

# THE SHADOW PANDEMIC

Domestic Violence in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic



11 December 2020  
Online

Webinar report



# Introduction

Academician Agnes C. Rola, *Co-Focal Person on Gender and Development and Member of the Social Sciences Division, National Academy of Science and Technology*

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## **The topic of domestic violence is becoming important especially during this COVID-19 pandemic.**

Domestic violence is considered as a “pervasive social problem”. According to the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, one in four Filipino women aged 15-49 has experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence by their husband or partner.

Every year, an 18-Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women (VAW) supports the Philippine government’s goal of protecting the human rights of women and girls by upholding its commitment to address all forms of gender-based violence. This is an advocacy campaign that is observed annually from November 25 to December 12 as mandated by law. Today is the second to the last day in its 2020 celebration.

By law, government agencies are mandated to raise awareness on the problem of violence and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. For this webinar, our hypothesis is that this domestic violence may have increased during the COVID pandemic caused by stresses due to lack of jobs, thus threatening hunger, and the lockdown per se. The implementation of varying community quarantine measures may have hindered victims to seek help, report the abuse, and/or escape their perpetrators due to the suspension of public transportation, strict orders to stay home, and limited issuance of quarantine passes.

Part of the DOST-NAST COVID-19 webinar series “Where We Are and Where We Want To Be”, the activity aims to characterize the “shadow pandemic” or violence against girls and women across the country in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, identify good practices in dealing with the matter, and recommend actions to end or minimize domestic violence.

# Incidence of Violence against Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jean Enriquez, *Executive Director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific*

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## **Section 10 of the Magna Carta for Women, women have the right to protection and security in times of disasters, calamities, and other crisis situations especially in all phases of relief, recovery, rehabilitation, and construction efforts.**

The government shall also address the particular needs of women from a gender-based perspective to ensure their full protection from sexual exploitation and other sexual and gender-based violence committed against them.

Trafficking was discussed, where it was defined in terms of the acts, means and purpose. According to Director Enriquez, most of the trafficking cases they handled for decades in CATW-AP used the means of taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, where the use of force was not present. Most of the victims of sexual trafficking were abused or raped by their relatives at a young age, so the trauma that was not healed or not attended to contributed to their vulnerability other than the economic factors.

Director Enriquez showed the statistics on the number of reported cases of VAWC per month for 23 WCPUs nationwide. Despite the known increase in all forms of violence, the reporting, however, showed that there was a dramatic decrease of VAWC cases from January to April 2020.

She mentioned the following challenges during the pandemic: barangays delaying the release of Barangay Protection Order (BPO), PNP women's desk deferring action to post-ECQ even in cases of rape, inability to file complaints with prosecutor's office, difficulty of survivors in obtaining medico-legal examination, and absence of transportation/mobility constraints.

She presented some cases of trafficking and prostitution through a human rights documentation system, which includes the profiles of victims and perpetrators, and event/incident documentation.

The last part of the presentation focused on the insights on cases of prostituted women: the pandemic did not stop the male buyers' entitlement over women's bodies, buyers are those privileged with mobility, the hunger worsened women's vulnerability, the assistance provided to prostituted women is not long term, and there is a need to address the fear to charge men in uniform.

# Implications of the Shadow Pandemic on Migrant Workers

Dr. Aurora Javate-De Dios, *Senior Program Adviser, Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), and Faculty of International Studies, Miriam College*

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**The 16-day campaign on Violence Against Women (VAW) was introduced by the Center for Global Leadership in 1991 and was formalized by the United Nations. Currently, there are 187 countries and about 300 million people participating in the campaign.**

Dr. Javate-De Dios emphasized the impact of COVID-19, a global pandemic which has caused massive unemployment and shrinking economies among other pandemics.

According to PSA, the unemployment rate rose to 17.7% wherein 7.3 million Filipinos are unemployed as of April 2020. There are more than 50,000 repatriated OFWs to date.

Meanwhile, in the context of gender norms, past experiences show that pandemics and public emergencies increase the risk to violence against women (VAW) and gender-based violence (GBV). One of these is the domestic violence which simply occurs within the confines of the home. Lockdowns have not only increased the possibility of VAW at home but even prevented women from reporting and accessing services on VAW.

For the returning migrants, losing their jobs and income also aggravated domestic violence. She also discussed the vulnerabilities of migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to address these vulnerabilities.

She mentioned the surge in online/cyber VAW during the pandemic where women and children are subjected to online violence such as physical threats, sexual harassment, stalking, zoom bombing and sex trolling.

Lastly, Dr. Javate-De Dios emphasized the things to be done on the campaign against VAW including the use of online platforms, enhanced protection system for victims and faster punishment and prosecution of VAW cases.

# Philippine Programs on Ending Domestic Violence

Sandra Montano, *Chairperson, Philippine Commission on Women*

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**The prolonged imposition of community quarantine has placed women and girls at greater risk of experiencing violence at home brought by economic instability, restricted movements and transportation, and limited access to necessary care and support services.**

While more than 8,000 VAW cases were reported during the height of the community quarantine (15 March to 31 October 2020), the data from the Philippine National Police (PNP) did not indicate an increase in VAW cases. However, this does not mean that VAW cases have decreased because reporting of cases may have been affected by the restricted movement, availability of online communication channels, and information on where and how to report.

