



Q&A: Spotlight Initiative Programming during COVID-19

5 May 2020

The Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, in coordination with UN agencies, hosted webinars for Spotlight teams to ask any technical/EVAWG questions on Spotlight programming in the COVID-19 context. UN experts joined to answer questions and share their experiences. Approximately 150 participants joined from across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific. Based on the various questions, the webinars broadly covered **3 themes**: Quality and ethical **data** collection, providing **essential services** for survivors of VAWG, and engaging in the **prevention** of VAWG in the context of COVID-19. The recovery phase, *Leave No One Behind* and civil society, as well as communications on COVID-19 were discussed.



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DATA COLLECTION ON VAWG

How and when should data on VAWG be collected in the COVID-19 context including safety and ethical considerations? Are there any good practices that can be shared for replication?

Ethical and safe data collection

- **Globally agreed ethical and safety principles for data collection on VAWG must be adhered to during this period.** There must always be confidentiality, with special attention for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination that are at greater risk. Rule of thumb: if you cannot guarantee the full safety and ethical considerations for women and those participating in data collection - **don't do it.**
- The need for data should not outweigh the need to respond to survivors, which must be prioritized.
- Conventional data collection methods, such as population-based surveys, face-to-face methods of interviewing, focus group discussions, and qualitative interviews for prevalence data will be impacted and are likely to put women at greater risk of violence during this period of social distancing.
- There is a narrative from donors and international organizations that request proof of the increase in VAWG. There is already enough evidence that VAWG existed pre-COVID, increases in emergency contexts, and will continue to be perpetrated. The priority should be to **reorient programming** to best serve women and girls.



Different data sources

- It is important to explore **existing secondary data sources**, including **administrative data**. **Using apps, phones and other technologies to collect data can put women at unnecessary risk**, as there is no way to ensure the privacy of respondents (e.g even if the technology is encrypted, perpetrators often control or have access to phones/internet and a trail can be left).
- It is extremely complex to produce reliable data on VAWG, especially in the current context. The reliability of official data from police or law enforcement sources is jeopardized because of the high level of unreported cases. Often, women cannot access their phones nor escape from their houses to report violence due to the controlling behavior of the perpetrator, which results in considerable underreporting.
- “Service-use” (i.e. administrative data) must be distinguished from survey data. In the former, incidence and reported cases are measured, which should not be conflated with the number of women actually experiencing violence. **When interpreting administrative data, it is critical to consider the margin of underreporting.**
- It is critically important to work with **civil society partners, women’s organizations and the media** who are tracking and monitoring GBV in the field.
- In many countries, police data on GBV is published monthly. Rates from March/April and throughout the pandemic can be compared to previous rates (i.e Jan/Feb, 2019) to get an idea on trends.
- Data from helplines and health records can provide various insights, including on types of violent behaviours.
- Survey instruments collecting qualitative data on women’s experiences in the past 12 months can be helpful after lockdowns are eased/one year after the pandemic.
- Spotlight countries are undertaking data collection efforts during this context. For example;
 - The **Malawi** Spotlight team used U-report polls to better understand community perceptions on the risks and impacts of VAWG in the COVID-19 context. The data showed 61% of respondents believe that if a woman suffers SGBV in this situation, there is nothing that can be done to help her.

[Learn more](#) about the principles and recommendations for ethical data collection on VAWG during COVID-19 (*UN Women-WHO Global Joint Programme*).

SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS & LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

What does (remote) service delivery look like in this context, including the use of safe technologies and for those without access to technology? As lockdowns make it increasingly difficult for survivors to access services, how can countries ensure that they are oriented towards existing referral pathways? How are those left furthest behind reached? Are there any good practices/examples?

Referral Pathways, and communicating information on services

- In light of the current context, most service providers such as health, police and justice are adapting their services to remote service delivery using mobile technologies, or community outreach, to raise awareness and deliver support to survivors.
- VAWG services should remain categorized as an essential service. It is important to undertake a **mapping of existing and available services and rapidly update referral pathways** so all sectors know which organizations are available and operating. This is important for coordination, which often falls to the wayside in crises.

