

#GENDER EQUALITY

**REPORT: Examining Barriers to
Justice for Survivors of Violence
Against Women, Especially
Ethnic Women in Vientiane and
Oudomxay Provinces**

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All photos were provided by the field study team for the purposes of this report and all subsequent advocacy materials. The photos used herein, are the property of GDA and should be referenced as: ©**GDA Laos 2022**.

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Acronyms

COVID-19	-	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DJO	-	District Justice Office
DLWU	-	District Lao Women’s Union
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
VAW	-	Violence against women
GDA	-	Gender Development Association
HOV	-	Head of Village
KII	-	Key Informant Interview
Lao PDR	-	Lao People’s Democratic Republic
LWU	-	Lao Women’s Union
MOJ	-	Ministry of Justice
ODX	-	Oudomxay Province
VA	-	Village Authority
VAW	-	Violence against Women
VLWU	-	Village Lao Women’s Union
VMC	-	Village Mediation Committee
VMU	-	Village Mediation Unit
VTE	-	Vientiane Province

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Executive Summary

With the overarching purpose of advancing a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-led initiative supported by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) on improving access to justice systems for survivors of Violence against women (VAW), the Gender Development Association undertook the research activity, *Examining barriers to justice for survivors of VAW, especially women in Vientiane and Oudomxay Provinces*. From 18 February-2 March 2022 and 9-23 March 2022, the GDA field study team collected primary data from 10 villages in Houn district, Oudomxay Province (ODX) and 10 villages in Mad district, Vientiane Province (VTE). Using a survivor-centred and gender-responsive approach, GDA collected data from 563 total respondents – 531 respondents at the village level and 32 respondents from the district and provincial levels. Data collection tools included an individual survey, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

The study was divided into 6 categories: (i) understanding of VAW, (ii) knowledge of laws and justice system, (iii) perceptions of reporting, (iv) accessing justice systems, (v) accessing social services, and (vi) the impacts of COVID-19 on violence. This allowed the study team to engage deeper with respondents to identify and analyze the nuances of the gaps and barriers to the justice system, as well as the factors, perceptions, and behaviours that enable them. After all, solutions cannot be identified without a clear understanding of the problems, and the different ways they can manifest.

Although many aspects of the study confirmed conclusions made in previous research initiatives and verified the evidence collected in the desk review, there were several areas which may shed light on new aspects that require further investigation. One of the most interesting outcomes of the study was the clear indication that ‘case free’ and ‘model village’ designations not only prevent survivors and witnesses of violence from reporting, but also deter village authorities from reporting cases and/or referring them to higher levels. Another major barrier to reporting identified in the study is ‘cost’. There were also responses on access to information on laws, perceptions of the effectiveness of justice systems, and the availability of social services, support information which identify clear gender biases in the justice framework and the lack of integration of the rule of law at the local level. In many areas, customary law and informal justice systems normalize violence and weaken survivors’ right to redress. This is particularly prevalent in rural and remote ethnic minority communities. Interestingly, results on the impacts of COVID-19 on the prevalence of VAW were inconsistent with national reports as neither sample area identified an increase in violence as a consequence of stress, tension, the decline in mental health status, and financial insecurity which resulted from the pandemic.

Respondents provided valuable recommendations which reflect how aware authorities are of the gaps and barriers that exist in the current justice framework. However, it can be concluded that without adequate financial and human resourcing capacity; widespread mobilization; the establishment of coordination and quality assurance mechanisms; greater emphasis on gender-responsive and survivor-centred approaches; and the equal, active, and meaningful inclusion of women and ethnic minorities into all aspects of the continued development of Lao PDR’s legal sector, transformative change cannot be achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Since ratifying the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* in 1981, Lao PDR has been committed to eliminating Violence against women (VAW) and discrimination. The Government of Lao PDR recognizes that its elimination is crucial to protecting the rights of all persons in Lao PDR and achieving sustainable development; including that women have improved access to justice. Although there is growing recognition that VAW against women is a serious violation of human rights, in Lao PDR it exists as by-product of deeply embedded patriarchal structures and discriminatory gender roles and norms. Although government agencies and development partners have been working to facilitate social behaviour change, gender transformative change cannot be institutionalized without improving systems. Simply, without a strong rule of law and governance mechanisms to prevent VAW and provide remedies for survivors, the elimination of violence cannot be achieved.¹ Furthermore, transformational change inherently requires addressing the structures, perceptions, norms, and beliefs which have established an environment which enables and normalizes violence against women and children.



