



# COVID-19 PANDEMIC: Not only a Health issue for Women and Girls

*For a Just and Equitable Society*



## Quick facts about COVID 19 and women

- Globally 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.
- Violence against women and girls is pervasive but at the same time widely under-reported. Less than 40% of women who experience violence report these crimes or seek help of any sort.
- Approximately 87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. The majority of these killings were committed by an intimate partner or family member of the victim.
- More rural women experience domestic violence, and yet few seek services, according to a multi-country study by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Globally there is currently approximately 2,403,963 confirmed cases of COVID 19, 624,698 recovered and 165,229 deaths which increases everyday
- There are currently 170 reported cases of COVID 19 in Tanzania and 10 deaths which increases everyday
- The WHO declared Corona Virus a pandemic
- Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing.

## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health issue. It is something new which has actually forced the world into an unbelievable shock and pressure, but women have not been left behind. The Corona Virus pandemic does not only affect women health wise but it affects their daily lives socially, economically and politically. Women have been and always working hard to ensure their family development, society and national development in different aspects they are engaged but with the coronavirus, all these efforts have come to a unplanned halt and a confusing adjustment that is still making life hard every day.

Women before the coronavirus have been affected by many social, economic and political issues that have been making them vulnerable and unfortunately with the coronavirus these issues like violence and economic dependence have increased making all efforts that women and other stakeholders have been making to be free from the vulnerabilities in vain.



### Politically;

- i. Tanzania have the general election this year and women empowerment programs for political leadership has stopped because of COVID 19 with which the government have prohibited crowds. This will affect women participation in the government as it is an ugly truth that in the community we live in, women are hit hard when it comes to political participation especially on leadership and thus needs to be empowered on their rights and importance to participate as leaders and not voters. This has been a successful initiative which has brought women on board and built their confidence to run for political positions something that COVID 19 has affected. Its worrying that we might not have as many women participate in the coming election.
- ii. Due to coronavirus the government has put all the efforts and fund to combat COVID 19. This means there is likelihood the fund that were specifically for women initiatives will not be given priorities now the fact that throws women to more vulnerabilities.

The states around the world have mostly put everything at a stop and focus on COVID 19 something that is putting women at risk of many issues including violence. It is a good thing to ensure that as a state and as a world we combat COVID 19 so that the world can go back to normal and no more lives lost but is also important that these efforts should not leave behind other issues that need urgent attention like violence against women and children. During any crisis, women and children are hit harder. Women are at risk of increased infection, domestic violence and loss of livelihood and have less access to sexual and reproductive health services as healthcare systems become overstretched. During any crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, women make essential contributions as leaders and frontline responders. But they are also hit harder by the health, economic and social impacts of the outbreak.

Tanzania has recorded more than 150 cases of COVID 19 and 10 deaths now, the initiatives on COVID 19 by the country started on 17<sup>th</sup> March ,2020 when the government of Tanzania closed schools, universities and other learning institution, prohibited meetings and social gathering. The government also have been providing awareness on COVID 19 aiming at ensuring that everyone is taking care and combating transmission by using sanitizers, washing hands, wearing masks, level sitting in public transports and discourage unnecessary outings.



## Socially

- i. Gender based violence and Domestic violence have increased. Due to the initiatives taken by the states to combat COVID 19 most have left women helpless and economically dependent. Women are exhausted from taking care of patients which is actually women's societal role in many communities. Due to the adjustment of family roles to combat COVID 19, women have been thrown into more acts of violence by the communities, families and mostly their spouses. These are happening and unfortunately the government have focused more on the COVID 19 emergency leaving women without help as supposed to.
- ii. In Mara region it has been reported that families have started practicing FGM to the young girls and some have been rescued, this is due to the fact that schools have been closed and other stakeholders are more focused on the coronavirus pandemic and thus cannot focus on the issues of FGM.
- iii. Women in Rural areas in Tanzania are even more vulnerable, because first the knowledge on COVID19 is limited and even when the knowledge reach them, affording the means of preventing themselves is a challenge. These women are burdened by family needs thus cannot prevent themselves fully or even their children and families. Women and girls at this time may not be able to reach networks, organizations that provide support in the time of abuse.
- iv. We have learned the hard way with the Ebola experience that where there is a crisis women are the mostly to be hit hard than others. Ebola pandemic demonstrated that multiple forms of violence are exacerbated within crisis contexts, including trafficking, child marriage, and sexual exploitation and abuse. COVID-19 is likely driving similar trends at present. Women's fear and experience of sexual violence and other forms of violence in public spaces is also likely to escalate. Where women have access to technology, online violence against women is also increasing.
- v. Increase of family roles and burdens, as government initiatives schools are closed and thus burdening women to care for children, care for the sick if need be, care for the spouses and other family members. Our communities do not have balanced and equal gender roles thus making women more vulnerable in regard with their mental health and general growth and support.



