**UN Questionnaire:**

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.***

Unconfirmed figures of women and girls at risk of GBV in Nigeria are put at about 80 million, most of them have been placed under lockdown with potential abusers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Information from credible Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), government agencies and concerned stakeholders in Nigeria who are tracking incidents and reports of SGBV within this period have indicated a significant rise. GRIP, a local based NGO in Ekiti state, south west Nigeria, are reported to have responded to 54 cases of SGBV across Nigeria within the first thirty days of the lockdown period, including a case of a woman who was at the verge of taking her life and that of her children due to frustration from domestic violence.

Service providers have reported sharp increases in cases of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. Data on reported incidents of GBV cases in Nigeria based on preliminary information from 24 states shows that in March, the total number of GBV incidents reported were 346, while in the first part of April, incident reports spiked to 794, depicting a 56 per cent increase in just two weeks of lockdown. Some of these incidents of violence have tragically resulted in the death of victims, the rape of children, including incestual rape, and tenant–landlord assault.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In the same vein, Dr Adamu Kasarawa, the Sokoto state commandant of the Hisbah Commission which is in charge of the enforcement of sharia law, said there has been a spike in the rate of sexual abuse including rape, harassment, exploitation and unwanted pregnancies associated with under aged girls between February 1 and 15th of April, with 72 cases reported. In a recent media report tracked on [AllAfrica.com](https://allafrica.com/), Dr. Kasarawa said they have received several report of cases from women, most pertaining to IPV. He said collation from 70% of the 122 Hisbah divisional officers in the state showed that in January alone there were 316 cases, in February 423 cases, in March 511 and 379 cases of GBV.

In late May, a 22-year-old first year student of the University of Benin, Miss Omozuwa Uwavera, went into a church building in her neighborhood to read her books in preparation for the resumption of schools after the COVID-19 lockdown, she was attacked, raped and hit on the head with a fire extinguisher which led to her death shortly after being found and rushed to a hospital. The brutal killing of Omozuwa and the shooting to death of a 16-year-old bus passenger, Miss Tina Ezekwe, in the preceding week by a policeman trying to enforce COVID-19 vehicle movement restrictions in Lagos have led to nationwide condemnation of increasing cases of violence against women and protests on social media by celebrities, concerned citizens and stakeholders.

1. ***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?***

The Nigeria Police has rolled out phone numbers of Assistant Inspectors Generals of Police, Commissioners of Police, Divisional Police Officers and Public Relation Officers across the different state police commands, encouraging citizens to report various human rights violations including Sexual and Gender Based Violence. FIDA Nigeria (International Federation of Female Lawyers) has published online directory of SGBV hotlines in its 32 branches across the country and that of its partners to respond to these cases during the lockdown and beyond. Similar measures were taken by CLEEN Foundation[[2]](#footnote-2), which recently launched a virtual Public Safety and Security Support Project to address rights-based approach and misconduct by security operatives during the lockdown. Also, the National Human Rights Commission and other governmental and non-governmental organizations have launched various projects in response to human rights violations, including SGBV during this period of lockdown.

There is no feedback yet on comparative numbers of calls that have come on these pathways, as most organizations are still tracking data and working on reports.

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

There are no evidences or indicators to show that this is the case or is obtainable. Organizations at the forefront of prevention of violence against women are also faced with the challenges of providing fast and effective response to cases during the lockdown and curfew periods as they are not categorized as Essential Workers.

Exemption of victims of domestic violence from restrictive measures and stay at home orders might only become possible if a deliberate advocacy is done in this regard by stakeholders. Overzealousness on the part of security officials enforcing the lockdown directive is also a major challenge. In April there was a viral video on Nigerian social media platforms of two police officers brutally assaulting a woman in Osun state. The victim, Miss Tola Azeez would later tell journalists that she was only out to get some drugs at a pharmacy when she was accosted for being out during the lockdown.

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

Shelters have not been given any special considerations as they have also been subjected to the laws put in place for government and private institutions to remain closed or operating at skeletal levels. The Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) and government shelters have since been shut down. Project Alert, which is a forefront intervention in the prevention of domestic violence against women have a functional shelter in Lagos which was kept partially open. Challenges faced by operators of shelters in other states, including the FCT, include protection of staff from the infection, movement restrictions to get victims or survivors to the shelters that are open, overcrowding of such places due to new cases and residents of the shelters who have been away in institutions of learning are all back home due to COVID-19. Another challenge with availability of functional shelters during this period is funding.

