

Developing Key Messages for Communities on GBV & COVID-19

Preliminary Guidance from the GBV AoR, updated 21 April 2020



In humanitarian settings, tailoring community engagement interventions for gender, language, and local culture improves communities' uptake with interventions. Measures taken to prevent and respond to COVID-19 pandemic such as confinement may increase GBV, especially domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). This document is meant as a starting point for the field colleagues to support them in ensuring communication to communities around COVID-19 includes gender-based violence (GBV).

To keep in mind:

Audience

- Survivors of GBV and/or people at risk of GBV (especially women and girls)
- Women
- Adolescent girls
- Girls and boys and unaccompanied/separated children
- Men
- Adolescent boys
- LGBTIQ+
- Older people
- People living with disabilities
- Migrants/ refugees / asylum seekers / IDPs
- Persons in institutionalized care or confinement
- Communities from hard to reach/remote areas
- Communities from urban areas
- Other vulnerable groups (ethnic groups, religious groups, sex workers, etc.)

Format

Effective communication will require mixing/ combining different formats so the same messages are delivered in different ways to different target groups. It is key to analyse the profiles of the different target audiences to ensure communication is tailored to their needs and expectations and does not increase GBV risks.

- Diversify and adapt ways of dissemination to different groups of people: How can they have access to information? Where/when to broadcast or put those messages / posters? Etc.
- Messages should be short and clear; language should be simple
- Messages should be aligned with Government/ WHO guidelines on how to prevent the COVID-19

and infection prevention control (IPC) measures need to be taken into account.

- Visual: pictures or posters (could be put inside Dignity Kits/ in kind assistance too)
- Oral: audio messages (transmitted through radio/ loud-speakers/phone calls)
- Oral and Visual: videos/posts (transmitted through internet, social media, text messages, television, communication applications)
- Ensure messages are done in various and relevant languages and accessible format (including deaf language)

Topics

- Risk of increase of domestic violence within the period of COVID-19: what men and children can do
- Risk of increase of domestic violence within the period of COVID-19: what women and girls can do
- In some contexts, sexual abuse and exploitation might become a more serious issue within the period of COVID-19: what can people at risk can do? How to report a complaint and what assistance is available?
- Sexual abuse and exploitation might become a more serious issue within the period of COVID-19 in your context: what men and boys can do?
- Harmful practices against women and girls may be on the rise within the period of COVID-19: How can we prevent it?
- Social stigma (including towards health workers/ frontliners)
- What services are available for GBV survivors? Which ones? How are they accessible now and how?

Special attention to be put on:

- * Ensuring that information dissemination is conducted in ways which will not increase the spread of COVID-19, nor increase the risk of GBV
- * Tailor all communication to the context, adjusting for community perceptions, beliefs and practices
- * Word messages in a survivor-centred and empowering manner
- * Messages should show support, be based on facts and avoid increasing social stigma
- * Consult with communities (mainly with women and girls) and at risk groups, about issues of concern regarding the pandemic and GBV, the best way to develop the messages, and ways of their dissemination
- * Identify trusted sources of information or key influencers to support/deliver the messages
- * Use continued feedback to adapt messages to the evolving situation
- * Build trust with communities, ensure a feedback mechanism is put in place and continually check it is working
- * Identify specific platforms to engage with marginalized/vulnerable groups
- * Make sure there is available information on GBV referral pathways that includes up-to date information on available, functioning services
- * Verify the functionality of the PSEA reporting mechanisms and its coverage in areas where GBV service is available
- * Verify what kind of actions can be taken when there are no GBV services in the area, and what kind of alternative protection and support structures are available

Examples of messages

FOR EVERYONE:

Violence / Gender-based Violence

- “Listen and Link”: If someone experiences gender-based violence and asks for help, you can be a source of support: “listen” to their problem, show support, don’t judge and try to engage in the situation, you can “link” them to information about helplines and/or other social support services available in your area (INSERT contact and opening hours). Remember, it’s not the survivor’s fault.
- During times of crisis, some families use negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage or other harmful practices. These are not solutions! Protect every member of your family by saying no to these harmful practices. You are not alone, you can reach out to ask for support (INSERT contact and opening hours)
- Act as a leader in your community by saying no to violence, child marriage and other harmful practices. Promote peace among couples and families during the COVID-19 crisis and share information about available services.

