

Government and policymakers must be prepared to address social issues such as violence against women affected by COVID-19 pandemic

May 5, 2020

It is important to reduce the risk of COVID-19 virus infection; it is also important to prepare and respond to social issues including violence against women as an additional consequence, raised by Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) in their brief paper "COVID-19 and the impact of violence against women".

According to the study, the reasons for the increasing rate of violence in the pandemic include: 1) all family

members living in confined housing due to extended quarantine periods; 2) social pressures due to social distancing and other businesses, and anxiety about health.

The brief paper also suggests strategies to reduce violence against women during COVID-19 pandemic conditions. According to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, government and policy makers must include preventive measures to address violence against women in COVID-19 response plans, and thereby identify strategies to address social distancing. Health supports



that can be accessible within each respective area need to be provided along with the contact person and address, and available time for health service centers. In remote areas, there should be prepared for the process how to connect with subordinate center and transfer the cases, including providing telephone service; safe-houses; consultation center and centers to accept the reports of sexual violence cases and consultation. Health practitioners should also be aware of the consequences and risks of violence against women.

The paper suggests that provision of medical care and first-line support can help women. First-line support is not an evaluation; it includes sympathetic listening to women's challenges; investigating women's concerns and needs; helping to document the survivors' feelings and experiences; and enhancing security and providing support to victims.

The organizations that provide humanitarian assistance need to include services for children and women in the COVID-19 response program, and the paper recommends that information relating to violence against women should be gathered and be made available to the public. Local people should also be informed about the potential

rise of violence against women during the pandemic, and it is necessary to provide contact information to survivors - where they can seek medical help and social services. Women who have experienced and survived domestic violence can also help their family members or friends with similar experiences, via phone hotlines or finding local services. The paper recommends that the relevant governments, policy makers, and humanitarian assistance providers should seriously consider the potential risks for violence against women in the pandemic, and provision of effective measures to prevent and address violence.

The study highlights violence against women during the COVID period per sector: increasing rate of domestic violence related to violence against women during the COVID period; increasing violence in the workplace in the health sector; increasing rate of exploitation of vulnerable workers such as migrant workers, domestic helpers, and sex workers; increasing violence against women in refugee and IDP camps; increasing violence of the armed forces and the increase of the government's security power. The paper was published by MIGS on April 23, 2020.

Shwe Lay

Existing laws and cultural norms perpetuate many discriminatory practices against women in Myanmar

April 14, 2020

Women's rights activists raised the fact that existing laws and culture are strengthening discriminatory practices against women in Myanmar – during the DVB Debate program "Do Women Have the Right to Decide?"

Lway Poe Ngeal, Women's Rights Activist and General Secretary of the Women's League of Burma (WLB), said "It is not true to say that Myanmar women are not being discriminated against. Many gender-based discriminations are happening against women, based on given laws and cultural settings."

According to her Ta'ang culture, women are not given the right to inherit; and it is men who have the right to inherit, so she said it is a kind of discrimination. She pointed out the weakness of the laws, even the country's main "2008 Constitution" which includes some discriminatory clauses. According to the study, at least one in five married women are experiencing violence. She highlighted that the fight against all deep-rooted discriminatory must continue, in order to

end all forms of gender-based discrimination.

Daw Hla Hla Yee, Director from Legal Clinic Myanmar, said "What I want to see is women to be brave for change. If we are not supporting each other, it will be difficult for us to make a decision. So, women, let's make a start to change by ourselves. We need to believe ourselves that we can do it."