Chairperson Montano shared the initiatives of the PCW Council members, which include the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The DSWD issued a *Call to Action for Women's Protection Against Violence* that enjoins all service providers to ensure continuous delivery and services for all reported incidents of VAW/GBV and adopt proactive interventions to help victims directly report abuse without leaving their homes. The DILG issued an advisory to activate the Barangay VAW Desks and Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPC) and ensure that VAW/VAC-related services are readily available when requested. The DOH issued directives on the continuous provision of essential health services and protocols on maternal care and childbirth during the pandemic. The DOJ implemented electronic inquest proceeding (e-Inquest), and the Supreme Court implemented electronic filing of criminal complaints and information, and posting of bails. The CHR maintains a public electronic reporting system for GBV cases ([www.gbvcovid.report](http://www.gbvcovid.report)), and Tanggol Karapatan Online (e-Lawyering). For the PCW, Chairperson Montano shared that the agency launched a social media campaign "#JuanaSaPanahonNgCorona" and provided VAW referral service which can be accessed through phone and online means. The PCW, DOH, DILG, DSWD, and CHR issued a Joint Statement with the Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM) on strengthening GBV response mechanisms in all levels of government and public vigilance in reporting any form of abuse.

In terms of citizen involvement in reporting VAW in their communities, she mentioned the importance of reinforcing the online presence of service providers, making services accessible online, maximizing information dissemination activities and roving duties and establishing community-based systems and safe spaces.

# A Message of Hope for All Girls and Women (video)

Vice President Maria Leonor Gerona Robredo

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**In her message of hope for women and girls, Vice President Robredo noted the potential increase of unreported cases of domestic violence due to the lockdowns.**

Lockdowns have limited the accessibility of reproductive health services.

She mentioned the country's standing as one of the most gender equal nations in Asia based in the Global Gender Gap Report 2020. However, she also noted that much remains to be done.

She emphasized that economic empowerment is the first step towards true women empowerment. According to her, if every woman would have the ability to support herself and her family, she would be confident and fully able to free herself from her oppressors and abusers. She also shared her belief that for every Filipina given a livelihood, families and communities will also be changed.

In closing, she engaged the public to create opportunities that would help in uplifting Filipino women and building a fair, humane, and truly equitable society.

# Open Forum

Moderator: Dr. Aries A. Arugay, *Outstanding Young Scientist 2020 and Professor, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman*

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## **Possible relationship between the actual abuses and the environment of misogyny in the government due to the spike in the number of abuses towards women and children for the past four years**

Director Enriquez responded with the statistics from the National Demographic Health Survey that from 2013 and 2017, one (1) out of five (5) and one (1) out of four (4) Filipino women, respectively, has suffered from physical, sexual, verbal and economic abuse. She said that there are other factors to be considered such as this pandemic which hampered the direct reporting of cases. Hence, the number of cases could have been higher. Dr. Javate-De Dios, on the other hand, linked the leadership of the country to how it enables or encourages violence against women (VAW) or tries to prevent VAW. She highlighted the decline in the global gender gap index and the importance of the policy environment. She emphasized that misogyny has always been present but it is not accentuated before because if we have a head of state that really belittles and insults women, everyone has the license to do the same. Thus, leadership is critical in creating an atmosphere free of violence against women.

## **Position of Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) on sexist jokes as prohibited in the Safe Spaces Act**

Chairperson Montano said that PCW, together with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) is strong in imposing the law and has issued a joint memorandum to have a stronger implementation up to the barangays and communities. With this memorandum, each barangay will have a barangay VAW desk and will serve as the first responder when there is an abuse. Dr. Arugay agreed with the role of barangay as a critical governance structure with hopes that gaps in reporting cases can be addressed with this memorandum.

## **Efficiency of legislative reform in addressing the issue of VAW**

Dr. Javate-De Dios answered that the issue of inequality is a long-term project and it never disappears. She added that the Philippines has some of the best legislations and even the United Nations (UN) is in awe with the quality, especially the Magna Carta of Women (MCW). She said that MCW has been a model for many countries to provide a holistic frame for the protection of women. She, however, stressed that legislation is not self-propelling and everybody needs to take concrete steps in order to implement policies that have significance on the ground level. Legislation is hardly appreciated by local people because of lack of awareness. She added that legislation can only find resonance when it is embraced by local officials in charge of implementing these legislations. In addition, Director Enriquez said that other than legislative reforms, formation of women's groups and even young male advocates and amplifying their voices are very crucial and should not be missed in countering, fighting, and eliminating VAW.

