



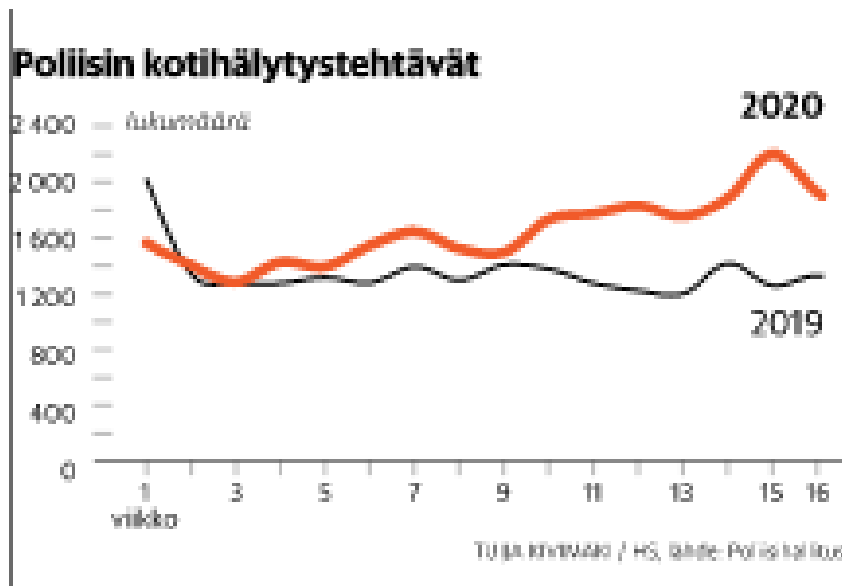
THE FEDERATION OF
MOTHER AND
CHILD HOMES
AND SHELTERS

Report to Special Rapporteur Dubravka Simonovic

The Federation of Mother and child homes is a nationwide child welfare organization founded in 1945, aiming to help children and families in difficult and insecure situations and prevent domestic violence. The Federation is the central organization for its 30 member organisations. We started the first four shelters for the victims of domestic violence in 1979, and now our member organisations run altogether 20 shelters and 22 daytime services throughout Finland. In addition to helping the victims, including children, we also have services for the perpetrators to stop the violence. During 2019 we helped 4008 individuals in our daytime services and 3365 individuals in our 24/7 shelters.

- 1. To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis.**

In Finland the police has publicly announced that house calls have increased. Our information is based on the news in several media. This figure telling about the rise of police home calls was from the largest newspaper Helsingin Sanomat on 2.5. The numbers on the horizontal axis are the first 16 weeks from the beginning of the year:



In our shelters we had at first phase of the lockdown less survivors, supposedly because of everyone was trying to avoid any contacts to other people and especially to places where there are several families. After the very first weeks the situation normalized and altogether we had the same amount of survivors than what last year during the same period. During 16.3.-15.6.20 we had

1036 individuals (570 adults and 466 children) in the shelters of our member organisations, and during the same time last year the number was 981. We also opened one new shelter during the year, so that increases the numbers of 2020 compared to last year.

In daytime services we can see the effects of the pandemic. During 16.3.-15.6.20 we helped 2607 individuals (2283 adults and 324 children) in the daytime domestic violence units of our member organisations, and during the same time last year the number was 2032. So the increase is almost 30 %.

We made an inquiry in our webpages about the effects of the pandemic time for families with children. So far we have got 579 answers, and the questionnaire is still open. In the preliminary findings about half of the respondents says that they have survived well the pandemic time. But 43 % tell about the increased psychological strain. The lockdown has increased stress, tiredness, fear and conflicts within the family as well as financial worries. 11 % tell about fear of violence. The effects have been stronger in single parent families and in families with previous problems. 40 % of the respondents think that the future will be harder for them – this includes families where there were no problems before the pandemic.

2. Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

There is a national 24/7 helpline for the victims of violence, Nollalinja, which is run by an NGO and financed by the government. The lockdown situation has been in many of the conversations.

Our NGO offers counseling and help in chat. The help is similar to phone helplines, but chatting is also a possible even if the partner or the whole family is at home: you can go for example to the bathroom and chat, without anyone hearing sounds or voices as in telephone calls. We have had tremendous 800% rise in chat conversations during pandemic time. In 16.3.-31.5. we had 643 conversations in our "Help for violence survivors" -chat, compared to 81 conversations during the same time last year.

3. Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence?