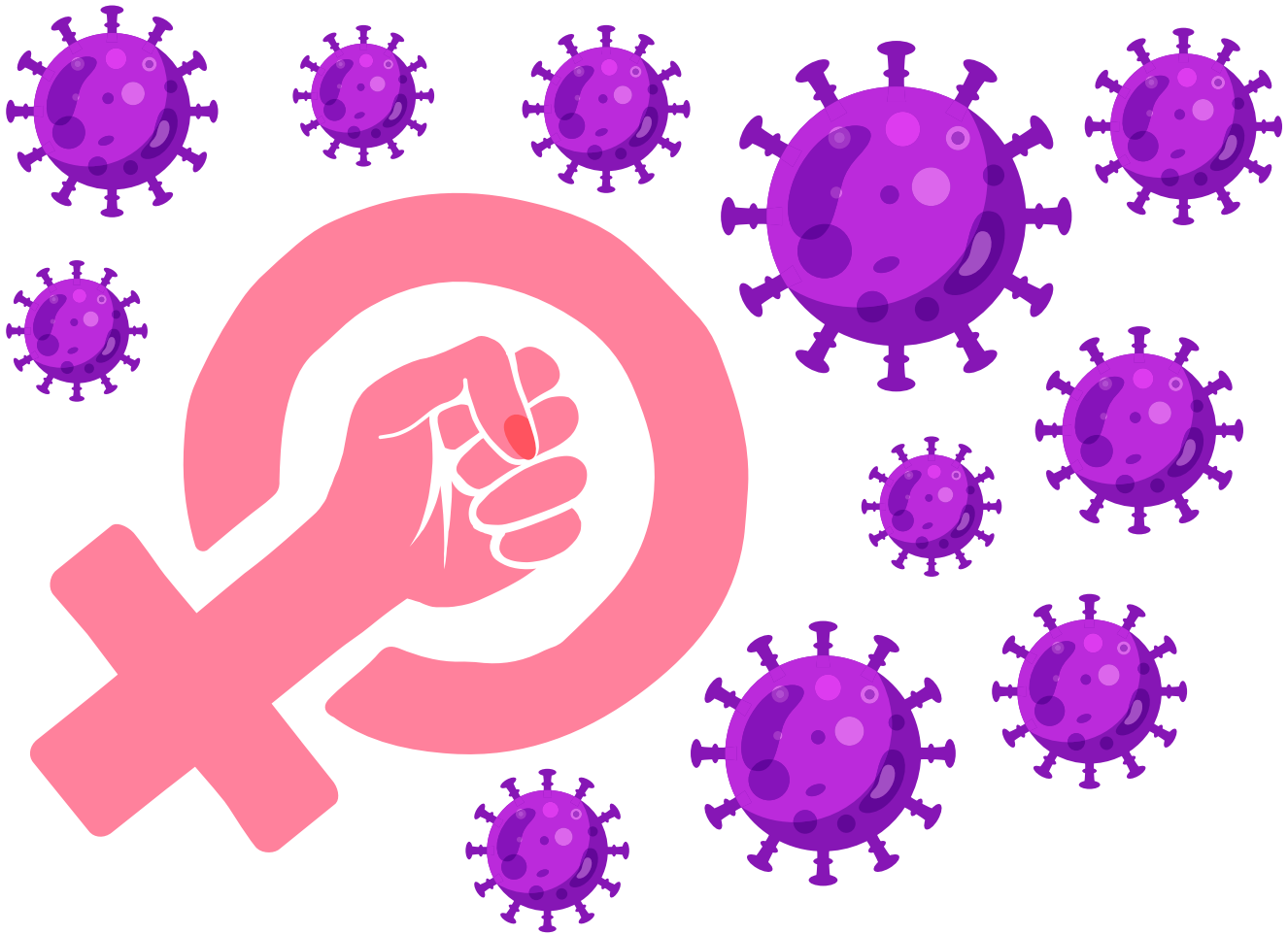
She said that women are not competing with men, just suggesting women also need to be involved in decision-making process. Unless women are involved in decision-making, then national development cannot occur.

Lway Poe Ngeal said, "We were growing up among the conflicts. Women are often victimized in the conflict. As a citizen, we women also want to be involved in solving these problems. We want to try our best for our country's development by being involved in different sectors. So we are saying women's contribution and efforts are also needed in the process of democratic state-building."

Shwe Lay

(Reference: <http://burmese.dvb.no/archives/382532>)

The newsletter is sponsored thanks to the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar Initiative funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) which offers funding to researchers and institutions to find solutions for global development challenges, and Global Affairs Canada. Neither organization necessarily shares or endorses any of the views, people or events presented in this publication. Please contact shweshwe.kyinhlaing@gmail.com for free subscription.



