

Exacerbating and already dangerous problem: Gender-based violence in Covid-19 times.

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Immigrant women's experiences of Gender-based violence in Iceland

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The project is implemented by:

Overview of the talk

- Definitions
- Connections with COVID-19
- Categories of GBV
- Iceland as a gender paradise and the Nordic paradox
- Methodology and data analysis
- Overt actions
- Support
- Immigrant women's experiences of violence project

A few definitions (UN definitions)

- **Gender based violence** refers to harmful acts directed at an individual **based** on their **gender**. It is rooted in **gender** inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.
- **Violence against women** is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."
- **Domestic abuse**, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence", can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

- **Intimate partner violence** refers to behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours
- **Sexual violence** is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object."

COVID-19 and gender-based violence

- UN titled it the “Shadow pandemic”
- Gender based violence is the most widespread form of violence
- 1 in 4 countries have no laws specifically protecting women from domestic violence
- The WHO reports that 33% of women will experience violence or sexual harassment in their lifetimes
- The UN placed a focus on domestic violence in the Covid pandemic
- Reports tripled in China, 14% in Finland, 20% in USA and Spain, and 30% in France and Singapore
- Economic impacts have extensive effect on families and vulnerable populations

What makes the pandemic a breeding ground for domestic violence

- Offers increase opportunity for control
- Families confined to one space
- Exacerbates financial insecurity
- Increases risk for vulnerable women such as women with disabilities, immigrant women, children

Categories of GBV

- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial/Economic
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Stalking/Cyber stalking
- Human-trafficking

Context of Iceland

- Iceland often touted as a gender paradise
- Comes at the top of several gender equity measurement tools ()
- Very active feminist movement
- Strong grassroots movements
- Nordic paradox

#MeToo in Iceland (brief history)

- Resulted in numerous social groups came out to disclose their experiences including: women in the media, in the theatre, in the sciences, at various school levels, higher education, sports, women with disabilities, and immigrant women

Actions taken in Iceland related to COVID-19

- To date had three waves
- Play and primary schools remained open
- Secondary schools and universities went online
- Physical distancing (2m for most of the year)
- Closure of non necessary services
- Shift to online shopping and home delivery services
- Wide-spread accessible testing (within 24 hours results in 6 hours)
- Daily public announcements from authorities

Immigrant women's experiences of Violence (IWEV)

- Team of 7 researchers
- 3-4 year mixed methods project
- Survey on Intimate partner violence (IPV) and employment-based violence (EBV)
- Translated into seven languages
- Advertised on various media goes live in April
- Stakeholder interviews including grassroots/NGOs, legal support, Immigration officials, Police, Health providers (30)
- Interviews with survivors (begin fall 2021)
- Media analysis of discourse on violence: Legal and general discourse

Methodology for today's talk

- Critical document analysis
- Three main news outlets in Iceland (that were publicly accessible): Ríkisútvarp og sjónvarp (National television), Vísir (online newspaper connected to Stöð 2 (the “Second station”), and Morgunblaðið
- Other outlets will be added as the data collection progresses
- Search with following key words: domestic violence, violence against women, intimate partner violence, gender-based violence
- Found over 350 articles 191 fit parameters from Jan 2020- Mar 2021
- Excluded articles not about violence in Iceland outside of references to UN

Coding of data

- 43 references to survivors (Icelandic women most frequent)
- 39 references to perpetrators (no nationality most prominent)
- 39 references to police
- 6 references to COVID-19 in relation to GBV
- New state legal actions regarding stalking (including online)
- Funding call for development of services and research on violence

Findings general picture

- Men report on men/Women report on women
- Over 698 reports (11/2020) up from 639 (11/2019)
- Majority connected to daily/weekly police reports
- 40% current spouse/partner and 23% former spouse/partner
- Increase connected to the increased emphasis on GBV through the various social movements and government and grassroots organizations in the past seven years (#Freethenipple, Konur eru konum bestar (#kekb), #metoo, #fokkofbeldi, #fáðujá)
- Conclusion of several court cases (5)
- Increased visibility of violence and services
- Services moved online or over the telephone
- Several artists (male and female) developed public donations to Kvennaatharfið (The Women's Shelter), Bjarkahlíð

Common terminology in Icelandic

- Heimilisofbeldi
- Ofbeldi í nánum samböndum
- Ofbeldi gegn konum
- Kynferðisleg áreitni
- Lögreglan
- Bjarkahlíð and Kvennaathvarfið

Actions

- Government put increased funding in to DV and psychological services
- Several individuals and organizations dedicated funding to various services
- Increased prominence of service providers being interviewed and discussing the various issues related to GBV
- Development of new services such as a hotline connected to emergency services
- Discussions included in daily announcements

Stakeholder interviews and media results

- Acknowledgement of need for long term support for survivors
- Fewer immigrants report violence, but also have significantly different definitions of violence
- Violence against women with disabilities is under reported
- Recognize lack of services outside of the larger municipal areas (no reports in media of violence outside of Capital area and the capital of the north (Akureyri)), but increased services online has made a difference
- Increase in services: housing, call lines, lack of information for immigrant women, perpetrators use lack of knowledge against immigrant women
- Training: Do mostly inhouse training, limited training for cross-cultural services
- Funding: Increase during pandemic, but majority of providers brought up limited funding and resources limit services significantly