

Developing Key Messages for Communities on GBV & COVID-19



Preliminary Guidance from the GBV AoR, updated 7 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. 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

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 do 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

(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 application)
- 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 people at risk can do?
- 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?
- Are harmful practices for women and girls at rise within the period of COVID-19 ? Why and how we can prevent it ?
- Access to assistance and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and how to report a complaint
- Social stigma (including towards health workers/ frontliners)
- What services are available for GBV survivors? Which ones ? How are they accessible now?

Special attention to be put on:

- * Ensure 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
- * 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 working
- * Identify specific platforms to engage with marginalized/ vulnerable groups
- * Messages should show support, be based on facts and avoid increasing social stigma
- * Make sure there is available information on GBV referral pathways and the type of services available or still functioning
- * Verify the functionality of the PSEA reporting mechanisms and its coverage in areas where GBV services 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 and “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. Don’t feel ashamed to ask for help (INSERT contact and opening hours)
- As a leader in your community you can stop child marriage and other harmful practices from happening in your village. Promote peace among couples and families during the COVID-19 crisis. Guide your people and take action!

PSEA

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

Mental Health and Psycho-social Support (MHPSS)*

- It is normal to feel sad, distressed, worried, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.
- Talk to people you trust. Contact your friends and family.
- If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle (including a proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contact with loved ones at home). Keep in touch with family and friends through email, phone calls and making use of social media platforms.
- Don’t use tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with your emotions.
- If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker, social worker, similar professional, or another trusted person in your community (e.g., religious leader or community elder).
- Have a plan where to go and seek help for physical and mental health and psychosocial needs, if required.
- 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.
- Draw on skills that you have used in the past during difficult times to manage your emotions during this outbreak.

Children

- Children are usually unable to express their fears/anxieties. 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: health staff, volunteers and others who provide essential services.

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](#).



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. Don’t feel ashamed to seek help (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 remember it is not your fault.
- If you or someone in your family are feeling threatened or in danger, call the family protection unit of the police (if available in your area). They are available to protect you even during a pandemic.
- In case of violence at home, when possible, try to organize an “emergency 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.

FOR MEN:

Gender-based Violence

- The state of emergency/confinement/government restrictions are not an excuse for violence. Be a leader: keep yourself, your family and community healthy and protected. Say no to any form of violence.
- Staying at home because of COVID-19 may cause tension among couples. 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 wives, daughters, sisters and mothers might have more domestic duties: let’s help them!
- If you or someone in your family are feeling threatened or in danger, call the family protection unit of the police (if available in your area). They are available to protect you even during a pandemic.

MHPSS

- Taking care of yourself will benefit your family and is a sign of strength and responsibility. If you feel overwhelmed and tense, seek help from (INSERT contact and opening hours). It is normal to feel out of control and to worry how to provide for your family in this situation.

Resources:

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