- In **Nigeria**, the Spotlight team assessed where states were responding and is moving to operate where there are gaps. They also advocated for the Ministry of Women affairs to be part of the presidential task force on COVID-19 to support with coherent response - it now successfully is.
- It is helpful to look at what's been done across GBV sub-clusters and health clusters. Humanitarian clusters will have firsthand information on the availability of services and locations, and will have identified recent trends. [Learn more](#) from the GBV Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR).
- In emergency situations, there are helpful security and health surveillance mechanisms that can support.
- Cell phones can be extremely useful to disseminate simple text messages in remote areas. However, men in households often have access to phones so this must be done carefully.
 - **Example:** Safety Net Australia partnered with Telstra (an Australian communications network) across the Asia-Pacific region, sharing pre-programmed phones with \$30 credit through women's networks. Programmed buttons could be tapped for support. This was pre-pandemic but found success.
- **Communities** can play a critical role in supporting survivors of VAWG. Community networks can learn of the signs that indicate women may be experiencing violence and be equipped to support.
- **Lessons learned from previous crises** (e.g Ebola) have shown community groups play a very important role for health service provision, community awareness and disseminating information on available services. However, usual community engagement cannot be done in this context, and there is not yet evidence of what works instead. Certain EAWG programmes have explored options such as community radio, TV, public service announcements, community channels and other forms of remote community engagement to disseminate information and mobilize communities.
 - The **Uganda** Spotlight country team uses radios to disseminate information on accessible referral pathways and services in multiple languages.
 - A good example **without the use of technology** comes from a programme in South-East Asia, where an 'SOS' was developed. Forced sex workers would know to hold a blue rose that would indicate to community workers that they need help.

Remote service delivery

- **Local community-based associations**, especially women and youth-led organizations and other humanitarian agencies can be useful entry points for delivering services and/or information in remote areas.
- Engaging with community members that have the role of "relais" between organizations or services and remote and/or marginalized communities can be particularly useful in the current context.
- **Women often don't seek help from formal service providers but rather through informal pathways**, such as family or close friends.
- While there is a common idea that **apps** can get information out quickly and safely to survivors, this approach must be taken with caution as many being used do not have a **human-rights based approach and can do more harm than good** (e.g WhatsApp - good encryption though there are anonymity and privacy issues). A guidance on the safe use of apps with a survivor-centred approach is being developed. [Learn more](#) about using technology safely in the context of VAWG during COVID-19.
- Healthcare workers play an important role in offering firstline support and **connecting women experiencing violence with existing essential services**, as well as supporting survivors and validating their experiences. [Learn more](#) about what the health sector can do (*WHO*).



- **Governments have worked with the private sector** to provide accommodation for women facing domestic violence when existing shelters closed due to social distancing measures. **For example**, the Government of France paid to reserve 20,000 hotel rooms to accommodate survivors of violence.
- Women with disabilities and other marginalized groups must be serviced in a holistic and inclusive way. Service providers can support by disseminating inclusive messages and tools.
 - The **Uganda** Spotlight team is undertaking advocacy work with the government on inclusive messaging for women with disabilities and has developed a toll-free and civil-society call line.
- Country teams know best what works in their contexts - **document lessons learned/promising practices!**

[Learn more](#) about the implications for the provision of essential services for women and girls who have experienced violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (*UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNODC, UNDP*).

Justice Sector

- Measures can be implemented for courts to speed up VAWG cases, enforce protection orders, conduct risk assessments and ensure aggressors are removed from situations that pose a danger to women.
- **Security sector actors/police force units can be repurposed** to address VAWG and be given proper support.
- **It is critical to engage civil society in the process.** For example, the police commissioner and emergency controller in **Papua New Guinea** reported a decrease in domestic violence cases. However, Civil Society National Reference Group members are getting reports of police turning down survivors at local police stations in the country. The Spotlight team is looking into this, and is engaging civil society in the country's EVAWG COVID-19 response.

[Learn more](#) about criminal justice responses to VAWG during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 (*UNODC*).

Civil Society

How can we expect Implementing Partners to deliver the same results in this context?

- **Implementing partners cannot be expected to operate in the same way in this context and it is important to look into how the Spotlight Initiative can best support them.**
- Eligible costs for supporting civil society include (but are not limited to) providing those on the frontline with PPE and supporting CSOs to survive the pandemic. There is flexibility on how to assist civil society.
- **Make urgent and flexible funding available** for support services operated by civil society and women's rights organizations.
- **Civil Society National Reference Groups should be the first point of engagement** on determining how to tailor Spotlight programming to support civil society in the COVID-19 context.
- While it is encouraged to engage with CSOs that the UN has not worked with in the past, the Secretariat recognizes it is critical to respond urgently in this context. **CSOs that are best placed to do so can be funded.**

PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

How can teams ensure prevention and mitigation of VAWG in the COVID-19 context, including in low-resource areas? Are there any best practices/lessons learned? How can men be engaged in prevention efforts?