With the overarching purpose of advancing a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-led initiative supported by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) on improving access to justice systems for survivors of VAW, the Gender Development Association (GDA) undertook the research study – *Examining barriers to justice for survivors of VAW, especially women in Vientiane and Oudomxay Provinces*. The objectives of the study were to:

- 1) Examine the level of awareness of the various forms of VAW and assess legal literacy of the mechanisms/processes for accessing justice systems.
- 2) Identify the direct and indirect barriers preventing survivors of VAW from accessing justice systems.
- 3) Analyze the availability and effectiveness of support services for survivors of VAW.
- 4) Comparatively analyze the impacts of ethnicity on the types and prevalence of violence in Vientiane and Oudomxay Provinces

¹ UPDP Laos, *Call For Proposals: Grant for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Organizations for Research Study on Justice and Gender-Based Violence*, October 2021

METHODOLOGY



From 18 February-2 March 2022 and 9-23 March 2022, the GDA field study team collected primary data from 10 villages in Houn district, Oudomxay Province (ODX) and 10 villages in Mad district, Vientiane Province (VTE). Using a survivor-centred and gender-responsive approach, GDA collected data from 563 total respondents – 531 respondents at the village level and 32 respondents from the district and provincial levels. This exceeded the original research plan which aimed to achieve 436 total respondents (400 at the village level and 36 from district and Provincial levels). The field research undertook a mixed methodological approach to ensure the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. As such, data collection tools were comprised of: an *Individual Survey* to gauge knowledge and understanding of VAW and its various forms, rights literacy, legal literacy, access to support services, and impacts of COVID-19 on the prevalence of violence in the household and community; *Focus Group Discussions (FGD)* for facilitating a broader conversation among villagers and dive deeper into the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that may motivate certain thoughts and behaviours; *Key Informant Interviews (KII)* with Village Authorities – Head of Village (HOV)/Village Chief, Village Mediation Unit (VMU)/Village Mediation Committee (VMC), Village Lao Women’s Union (VLWU), and village police - and district and Provincial Authorities – district Justice Office (DJO), police, court officials, and public prosecutor; and an *Individual Story* (semi-structured interview) for survivors of VAW to share their experience in regards to accessing justice systems.

Sample sites comprised of 20 villages total that were selected based on existing MoUs (in order to mitigate delays for acquiring authorization), and because they were included as sample sites from previous baseline studies. [To protect the safety and confidentiality of respondents, the list of sample villages included in the study is not disclosed in this report. If this information is required, please contact the Gender Development Association at info@gdalaos.com]. Sample sites from

previous studies conducted by GDA were used to compare baseline data, engage deeper with respondents with whom the field team had already established a rapport based on safety and trust, and to inform the results analysis. Furthermore, an intersectional lens was strongly applied to the analysis in order to identify patterns or trends between and among ethnic groups and understand the nuances of how intersecting identities impact both survivors and perpetrators of violence. In order to distinguish patterns or characteristics related to VAW and how survivors access justice systems, GDA prioritized respondents identifying as Hmong and Khmu. Although the field team was not able to collect data from respondents identifying as Hmong, the full sample of respondents predominantly included Lao, Khmu, Lue, and mixed ethnicities. The breakdown of respondent ethnic identifies is outlined in **Table 3**. Some respondents were selected based on their past participation in GDA’s recent *Gender Rights Project*. The selection of respondents was supported by the local LWU. After the primary data was compiled and synthesized, GDA organized a *Results Verification Workshop* with all key stakeholders to confirm the initial conclusions of the study and gather any additional input.

Lastly, the study (including design of the data collection tools and primary data analysis), was largely informed by a semi-comprehensive (non-exhaustive) desk review of legal instruments and secondary data by the consultant. The conclusion of the desk review revealed four key gaps/barriers in the current justice system: gender-mainstreaming in the legal sector, service delivery, enforcement and accountability mechanisms, and availability of disaggregated data.

REVIEW OF THE STUDY



Below is a brief overview of the achievements and challenges experienced throughout the primary data collection phase of the project, informed by feedback from the field study team:

Achievements & Best Practices

Houn district

- The district team was instrumental in coordinating the village organizations in each sample site, and increased participation in interviews with the community.

