

Addressing Violence against Women (VAW) under COVID-19 in Brazil¹

Emerging evidence from COVID-19 impacts as well as lessons from past epidemics suggest that significant risks of VAW increase in these contexts, especially in countries with weak health systems, weak rule of law, and already high levels of VAW and gender inequality. Recent reports indicate that this is also the case in Brazil. Data from the first two months of confinement measures (March-April 2020) point to a 22% increase in femicide and a 27% increase in complaints to the national VAW helpline, when compared to the same period of 2019. Increased economic stress due to income losses, anxiety in face of the epidemic and fear of contagion, social isolation and mandatory confinement with potential abusers and with children at home indicate that women and girls are likely to be more exposed to intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation and abuse during this period. While risks increase, access to health, security and justice sector services provided to survivors may be limited due to de-prioritization of funding, closed facilities and restrictions on public mobility.

This note aims at providing support to federal and subnational governments in understanding the increased risks of VAW in the country under COVID-19 and providing the most appropriate responses in the short, medium and longer term. It points to evidence of epidemic-related risk factors connected to increased levels of VAW, trends of VAW during the COVID-19 epidemic in Brazil, policy measures and interventions implemented globally to mitigate adverse impacts, as well as response efforts that have been put in place both by governments and civil society organizations. It also compiles existing data available on increased VAW in the country since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing to the main (direct and indirect) links between the two.

While aiming to provide timely support during the ongoing pandemic, high frequency data available and the restrictions imposed by the present-day situation on data collection make it hard to assess the effective impact of such measures, interventions and response efforts. Their implementation should be accompanied carefully to provide lessons for others and potential future pandemics. As such, this is intended to be a living document that will contribute to the global knowledge on how countries are responding to VAW-COVID-19 related challenges by documenting actions in this sector. Overall, findings should be considered preliminary and will be updated based on consultations with Brazilian counterparts from government, civil society and experts.

¹This note was prepared by Gabriela Bastos, Flávia Carbonari, and Paula Tavares. The team would like to thank Pablo Ariel Acosta, Alberto Coelho, Maria Gonzalez and Juliana Braga for their invaluable contributions and support.

1. Increased Risk Factors for VAW during COVID-19^{2,3}

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) reached Brazil in February 2020. Prior to its first confirmed case, on February 3, 2020 the Government of Brazil declared the “State of Public Health Emergency of National Importance” and took several actions to contain and mitigate the impact of COVID-19, including allowing for quarantine and social distancing measures. In addition to health impacts, measures have aimed to mitigate effects of COVID-19 on already economically vulnerable populations, among whom women and families are overrepresented. Pre-COVID data showed, for example, that women in Brazil are disproportionately unemployed (13.1 percent women versus 9.2 percent men) and underrepresented in the labor market (female labor force participation rate stood at 53.1 percent versus 71.6 percent for men) (IBGE 2019).

Despite emergency measures, the largest economic shock effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are indeed being felt among the already economically vulnerable population and may be felt especially by women and girls, who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty.⁴ In addition to higher unemployment and lower labor market participation among women, even where employed, they are overrepresented in sectors with high reliance on face to face interactions and in informal work and other vulnerable forms of employment, which often leaves them out of formal social protection measures targeted to workers. At the same time, women’s already significant unpaid care burden, given their multiple domestic and childcare responsibilities, may be heightened, as school closures and confinement measures are adopted, leading to increased limitation in time available to work in the labor market.

Public health measures to prevent COVID-19 spread, such as quarantines and social isolation, may lead to a combination of higher exposure to abusers within an environment of increasing problematic coping behaviors in face of mounting social and economic stress. These measures limit both physical mobility and potentially increase economic vulnerability among women experiencing interpersonal violence. Women’s worries about their physical safety or experiences of mental or emotional distress may be heightened, and magnified child maltreatment and abuse, due to a confluence of school closures, stress, fear and uncertainty, and breakdown of societal infrastructure and generalized public services may also occur. Increased mortality, morbidity, and fertility rates driven by pandemics also have implications for VAW-related risks within extended family networks, as well as exploitative relationships for women and girls, especially those facing economic vulnerability.

While risks increase, access to services for survivors may be reduced, with the contraction of health, security and justice sector services due to de-prioritization of funding, closed facilities and restrictions on public mobility. The increased burden caused by any pandemic on health care providers and the contraction of routine health services means barriers to screening and service provision for VAW will be amplified. Furthermore, the referral pathways – including from security services – may change during a pandemic or post-emergency, and there can be a failure of complementary health and legal services to address immediate and medium-term needs of women, who may further be impaired in seeking help and justice.

Finally, health care workers, 65% of which are women in Brazil, and who are more likely to be in the front line, are also at increased risk of violence in emergency settings, at work, in their homes and in public spaces.⁵ This is due to several reasons, including violence and abuse perpetrated by patients and patients’ families; lack of safety they may face moving to and from areas of work; discrimination, shame and stigma faced at the community and public space; increased stress related to conflicting work demands and personal caretaking responsibilities.⁶

² COVID-19 refers to the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) disease discovered in 2019.

³ Adapted from Peterman et. all (April 1st, 2020), available at <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children> . See also CARE 2020 and Fraser, E. 2020.

⁴ UN Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women, 9 APRIL 2020.

⁵ For more information on stigma against healthcare workers in Brazil see:

<https://g1.globo.com/pe/pernambuco/noticia/2020/04/27/profissionais-de-saude-relatam-situacoes-de-preconceito-na-pandemia-da-covid-19.ghtml>

⁶ Yaker, R. (2020) Securing the Safety and Wellbeing of Women Frontline Healthcare Workers in the COVID-19 Response. GBV AoR Helpdesk. Emergency Support Query.