## Economically

- i. Women have become economically depended now especially those whose work areas have been closed due to the Corona Virus crisis, some business have been closed and even those in operation are not effectively running due to the fact that many people stay at home which makes it hard for small businesses which are most done by women to effectively progress. Women disproportionately work in insecure, lower-paid, part-time and informal employment, with little or no income security and social protection, such as health insurance and are therefore less protected from economic recession in times of crisis and that the epidemics exacerbate existing inequalities, including those based on economic status, ability, age and gender.
- ii. The socio-economic inequalities will place the most vulnerable groups especially women at an even higher risk of violence. In the aftermath of the crisis, violence against women and girls will continue to escalate, at the same time as unemployment, financial strains and insecurity increase. A loss of income for women in abusive situations makes it even harder for them to escape.
- iii. The financial impact of COVID-19 will also affect the capacity of local women's organizations, to advocate for policy and legal reforms on violence against women and girls and for service provision to survivors of violence over the long-term.

## RECOMENDANTION OF INITIATIVES TO BE ADOPTED

### Women;

- i. Report issues of domestic violence that they face and also seek help from a person or authority close to them including Police Gender desks and village authorities and also CSOs
- ii. Help other women out there who might be in a situation of abuse and violence to report
- iii. Make savings if they have sources of income now so that they cannot be financially dependent at this time of the crisis and financial dependent increases their vulnerability to violence and abuse.

### Government

- i. Conduct research on violence against women and how COVID 19 is greatly impacting women in Tanzania
- ii. Strengthen online services so that women can be able to receive help even without visiting



the places for help and strengthen services and have emergency centers to help women victims of violence. This can be done through stakeholders help and empty spaces available such as learning institutions.

- iii. Continue raising awareness to service providers on the continuing impact of COVID-19 to women in the communities
- iv. Put women at the center of policy change, solutions and recovery
- v. Ensure sex and gender-disaggregated data is collected to understand the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls and inform the response

### **CSOs**

- i. Strengthen advocacy and engagement of different actors to address violence against women and girls during COVID-19
- ii. Proactively challenge gender stereotypes and harmful masculinities, accentuated under COVID-19 circumstances (e.g. increased household care work for women, financial insecurity/unemployment), with targeted messages for men in order to encourage healthy ways of coping with stressful situations.
- iii. Gender-responsive and locally relevant responses to COVID-19 and violence against women and

girls, with women in key decision-making roles

- iv. Increase of knowledge and awareness-through community mobilization
- v. Have in place communicative materials that depicts equal work practices for men and women, education of home and household roles that portray gender roles at the community and household, promoting positive gender roles and materials that depicts household

### **Employers**

- i. Ensure that all companies adopt and implement workplace policies that are gender-sensitive and inclusive of new COVID-19 challenges, e.g., how to ensure safety, and deliver training and professional development.
- ii. Support women employees who are unexpectedly working from home through online guidance and training on remote working arrangements, processes and technology.
- iii. Consider providing hazard pay to workers in the service industry (a majority of whom are women) to cover, at minimum, medical expenses.



## Community

- vi. Report issues on violence against women and girls
- vii. Assist to minimize societal gender roles of women from the family to the national level
- viii. Follow up on updates on COVID 19 to Protect everyone from being infected

## REFERENCES

- i. WHO website
- ii. UNWOMEN; COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.





Norwegian Embassy



Ministry for Foreign  
Affairs of Finland

#### LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE - HEADQUARTERS

Justice Lugakingira House, Kijitonyama,  
P. O. Box 75254, Dar es Salaam - Tanzania

**Tel:** +255 22 2773038/48 **Fax:** +255 22 2773037

**Email:** lhrc@humanrights.or.tz **Website:** www.humanrights.or.tz

#### ARUSHA OFFICE, THE LEGAL AID CLINIC

Olerian Street, Plot No. 116/5, Sakina kwa Iddi  
P. O. Box 15243, Arusha, Tanzania

**Phone:** +255 27 2544187

**Email:** lhrcarusha@humanrights.or.tz

Ilere Street – Kinondoni, P. O. Box 79633,  
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

**Phone/Fax:** +255 22 27612015/6

**Email:** legalaid@humanrights.or.tz

#### DODOMA OFFICE

Plot No. Area D, P. O. Box 2289, Dodoma, Tanzania

**Phone/Fax:** +255 262350050 **Email:** lhrc@humanrights.or.tz

   @humanrightstz

 HakiTV

*For a Just and Equitable Society*