In Finland we did not have obligation to stay at home, it was just a strong recommendation. The domestic violence shelters were open all the time, so it has been possible to go there all the time.

4. Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

Yes, we have all together 29 shelters in Finland and there is always room for victims in some of those shelters, even though not necessarily in the near ones.

5. Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. It is good to know though, that in Finland the use of protection orders has decreased during recent years, partly due to a obligatory fee for the applicant, if the protection order is not granted. The ministry of justice has established a working group to strengthen the functionality of the protection orders, and it started the work virtually in spite of the pandemic. Our NGO is represented in the working group.

6. What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

Unfortunately the lockdown has also delayed processes in justice systems, for example decisions on custody.

7. What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health.

Health services have been available throughout the crisis, but people have been hesitant or even afraid to go health services, thinking that it is the place where all the COVID-19 patients are. During recent weeks the authorities have several times encouraged people to get help to any health issues and assured that COVID-19 patients are treated in separate locations.

8. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The situation has affected daytime services for the victims of domestic violence as well as the work with perpetrators. All groups have been on hold, and also individual work has been mostly changed to video calls – although according to the need, especially with children, the meetings have been face to face throughout this spring.

9. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments.

Two major broadcasting companies (one of them a public service broadcasting company funded by taxes), Alko (the national retail seller of alcoholic beverages owned by the Finnish Government), the city of Helsinki and several social- and health care sector NGO's declared "Declaration of peace in families" during the restricted time of pandemic. The idea is copied from the long-standing yearly tradition of declaration of Christmas time peace, which is familiar to everyone in Finland. The declaration of peace in families was read by a famous Finnish actor and the President of Finland was the patron of the campaign. The declaration was shown several times as TV advertisement, and from the webpages people could find more information of all the help available.

<https://www.perherauhanjulistus.fi/>

Declaration of family peace

Tomorrow, if all goes well, we will be a step closer to freedom.

But it's not over – not yet.

That is why we are declaring here and now universal family peace. Let each of us take care of our loved ones with the appropriate love and support one another. We are out of our comfort zone. It's hard to think outside the box when it feels like the four walls around you are closing in and you're getting sick of seeing the same faces every day.

Because the danger is that the fear and anxiety, whether propelled by alcohol or without it, erupts and gets channeled into words and actions against the ones we love the most. What we need now is compassion and love for each other. And if that fails, help will be needed for both the victims and perpetrators, whether they are children or adults. Let us offer it to them, in any way we can.

Finally, we want to wish all residents of Finland one thing – strength.

Partly linked to this campaign, but also to the general discussion and our own advertising, the visibility of our NGO, The Federation of Mother and child homes and Shelters, increased significantly: there was 297 articles, where we were mentioned, compared to 80 articles last year

during the same time. This meant that the issue of lockdown increasing violence and other problems at home and the help we provide was more widely known.

Another good practice is that the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations opened up an extra funding for projects which help people in the problems caused by pandemic and even up the growing inequalities.

10. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRIs or equality bodies.

We have provided more online help and expanded chats. Now our chat-services, where anyone can chat about their situation with a professional, is open every weekday 10 – 15 + Monday and Wednesday 17-19. This has required quick training of new chat-workers and investing on advertising the chats. But it has really been worth it and needed: there is huge growth in contacts during the pandemic time (numbers mentioned in the answer for question nr 2).

We also got funding from the extra project funds and are developing quickly a common system for safe virtual meetings to our member organisations, and started to build a possibility to book conversation times online.

During the pandemic an alliance of several organisations has organized foodpackages, where there is ingredients and recipes for one weeks meals to over 5500 families. Our NGO gave out these packages for the families that get help from our member organisations, including families that are leaving shelters or families that use daytime services for the victims of violence.

We were also part of the Uber-company's [#movewhatmatters](#) campaign, and got free rides in Helsinki-area to ensure safe traveling for the workers and families using our services.

11. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above.

The financing of NGO services is not in danger at the moment but the future after pandemic is very worrying. The financial situation of local authorities, who pay for some of the work, is bad – there are lots of cuts of costs ahead. Also the income of Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations has decreased significantly, and because of that there will be less grants to NGOs, both for the ongoing work and especially for new projects.

We are also lobbying to remind the authorities the NGO's need to be included in the plans and compensations as well as having a role in exiting the pandemic time. 20 NGOs sent a joint letter to the government about this, demanding that resources are also allocated to NGO work.

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Riitta Särkelä
Secretary General

Sari Laaksonen
Development director

Johanna Linner Matikka
Expert