

BRIEFING

# Take Action

COVID-19 & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

*RESPECT. PROTECT. UNITE.*



## Violence against women & girls

Movement restrictions limit a survivor's ability to escape and seek support, which entrenches perpetrator impunity.

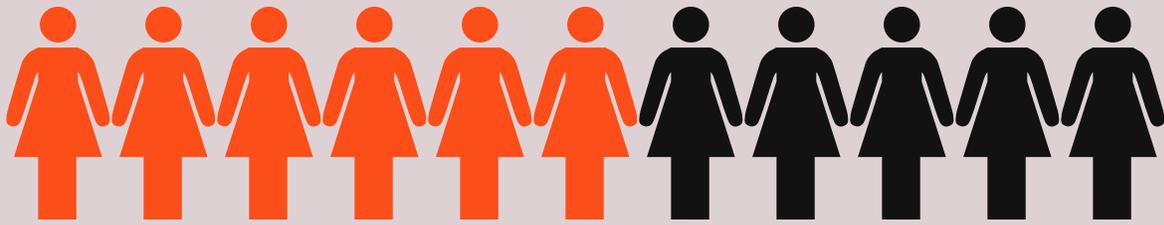
# A VIOLENT PANDEMIC



The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the risk of violence against women and girls. Movement restrictions including curfews, quarantines and reduced public transport confine people to a limited shared space which adds stress on relationships inside the home. This, combined with anxieties related to the health and economic consequences of COVID-19 are associated with increases in intimate partner violence against women and girls. Movement restrictions limit a survivor's ability to escape and seek support, which entrenches perpetrator impunity.

Limited access to sexual and reproductive health services due to movement restrictions and reduced service provision is associated with increased rates of high-risk pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. These risks are exacerbated for women and girls who already faced discrimination prior to the pandemic, including those with a disability, elderly women, pregnant women and girls in child, early or forced marriage, minority communities and people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex community.

The long-term consequences of COVID-19 are anticipated to have a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls and erode gains made in gender equality. Increased female unemployment and additional domestic responsibilities are anticipated to further entrench inequality.



63.9%

of women in Papua New Guinea have experienced **physical, sexual or emotional violence by their spouse.**



of these women were **injured due to spousal violence**



## SHOCKING LEVELS OF VIOLENCE

Papua New Guinea has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world. COVID-19 is making a bad situation worse. One helpline reported a huge spike in the severity and number of domestic violence cases received when Papua New Guinea declared a state of emergency. Increasing community tensions due to COVID-19 related mistrust and fear have also been highlighted as possible risk factors for elevated rates of sorcery related violence.

# WHAT ARE THE **RISK FACTORS** ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19 THAT INCREASES VIOLENCE?



**Loss of employment,** lack of finances, food insecurity and negative financial coping mechanisms.



Increased reliance on **negative coping mechanisms** such as alcohol misuse.



**Anxiety, stress and confusion** related to COVID-19 and its health, economic and social consequences.



Sense of **perpetrator impunity,** as the police focus on the COVID-19 emergency response.



**Building frustrations** between people stuck in the same home.



# 85%

of people said they had witnessed or heard stories of survivors **being turned away from services** due to COVID-19 restrictions or closures.



## SCARED TO SEEK HELP.

Despite an increase in violence and need for specialised support, in-person services fell sharply during COVID-19 restrictions. There was a 31% decrease in clients accessing in-person services during the state of emergency compared to the prior months.

In a recent study, 85% of people said they had witnessed or directly heard stories of survivors being turned away from services due to COVID-19 restrictions or closures.

The closure of health services and concerns regarding COVID-19 transmission from health workers has also been associated with high-risk pregnancies, reports of pregnant women being turned away from maternal health check-ups resulting in maternal disability and miscarriage and a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services including to family planning services.



# TAKE ACTION

**Recognise** that services for gender-based violence survivors are life-saving and essential.

**Provide** essential services for gender-based violence survivors and ensure continued access to sexual and reproductive health services.

**Understand** the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls and include women in decision making for outbreak preparedness and response.

Policy  
makers



**Support** youth-led advocacy for recovery efforts that prioritise adolescent girls' access to uninterrupted education and income-earning opportunities.

**Ensure** youth participation in decision-making in national and sub-national COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery actions.

**Help** adolescent girls to substantively participate and lead in COVID-19 recovery efforts alongside male counterparts.

Young  
People



**Continue** the collection and analysis of information on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls.

**Ensure** evidence-based advocacy for the prioritisation of women and girls in recovery efforts.

**Provide** psychosocial support for women, men, boys and girls to support positive coping mechanisms, holistic wellbeing and resilience.

International  
partners