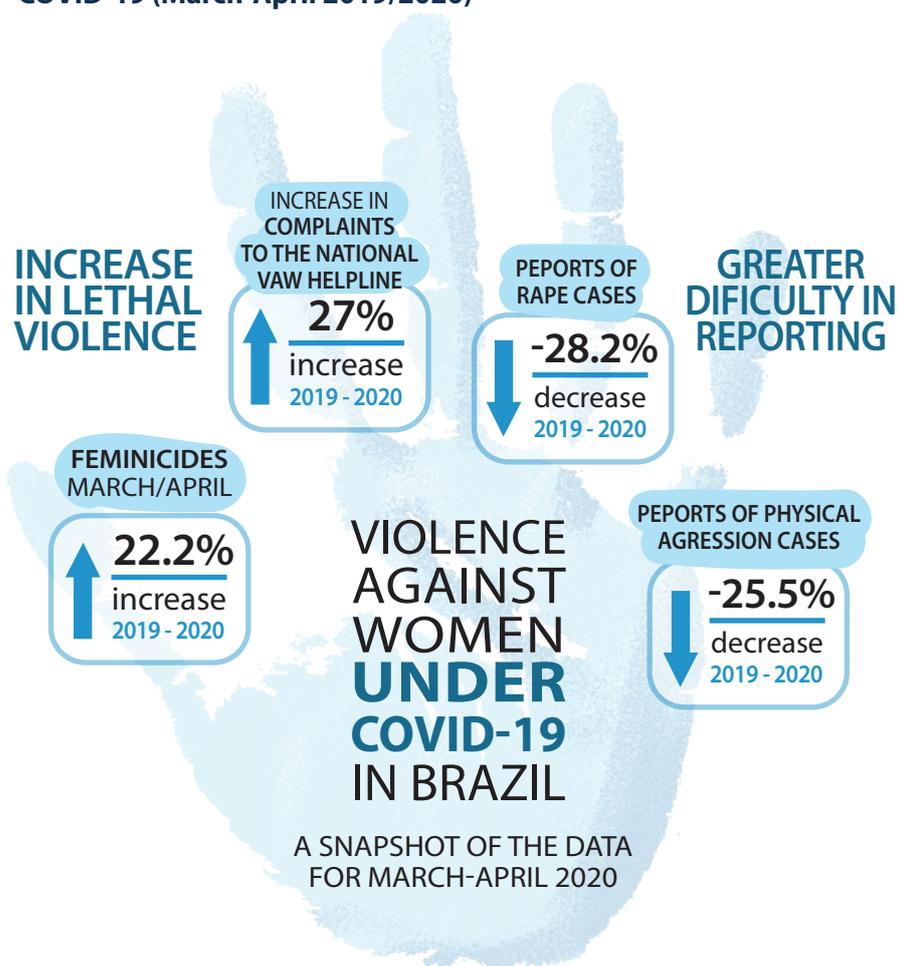
2. VAW during COVID-19 in Brazil⁷

In Brazil, existing data prior to the onset of COVID-19 estimated that more than 500 women experience some form of violence every single hour, and at least one woman is murdered every two hours. In 2018 alone, 1.6 million women were beaten or were almost strangled, while 22 million (37% of the country's female population) experienced some type of harassment. In most cases (52%), victims did not report the perpetrator or seek help. In more than 40% of all cases of violence reported in 2018, survivors knew their perpetrators. Regarding VAW in public spaces, almost 4 million women reported having been physically assaulted in the public transportation system. Overall, youth and afro-descendant women are disproportionately affected.⁸ With such staggering rates and despite the existence of one of the most progressive domestic violence laws in the world, in 2015 Brazil ranked fifth among countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world.⁹

Meanwhile, evidence on the aforementioned COVID-related risks, compounded with already high VAW prevalence rates, has been materializing in Brazil, where confinement measures implemented to minimize the direct effects of Covid-19 have been put in place. High frequency data gathered from select states in the country show concerning trends of (i) an initial decline in in-person reporting of VAW at police stations and requests for emergency protection orders, which demonstrates that women in situations of violence are having difficulty in accessing public facilities to register complaints and obtain immediate protection; combined with (ii) a significant increase in the number of femicides in most states, as well as calls to the national VAW helpline since the beginning of March 2020, when first quarantine and social distancing measures started to be implemented; and (iii) a significant increase in mentions on social media of intimate-partner conflicts within households.

Data from the first two months of confinement measures (March and April of 2020) point to a 22% increase in femicide and a 27% increase in complaints to the national VAW helpline, against the same period of 2019.¹⁰ In April alone, when all 12 states in the country analyzed by this note had already implemented isolation measures, the national VAW helpline – “Call-180” – created in 2005 to provide support to victims reported a 37% increase in complaints in comparison to the same month of 2019. In parallel, reporting of VAW-related cases in police stations decreased significantly, despite the adoption in many states of an online reporting mechanism: reports of rape and physical aggression cases dropped by 28.2% and 25.5% respectively between March-April 2019 and 2020. Figure 1 presents a snapshot of the data on violence against women in Brazil during the first two months of confinement measures, in comparison to the same period of the previous year.

Figure 1 – Snapshot of violence against women in Brazil during COVID-19 (March-April 2019/2020)



⁷ This is a short summary of data collected and analyzed by the Brazil Forum on Public Safety per the World Bank's request.

⁸ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública e Datafolha. 2018. Visível e Invisível: a Vitimização de Mulheres no Brasil – 2a edição.

⁹ Waiselfisz, J. (2015). Mapa da Violência 2015. Homicídios de Mulheres no Brasil. Brasília: FLACSO Brasil.

¹⁰ Data gathered and analyzed by the Brazil Forum on Public Safety per request of the World Bank.

Such alarming evidence of heightened VAW trends during COVID-19 in Brazil are in line with data from other countries. In France, for example, cases of domestic violence increased by 30% since the beginning of quarantine measures implemented since March 17. VAW hotlines in Cyprus and Singapore registered an increase in calls by 30% and 33%, respectively.¹¹ In Canada, Germany, Italy¹², Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, government authorities and women's organizations have likewise indicated an increase in reports of domestic violence during the pandemic and an increase in the demand for shelters for women who fear for their lives.¹³

2.1 Key VAW Trends Based on the first two months of COVID-19 measures in Brazil

This sub-section provides an overview of key VAW trends summarized above, based on data registered in government channels in March and April 2020, during which COVID-19 was already spreading across the country and restraining measures from authorities were already being implemented in most states (see Box 1 for more information on the data collected for Brazil).

Box 1. A note on the VAW data in Brazil and methodology

It should be noted that official sources of VAW data are fragmented in Brazil among different channels used by women to seek help, including the national 180-helpline, police stations/public security secretariats, social assistance units, shelters, among others. The country also faces a lack of disaggregated data particularly for more vulnerable groups such as adolescent girls and older women, the LGBTI+ population, among others. The data presented in this note draws on statistics made available in a timely (before May 30, 2020) and transparent manner on different types of VAW reports from 12 states, namely: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Acre, Amapá, Pará, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Maranhão, Rio Grande do Sul, and Mato Grosso. The data reported were collected by the national 180-helpline data (for all types of VAW), as well as by the State Public Security and/or Social Defense Secretariats and Courts of Justice related to domestic violence in the different states. Data on Urgent Protective Measures were requested and available from the Courts of Justice of the States of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Pará, Acre and Mato Grosso. Data collection was carried out throughout the month of May and requested for the periods of March and April 2019 and 2020. In April, all states had adopted some type of social isolation measure to face the pandemic. Given the barriers women are facing in accessing formal reporting channels under the current COVID-19 context, the note also explores data on the perception of external agents/neighbors about domestic violence episodes, analyzing comments made by users on social media as third-party evidence reporting on household fights and violence.

¹¹ UN Women, 2020.

¹² In Italy, according to data released by the Minister of Family and Equal Opportunities, Elena Bonetti, between April 1 and 18, there was a 161.71% increase in complaints, with 1,039 this year compared to 397 in the same period last year, and domestic violence cases were reported to go up by 73%. Source: Gazeta Web of May 15, 2020. Available at:

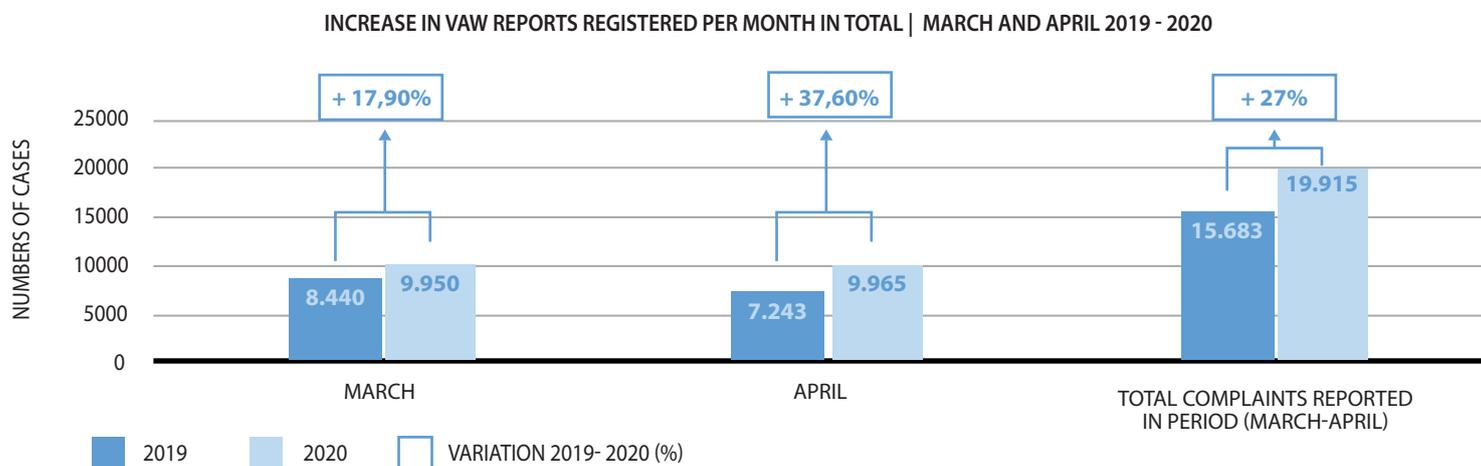
https://gazetaweb.globo.com/porta1/noticia/2020/05/denuncias-de-violencia-domestica-voltam-a-subir-e-crescem-73-na-italia_105546.php

¹³ UN Women, 2020.