Corona Virus & Gender

April 15, 2020

This morning I read an article. In France, some women living in their homes for fear of Corona virus were violated by their husbands, and there is a reported 36% increase of domestic violence cases. It is quite shocking to see that while staying at home because of COVID-19, spouses are committing acts of domestic violence.

I wonder if the reason for the rise of domestic violence is concerned with gender norms accepted by society. The norms set for men and women in our society are different. Our society differently identifies gender specifications and roles. The division of roles are constructed based upon people's attitudes and gender stereotyping practices. Let's find out different perspectives towards women and men, the condition of Corona virus spread, and domestic violence issues.

In fact, the Corona virus is challenging all people, regardless of their skin color, sexual orientation. However, people are differently impacted as long as society is viewing men and women differently based on their gender. While everyone is afraid of infection; women either; then at the same time, they are threatened by the violence. Let's take a closer look at why that is so.

The first point I want to mention is related to the norm that women in our society should be able to do domestic chores; and women are responsible for the protection of the household. Domestic affairs only apply to women. This gender stereotype often sets the standard of a “good wife”. How does this view affect women in times of such a pandemic? Let's see.

In this moment, the threat of the virus has disrupted daily activities including business activities and jobs; people are facing problems and there is social chaos. Housewives' biggest concern at this moment is the rising price of commodities at markets and overall inflation. Even they have a hard condition to go to the market. In such situations, the psychological stress may be worse for women who are considered to be the ‘most responsible for household affairs’ in the family.

Due to the norm that women are responsible for managing households' chores, it makes them increase more anxiety to prepare for daily meals for their family. We have found that the emotional stress of housewives is higher than their husbands as women are afraid of failing their duties for their families.

Although men may have anxiety about not being able to work outside the home and earn income, women also have similar anxiety. Plus, housewives have more stress about how to arrange family's daily meals, how to maintain family life, and how to save on household expenses.

In addition to emotional distress, the second factor is the burden of household duties. According to gendered norms, women are already assigned to do household tasks. There are many married women who spend all day doing households tasks from dawn until dusk. Women also have to do more households tasks in this moment, as schools and workplaces have closed, so families are staying at home due to COVID-19.

Those who used to go to school and who used to go to work are now staying at home. Women may have more household burdens as long as social norms dictate that household responsibilities are always women's responsibilities. While children and other family members are not going outside, housewives might consider how to manage the family, many kinds of household chores such as cleaning and preparing meals are their primary responsibilities.

If they can share the responsibilities with other family members, it would be great. However, if family members are still thinking that it is solely a house-wife's duty, then women will have to do all the tasks alone, with more loads including caring for children, husbands, and other elderly persons in the family.

A third gender norm that affects women is that women need to give priority to others before themselves. It is like the Burmese proverb: “Treat your son as a master, treat your husband as a god”. Women are willingly accepting this concept. For example, women must prioritize others (such as their son or husband) while eating; mother and sister must give priority to their younger siblings or their spouse. When sharing meals at home, food is given to men and other families as priority. So we have witnessed

many times that women are satisfied with eating the remaining food after their family members. Although this act shows compassion, giving respect and love of women, it may cause health problems for housewives due to malnutrition. The risk of virus infection is likely to increase if the immune system is compromised. So, gender stereotypes can be detrimental to women's health.

The fourth cultural norm is related to domestic violence. In Europe, the term Mask 19 has become more prominent. When someone says “Mask 19”, it means “domestic violence is happening; please help”.

Although domestic violence can happen everywhere and at any time, it can occur more frequently in society when there is emotional turmoil, during times of pandemic, natural disaster, and war. In such situations, violence against women can happen both at home and outside. When we look at the causes of domestic violence, we find an interesting point. Men who suffer high levels of stress sometimes drink alcohol or use drugs to relieve stress. They drink alcohol to reduce stress. When they are drunk, some men are violent towards women.