- The district team provided language support as they were fluent in the local ethnic languages. They communicated effectively with respondents and engaged in dialogue with them.
- The district team provided essential logistical support as they were familiar with the local conditions and prepared the necessary equipment, food, and supplies for travelling to 5 sample sites situated in mountainous areas. Data collection in these areas required the field team to stay overnight and organize additional evening activities with the villagers.
- The creation of a WhatsApp Group facilitated direct communication and coordination for all team members.
- Organizing the study in conjunction with other project activities meant participants were engaged and willing to stay until the whole interview process was complete. This was a factor which enabled the successful achievement of the target sample size.

Mad district

- The district team eagerly learned how to use the Kobo Toolbox data collection contributed to the field study and enumerators.
- The district team ensured flexibility in coordinating field visits with each sample site, so information was gathered at the convenience of the community.
- The district was familiar with the local conditions and provided essential logistical support by preparing food and supplies before traveling to the sample sites. Many data collection activities were organized in the evening as some villagers were harvesting their plantation during the day.
- Creating a WhatsApp Group proved critical for keep the progress of the study on track.
- Organizing the study in conjunction with other project activities meant participants were engaged and willing to stay until the whole interview process was complete. This was a factor which enabled the successful achievement of the target sample size.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Houn district

- The field study plan was rescheduled part way through the due to poor weather conditions.
- Coordinating interview dates with village authorities across multiple sample sites proved challenging as several areas rescheduled because of traditional events and celebrations.
- The field team had difficulty securing a rental vehicle that fit the budget and was safe enough to drive through poor road conditions and mountainous areas.
- Due to the sensitive nature of the study, village authorities were not always cooperative throughout the interview process. Additionally, even though there were respondents in the community that had experienced VAW and abuse, it was difficult to encourage participation in many instances, mostly because cases were unresolved or the lack of access to justice

systems left survivors feeling disenfranchised and hopeless. Many participants preferred not to participate than risk re-traumatization.

Mad district

- Sample sites were difficult to access during poor weather conditions. As such, the field team opted for a daily schedule instead of a weekly schedule, so implementation plans could be confirmed based on the most current weather conditions. This was an added complexity in the general research plan.
- Village coordination was very informal and poor communication resulted in the inability of village authorities to secure the target number of participants.
- As the field study plan coincided with the harvest season, many villagers were not able to commit their time to participating for the entire duration of the interview period.
- As villagers had limited knowledge of concepts around VAW, many of the questions proved difficult to answer. Enumerators reworded questions and provided prompts as needed, however this resulted in very lengthy interview periods.
- The field team had difficulty securing a rental vehicle that fit the budget and was safe enough to drive through poor road conditions and mountainous areas.
- Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, many sample sites were quite secretive and only provided limited information, despite the field study team being informed of the actual number of cases.
- district Police Officers that agreed to participate in the study, refused to answer the individual survey without reasoning. As such, they were removed as target respondents for the key informant interviews.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

1) Overview of the full study sample:

Data Collection Tool	Target Group	HOUN DISTRICT, ODX			MAD DISTRICT, VTE				GRAND TOTAL
		Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Non-Binary	Total	
Individual Survey	Villagers	49	47	96	54	37	1	92	188
	Village Authorities	0	22	22	0	20	0	20	42
Key Informant Interview	Village: HoV, VLWU, Village Police, VMC/VMU.	11	43	54	14	26	0	40	94
	District: 5 sectors of the VAW Committee	4	6	10	2	1	0	3	13
	Province: 5 sectors of the VAW Committee	6	4	10	6	3	0	9	19
Focus Group Discussion	Villagers	67	57	124	46	33	0	79	203
Individual Story	Survivor of VAW	2	0	2	2	0	0	2	4
GRAND TOTAL		139	179	318	124	120	1	245	563

Table 1: Overview of respondent groups by data collection tool and sample area



2) Demographic data disaggregated by ethnicity, age, marital status, job and education.
 Note, of the total respondents, 6 females and 1 male identified as having a disability.