Increase in Calls to the VAW Helpline

Reporting of violence against women via the national VAW Call-180 helpline¹⁴ recorded an increase of 27%, up from 15,683 complaints in March-April 2019 to 19,915 in 2020, during the period already affected by the health crisis (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Number of reports of violence against women registered through the Call-180 helpline, Brazil, March/April 2019-March/April 2020.

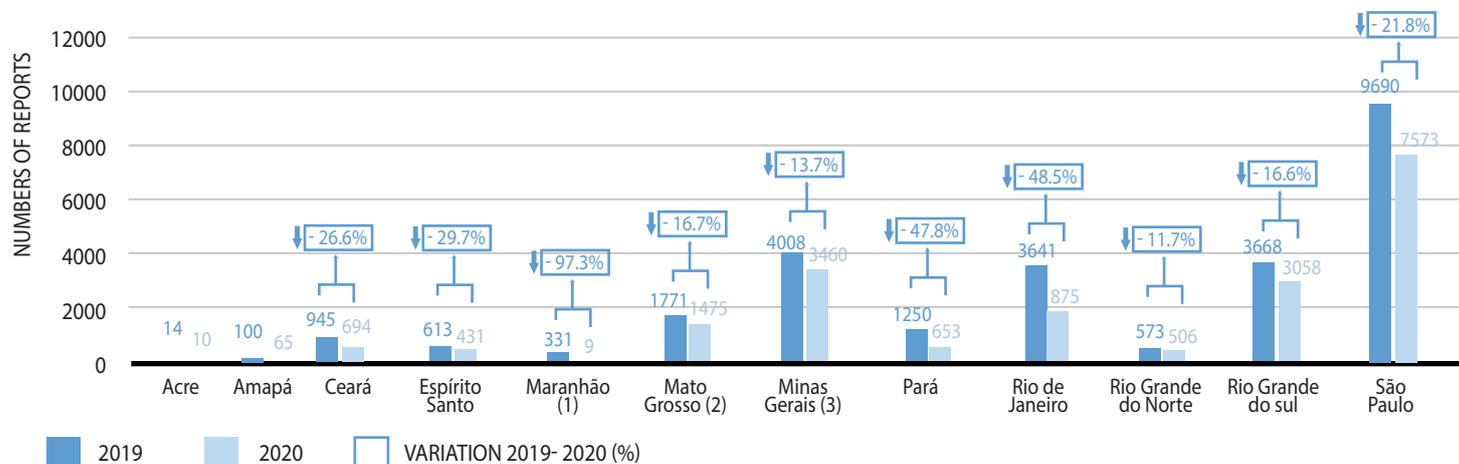


Source: Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (Ligue 180). Note: The records refer to crimes of threat, private imprisonment, femicide, attempted femicide, homicide, attempted murder, slave labor, trafficking in women, violence in sport, violence against religion diversity, domestic and family violence, violence physical, moral violence, obstetric violence, police violence, patrimonial violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and virtual violence.

Decline in In-Person Reporting of VAW and Requests for Protective Measures

At the same time, all states covered in the analysis recorded a reduction in the number of domestic violence complaints reported through police stations in March and April 2020, with an average overall drop of 25.5% compared to the same period of 2019. The greatest drop among the states occurred in Maranhão, where complaints fell by 97.3%. In Rio de Janeiro and Pará, complaints fell by 48.5% and 47.8%, respectively, while in Rio Grande do Norte, the only state where the number of complaints grew in March, there was a 57.7% drop in reports at police stations in April, when social isolation measures were already in place.

Graph 2. Domestic violence reports (physical aggression). Select states, March and April 2019/2020, Absolute Numbers and Variation (%)



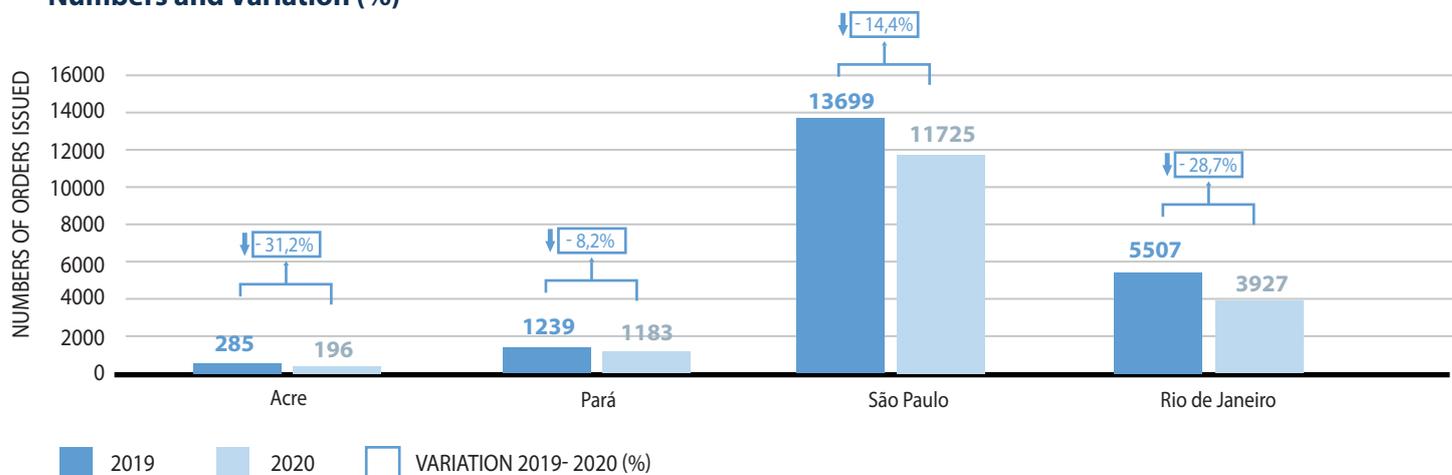
Source: State Secretariats of Public Security and/or Social Defense; NAT/MPAC Criminal Analysis Observatory; Brazilian Public Security Forum. Note: (1) The data for April cover April 1-17 for both years (2019 and 2020) and consider cases of physical aggression as defined by the Maria da Penha Law, i.e. "any conduct that impacts a woman's physical integrity or health"; (2) Data for April 2019 and 2020 refer only to victims aged 18 to 59 years; (3) Considers the total of bodily injuries for which victims are women.

¹⁴The 180-helpline ("Ligue 180") is a service created in 2005 and currently offered by the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH), with the objective of receiving reports of violence against women, in addition to providing women with guidance on their rights and the women's service network.