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

It has been difficult to get protection orders and prosecution of offenders because courts had been on strike during the first two months of the COVID lockdown and have only resumed skeletal services (two days a week) in mid-April 2020. The cost of getting the protection orders are also way beyond the reach of victims and NGOs handling their cases, average cost is about thirty thousand naira (77 USD) to put the entire process together from start to finish. NGOs providing response have had to resort to working with local security structures such as vigilante services and community-based youths working with local leaders and chiefs to enforce protection of victims from their abusers. Most victims are also economically dependent on their abusers, which makes it more difficult to protect them.

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

Courts were on strike during the first two months of the COVID lockdown and have only resumed skeletal services (two days a week) in mid-April 2020. Upon resumption the courts are also inundated with several pending cases which are ordinarily considered more important. An important step forward in the national response to issues affecting woman and young girls was the sentencing of one Yinusa Dahiru to 26 years in prison over the 2015 abduction, kidnapping and sexual exploitation of 14-year-old Miss Ese Oruru. The judgment was passed on 21st of May 2019.

1. ***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 are considered as essential services and were treated as such during the period, hospitals as well pharmacy stores are allowed to open while observing the social distancing and other rules. However, the restrictions in movement and economic implications of the pandemic affected women and young girls as they were no gendered perspectives to the addressing of issues by government e.g provision of sanitary items or contraceptives for easy access by women during the enforced stay at home periods, leading to unplanned or forced pregnancies. They are just two females (out of twelve) in the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, appointed by their offices to the committee.

Other issues affecting women’s access to health services include lack of public transportation to move them from one point to the health services location.

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

There are some key issues arising within the period of the lockdown that limits the effectiveness of efforts to stem the scourge of domestic violence against women in Nigeria. Some of these limitations are: cultural barriers, as issues affecting women are still treated with levity; endemic silence by survivors/victims; stigmatization of survivors/victims; attitude of some police officers, security agents and stakeholders responding to cases.

There are also the nagging issues of low response of the justice system; restriction of movement occasioned by the Covid-19 Lockdown, which is hindering investigation and preservation of evidence. Ignorance is also a big challenge as some women and girls are with little or no knowledge on how to access justice when they face violations. Some women are illiterate and even when they have phone cannot read and write, and as such cannot leverage on technology to protect their rights. Another barrier is poverty and joblessness–some women are poor and unable to pursue justice to a logical conclusion–and some cannot afford credits on their phones to make calls in the event of SGBV.

1. ***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.***
   * Deliberate inclusion of women and young people in Task Forces and committees
   * Inclusion of gendered perspectives to national prevention and control measures
   * Prioritization of gender-based violence response as essential services
   * Expanding the roles of mobile courts on violation of stay at home orders to also handle domestic violence cases
   * Provision of online channels for the acquisition of protection orders
   * Set up of special desks in police formations and stations for cases of violence against women and girls
2. ***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.***
   * Advocacy to government for the highlighting of rising incidences of SGBV and provision of structured response
   * Sensitization and awareness creation among women and young girls to enable them access the right services when in danger or in need of help. In this regard Love Matters Naija shared deliberate Sex, Relationships and IPV during COVID-19 enlightenment posts and stories on its social media platforms to over 800 thousand young people[[3]](#footnote-3). National Coordinator of LM Naija, Alu Azege also participated in an online conference put together by Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)[[4]](#footnote-4) where she trained women focused Civil Society Organizations on Information, Education and Communication (IEC) tools to effectively fight the scourge of GBV and IPV during COVID-19. A major part of the strategy session at the conference involved an update on status of incidences during COVID-19.
   * Provision of specially targeted services and palliatives to physically disabled women and girls
   * Leverage on existing programme structures and networks in the rural areas to partner with government in the provision of information and reproductive health services to the poor rural dwellers

1. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS: THE SHADOW PANDEMIC: A brief prepared by UN Women with UNFPA, UNODC and UNICEF on behalf of the UN System in Nigeria, May, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://cleen.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://web.facebook.com/LoveMattersNaija/photos/a.430637474070810/877516692716217/?type=3&theater>  
   <https://web.facebook.com/LoveMattersNaija/photos/a.430637474070810/892102571257629/?type=3&theater&_rdc=1&_rdr>

   <https://web.facebook.com/LoveMattersNaija/photos/a.430131877454703/883049345496285/?type=3&theater> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. www.wrapanigeria.org [↑](#footnote-ref-4)