Women can handle stress by discussing issues with each other among women's groups, but for men, they do not have ideas about how to deal with stress. Most of them try to commit violence for stress relief. There has been a great increase in emotional, physical, and sexual violence. Domestic violence can manifest in various forms; not only physical or emotional violence, but also sexual violence. In fact, even if the husband is legally married, it is marital rape if the woman is unwilling and does not give consent. Such cases are considered domestic violence and sexual violence.

Another link related to domestic and sexual violence is that there are many problems regarding unwanted pregnancies due to inadequate access to family planning and contraception at this time.

These are the impacts of gender stereotypes and norms that can be experienced by women during this “stay at home” period. These challenges are happening due to gender-based discrimination.

In this respect, we can reduce these impacts by raising awareness. Awareness should be raised among communities, as well as families, to give respect and support to women, thereby condemning violence. Particularly, those who are staying at home should be educated through social media platforms. In addition, it is important to raise awareness about where women can find and access psychosocial support and services, for those who experience such violence.

If you have stress because of COVID-19, you should deal with that issue in a peaceful way without using violence against others. Treat each other in a compassionate way. We want you to avoid treating each other badly, rather, please treat people with love.

Aung Myo Min, Executive Director of Equality Myanmar

EMReF would like to thank and appreciate Sayar Aung Myo Min for granting permission to use his article in our “Sa Voix” newsletter.

(Source: hiburma.net)



Photo : Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement facebook

Union Minister Dr. Win Myat Aye urges all to participate in the rehabilitation program for women affected by COVID-19 impacts

May 8, 2020

In the rehabilitation program for women affected by the impacts of COVID-19, the private sector, United Nations organizations, non-government organizations, civil society organizations, and donors need to be involved and coordinate with the government, according to Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement Ministry, and chairman of Myanmar National Committee on Women.

The meeting was held on May 7 at the Myanmar National Committee on Women via video conferencing, and the committee negotiated about

the COVID-19 response.

Dr. Win Myat Aye said, "The impact of COVID-19 is big for global business and social sectors, and Myanmar is also experiencing negative impacts. However, the impacts on women and girls are huge. The specific needs of women and their roles in each process of responses should be considered."

Women may face some challenges to access health care and health services, particularly, reproductive health services during the COVID-19 period. In addition, 60% of women, including health workers, are frontline workers in the response of COVID-19 in Myanmar, so they are more likely

to be exposed and become infected by the virus. The quarantine period has also impacted women's employment and businesses, while the government is addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Union Minister Dr. Win Myat Aye called for more coordination and cooperation while their committee working on women's development and gender equality issues is now addressing sector specific responses, thus addressing specific needs of women and girls in Myanmar during COVID-19 period.

(Sourec : <https://www.facebook.com/mswrrmyanmar/posts/1659404794209139>)



Photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Carter

World Famous Quotes

“The abuse of women and girls is the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violation on earth.”

..... Jimmy Carter
 (39th United States President 1977-1981)

“COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Key Advocacy Points from Asia and the Pacific” brief paper released

May 11, 2020

Women and girls have increased burdens for non-productive care works without earning income, and gender-based violence and protection hazards have also increased; these points were highlighted in the publication “COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Key Advocacy Points from Asia and the Pacific”.

This paper was shared by Gender Equality Network (GEN) and the report indicated the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender and provided recommendations. According to the paper, it was learned that men and women are differently impacted based on their gender; these specific impacts include: 1) the increase of burden for women and girls to do care works without earning; 2) the



support for the needs of women in healthcare; 3) the increase of gender-based violence and protection threats; 4) the impacts on women's

economic performance; 5) the impacts on women migrant workers; 6) the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services; and 7) exclusion of women from leadership roles.

The detailed recommendations to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic also explicitly state that women and girls must be involved in decision-making processes and their leadership is needed to strengthen COVID-19 response plans. The paper suggests that the National Strategic Plans for preparing and responding should be based on gender analysis; access to information on disease prevention and response; focus on human rights in response to the disease; provide psychological support for women and girls who have suffered from infectious disease and/or gender-based violence.