The number of protective measures requested by domestic violence victims between March and April, when quarantine measures were in place, also fell substantially, in line with records of cases requiring in-person reporting. According to data made available by the Courts of Justice of each state, protection orders issued fell by 31.2% in Acre, 8.2% in Pará, 14.4% in São Paulo and 28.7% in Rio de Janeiro, respectively, suggesting the potential difficulty women in situations of violence are facing in accessing in-person reporting channels to register complaints.

Even in states where online complaint filings and issuance of protective measures were implemented, numbers dropped – such as in São Paulo, where complaints fell by 21.8% and Rio de Janeiro, where 28.7% less protection orders were issued. It should be noted, however, that such online and remote services were only made available more recently – starting in April 2020¹⁵ – and survivors may not have been readily aware of this option. This could help explain the decrease in the numbers of VAW complaints reported, for example, as opposed to the increase observed in calls to the national VAW helpline, which has been available longer and well-disseminated among potential survivors. As such, monitoring the trends with reporting through online means may provide important indication of the impact of increased access options through reporting figures.

Graph 3. Number of Urgent Protection Orders Issued, Select states, March and April 2019/2020, Absolute Numbers and Variation (%)



Source: Courts of Justice; Brazilian Public Security Forum.

It should be noted that, under normal circumstances, underreporting of VAW is already traditionally high, given survivors' reluctance to register complaints due to fear, stigma, social norms and lack of trust in the justice system. Under quarantine measures, underreporting is expected to be significantly higher given the constraint women may have in reaching formal services given the fact that they are confined at home in the presence of the perpetrator and with restricted mobility. Similar trends were documented in other countries, such as Italy.¹⁶

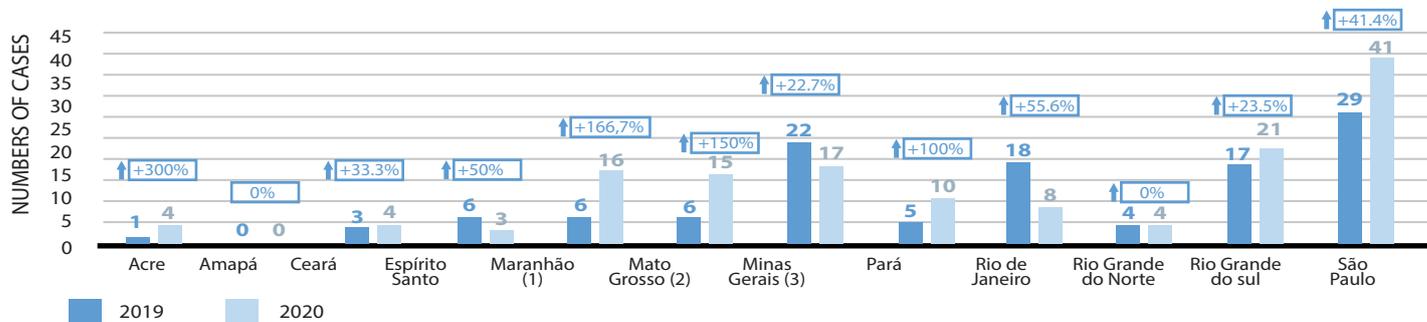
Increase in Femicides and Female Homicides

Mortality data for women during the period of social isolation recorded the greatest variation. The number of femicides registered in the 12 states examined increased by a total of 22.2%, jumping from 117 victims in March/April 2019 to 143 victims in March/April 2020. In Acre, Maranhão and Mato Grosso, the rates increased respectively by 300% (up from 1 to 4 victims), 166.7% (up from 6 to 16 victims) and 150% (up from 6 to 15 victims). Only three states recorded a drop in the number of femicides during the period of analysis: Minas Gerais (-22.7%), Espírito Santo (-50%), and Rio de Janeiro (-55.6%). It should be noted that a more comprehensive analysis, examining the level and periods of implementation of quarantine measures, other trends of violence, as well as specific measures adopted to prevent and mitigate them, might provide additional insights regarding the discrepancy in data in these three states.

¹⁵ For more information, access: shorturl.at/cghzZ.

¹⁶ In Italy, where one of the most critical situations of the coronavirus pandemic has been reported as of the drafting of this note and quarantine measures have been in place since March 9, 2020, a drop of 43% in the reports/occurrences of domestic crimes has been recorded. Records from the country's largest domestic violence helpline, Telefono Rosa also show a 55% drop in calls and reporting since the beginning of the lockdown (Source: REUTERS. In Italy, support groups fear lockdown is silencing domestic abuse victims. The New York Times, NY, April 4, 2020; TAUB, Amanda. A new covid-19 crisis: domestic abuse rises worldwide. The New York Times, NY, April 6, 2020.)

Graph 4. Femicides, Select States, March and April 2019/2020, Absolute Numbers and Variation (%)



Source: State Secretaries of Public Security and / or Social Defense; NAT/MPAC Criminal Analysis Observatory; Public Security Institute of Rio de Janeiro; Brazilian Public Security Forum. Notes: (1) Data for Maranhão for April 2019 and 2020 cover only the period between April 1-17; (2) Data for April 2019 and 2020 include only victims aged 18-59.

It is important to note that in Brazil, femicides are considered a distinct category of homicides, regulated by the Femicide Law (Law 13,104, of March 9, 2015), when committed against women because of their gender. The data on femicides presented here were extracted from reports issued by the Civil Police and, therefore, consider only those cases that were immediately registered as femicides. It is likely that after the conclusion of police investigations, other cases will be classified as such, thus further increasing the number of femicide victims. It should also be noted that such underreporting may impact the numbers, as not all states apply the law adequately, and therefore there may be additional cases of femicide that have not been classified as such.

In addition to femicides, data on other non-qualified killings of women were available and collected for eight states, and showed an overall increase of 8.8% between March-April 2019 and March-April 2020, with large variations between states. In Acre, the increase was 75% (from 4 to 7 victims) and in Amapá two women were murdered this year and none last year. In Ceará, the number jumped from 36 female homicides recorded between March and April 2019 to 61 in the same period of 2020. Part of the reason may be the fact that only 6.6% of all murders of women in Ceará were classified as femicides, which may also reveal underreporting of this crime in the state.

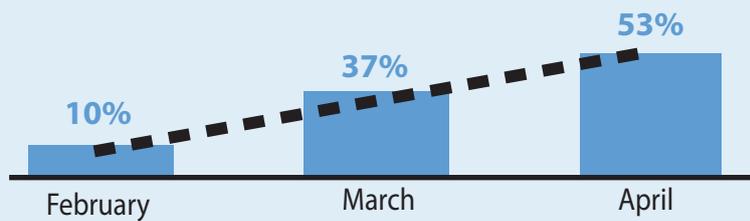
Although it is not possible to affirm that the increase in mortality rates resulting from violence against women is due only to impacts of quarantine measures, which further increase the vulnerability of women facing situations of domestic violence, this is certainly a strong hypothesis to be considered, which merits follow-up monitoring by the government and civil society.

Evidence from Social Media: Increase in Informal Third-Party Reporting on Domestic Violence Incidents Through Twitter¹⁷

Given the constraints noted above from emerging data on women’s access to formal reporting channels when experiencing domestic violence, additional data collected from social media were also analyzed during the initial period of the pandemic as a form of informal third-party reporting on domestic violence incidents. Analyzing data from Twitter posts containing third-party reports of domestic violence incidents, in particular fights by neighboring couples, 90% of reports occurred in March and April, when isolation measures were already in place, while only 10% of reports occurred in February, prior to the pandemic. The total increase between February and April was 431%, with over half the reports (53%) occurring in April alone, when measures had been more broadly implemented throughout the country. The data also show that 25% of third-party informal reporting through Twitter occurred on Friday’s, with a peak in reporting between 8pm and 3am Saturday. While data may be anecdotal and informal at this stage, it is important to note that this type of third-party reporting is also in line with the focus of many government campaigns encouraging neighbors and “by-standers” to report incidents during lockdown periods. It is also important to note, however, that data collected through social media may underestimate incidence among certain population groups which may have limited access to such technology.