Mental Health and Psycho-social Support (MHPSS)*

- It is normal to have feelings of sadness, distress, fear or anger during a crisis. There are various ways to manage these emotions, such as talking to someone you trust, meditate, pray, or practice sports – even if you don’t have a lot of space available. Remember, violence is not the answer.
- If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle (including a proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contact with loved ones at home). Avoid tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with your emotions.
- Talk to people you trust. Keep in touch with family and friends through email, phone calls and making use of social media platforms.
- If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker, social worker, similar professional, or another trusted person in your community such as a religious leader or a community elder.
- Get the facts about your risk and how to take precautions. Use credible sources to get information, such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.
- Decrease the time you and your family spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.

Inspired from: [Inter-Agency Standing Committee. \(2020, March\). Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak Version 1.1.](#)

PSEA

- Remember that support and assistance are FREE. No one is allowed to ask for money, favors, or sex in exchange for assistance. You have the right to decline and should report anyone who attempts to exploit or abuse you (INSERT contact and opening hours + reporting modalities for complaints)

Children

- Prolonged periods of school closure and movement restrictions may lead to emotional unrest and anxieties. Help children to understand what is happening without worrying them too much. If they are kept home from school, try to develop a schedule for them and encourage everyone to be supportive and patient, to limit family conflict.

For more resources on messages for children check [UNICEF: MHPSS support messages for children during COVID-19 response](#). More parenting tips [here](#)

Social stigma

- Support members of the community who are on the frontline of the COVID-19 response such as health staff, and others who provide essential services.



Examples of messages

FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS:

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, you might have more work and pressure on your shoulders: remember that it is ok to feel overwhelmed, stressed or scared. You can call to get support via (INSERT contact and opening hours)
- If you feel unsafe in or around your home; if you are harmed or feel threatened, intimidated or harassed; seek remote confidential support from (INSERT contact and opening hours). You should not feel ashamed and you have the right to get help: you do not have to manage this on your own and always remember it is not your fault.
- In case of violence at home, and when possible, try to organize an “safety plan” if you fear for your life or that of your family. This plan should include a place where you can find refuge, contact details of services or people who could support you, etc. Call (INSERT contact and opening hours) to learn more about a safety plan.

FOR MEN:

Gender-based Violence

- The state of emergency/ confinement/government restrictions are not an excuse for violence. Ensure your family and community stay healthy and protected. Say no to any form of violence.
- Staying at home because of COVID-19 may cause tension within the family. Uncertainty on the future and impact on livelihoods can exacerbate worries for the everyday sustainability of the family. You may feel caged, feel crowded at home – or feel isolated and have a hard time without social contacts and intimate relationships. If you find yourself getting so angry or frustrated that you think a disagreement may turn into a fight with your partner or children, take a break (pray, meditate, read or do some sports) and talk about the matter later when everyone is less angry. Violence is never the solution.
- With the COVID-19 measures, your partner(s), daughters, sisters and mothers might have more domestic duties: let’s help them!

MHPSS

- Taking care of yourself will benefit you and your family, and is a sign of strength and responsibility. It is normal to feel worried about how you will provide for your family in this situation. If you feel overwhelmed and tense, seek help from (INSERT contact and opening hours). Violence is never the solution.

All messages in regards to COVID-19 should be aligned with WHO guidelines and the national Government/ Ministry of Health guidance. Key messages on basic protective measures, how to cope with stress, when and how to wear medical masks, etc can be found [here](#).

Resources:

[The Regional Risk Communication and Community Engagement \(RCCE\) Working Group. \(2020\). COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement. Example of message against IPV for Twitter or Facebook use from UNFPA - DRC](#)

More resources on the [GBV AoR website](#)

