



IMPACT STORY



WOMEN LEAD INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19 IN VIET NAM

Photo courtesy of Da Nang Women's Union

When Ms. Hoang Thi Thu Huong, 47, took office at the Da Nang Women's Union and heard that there was a risk of domestic violence increasing under lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she knew something had to be done. She promoted a Facebook page called "Da Nang Women—Listen and Share," where women can access essential information including hotlines and support services or privately share their stories from their accounts. She also created a series of radio spots to raise public awareness on the different types of violence against women and children and promoted information on how survivors can safely seek support and counseling.

"I just wanted to get the message out there that violence against women and children is not accepted and that there is still someone there to help and places where [survivors] can go to get support during the lockdown," said Huong, 47, Chairperson of Da Nang Women's Union, a local organization for women in the city of Da Nang with around 168,000 members.

In August, when the city underwent a second, nearly two-month lockdown due to a surge of COVID-19 cases, Ms. Huong, with the support of UN Women, established a steering committee to respond to violence against women in the context of COVID-19.

Photo above: Community members actively joining efforts to raise awareness on violence against women and children and giving support to vulnerable families.

The committee consists of 14 members who are leaders of the Women's Union in districts and communities. As part of their efforts, the committee mobilized members at all levels and engaged over 500 men through 16 Male Advocate Clubs to share information on hotline numbers, safe shelters, and other support services for local people,

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

As illustrated in this brief, in mid-2020, the project **Community mobilization in prevention of violence against women** swiftly adapted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through a partnership with **Da Nang Women's Union**. It is part of the multi-year programme **Stepping Up Solutions to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls in Asia and the Pacific** implemented by **UN Women, UNICEF** and **UNFPA** with funding from the **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**. Since 2020, UN Women is contributing core resources to the project from the initiative **Building Da Nang to Be a Safe City for Women and Girls**, which promotes respectful relationships through local level activism reaching some **8,000** people.

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especially women, on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 and domestic violence. The male clubs, supported by UN Women and established with the financial contribution of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Partners for Prevention Joint programme in Asia and the Pacific, take cue from the highly successful SASA! programme in Uganda that worked with communities to prevent violence against women. “We used different channels including social media, leaflets, and loudspeakers to reach people on the ground who are under the lockdown,” said Huong.

As a result of these approaches, many women and people got the information and prompt support needed to prevent and reduce the consequences of violence.

“During the lockdown, I regularly received messages from survivors of domestic violence. They chatted with us through Facebook messenger or Zalo [a popular messaging app in Viet Nam] asking for help. I connected them to different essential services, for example psychological counselling, healthcare and legal assistance in their communities or districts. The most important thing is to ensure their safety without the perpetrators finding out,” said Phan Thi Tu Oanh, 34, a member of the committee and administrator of the Da Nang Women’s Union Facebook page. Oanh also shared that in August they provided direct support to women who experienced domestic violence during the lockdown.

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In addition to the risk of violence, many women in Da Nang lost their jobs or saw a reduction to their incomes as another impact of lockdown and social distancing measures. To support the most vulnerable women to rebuild their livelihoods, UN Women, in collaboration with Da Nang Women’s Union and men’s clubs, identified and supported 100 women survivors of violence with a total cash grant of 150 million VND (\$7,500 USD). Priority was given to the most vulnerable families, such as those with women as the main breadwinners, those who were pregnant or with children under 12 months of age, as well as those living with disabilities or chronic diseases and women over 65.

Nguyen Thi Hanh, a resident of the Hoa Cuong Bac ward in Da Nang said, “the impact of COVID-19 has affected my





FAST FACTS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN VIET NAM

- Nearly 63% of ever married women experienced at least one form of violence by a husband in their lifetime.
- In Viet Nam, the Peace House Hotline (a shelter run by the Viet Nam Women’s Union) and the Sunshine Hotline (as supported by UNFPA in the Quang Ninh province in partnership with the Korean International Cooperation Agency) have received twice as many calls for help over the social distancing and lockdown time from February to April 2020 compared to the same months in previous years.
- A recent study conducted with 303 married women in Hanoi found that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated domestic violence.

family a lot. My family’s income depends primarily on my small business and my husband’s work in construction. During lockdown, we had no job and no income, which easily causes stress and conflict, so I was afraid that violence could happen at any time. Fortunately, with support from the Da Nang Women’s Union, my family could overcome the difficulties. The members of men’s clubs also actively shared information about violence prevention and stress control so that my husband understands better and shares house chores with me.”

Although currently the spread of COVID-19 is under control and some normalcy has been regained, the work Hoang Thu Huong and her peers undertake does not end. “I know that violence against women and children will not stop during crisis and disasters. We will have to do more to engage all society and individuals,” Huong stressed.

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