¹⁷ Between February-April 2020, Decode Pulse, a company specialized in social media data mining, collected around 52,000 posts on the Twitter platform mentioning some indication of fighting between neighboring couples. After filtering the data for messages involving domestic violence incidents, a total of 5,583 posts were found to report such occurrences.

Graph 5. Percentage of frequency of reports of couple fights on Twitter, by month, Brazil (February-April 2020).

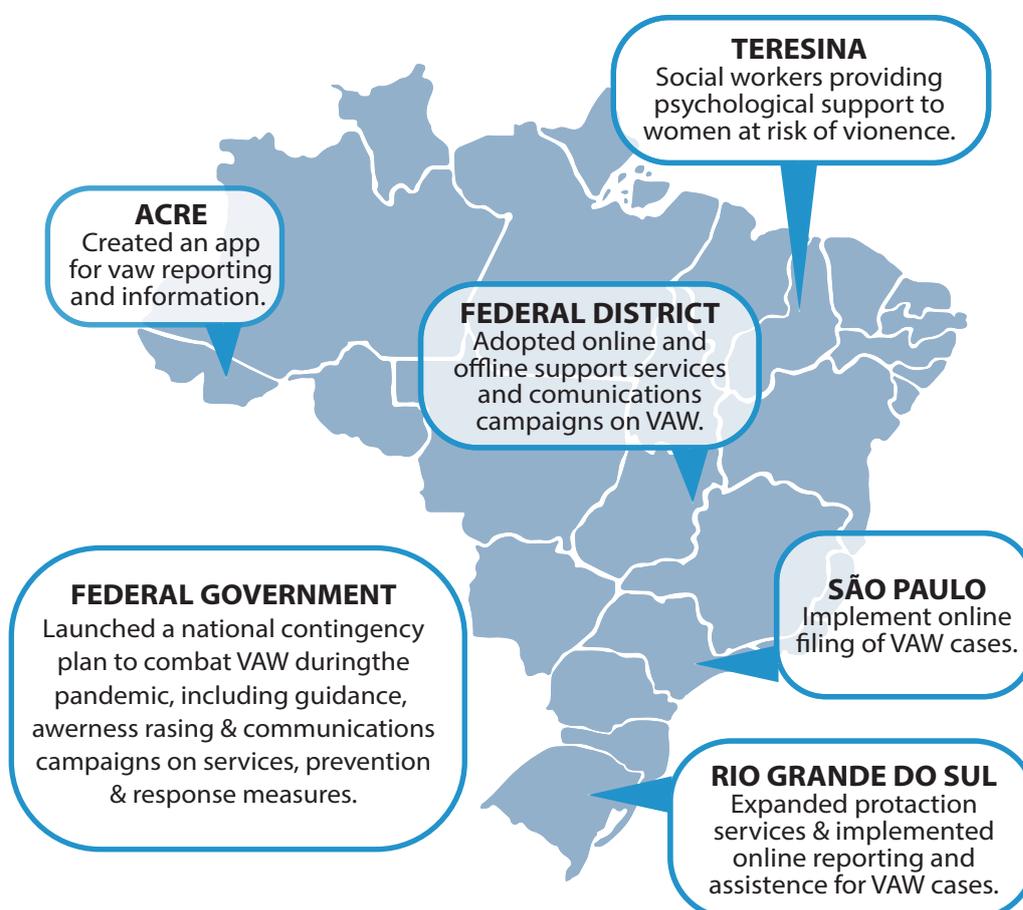


Source: Decode; Brazil Forum on Public Safety. Note: Such data collection is anecdotal and currently not part of the regular government data collection or reporting systems, and may or may not be collected regularly going forward. However, the evidence it shows suggests it could be helpful to continue monitoring such trends.

3. Policy Measures Implemented in Brazil in Response to Increasing VAW Trends under COVID-19

In response to the expected and evidenced trends in VAW risk increase in Brazil, the Federal Government and several states and municipalities throughout the country have started to implement specific policies to support women during the pandemic, also in an effort to bolster prevention and response in the medium to long term. Figure 2 presents selected examples of government policies implemented in different regions of Brazil during the pandemic.

Figure 2. Selected examples of government policies implemented throughout Brazil during COVID-19



Source: Authors' compilation of government-led policies and responses to VAW during COVID-19 per the information in Table 1.

A more comprehensive set of examples is described in Table 1 below, most of which are in line with policy measures also being implemented in other countries, as discussed in the following section. These examples were selected based on news reports and information provided by government counterparts, as available when this note was drafted. Several similar measures are being implemented in other states and municipalities in the country. Further, several additional policy response measures are the object of draft bills currently going through Congress, which may be passed and implemented in the short to medium term, as documented in Annex 2. In addition to government measures adopted, civil society has also been at the forefront of initiatives toward increasing awareness about the enhanced risks for women during COVID-19. These include not only public awareness campaigns but also toward providing social, legal and economic support to survivors, as illustrated also on Table 1.

Table 1. Government and Civil Society-led Responses to VAW during COVID-19

Type of measure	Examples of Policies and Initiatives Implemented
Strengthening Response & Support Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o On March 20th 2020 the President signed Decree n. 10.282 designating social assistance services targeted at the most vulnerable as essential services that should remain operating during quarantine. o On July 7th, 2020, Law N° 14.022/2020 was passed, adopting measures to combat and prevent domestic violence during the state of emergency of public health resulting from the new coronavirus, including designating VAW services as essential and which cannot be interrupted during the pandemic and mandating that cases of VAW reported at the federal level through the national VAW Call-180 Helpline and the Call-100 Helpline for protection of children and adolescents from sexual violence must be communicated to the relevant authorities within 48 hours. o The Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights launched a national contingency plan to respond to increasing numbers of VAW during the pandemic, including guidance for maintaining services provided by the network of support to VAW victims (Rede de Enfrentamento à Violência contra a Mulher); the implementation of COVID-19-related VAW committees at the state and municipal levels; campaigns to raise awareness among victims, men and bystanders on the importance of reporting VAW cases; and massive dissemination of information about pre-existing services for VAW prevention and response. o The Government also launched online platforms – including an exclusive website and an app¹⁸ for reporting – to expand the outreach capacity of the existing helpline numbers (Disque 100 and Ligue 180).¹⁹ Besides providing relevant information on how to respond to VAW situations, the platforms enable uploading evidence (photos and videos) on the reported violence. • Acre: the state public prosecutor’s office has created an app that allows women to report cases of violence remotely and provides information on VAW behaviors and resources available for protection, including location and contact information of services available in their municipality. • Federal District: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Adopted technological solutions to prevent and respond to increasing cases of VAW, including an online platform for filing police reports, email channels and a WhatsApp number. o Prioritized services and response for VAW cases, ensuring that assistance and public security services were kept open. o Launched the “Voce Não Está Sozinha” (“You are not alone”) campaign to raise awareness and disseminate information on services and channels available to women facing domestic violence.²⁰ o Enacted a law mandating that housing complexes report any suspicion or occurrence of domestic violence to the police. o Developed a new assistance protocol to victims during quarantine.²¹

¹⁸ <https://tecnoblog.net/332627/governo-lanca-direitos-humanos-br-denuncia-violencia-contra-mulher/>

¹⁹ <https://www.progresso.com.br/brasil/governo-lanca-canais-digitais-de-atendimento-contra-a-violencia/371562/>

