

Women and COVID-19

A Case Study Lebanon

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Story

Born from Lebanese parents, Lama was raised for much of her childhood by her single mother in Europe. When her mother remarried a Lebanese national, the family returned to visit the country they had left behind over a decade ago. They intended to stay for a week that spring. But after arriving, Lama's stepfather took his family's passports until their European visas expired. "He locked us inside the house and began beating my mom and my siblings because they would ask to go back to Europe," Lama said. "One day, my stepdad brought me and my sister to our aunt's place. He raped me when they left the home. I screamed and I cried until he threatened to kill me."

Story

Joumama, another survivor who was forced to marry as a young girl, says she had to abandon the man that she really loved. Yet once married, she secretly met with him anyways. When her family found out, they sought to kill her for tarnishing their "honor."

"I could never tell my family about this man or else they would have tried to kill me long before," Joumama said. "When they tried to catch me, I ran away and found protection with ABAAD."

Kafala!

There are 250,000-300,000 domestic workers in Lebanon, majority of them are migrant women from Ethiopia, the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Their work and residency in Lebanon are regulated by the infamous "Kafala" system. Arabic for 'sponsorship,' Kafala has long been denounced by human rights groups as a system that allows employers to exploit and abuse workers. Domestic workers are excluded from the Lebanese Labor Law. Leaving a job without the employer's agreement exposes workers to many risks, including detention and deportation. Those who try to escape also risk being detained in overcrowded prison conditions, where COVID-19 rates are high.



Factors affecting women's health during covid-19 pandemic

What do we know?

- Quarantine has increased exposure to domestic violence/intimate partner violence and other forms of GBV, including FGM
- More marginalised groups at further risk of harm – migrant workers, domestic workers, women and girls with disabilities
- Discrimination and oppression
- Overcrowding in displacement settings (especially among refugees) add more challenges
- Limited access to health, water, sanitation, hygiene

Lebanon: A Case Study

Lebanon is witnessing multi-crisis: Financial, political, Covid-19 pandemic.

The situation has dramatically impact the vulnerable groups especially women and girls , refugee women, migrant domestic workers, and women and girls with disabilities in specific.

Unemployment rate is high with a high load of unpaid work, more burden on women and girls.

Priorities shifted to provide shelter and food overlooking other basic needs.



Hussein Malla

Credit: AP

Lebanon: Case Study

- Lebanese women as well as young adults between 25-34 years of age have been particularly affected by reduced salaries.
- Drastic change in employment status was significantly felt more by Syrian women than men, as 61 percent reported losing their jobs due to COVID-19 compared to 46 percent of Syrian men.
- Out of the working Lebanese, 23 percent reported recent salary reductions.
- Economic sectors that have been the most impacted are construction as well as services and sales (incl. accommodation and tourism, restaurants and food services).
- Employers had to close businesses or were forced to reduce staff. Syrians were over proportionally affected by these layoffs.

- With food prices soaring in Lebanon, food is a major source of concern for a large proportion all three groups.
- 50% percent of Lebanese, 63 % of Palestinians and 75 % of Syrians felt worried they would not have enough food to eat over the past month.
- Those who have lost their jobs – either since or prior to the outbreak – have shown to be more distressed than others.
- Moreover, of particular concern are the Syrian refugees, with 11 percent reporting going a whole day and night without eating and 21 percent skipping meals.
- These coping mechanisms could lead to malnutrition in the longer-term.

Rapid Gender Analysis - CARE

- Women experience additional burden as care givers with an inability to financially contribute to households.
- COVID-19 affect everyone but women in specific with less opportunities
- More anxiety and distress due to the economic situation
- Additional movement restrictions on women and girls , so lack of access to HCS specially SRHR
- MORE GBV
- Risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking , for people to meet their basic needs.
- Migrant workers have little protection
- Less engagement in community based decision for the majority of people especially women

Gender Based Violence Data in Lebanon

- Initial reporting from Internal Security Forces (ISF) hotline on domestic violence (1745) suggests a significant increase in calls in March 2020 compared to March 2019.
- KAFA has reported an increase in the severity and emergency nature of the calls compared to previous months.
- ABAAD reports an increase in women reporting death threats

More challenges...

