

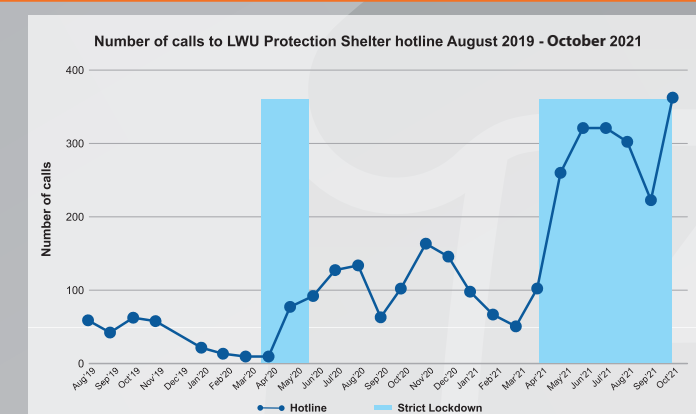
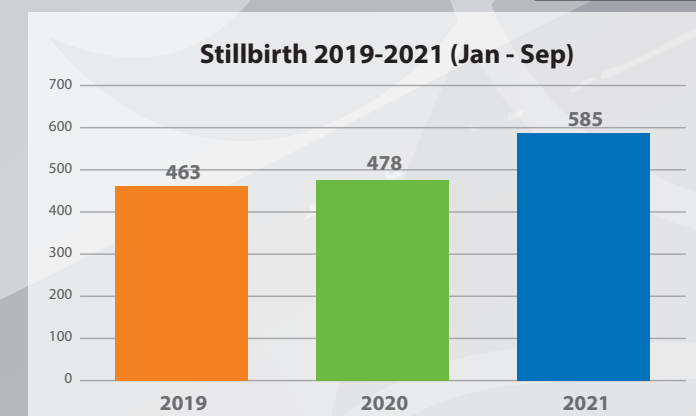
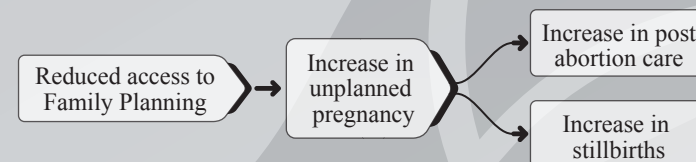


See the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, will you collaborate on the solutions ?

Covid19 has had an additional and disproportionate impact on women and girls all over the world. In Lao PDR, since the pandemic:

1. Women's unique health needs have been negatively impacted

- Resources are diverted away from primary healthcare: pre- and post-natal care, sexual and reproductive health and lifesaving clinical care for survivors of GBV.
- Consequently, there is a reduction in health seeking behaviors:¹
 - New users of contraception declined by 15% and consequent increase in the number of live births in 2021.
 - Based on the number of births, the proportion of pregnant women accessing antenatal care services has decreased.
 - Increase in post abortion care for complications due to unsafe abortions
 - Increase in risk of stillbirth and increase in post abortion care for complications due to unsafe abortions, indicates reduced access to antenatal care.
- Decrease in access to balanced food and nutrition as women stay indoors, exacerbating risk of anemia, and complications for pregnant and lactating women.
- Women make up 67% of health centre workers and 93% of midwives² in Lao PDR—female staff at the front lines of the COVID-19 response are exposed to heightened risk of infection.³



2. Lockdowns increased the risk of violence, abuse and mental health/psycho social issues

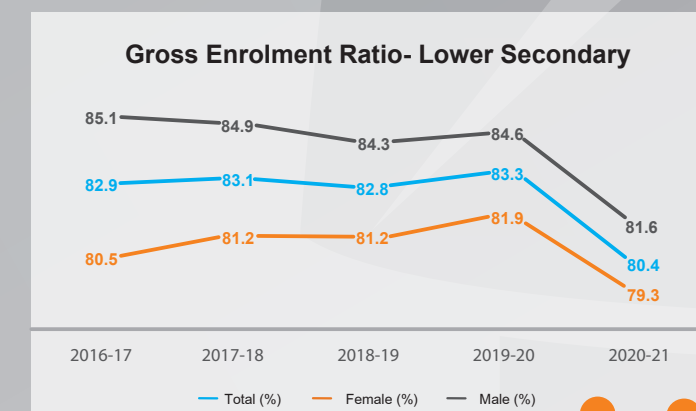
- Violence against women and girls intensified, especially domestic violence and sexual exploitation - counseling requests about these issues increased.⁴
- Hotline data shows 3-5 times increase in calls to the LWU hotline/helpline for counselling during strict lockdowns.⁵
- Women and girls' mental health was severely affected, many reported increased stress and anxiety through hotlines run by LWU, LYU and VYC.
- Accessing GBV services was challenging due to restrictions on movement, reduced qualified personnel in the field and limitations on services available.

WHY HAS THE RISK OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INCREASED?



