide and invest in services to prevent and respond to violence against women, girls, boys and adolescents, in their diversity. These must be considered essential services and must continue operating during the COVID-19 response.

- Include Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MAW), or Ministries for Women, and/or Ombudsperson Offices, social protection instances or systems for child protection in the discussions regarding the national response against COVID-19.

- Work closely with civil society organizations, women and human rights defense organizations and increase their funding so they are able to develop new modalities in order to prevent and provide care in case of violence against women, girls, boys and adolescents during the COVID-19 response and recovery.

- Develop messages and/or campaigns about where and how to get help and counselling, through the various channels and means available to diverse populations and contexts.

- Develop new modalities in order to provide services and attention to survivors in confinement settings, which guarantee their safety, thus strengthening neighborhood and community systems such as innovation resources and the use of technologies and other alternative and inclusive means.

In Argentina, women who are experiencing violence at home can go to a drugstore and ask for a “red mask” to raise the alert about their situation and ask for assistance.

Also in Argentina, a campaign called #LaOtraPandemia (The other pandemic) has been launched within the framework of the Spotlight initiative to raise awareness about gender violence.

In Costa Rica, the National Institute of Women launched the #NoEstásSola (You are not alone) campaign in collaboration with UN Women and UNFPA, in order to provide information to women about the diverse services available during the crisis.

In several countries in the region (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Peru, among others) attention services through phone lines have been reinforced and communication channels have increased, including SMS, WhatsApp and mobile apps.

In Ecuador, with the collaboration of UNICEF, a Hackathon (online contest) is being conducted in order to find the best talent to solve the challenges posed by COVID-19 and gender violence, and provide the best solutions.
- Activa support services for citizen well-being and mental health during the confinement as a way to prevent situations of violence and tackle risk factors, directed to parents, caretakers, etc. such as stress management techniques.
- Take advantage of confinement to promote communication campaigns with messages that can transform social gender norms regarding care issues, partner relationships free of violence and parenting free of violence.
- Develop awareness raising and information campaigns about the risks of cyber-violence and online sexual exploitation aimed at boys, girls and adolescents, as well as to parents and caretakers.

- Train health and other social support service staff on survivor identification and frontline support.

- Increase neighborhood, community and digital control to monitor, protect and support women, girls, boys and adolescents in situations of violence.

- Ensure cash support for women and girls who require access to phone/internet data to use all the mobile applications that are available concerning violence.

- Maintain central operations and health services to help survivors of violence, guaranteeing that they have the right to distance themselves from their aggressors, whether it is through a referral to a shelter or safe lodging, or through restraining orders against aggressors, even if mobility restrictions are in place.

- Prioritize and strengthen the funding for shelters/safe houses for women, girls, boys and adolescents who face a high risk of violence.

- Ensure the continuity of health services for a prompt quality attention and response to cases of sexual violence, such as the access to sexual and reproductive health services, emergency contraceptive methods and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
• Ensure the continuity of justice services, when mobility of judges and justice staff is compromised, through digital and remote mechanisms, especially when these services are needed to resolve disputes related to intimate partner violence, liquidation of assets, custody, alimony, child support, etc.

• Evaluate measures to reduce the risk of family separation in case of femicide, without leaving the children in confinement at home with their mother/stepmother’s murderer or in an institution. In addition, ensure continuous psychosocial support for the children of women victims of femicide, recognizing that during the quarantine, children might be more likely to witness or become additional victims of femicide.

• Avoid long-term separation between children and their families, encourage remote communication between families in cases of temporary separation, establish alternative, safe and acceptable care arrangements in the event of illness or death of a caregiver.

Other initiatives being carried out by governments, organizations and service providers in various parts of the world: ECLAC Mapping; Web UNICEF; Web UNFPA; Web PAHO/WHO; Web UN Women

References:

[1] Guedes A, Bott S, Understanding and addressing the intersections of violence against children and violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean, ONU Mujeres, OPS/OMS, UNFPA y UNICEF, 2019