²⁰ <https://www.agenciabrasilia.df.gov.br/2020/04/03/gdf-reforca-combate-a-violencia-domestica-durante-isolamento/>

²¹ <https://www.metropoles.com/distrito-federal/violencia-contra-mulher-queda-no-numero-de-denuncias-preocupa-df>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The Center for Assistance to Families and Perpetrators of VAW started to operate through the phone and can be accessed in special hours to assist emergency cases. o Established a Technical Group to monitor, evaluate and propose improvement actions to services provided to victims and perpetrators, both during and after the social isolation period.²² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rio Grande do Sul: the state has expanded the Patrulha Maria da Penha, an exclusive police assistance service for VAW survivors, to 82% of the state's municipalities. The state also made online reporting available for cases of VAW and is now providing assistance to women through WhatsApp. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • São Paulo and other states: Reports of domestic violence can be filed online (as opposed to in person reporting in police stations as provided for law).²³ Other states are also adopting the online police report tool. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teresina: Social workers from women's one-stop shop service centers started to send daily comforting audio messages to women at risk of violence, including advice on positive parenting and coping strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Discount on transportation app: a transportation app is offering VAW victims discounts on trips to police stations to get assistance in cases of domestic violence.²⁴ o Projects for volunteer professional support Justiceiras²⁵(Vigilantes) and Mapa do Acolhimento²⁶ (Map of Support): collective support organizations that gather volunteer professionals from different field, such as lawyers, social workers, psychologists to offer legal, social and psychological assistance to VAW victims. There are several initiatives of this nature all over the country, which are being reinforced during the Covid-crisis. ²⁷ o PenhaS²⁸: the online app that offers support for VAW victims allows women at risk of VAW to register up to five contact numbers that can be accessed through SMS in any emergency situation. The app also records the ambient sound so stronger evidence can be built when reporting the violence. The app can be used anonymously and has a security mechanism that does not allow any other people to access the app in the telephone. o You Are Not Alone virtual assistance²⁹: launched by Instituto Avon, the virtual assistance tool helps women understand if they are facing a situation of violence and provide information on the services available to better assist them.
Providing Financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Government: On April 2, 2020, the Law 13.982³⁰, which provides emergency financial support of R\$600 (USD 115) to low income families, was enacted. Single mothers will be paid twice the amount and will be prioritized in withdrawing the cash.
Adjusting/ ensuring Justice & Security services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Government: On July 7th, 2020, Law N° 14.022/2020 was passed, adopting measures to combat and prevent domestic violence during the state of emergency of public health resulting from the new coronavirus, also determines that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Security agencies should create free interactive communication channels for virtual assistance to women facing violence, while maintaining face-to-face service mandatory for more serious cases, namely those involving femicide; serious bodily injury; bodily injury followed by death; threat practiced with the use of firearms; rape; sexual crimes against children under 14 or vulnerable; non-compliance with protection orders; and crimes against adolescents and the elderly;

²² <https://www.metropoles.com/distrito-federal/violencia-contra-mulher-queda-no-numero-de-denuncias-preocupa-df>

²³ <https://datalabe.org/atendimento-a-violencia-domestica-muda-em-meio-a-pandemia/>

²⁴ <https://99app.com/coronavirus/>

²⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/justiceirasoficial/>

²⁶ <https://www.mapadoacolhimento.org/>

²⁷ <https://www.uol.com.br/ecoa/ultimas-noticias/2020/05/08/mulheres-formam-redes-de-apoio-contra-a-violencia-domestica-na-pandemia.htm>

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yikp35fISas>

²⁹ <http://institutoavon.org.br/vocenaostazoninha/>

³⁰ Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2020/lei/L13982.htm

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Forensic medicine institutes must proceed with medical examinations for VAW-related crimes. Governments will also be able to create mobile teams to assist victims of sexual crimes; o Women survivors of violence may request any urgent protective measures through online communication devices. o Protection orders already in force will be automatically extended and will be enforced during the state of emergency in humanitarian and health crises throughout the national territory. The judge shall accordingly subpoena the offender, which may be carried out by electronic means, to inform of the protection order extension. <p>• Rio Grande do Sul: The Office of the Public Defender began providing remote assistance for VAW victims after in-person assistance was suspended. The state justice system also continued processing new requests and extension of existing emergency protective measures during quarantine.</p>
Improving Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Government (Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights): Signed an agreement to standardize and automatize data collection on VAW from all the women centers Casa da Mulher Brasileira in the country. • Federal Senate (Special Prosecutor for Women): Is prioritizing the technical analysis and approval of draft bills targeted at preventing and responding to VAW , including bills introduced to increase the number of women’s police stations and to create a National Policy on Statistics Information on VAW to gather and systematize data on domestic violence from different sources
Raising Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Government: In May 2020, the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights launched the campaign of Awareness and Fight against Domestic Violence. • Civil Society: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o #VizinhaVocêNãoEstáSozinha (#NeighborYouAreNotAlone) Campaign: launched by the movement Agora é que são Elas aiming at creating a supporting network and to raise awareness among victims on the importance of reporting the violence suffered and to let perpetrators know that bystanders are vigilant. The initiative has also partnered with other neighborhood supporting apps to expand the outreach capacity of the campaign.

4. Policy Measures Implemented Globally in Response to Trends of Increasing VAW under COVID-19

In addition to the measures already under implementation in Brazil, evidence from responses implemented in different countries provide general recommendations for short-term relief measures during pandemics, including: bolstering violence-related first response systems; expanding awareness raising efforts and access to information; and encouraging informal (and virtual) social support networks. Table 2 below provides a summary of such measures, including examples of relief responses implemented by specific countries under COVID-19. Although it is too soon to assess impacts and results and establish best practices among emerging and innovative measures, the examples identified and implemented to date may provide options for the Federal and sub-national governments in Brazil.

Table 2. Global Policy Measures with country-level implementation in Response to Increasing VAW Risks during COVID-19

³¹ <https://www.uol.com.br/universa/noticias/redacao/2020/04/13/brasil-automatiza-coleta-de-dados-sobre-violencia-contra-a-mulher.htm>

³² Senado Notícias. Available at:

<https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2020/03/31/coronavirus-senadores-alertam-para-violencia-contra-a-mulher-durante-isolamento>

³³ <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/denuncie-a-violencia-domestica>

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/agoraquesoelasblog/>

Type of measure	Examples of country-level implementation under COVID-19 ³⁵
Strengthening Response & Support Systems	<p>Australia: An NGO provides mobile phones and AU\$30 pre-credit in addition to providing survivors with the means to connect with support.</p> <p>Argentina and Chile: The Federal Government has partnered with WhatsApp to launch a “silent call center” with attendants trained by the company so women who are at home with the perpetrator can reach out for help without the risk of being overheard.</p> <p>Chile: The Government announced the continuity of care services at Women's Centers and shelters and reinforcement and expansion of VAW helpline shifts to provide services 24/7.</p> <p>China: Networks to help women during the epidemic were set up. “Vaccines Against Domestic Violence” counts already with over 2,500 volunteers.³⁶</p> <p>Colombia, Uruguay and Argentina: Governments have reinforced and extended the opening hours of emergency phones and launched helplines via WhatsApp to advise and protect women 24/7.</p> <p>France: Opened counseling centers in markets and pharmacies to enable women to report violence when going out shopping; created a web platform with trained officers to receive online reporting of domestic violence (arrestonsviolences.gouv.fr); announced the provision of \$ 1.1 million euros for civil society organizations working to combat domestic abuse in response to the increased demand for services.</p> <p>France, Italy and Argentina: Established partnerships with hotels to provide temporary shelters for survivors.</p> <p>Paraguay: A national roundtable is being activated and expanded to bring together law enforcement and justice, VAW and child protection officials. The Ministry of Women is being equipped with a “situation room” that will track the evolution of VAW and coordinate the response and the prevention of VAW during the COVID-19 crisis.</p> <p>Scotland: Women’s Aid Scotland is providing assistance to women victims of abuse who can be contacted by phone, email or Facebook. Face-to-face meetings with online modality are also being offered.</p> <p>South Africa: Community-level service delivery for VAW survivors is being supported by the government, focusing on women in the informal economy and on young girls and women affected by HIV.</p> <p>Spain: Declared services for VAW survivors as essential, guaranteeing their operation during lockdown, particularly specialized centers and shelters for survivors. A panic button was inserted in the Alertcops app - a citizen security alert service provided by the Spanish Law Enforcement Authorities (Policia and Guardia Civil), allowing victims to send a written distress call to the police, who can use geolocation gathered through the app to send help.</p> <p>Uruguay: Training of community health workers to identify cases of domestic violence when providing at-home visits.</p> <p>US: Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) includes fund to reinforce services provided to VAW survivors.</p>

³⁵ Most examples have been adapted from National Association of Public Policy Experts report: <http://anesp.org.br/todas-as-noticias/2020/4/6/covid-19-e-violencia-domstica-pandemia-dupla-para-as-mulheres>. Accessed on April 12, 2020.

³⁶ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/blog/post/defending-rights-time-covid-19-whrds-tackle-domestic-violence-china>

Adjusting/
ensuring
Justice &
Security
services

Argentina: Police forces are instructed to remove the perpetrator from the scene and receive complaints and statements at home or remotely.

China: A Beijing court has been using online court hearings to handle cases and protect vulnerable survivors during the epidemic.³⁷

France: While courts are closed, protection orders for domestic violence cases can be filed remotely and are treated as priority during this period.

Italy: Prosecutors have ruled that the perpetrator – not the survivor – must leave the family home in situations of VAW.

Scotland: Additional £825,000 (USD 1,028,000) directed to Scottish Police for training on domestic abuse cases.

Spain: Women who are leaving a situation of VAW are exempt from the lockdown.³⁸

Uganda: adaptation of e-learning modules on VAW response for police, public prosecution, judiciary and prison officers in the context of Covid-19.

US: Some courts are establishing automatic extension of protective measures/restraining orders.³⁹

Raising
awareness

Chile: "Violence Does Not Enter Here" campaign for dissemination and awareness about VAW and resources for victims or close circle through the different channels available. Hashtag #Noestassola ("You are not alone") on Twitter.

China: #AntiDomesticViolenceDuringEpidemic hashtag mentioned more than 3,000 times on social media platform Weibo ; Yuanzhong, a women's rights NGO, published a new guide to disseminate information on how women can protect themselves from domestic violence during the pandemic. ⁴¹

Italy, France, Chile: Governments established partnerships with pharmacies to enable women to use code words to request help.

Spain: Published a guide of recommendations and strengthened support services for VAW victims.

Switzerland: Government is conducting intensive campaigns with telephone numbers for reporting. The campaign calls for solidarity surveillance for neighbors to call the police and report if they hear violent couple fights around them.

UK: Communication campaign using the hashtag #YouAreNotAlone to publicize services available to VAW victims and to engage solidarity surveillance, and awareness campaigns through social networks and essential services that remained open during quarantine (pharmacies, supermarkets). ⁴²

³⁷ Fraser, E (2020). Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence against Women and Girls. VAWG Helpdesk Research Report n 284. UKAid – DFID.

³⁸ UNDP Brief. Gender-based violence and Covid-19. May 11, 2020. Available at:

<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19.html>

³⁹ <https://www.womenslaw.org/laws/preparing-court-yourself/frequently-asked-questions-involving-courts-and-covid-19#5>

⁴⁰ Owen, L (2020). Coronavirus: Five ways virus upheaval is hitting women in Asia. BBC World Service. April 7, 2020

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-51705199>

⁴¹ The Economist (March 7, 2020). "Covid-19 has revealed widespread sexism in China", available at:

<https://www.economist.com/china/2020/03/07/covid-19-has-revealed-widespread-sexism-in-china>

⁴² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-support-for-domestic-abuse-victims>

5. Policy Measures to Prevent or Mitigate Trends of Increasing VAW Risks under COVID-19 and in Future Epidemics – Conclusions and Preliminary Recommendations

As preliminary evidence from COVID-19 started pointing to increasing trends of VAW risks for women globally and in Brazil, governments and civil society began acting swiftly with the aim of mitigating such trends. As this note documents, policy measures have been adopted broadly in response to such unintended impacts of social isolation and mandatory confinement policies. Experience from past epidemics and VAW-related risks in a context of limited access to health, security and justice sector services can also be drawn upon to suggest policy response options.

The national and international experiences presented in this note toward mitigating increasing VAW risk trends suggest several preliminary policy options for short-term relief, medium-term response, and long-term resilience efforts to strengthen prevention and response capacity. While acknowledging that findings are preliminary and should be updated with ongoing evidence, this note presents below some preliminary recommendations from such emerging evidence, with the aim of guiding policy measures implemented in the short, medium and long term in Brazil. It should be noted that implementation should be based on planned consultations with Brazilian counterparts from government, civil society and experts, and accompanied carefully to also provide lessons for others and potential future pandemics.

Table 3. Preliminary recommendations for VAW short-term relief, medium-term response and long-term resilience measures for COVID-19 and other epidemics

Strategic area	Recommendation	Specific implementation measures
Short-term relief		
VAW-related first-response systems	Ensuring VAW prevention and response services are designated essential during emergency situations.	Develop adequate national and subnational-level legislation on the matter to avoid discontinuity of these services during quarantine.
	Expanding, strengthening and adjusting existing services.	Strengthen and expand telephone helpline services and hours of operation by, for example, hiring additional personnel, providing specialized training for emergency situations and monitoring delivery of referral services.
		Ensure and expand housing options for women, in particular those at high risk through, for example, additional funding or partnerships with hotels for alternative accommodation
		Adopt alternative reporting and help-signaling methods to mitigate risks and fear of women of being overheard, such as code words, code numbers and 'no-dial' or chat options.
		Encourage informal and virtual social support networks to fill potential gaps in formal psychosocial support and reporting systems
Resources availability	Ensuring minimum budgeting, human and financial resources to maintain essential VAW services.	Implement or adjust policies to ensure budget is available and increased as needed for emergency VAW response.
		Promote political mobilization and coordination among government branches aiming at preserving existing budget for VAW prevention and response during the emergency.

