



# OUR VOICE:

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IS KEY TO EFFECTIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE IN TIMOR-LESTE



The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global crisis unparalleled in recent history. It needs a universal response to match its size and complexity. Unfortunately, Timor-Leste's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan does not specifically address women's issues.<sup>1</sup>

**This is a problem for our country.**

## Why?

Research finds that Timor-Leste is the 2nd most at-risk country from COVID-19 in our region, there is too much at risk to ignore diverse women's experiences at this time.<sup>2</sup>

Accounting for women and girls in recovery responses will slow transmission of COVID-19 and lessen its economic impact, achieving better outcomes for everyone.

Research shows that policies that do not include women in decision-making are less effective and do harm.<sup>11</sup>

The UN has called on all governments to prepare for and take urgent action to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

## The Issue: Violence Against Women and Girls

Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified globally.<sup>4</sup> Domestic violence helplines and shelters around the world have reported significant spikes in calls for help and are almost full. This is because gender based violence increases during every type of emergency- economic, conflict or disease.<sup>5</sup>

In Timor-Leste 59% of ever-partnered women between the ages of 15-45 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>6</sup> This is likely to increase as security, health and money worries put more stress on confined households.

## How?

### Disruption to Livelihoods

In Timor-Leste:

- 75-90% of vendors in the municipal and postu markets are women.<sup>7</sup>
- Women are more likely to invest their income for their family's benefit like meals or schooling.<sup>7</sup>

Travel restrictions have limited rural women's ability to continue earning money for their family. The economic fallout from women's business closures and job/ livelihood loss can lead to increased household stress which can lead to gender based violence.

### Increased Unpaid Care

Globally:

- Women spend twice as much time on household work as men and four times as much time on childcare.<sup>8</sup>
- Women and girls have primary responsibility for water collection.<sup>9</sup>

As social isolation policies are enacted and schools shut down, women and girls are likely to see their already disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities increase significantly. Sick relatives will rely on women for care and households will need more water to wash their hands regularly. Increased responsibilities in insecure times may place women at heightened risk of domestic violence due to heightened tensions in the household.<sup>10</sup>

1. UN Women (2020). The First 100 Days of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific: A Gender Lens. <https://news2.unwomen.org/-/media/2020/04/20200420-100-days-covid-19-402.pdf?ts=1618463400>  
2. CARE (2020). COVID Crisis: Analysis of Risk in Australia's Neighborhood. <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Crisis-Analysis-of-Risk-in-Australia-20200420.pdf>  
3. United Nations (2020). Secretary-General's video message on gender-based violence and COVID-19. <https://www.un.org/sgsm/content/sgsm/content.asp?symbol=2020-04-05-secretary-general-video-message-gender-based-violence-and-covid-19&oldid=76696>  
4. UNDP (2020). Gender Based Violence and COVID-19. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/undp-gender-gbv-and-covid-19.pdf>  
5. UN Women (2020). The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women and Girls. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-infographic-en.pdf>

# Recommendations

UNFPA projections predict that 1 million additional cases of gender based violence can be expected to occur globally if lockdowns continue for at least 6 months.<sup>11</sup> If we are going to stop violence in Timor-Leste we all have to do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the needs, priorities and knowledge of diverse women are considered and the barriers they face addressed.

## Wash your hands

Frequent handwashing is essential to preventing the spread of COVID-19.



**Additional needs for water means increased work for women.**

**Ensure women have sufficient water available for existing care work and increased handwashing.**

## Stay at home

Social distancing is vital to slow transmission of COVID-19.



**For too many, home is not a safe place to self-isolate.**

**Increase resourcing for family violence services and safe housing.**

## Look after your health

Health systems may be overwhelmed by COVID-19, affecting the response to other health needs.



**Lockdown creates barriers to necessary sexual and reproductive services for women and girls that puts their overall health at risk.**

**Ensure the healthcare needs of diverse women are addressed alongside responding to COVID-19.**

## Listen to women

Gender equal leadership leads to better decision making and faster recovery.



**Women are leading COVID-19 response efforts in Timor-Leste in hospitals, homes and their communities.**

**Promote women's full, equal and meaningful participation in leadership and decision making roles related to response and long-term impact planning.**

## Wear a mask

Face masks can slow the spread of COVID-19.



**Women are more likely to be infected by the virus given their predominant roles as caregivers within families and as front-line healthcare workers.**

**Ensure all essential workers have access to face masks.**

## Stay connected

Lockdown will increase cases of violence in Timor-Leste.



**We can all do our part to stop violence by reaching out to support family, friends or neighbours.**

**Call a hotline and seek out local services for survivors.**

**KUANDU ITA BELE HAREE NANIS KRIZE NIA IMPAKTU JÉNERU, ENTAUN ITA BELE MÓS PREVENE IMPAKTU SIRA**

Atu ható'o informasaun kona-ba kazu violénsia ka asesu suporta, kontaktu ba Polísia iha número telefone 112 ka asisténsia Rede Referral, número telefone bele hetan iha: .

<https://hamahon.tl/>

6. The Asia Foundation (2015). Women's Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence in Timor Leste: <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/eng-FS1-2016-05-02.pdf>

7. TOMAK marketplace observation visits conducted in 2018

8. E. Duflo (2012). Women Empowerment and Economic Development. *Journal of Economic Literature*

9. CARE (2020). *Rapid Gender Analysis- Pacific Region*: <https://www.care.org.au/rapid-gender-analysis-covid-19/>

10. S. Harman (2015). Ebola, gender and conspicuously invisible women in global health governance. *Third World Quarterly*

11. UNFPA (2020). *Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage*: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19\\_impact\\_brief\\_for\\_UNFPA\\_24\\_April\\_2020\\_1.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf)