

***“During the epidemic... I was beaten with bruises all the time”*: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence against Women in Ha Noi, Viet Nam**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been spreading globally and exerting catastrophic impact on various aspects of life. As of 21 August 2020, the total numbers of infected and death cases that were associated with COVID-19 were 22.492.312 and 788.503, respectively; they are expected to continue to rise steadily over the upcoming months. Besides its visible health and economic consequences, the COVID-19 pandemic has also quietly crept into every single household, escalating a crisis of domestic violence (DV). It has been estimated that there will be an additional 15 million cases of intimate partner violence in 2020 for an average lockdown duration of 3 months, and the number will increase to 31 million cases for an average lockdown duration of 6 months. This type of “crisis within crisis” has emerged since lockdowns were implemented, as DV rose considerably in many countries worldwide.

In Vietnam, since the first case of COVID-19 was detected on 23 January 2020, there have been 1.009 confirmed cases and 25 deaths reported. Nationwide social-distancing measures were enacted under the Directive No.16/CT-TTg throughout most of April 2020, which led to more than 95 million people being isolated in their homes. Home has not been totally safer, especially for women who are victims of domestic violence.

The Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) and Hanoi School of Public Health (HSPH), sponsored by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, have conducted a research study aimed at examining the impact of the pandemic on women who were victims of DV in Hanoi, Vietnam. Women’s coping strategies in such situations were also explored.

The study, deployed and implemented from June to September 2020, combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. A total of 303 women aged 18-60 living in Ha Noi who used to be victims of mental, physical and sexual violence by their husband/partners were recruited and participated in this research.

The research study found that 99% of couples had marital/ domestic conflicts during the COVID-19 pandemic. 34% of women reported suffering from financial abuse; among them 72% were abused more than before the outbreak. 87.8% women experienced psychological violence caused by husband/ partner, with 91% of them suffering this type of violence more than pre-outbreak period. 59% of women suffered from at least one physical violent act; of these women, 93% experienced physical violence more during the outbreak and 56% experienced such behaviors more than 5 times. 25% of women reported sexual violence during the pandemic. 79% of them reported more sexual violence during the outbreak, and 52% experienced this type of violent more than 5 times.

Domestic violence resulted in injury in 80.7% of all cases, with 31.7% of women requiring medical care due to the violence caused by their husbands/ partners. More than half (51%) of victims thought about suicide; among these 7.2% attempted to suicide during the pandemic. Only 45% of victims have sought help for their situation but many of them reported that it is difficult to find help.

Addressing the increase of DV against women during COVID-19 pandemic requires a considerable amount of effort by the government and active cooperation between government agencies, social organisations, and communities. The effort may include but is not limited to: 1) integrating DV issue into COVID-19-related programs; 2) ensuring that women's voices are listened to, and that women's organizations have opportunities to be involved in the decision-making processes for effective and context-specific approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic; 3) raising public awareness of DV against women during the pandemic and disseminating the supporting information for targeted women need to be carried out; and 4) developing and strengthening support services for women who are victims of DV during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Khuat Thu Hong is the founder and Director of the Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS), an independent research organization located in Hanoi, Vietnam. She obtained her B.A. in psychology in 1984 and her Ph.D. in sociology in 1997. Before founding ISDS, she worked for the Institute of Sociology, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences for sixteen years and for the United Nations Development Program as a gender specialist for fourteen months. Her major fields of study include gender, sexuality, and social inclusion. Since 2017, Hong has been chairing the Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Network in Viet Nam (GBVNet). Hong is also a well-known social activist advocate for gender equality and social inclusion. She is a regular guest of national television and radio shows and is frequently interviewed by national and international newspapers on gender and social issues in Vietnam.