Prevention strategies

- **While immediate response and service delivery is crucial during this period, it is still important to support long-term comprehensive approaches which are critical to prevention.** This is a decisive moment and an opportunity to use the current momentum on addressing VAWG to design prevention policies based on the [RESPECT Framework](#), which gives guidance on how to address the root causes of violence and provides avenues for VAWG risk mitigation. There is work being done at the global level to use the RESPECT Framework as part of comprehensive prevention strategies.
- The Framework can be assessed to evaluate how **evidence-based measures can be adapted in this context.**
- It is an opportune time for Spotlight Champions (from grassroots to celebrities) to disseminate prevention messages. To learn more about the role of national-level Champions, country teams can review the Spotlight Initiative strategy for the selection of national Spotlight Champions [here](#).
- Alternative solutions can be created for women to safely raise the alarm should they wish to leave their home.
 - **Example: In France and Spain**, women can use the code-word “Mask 19” in pharmacies who will then reach out to the relevant authorities to investigate the case and protect them.

Communication and awareness raising

- In remote communities, radios can broadcast very simple messages in local languages with tips for women to protect themselves and messages for men to refrain themselves from being violent.
 - **(Nigeria and Uganda):** Radio shows can be used as vehicles to broadcast educational curriculums for adult education, for disseminating messages on parenting, non-violent behavior and prevention. U-report and mobile apps are a helpful way to reach people.
- Flyers/posters with simple messaging and phone numbers for support can be shared at grassroots levels.
 - The **Nigeria** Spotlight country team spread flyers and posters with messaging and phone numbers that survivors can call for help.
- There are successful campaigns for men and boys, but these cannot be done alone. **Engagement with men and boys must be embedded in a broader comprehensive prevention strategy.** Learn more about [engaging men and boys](#) in VAWG programmes and using [campaigns](#) to EVAWG.
- **(Timor-Leste)** It would be helpful to share messaging about how to cope with household tensions related to COVID-19 which are: 1) not putting the onus on women 2) making perpetrators accountable 3) building into longer term prevention messaging.
- Partnering with relevant sectors/ministries during this period for prevention messages can be helpful. For example, the **Uganda** Spotlight team integrated prevention messages on GBV into the Ministry of Health’s general call-line on COVID-19.
- Working through existing networks’ communication channels has proven to be very efficient for prevention messages, such as through inclusive women’s networks. **For example**, the **Uganda** team has worked with religious institutions on social norms change and VAWG prevention messages that reach wide audiences.

Economic livelihood and empowerment of women

(Honduras) It is important to engage in economic empowerment as a protective factor against VAWG and to support survivors with finding alternate sources of income. How can the Spotlight Initiative respond to this?

- When designing prevention strategies, it is important to consider entry points through livelihoods and economic empowerment programmes such as cash transfers, which can alleviate economic strains within the household. **This has a proven record to prevent VAWG and must be women and survivor-centred.**
- **Workplaces** can play a helpful role in providing information on the availability of services and supporting employees that experience violence, as in many cases this is the only external point of contact for women.
- Spotlight provides space for initiatives that support long-term recovery services and opportunities through the services pillar, as part of reintegration and rehabilitation of survivors of violence. This is critical for the empowerment of women.

[Learn more](#) about cash transfers in the context of VAWG (p. 8-13) (*UN Women*).

RECOVERY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR A POST-COVID WORLD

What does recovery look like? What are key considerations and policy implications in moving towards a post-COVID world? How can this situation be leveraged as an opportunity? This context has advanced some government efforts to be more responsive to VAWG; how can this be sustained?

- **VAWG should be integrated into recovery platforms across different areas**, such as health and economic stimulus packages.
- This context sheds light on the minimal national support systems available for survivors. It is an opportunity to demand support systems that should have already been in place, ensure they are strengthened and that they hold appropriate actors/sectors accountable. **It is important to consider how this can support ongoing EVAWG work.**
- **It is important to capture and retain lessons learned, as well as monitor the multi-faceted impacts of this context to inform future responses.**
- It is important that **governments provide flexible funding for services.**
- It is critical to make efforts for women's voices to be heard in recovery and response preparedness plans going forward - this was a lesson learned from the Ebola crisis and continues to be relevant.

