



Strengthening response to violence against women and girls

Handout: session 1 – Violence against women during covid-19, holistic assessment & counselling skills

Handout Developed by
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The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering of women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN, 1993).

The COVID-19 lockdown has affected women and girls in multiple ways which have made them more vulnerable to violations and violence. Given below are some stressors and risk factors for women and girls;

- o Increased spread of misinformation about COVID-19
- o Facing various forms of sexual abuse or violations
- o Increased care work
- o Reduced contact with support systems due to limited movement
- o Job loss (for women and men) adding extra financial burden on the family
- o Uncertainty about the future
- o Unequal access to COVID related information, testing facilities, health services, relief measures, etc.
- o Lack of access to substances for male partners, the resulting substance withdrawal and displaced anger
- o Some groups of women might be more vulnerable (pregnant women, transgender women, queer women, elderly women, adolescent girls, women with disabilities, survivors of child sexual abuse, etc.)

Building a Survivor Centric Approach:

- Ensure the physical safety of the survivor(s)
- Ensure Confidentiality
- Respect the wishes, needs and capacities of the survivor
- Assure a supportive attitude
- Provide information and manage expectations
- Inform the survivor about all of the available options for referral
- Treat every survivor in a dignified way, independent of her/his sex, background, race, ethnicity or the circumstances of the incident.

<u>Assessment of Violence and its Effects</u>	<u>Assessing Safety</u>	<u>Assessing coping</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listen to all forms of violence & violations (physical, verbal, emotional, economic, sexual, neglect) ● Check for patterns of violence (circumstances, when, how, frequency) ● Assess areas affected (basic needs, safety, health, mental health, work, relationships, self-image, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess interpersonal and household context (weapons used, physical injury, threat to life, extent of harm, destruction, harm to children, alcohol use) and extent of threat to safety ● Assess safety in community & society ● Assess internal and emotional safety (self harm, suicide, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess coping and resistance strategies tried to protect from violence, seek help, self-care and overall empowerment ● Check whom they have made disclosures of abuse to (for e.g. police, family, friends) ● Check details of support systems, internal and external resources

<u>Do's</u>	<u>Don'ts</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Equip yourself with information about COVID-19 pandemic, services, Government schemes for COVID, etc ✓ Assess for women's safety ✓ Conduct a holistic assessment (health, mental health, legal etc.) ✓ Acknowledge small and big ways in which women resist violence ✓ Balance listening with finding practical solutions and connect women to appropriate services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Don't connect/engage with the husband over the phone ☐ Don't Advise them to leave home unless necessary ☐ Don't blame or shame the victim ☐ Don't carry out any interventions that jeopardize women's safety

Interventions around safety planning:

- o Identify support systems and connect the client to them.

- o Identify triggers for violence and watch out for the same. Discuss ways of protecting herself (e.g. locking herself in the bathroom, screaming, involving others)
- o Share numbers of state and national helplines or other relevant referrals as needed. Ask them to write and store them safely.
- o Make and store safety kits in an accessible yet safe place (important papers, money, a pair of clothes for themselves and children, bank details, ID proof, important contacts).
- o Discuss a plan of action after the lockdown.
- o Work on the client's emotional safety (self-care, talking to someone, reviving hobbies). Watch out for suicidal thoughts/attempts/self-harm and offer counselling accordingly.

Things to remember during the session:



- First session could be the last session
- Ask for safe number, safe time to call and also what if someone else picks the call
- Take number of another trusted adult if possible
- If call drops check for safe ways (mode, timing) to connect again