Technology-based solutions	Implementing technology-based solutions to increase access to information, service provision, and data collection.	<p>Partner with communication and technology-based private sector providers to develop and expand technology-based solutions to prevent and respond to VAW.</p> <p>Explore the use of bots and artificial intelligence to facilitate dissemination of VAW-related information to women at risk and bystanders.</p> <p>Use and develop smartphone apps and online platforms with features to facilitate survivor's access to services and support networks, such as: georeferenced systems; panic buttons linking to police services or the victim's informal network; information on geolocated provision of service; and chat options for support, including confidential and private access (no content saved on device) and secure data and evidence collection for prosecution and response.</p> <p>Use hashtags and social media as useful tools for data monitoring and data mining on VAW-related posts.</p>
Awareness efforts and access to information	Engaging and raising awareness of bystanders on the importance of reporting VAW cases and increasing community surveillance.	Run communication campaigns directed at bystander engagement, such as through hashtags directed at community surveillance, by distributing posters in commercial and public spaces (grocery stores, pharmacies, elevators), and through traditional and online media, with information about helplines and calling on bystanders to speak up against domestic violence.
	Committing resources and efforts to develop effective online and offline communication strategies through traditional and non-traditional channels	<p>Use television, radio, print materials, the internet and social media, including online hashtags, images and videos, to raise awareness on VAW among women and the community.</p> <p>Distribute information resources broadly and in targeted locations, such as through posters in commercial and public spaces and essential services with continued operation (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies, elevators, among others).</p>
VAW response integration, strengthening and coordination	Mainstreaming gender and VAW in socio-economic responses to COVID-19 and similar epidemics.	Integrate VAW response into sectoral relief policies and ensure women are part of the design and implementation of relief measures.
	Ensuring active and effective coordination between different stakeholders involved in pandemic response.	Establish a coordination mechanism between national and subnational governments and among different sectors involved in pandemic response, such as through focal points or a task force, and involving women's active participation.
Data collection and availability.	Ensuring data collection and sharing continues so as to guide emergency VAW response.	Conduct rapid assessments and VAW data monitoring to guide emergency response, following ethical guidelines and carefully taking into consideration increased VAW risks.

Medium-term response and long-term resilience

VAW-related first-response systems	Ensuring that health systems and first responders are adequately equipped to address VAW within pandemic settings.	<p>Train health care providers in identifying women at risk of violence present in all testing and screening locations, such that recommendations for “self-quarantine” or “shelter at home” are accompanied by an assessment of the safety of doing so.</p> <p>Have women in response roles, such as clinicians and aid workers.</p> <p>Have in place protections (i.e., strong policies, codes of conduct and legal measures) for female health workers to address sexual harassment and violence.</p> <p>Re-enforce training and action plans for pandemic-safe response by police and legal personnel, with clear guidelines of how operations may differ during times of temporary shutdown of referral services.</p>
	Ensuring VAW referral protocols and standard operating procedures are regularly assessed and updated.	Regularly update referral protocols to reflect changes in available care facilities or access points, and inform and train key communities and service providers on the updated protocols.
	Ensuring human and financial resources for the continuous provision of adequate VAW services.	Earmark budget and funding for VAW service provision, including training and support to VAW first responders, to expand and maintain quality support in the longer-run, and to establish and enhance services, particularly in resource-low settings or where gaps may exist.
	Developing and enhancing technology-based solutions for continued and expanded access to information, service provision, and data collection and generation.	Develop technological solutions, including smartphone apps, artificial intelligence and online platforms to facilitate women’s access to information, services and support networks, including online reporting and call-for-help options, also leveraging partnerships with private sector communication and technology service providers.
Awareness efforts and access to information	Ensuring continued awareness efforts and communications campaigns on VAW.	Commit resources and efforts to develop and implement continued and regular online and offline communication strategies on VAW through traditional and non-traditional channels, including specific messaging on epidemic-related VAW response.
VAW response integration, strengthening and coordination	Ensuring VAW response is integrated into sectoral response and preparedness measures, especially in health, education, child protection, security and justice, social protection and job creation.	Create an inter-sectorial task force or coordination group with representatives from different government sectors and agencies with a focus on VAW prevention and response efforts for present and future epidemics.
	Expanding and reinforcing social safety nets with integrated VAW.	Expand social protection networks, such as health insurance, unemployment benefits, emergency financial aid, and tax exemption measures to support the most vulnerable, with special consideration for VAW survivors.
	Strengthening the leadership and participation of women and girls in all decision-making processes in addressing and responding to epidemics in different sectors.	Ensure women are involved in decision-making roles in different pandemic response sectors to promote increased gender perspective integration into present and future policies and actions.

Data collection and availability	Ensuring regular collection and systematization of data on VAW trends.	Create a “situation room” to track the evolution of VAW during the pandemic. These data are critical to designing evidence-based policy and programs that respond to women’s needs, reduce risks, and mitigate adverse effects during and after the pandemic. ⁴³
		Coordinate efforts with states secretariats of public security to regularly provide the Federal Government with data on VAW trends.
		Partner with local and national-level women’s organizations that provide services to survivors or women at risk to provide qualitative and quantitative data.
		Carry out research and data mining on social media on VAW-related posts as additional alternative data sources.
	Ensuring sex-disaggregated data collection to understand the impact of epidemics on VAW.	Ensure data collection includes sex-disaggregated information to help policy-makers understand GBV risk factors; the impact of COVID-19 on the availability of services for women survivors of violence; how women’s access to such services and help-seeking from formal and informal sources is affected; as well as new short and medium-term needs.

⁴³ UNDP Brief. Gender-based violence and Covid-19. May 11, 2020. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19.html>

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Annex 1 - Useful Resources

- Awareness raising material: En tiempos de emergencia, no estás sola: <http://www.mimp.gob.pe/files/cartilla-pnud-victimas-covid-19.pdf> (Spanish)
- ONU Mulheres: Gênero E Covid-19 Na América Latina E No Caribe: Dimensões De Gênero Na Resposta: http://www.onumulheres.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ONU-MULHERES-COVID19_LAC.pdf (Portuguese)
- ONU Mulheres: Ações para Eliminar as Desigualdades dentro de Casa: <https://nacoesunidas.org/covid-19-onu-mulheres-lista-9-acoes-para-eliminar-as-desigualdades-de-genero-dentro-de-casa/> (Portuguese)
- Guidelines for Mobile and Remote Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Service Delivery: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/guidelines-mobile-and-remote-gender-based-violence-gbv-service-delivery-en-my> (English)
- Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: www.gbvguidelines.org (English)
- COVID-19 resources to address gender-based violence risks: <https://gbvguidelines.org/en/knowledgehub/covid-19/> (English)

Annex 2 - Bills to Address VAW proposed in Brazil's Congress since the onset of COVID-19⁴⁴

Bill Number	Bill Description
PL 1796/2020	Adds a transitional provision to Law No. 11,340, of 7 August 2006, to recognize the urgency and determine that procedural acts are not suspended in cases concerning domestic and family violence during the Emergency in Public Health of National Importance related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
PL 1798/ 2020	Provides for permission, in the event of public calamity recognized by the Government, that the registration of occurrence of domestic and family violence against women, crimes committed against children, adolescents and the elderly occur via the internet or a telephone number emergency, and that the victim's hearing can be made at home.
PL 2029/2020	Provides for the provision of temporary shelter for women and children in situations of domestic and family violence during a state of public calamity.
PL 1267/2020	Amends law 10.714/2003 with the objective of expanding disclosure of Ligue 180 while the Covid-19 pandemic lasts.
PL 1319/2020	Increases penalties for crimes of domestic violence and family against women, in the case of incidence of Law No. 11,340, of August 7, 2006. The minimum and maximum penalty applied will be doubled while the State of Calamity period decreed due to the Covid-19 lasts.
PL 1444/2020	Establishes emergency measures to protect victims of domestic violence during public health emergencies resulting from the Novel Coronavirus pandemic.
PL 1458/2020	Establishes exceptional measures to protect women and to address domestic and family violence based on the provisions of Law 11.340 of 7 August 2006 - Maria da Penha Law - during the state of calamity provided for by Legislative Decree No. 6 of 20 March 2020 due to the public health emergency of international importance due to the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19); amends Law 8.742, of December 7, 1993 and gives other measures.
PL 1552/2020	Provides for the protection of women in situations of violence during the state of public calamity, with effect until December 31, 2020, or while quarantine measures and activity restrictions are in place in the context of the COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) pandemic.

⁴⁴The information in this Annex is current as of June 25th, 2020, when this version of the note was last revised.