

**COVID 19 IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA**  
**MAY, 2020**

**KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA**  
**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

## 1. CURRENT SITUATION

The first case of Coronavirus in Pakistan surfaced on 25th February, 2020. Number of total cases according to official data as of 19th May, 2020 has reached 43,966 of which reported cases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are 6,230 making 14 percent of the total national tally to date. The number of reported deaths in the province to date is 334 while total recovered are 1,944<sup>i</sup>.

Province wise data for male and female infected cases and deaths could not be traced however sex distribution of national tally by age shows that women between the age brackets of 20-29 and 30 – 39 are highest affected amongst all age groups. The distribution of deaths for female between the age brackets of 60-69 is the highest<sup>1</sup> in the country.

There are 23,557 quarantine facilities across Pakistan of which 2,760 are in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Isolation arrangements have been made in hundred and ten (110) hospitals across the province with a total bed capacity of eight hundred and fifty-six<sup>2</sup>.

In March, 2020, the Federal Government redirected \$40 m unutilized funds to fight the pandemic of which \$7 million were diverted to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On 19th March, 2020 the Federal Government announced lockdown.

## 2. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN CURRENT SITUATION?

- 1) Women and Poverty:** Aggravating poverty situation in the face of crisis brought about by the pandemic has hit the lower middle and white color class the hardest. Women in general and women headed households representing this class further are the most vulnerable groups and most in need of immediate social assistance.
  
- 2) Effects on Female Workforce:** Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are primarily associated with the informal and unregulated sectors and trades, such as working as unregistered health workers, as teachers in private schools and academies, as artisans in home based trades and as household or those engaged in providing domestic help. Required social distancing practices and the restrictions on intra and inter district transportation by the Provincial Government as well as closure of factories and other workplaces has resulted in limited mobility in general and for women from these trades in particular as they used to step out and find wage based work to support their families. In many cases women have had to lose work in these fields and pandemic has resulted in complex economic stress for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Covid-19 Secretariat, Islamabad (<http://covid.gov.pk/>)

<sup>2</sup> Reported by National Institute of Health, Pakistan

- 3) An increase in Burden of Unpaid Caregiving:** Growing burden of care for the ailing, children and the elderly and enhanced levels of domestic chores resulting from lockdown for women, in most cases, unacknowledged and supported by male family members, has been reported and witnessed across the province. These conditions are likely to lead to increased stress and physical fatigue levels for women and further lead to stress and burn out.
- 4) Women Business Entrepreneurs:** Loss of employment and lower to no business outputs in women run by women in limited resources have added to difficulties of women entrepreneurs. As many women led businesses tend to remain unregistered, they are likely to miss business support and equity measures by government in response to the pandemic.
- 5) Gender Based Violence:** About 35 cases of domestic violence have been reported via a CSOs run helpline between fourth week of March and May 2020. Other forms of gender based violence reported in media include honor killings (Waziristan case May 2020), murder (a man killed wife over cold meal, May 2020), sexual abuse with children (case reported from District Mardan in March, 2020).
- 6) Issues Faced by Female Health Workers:** As per verified reports some of the key issues faced by female health professionals working on the frontlines of response are faced with challenges such as:
- a. lack of personal protective gear thus greater exposure to virus
  - b. workplace discrimination and neglect (In a known incident a nurse hailing from District Chitral and serving in a leading private sector hospital of Peshawar was laid off by her employer after testing positive during her time serving at the hospital.)
  - c. workplace harassment and discrimination that may potentially lead to fear, stress and anxiety and affect quality of performance and life for female health professionals.
- 7) Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR):** SRHR and mother and child health services are also affected due to lockdown and may further risk diversion of resources for mother and child programmes to coronavirus response which might have implications for women in the longer run even after the pandemic is over.

### **3. WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING TO RESPOND TO THE CRISIS WITH A GENDER RESPONSIVE APPROACH?**

- 1) **Ehsas Emergency Programme:** The Prime Minister of Pakistan Emergency Cash Assistance has started as a social protection measure for the economically marginalized groups, particularly targeting women. Under the initiative, a cash assistance of Rupees twelve thousand per quarter is being paid to the deserving beneficiaries. The same programme is benefitting women in the province.
- 2) **Bolo Helpline:** The Department of Social Welfare, Special Education and Women Empowerment (SWSEWED), Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has started Bolo Helpline (0800-22227) for the referrals of cases of gender based violence.
- 3) **Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Helpline:** The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), KP has started a hotline providing host of response services to citizens including psycho-social counselling to callers, including to women. The hotline number is 1700.
- 4) **SOPs for Protection of Women in Quarantine Centers:** The Provincial Government has also notified SOPs for the protection of women and children in quarantine through Relief and Rehabilitation Department of Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- 5) **SOPs for Protection of Women in Shelter Homes:** The Department of Social Welfare has also notified the SOPs for women in shelter homes and institutions of social care for children.
- 6) **Women Engaged in Production of Face Masks:** Women and students of skills centers of Social Welfare Department have been involved in the production of face masks.
- 7) **Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline:** "Sehat Tahaffuz" helpline 1166 has been launched to provide health-related information services to the people. Through the Helpline citizens will be able to obtain immediate assistance to their queries and concerns related to Polio and routine immunization services. The helplines caters to queries from and for all genders.

#### 4. WHAT KPCSW IS DOING?

- 1) KPCSW in general provides technical assistance to the Department of Social Welfare, review of SOPs and protocols and flags and issues that come forth and need following with regards to crisis and its impact on women i.e. workplace harassment or follow up on registration of FIR on any case of gender based violence.
- 2) The Commission is close to concluding work on response strategy to combat gender implications of Coronavirus in mid and long term.
- 3) The Commission is now also positioning itself to prepare and lead advocacy on long pending domestic violence bill.

- 4) The Commission is working on developing strategic communication on attitudinal change for mitigating violence against women.

## **5. Way-forward**

- 1) The Provincial Government is fully committed to eliminating effects of the pandemic and the Commission looks forward to taking this opportunity to push the legislation on issues affecting women and lobby for expediting enactment of pending legislation.
  - 2) The situation also offers the Commission an opportunity to provide our technical and advisory services to the concerned government departments for efficient administration of emergency cash programmes with core focus on deserving and marginalized women.
  - 3) This is also an opportunity for us to increase inter-departmental liaison in the course of promoting women's protection agenda, key partners to engage in this respect are social welfare, health department and home department.
  - 4) The Commission is working on strategic communication to work on behavior changes toward realizing a fair environment for women.
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