## **Delays in the reporting of cases of VAW, before and during the pandemic, and what can be done**

Chairperson Montano quickly apologized for the delays in the reporting of cases, especially during the pandemic, because it is beyond their control. She added the problems related to the unreliable internet connection and cited some pre-pandemic cases. Government procedures are in place and being followed. Unfortunately, there are instances that some of the PCW staff or people in charge may not be available due to the pandemic causing backlogs in the process. The initiatives from various agencies were some of the things that can be done but they are still trying to be more efficient and productive given the limited resources. Dr. Javate-De Dios, on the other hand, stressed two points. First, strengthen the messaging that human rights and freedom are not suspended just because there is a pandemic. Zero tolerance to VAW in every medium should be amplified. She raised the effectiveness of cellular phones and instant messaging. She said that if NDRRMC alerts can be received by the general public through text, then VAW alerts can also be sent. Second is the concern about safety and protection. During

this pandemic, majority resorted to technology because face-to-face interaction is prohibited. Witnesses and victims can do video testimony and can have a one-stop approach. One testimony is enough for all agencies and should not be duplicated or repeated to avoid victims feeling victimized over and over.

### **Role of science and technology (S&T) in addressing VAW**

Director Enriquez said that with the help of digital experts, they have developed the mobile application, #HerVoice. Digital technologies are a big help during these times. Experts have developed software making it easier to install even without the internet. Online modules were also made accessible to grassroots women. She emphasized the need to improve the internet connection in the country and the help of telecommunications company to make it free for reporting in the application. Dr. Javate-De Dios said that in terms of research, psychologists and social scientists can do a study on the psychological impact of domestic violence, trafficking and prostitution. In terms of data gathering, it is now possible to monitor, report and analyze data and what it means in terms of its impact to women and children, not only in the present but in the future. She emphasized that there is hope for a society built on knowledge, and expertise of social and natural scientists can make the environment better and improve quality of life. Chairperson Montano, on the other hand, said that through the webinar, a strong message has been sent that science is indeed part of our lives. With the help of science, everyone can change the mindset of being a victim in almost all situations. Perpetrators are always present and everyone is vulnerable twenty-four-seven (24/7). Hence there is a need of self-empowerment. Economic empowerment is the way forward for women empowerment. There is a need to go out of the shell and out of gender-based violence (GBV). In terms of technology, it will always be good for all to connect to each other and inform everyone about what is happening. Technology is the biggest weapon for protection of every human being, including children. She ended with the statement, "*Women, if it is empowered, beyond measure, is beautiful beyond pressure*". Dr. Arugay called the help of data scientists in analyzing the data on cases of VAW.



# Synthesis

Academician Edward H.M. Wang, *Co-Focal Person on Gender and Development and Member of the Health Sciences Division, National Academy of Science and Technology*

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**As Academicians and Scientists, everybody should practice gender equality in the workplace and make sure that there is an opportunity for everyone not based on gender.**

He emphasized that VAW is a kind of pandemic, which everybody failed to recognize, and it is occurring together with the COVID-19.

He shared the distraction effect used in the field of medicine, which is about losing focus on the important issues due to pandemic. Even in a pandemic, violence goes on and inequality continues. Being a medical doctor, he said that he would probably diagnose this case as an emergency and there is a need to make long term plans on it.

Lastly, he reminded everyone of the learnings from the webinar and that everybody deserves a life free of violence and fear.

# Support Group

Dexter Lorma A. Bautista  
Luigi A. Dahonog  
Imee G. delos Reyes  
Ana Loren B. Durana  
Jainor Timothy U. Garcia  
Larrisse O. Lipit  
Ryan John P. Pascual  
Ruth Ann DL. Recto  
Abdul Jalil T. Yacob

*COVID-19: Where We Are and Where We Want To Be*  
**The Shadow Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the Context of COVID-19**  
11 December 2020, 9:00 AM

**PROGRAM**

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| 9:00  | National Anthem<br>Prayer  |  |
| 9:10  | Opening Message  | <b>Academician RHODORA V. AZANZA</b><br><i>President, NAST</i>   |
| 9:15  | Introduction to the Webinar  | <b>Academician AGNES C. ROLA</b><br><i>Focal Person on GAD, and<br/>Member, NAST Social Sciences Division</i>  |
| 9:20  | Incidence of Domestic Violence<br>During the COVID-19 Pandemic     | <b>Director JEAN ENRIQUEZ</b><br><i>Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia<br/>Pacific (CATW-AP)</i>  |
| 9:40  | The Shadow Pandemic and Its<br>Implications for Migrant<br>Workers | <b>Dr. AURORA JAVATE-DE DIOS</b><br><i>Senior Program Adviser, Women and Gender<br/>Institute and Faculty of International Studies,<br/>Miriam College</i> |
| 10:00 | Philippine Programs on Ending<br>Domestic Violence                 | <b>Chairperson SANDRA S. MONTANO</b><br><i>Philippine Commission on Women</i>  |
| 10:20 | <i>A Message of Hope for All Girls<br/>and Women</i>               | <b>Honorable MARIA LEONOR GERONA<br/>ROBREDO</b><br><i>Vice President of the Republic of the<br/>Philippines</i>   |
| 10:35 | Open Forum   | <i>Moderator: Dr. ARIES A. ARUGAY,</i><br><i>Outstanding Young Scientist 2020</i>  |
| 11:15 | Synthesis and Closing Remarks                                      | <b>Academician EDWARD H.M. WANG</b><br><i>Focal Person on GAD, and<br/>Member, NAST Health Sciences Division</i>   |