3. Many girls dropped out of school, many women lost their jobs and unpaid work increased

- Enrolment of girls in lower and upper secondary school dropped. A trend shifted due to COVID, more girls than boys dropped out of upper secondary school, compared to the 2019-2020 school year.⁶ This increases the risks for adolescent girls to early marriage, early pregnancy, sexual exploitation and child labour.
- Women were disproportionately affected by income and job losses - Pre COVID-19, 63% of the 2.8 million workers out of work were women.⁷ The informal economy, tourism, agriculture and garment sectors were hardest hit - where female labour is high - pushing more women out of work.
- Female migrants, rural women and women with disabilities, many of whom were already in low paying jobs, have increased socioeconomic vulnerabilities, with limited social protections.
- 71% of small or medium-sized businesses had to stop operations, 82% were owned by women.⁸
- More than 200,000 migrant workers (65% female) returned to Lao PDR during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in \$125-136 million reduced remittances and increased financial pressures on households.⁹
- In 2020, unemployment among women was 32.6% compared to 19.2% for men.¹⁰
- Pre COVID-19, women were taking up four times more care work than men. During COVID-19, women and girls bear an increasing bulk of unpaid caregiving responsibilities, due to children out of school, increase in economic constraints and care of the sick and elderly.



1. DHS2 from MOH 2. Midwives with mid and high level diplomas. 3. Department of Health Personnel, Ministry of Health, 2020.
4. Hotline data provided by Lao Women's Union, Counseling and Protection Center for Women and Children. 5. Hotline data provided by Lao Women's Union, Counseling and Protection Center for Women and Children.
6. Annual School Census 2020-21 Public and private schools, Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR, <http://www.moes.edu.la/moes/index.php/2021-01-13-09-40-39/77-2020-08-05-09-14-58>
7. Government of Laos and development partners, Manage changes and enhance policy preparedness for decent work: A human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient in Lao PDR, Background Paper of the Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce to Study the Impact of COVID-19, 2020.
8. UN Lao PDR (2020) Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Lao PDR. Vientiane. 9. A survey conducted by the UN Lao PDR among 350 SMEs (mainly in the retail sector) in six provinces in June 2020.
10. Final Report: USAID/Lao PDR COVID-19 Assessment, August 2021. (IOM, 2020. Lao PDR Returning Migrants Survey. Vientiane)
11. Final Report: USAID/Lao PDR COVID-19 Assessment, August 2021. (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC): Economic Impact 2020: <https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>).

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GENERAL

- Mainstream gender into all COVID-19 analysis and response.
- Strengthen data systems to collect and analyse data disaggregated by sex, disability, ethnic group etc. to identify gaps, assess service needs and strengthen programmatic response and monitoring.
- Make COVID-19 services and care available and inclusive, without discrimination, covering physical, mental health and psychosocial needs.
- Regularly inform and educate stakeholders about increased risk of GBV, SRH needs, and safeguarding of livelihoods for women and girls, ensuring communication material is multi-lingual and in disability accessible formats.
- Recognise the heavy burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls and collaborate for solutions to that.

Health including Sexual Reproductive health

- Ensure continuity of maternal, sexual reproductive health and family planning services, including for women and girls in rural regions, from ethnic groups; returning migrants, those pregnant and breastfeeding
- Expand telehealth and strengthen the support of the mental health counselling helplines/hotlines and services
- Increase availability and quality Youth friendly sexual reproductive health
- Women make up the majority of the frontline health workforce - ensure they receive the support, protection and care to continue delivering services.
- Support family planning (FP) programmes, \$1 USD invested in FP gives \$6 USD as returns on the investment! Contraception enhances women and girls bodily autonomy and has the highest returns on investment within the RMNCAH package.

Education, training and Safeguarding Livelihoods:

- Continue to make Comprehensive Sexuality Education accessible in school and out of school to all young people
- Establish special measures for adolescent girls to enroll and stay in school especially secondary school (eg. scholarships, cash transfers)
- Public and private sector to provide financial assistance and economic incentives (cash transfers, vouchers, tax cuts), social safety nets and long-term opportunities equally to women and girls, such as women in agri-food systems.

Recommendations

Under the leadership of the Lao Government and the recently launched National Action Plans for Ending Violence Against Women and Children and Gender Equality, and other national policies such as the RMNCAH Strategy and the Youth and Adolescent Development Strategy, Government and development partners can protect the rights and safety of women and girls by...

Protection and shelter

- Participate in multisectoral and inter-agency coordination for gender/GBV, to maximise synergies and optimise services for those who seek them
- Invest in shelters and services for women and girls fleeing domestic abuse and sexual exploitation
- Engage men and boys, village chiefs and male leaders as positive agents of change to fight harmful practices against women and girls

Call #1362

for concerns about violence, exploitation, trafficking

For information and advice for young people on sexual and reproductive health, including contraception and maternal health, women can call #1361 & men can call #137

Helpline/hotline numbers:

Young people can download the NoiYakhoo app for information on reproductive health, sexual health, STIs and more

For young women and girls who have any issues around stress, anxiety, life, love and relationships, Call #1554

For more information and recommendations, visit the Guidance Note on Protecting the Rights of Women and Girls in Lao PDR: <https://bit.ly/3nLKJVN>

Partners