- – 1745 – is NOT free of charge for all callers.
- Lack of capacity of police personnel to respond to cases of domestic violence
- Not 24/7
- The judicial protection orders is not functioning to cover the period during the lockdown and quarantine.
- Preventing freedom of movement for CBO staff providing GBV life-saving interventions.
- No municipal police to proactively mitigate and reduce domestic violence at community level as well as facilitate referrals and/or reporting to the ISF.
- Not enough fund and support programs protecting against GBV (including expanding remote case management)

More challenges...

- No shelters provided by the government
- Healthcare and GBV service providers are not providing access to life-saving care and medical support to GBV survivors, including clinical management of rape services.
- No dissemination of information and publicizing of the resources about gender-based violence services available across the country.
- No strengthening of the remote outreach to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation through the dissemination of information on available services.

Changes in the feeling of safety by women & girls in **their communities** since the spread of the COVID-19

- Less safe (57%)
- No changes (25%)
- More Safe (12%)
- Does not know (6%)



Changes in the feeling of safety by women & girls in **their homes** since the spread of the COVID-19

- Less safe (43.88%)
- No changes (29.59%)
- More Safe (19.39%)
- I don't know (7.14%)



Lebanon: A Case Study

Practical Needs vs. Strategic needs

Poor quality of electricity, water, education, healthcare especially in rural and refugees.

A huge part of practical needs are not provided including hygiene kits, food, safe shelter, water, sanitation systems.

Strategic needs: requires transformative gender based programs to create a movement at the national level.

53% OF FEMALE CAREGIVERS DO NOT HAVE THE FINANCIAL MEANS TO BUY MENSTRUAL PADS ON A MONTHLY BASIS, OUT OF WHICH:

**Syrian
63%**



**Lebanese
37%**

Plan International, 2020

Division of domestic labour

- More additional unpaid work during lockdown
- More physical distress
- Unlikely of men to engage in the household work
- Men staying at home are negatively affecting the family dynamic and increasing tension, only 14% of men in Lebanon engage in household work.
- Women now are asked to be innovative to engage also in income generation such as tailoring, juice making, sewing...

Income and paid employment

- 23.5% of Women in Lebanon is participating in the labour force
- Lebanon is one of the lowest countries in comparison to other middle-income countries within the region.
- During covid-19, 40.54% of women reported losing jobs compared to 28.86% of men
- Syrian women are engaged in daily work , informal sector, so they were affected the most and leading to more financial burdens on the families.
- Also this kind of work exposed her to exploitation, abuse and other kinds of violence
- Unemployed fathers will be mentally affected, leading to violence at home.

Participation and decision making

- Less decision making for woman, as fathers are present at home, even things related to childcare.
- Less decisions over women's reproductive health, using IUD as contraceptive methods, risk of infection.

Political participation and leadership

- In 2019, Lebanon ranked 149th out of 153 countries in women political empowerment , scoring Lebanon as one of the lowest representation across MENA region and the world.

Women and Health

- In Lebanon, women makes up 79.52% of the nurses in the HCS, frontlines, caregivers, more exposed to stigma and isolation !
- Access to HCS is low for both men and women, with barriers are transportation (23.5%) and financial (40%).
- Money used for basic needs.
- Also, fear of infection COVID-19
- Pregnant women reported no access to vitamins supplements, neonatal care, in rural areas and among Syrian mothers.
- Suicide attempts among women increased according to the ISF

Access to information and technology

- Access to info is social media and tv.
- Syrian; different scenarios for awareness in camps and preventive measures.
- 52% asked for more awareness sessions in timely manner!
- Men more on TV , women on social media platforms.
- Un Women reports that only 1 in 3 women have access to private phone
- Lack in specific info related to pregnant and lactating mothers...

Recommendations:

- All actors in humanitarian and COVID-19 response should consistently collect data and segregate them by vulnerability, and sex. Multisectoral approach should be reached.
- Engage the community through participatory approach
- Responding to pandemic while making sure not to overlook the basic needs especially access to health care system
- Reach out to vulnerable population including domestic and migrant workers.
- Psychosocial support is required
- Economic empowerment and equal participation of men and women in the labour market
- Do Not Harm approach should be applicable in all the work of NGOs
- Kafala sponsorship system should be removed , advocacy efforts should be huge from the humanitarian sectors, UN agencies, civil society, to ensure protection and dignity of migrant and domestic workers .

'She Overcame
everything that was
meant to destroy her'

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Thank You