Resources

Overall

- The COSI extranet has a [dedicated page](#) on the Spotlight Initiative's response to COVID 19.
 - This [living document](#) outlines national data and actions, and promising practices by governments in response to increased VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - [Spotlight Country and Regional Programme COVID-19 Response Plans](#) are available on the COSI extranet.
 - Key resources on VAWG and the gendered-impacts of COVID-19 can be found [here](#).
- [The webpage of GBV AoR](#) offers numerous practical guidance notes, resources and case management tools to address the spike of VAWG in the context of COVID-19.



- [COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls \(UN Women, 2020\)](#): This brief highlights emerging evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on VAWG and provides recommendations for various sectors.
- [Violence against women during COVID-19. Q&A. \(World Health Organization, May 2020\)](#): This webpage offers a set of questions and answers regarding violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data

- [Violence against women and girls data collection during COVID-19 \(UN Women, WHO, 2020\)](#): This brief summarizes principles and recommendations for those planning to embark on data collection on the impact of COVID-19 on VAWG.
- [Strengthening health systems to respond to women subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual violence: A manual for health managers \(WHO, 2017\)](#): This manual is for health managers at all levels of the health systems, and includes forms for data collection and facility (p. 105-106 and annex 10, p. 152-153)
- [Has it become too dangerous to measure violence against women? \(Devex, 2020\)](#): This article sheds light on the heightened risks posed by data collection on violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19.

Services

- [COVID-19 and essential services provision for survivors of violence against women and girls \(UNW, UNFPA, WHO, UNODC, UNDP, 2020\)](#): This brief explores the implications for the provision of essential services for women and girls who have experienced violence during COVID-19 and provides recommendations to improve the quality of and access to coordinated health, police and justice, and social services.
- [COVID-19 and violence against women: What the health sector/system can do \(World Health Organization, 2020\)](#): This brief guidance stresses that health systems have a responsibility to ensure services for women who have experienced violence remain safe and accessible during the outbreak and provides recommendations.
- [Technology Safety \(National Network to End Domestic Violence\)](#): This website explores the use of safe technology in the context of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and violence against women more broadly.
- [Not just hotlines and mobile phones: GBV Service provision during COVID-19 \(UNICEF, 2020\)](#): This note provides guidance on service provision for survivors who cannot easily access phone-based GBV support.
- [Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19 \(UN Women, 2020\)](#): This brief highlights emerging trends and recommendations regarding the impact of COVID-19 on VAWG facilitated by information and communications technology (ICT) and provides recommendations.
- [Disability Inclusive Social Protection Response to COVID-19 Crisis \(Joint - UN agencies/organizations\)](#): This joint UN brief presents ways in which social protection systems can be disability inclusive in COVID-19 response.
- [Disability-inclusive Social Protection response to COVID-19 crisis \(ILO, 2020\)](#): This video presents disability-inclusive social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis



- The Global Network of Women’s Shelters (GNWS) and the Asian Network of Women’s Shelters offers a [series of webinars](#) to plan, prepare and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- WHO developed a [set of infographics](#) that contains key messages to respond to VAWG in the COVID-19 context.
- [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) response – UNODC Thematic Brief on gender-based violence against women and girls \(UNODC, 2020\)](#): This thematic brief covers challenges faced by police, prosecution services, the judiciary and other parts of the criminal justice system and criminal justice responses to VAWG during and in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Prevention

- [Prevention: Violence against women and girls and COVID-19 \(UN Women, 2020\)](#): This brief highlights how the context of COVID-19 is exacerbating root causes and risk factors of VAWG, its impact on rates of VAWG, and the ability to undertake evidence-based prevention work in the current context with proposed interventions that can be taken during social distancing.
- [RESPECT women: preventing violence against women \(WHO, UN Women and others, 2019\)](#): This framework was developed based on the [UN framework for action to prevent violence against women](#) with updated evidence, and is considered a foundation for all prevention work to EVAWG.
- [10 Essentials for the Prevention of Violence against Women \(UN Women, 2016\)](#): This brief provides 10 essential points for working on VAWG prevention, including good practices.
- [Working with Men & Boys \(Virtual Knowledge Centre, 2020\)](#): This module provides guidance on how to engage men and boys drawing on the knowledge of experts and on existing programmes that work with step-by-step guidance through the programme cycle.
- [Campaigns \(Virtual Knowledge Centre, 2019\)](#): This module provides evidence-based practical guidance to institutions and individuals interested or involved in campaigning to EVAWG.
- [The effect of cash-based interventions on gender outcomes in development and humanitarian settings \(UN Women, 2019\)](#): This paper presents an overview of the latest research on cash transfers, gender protection, and empowerment outcomes, and discusses programme design features to be considered. Refer to pages 8-13 regarding VAWG specifically.