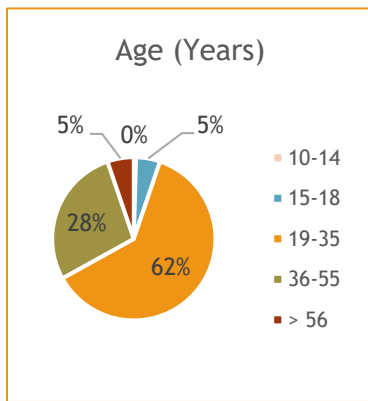


Table 2: Total respondents, disaggregated by age

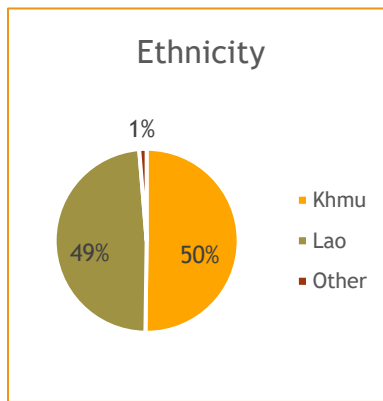


Table 3: Total respondents, disaggregated by ethnicity

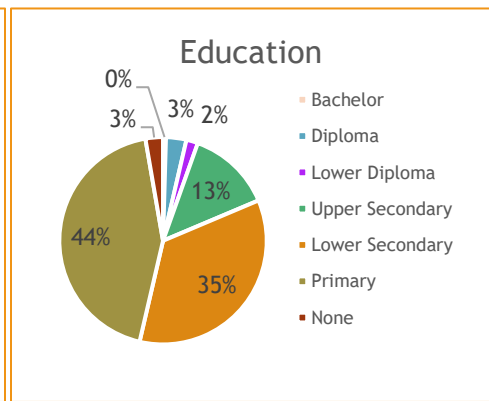


Table 4: Total respondents, disaggregated by education

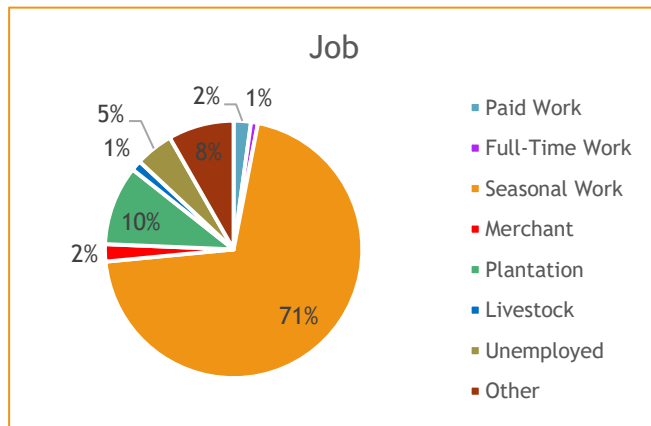


Table 5: Total respondents, disaggregated by job

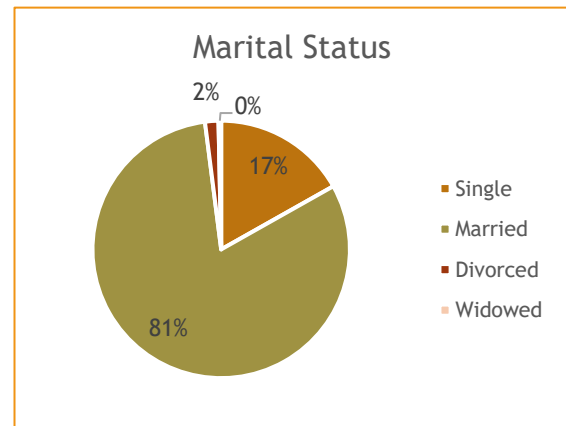


Table 6: Total respondents, disaggregated by marital status

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Individual Surveys

- **59%** of all respondents are *‘undecided’* on their **level of understanding of VAW** (see table 7).
- In ODX, **30%** of females and **27%** of males report **experiencing VAW in their community**; **41%** of females and **55%** of males report **experiencing VAW in their household**.
- **40%** of males in ODX and **35%** of females report **witnessing VAW in their household**.
- **82%** of males in ODX, **67%** of females in ODX, **44%** of females in VTE, **35%** of males in VTE and **100%** of non-binary respondents in VTE report **witnessing VAW in the community**.
- In ODX, **55%** of females report *‘verbal abuse’* is the **most prevalent form of violence in the community**, whereas **87%** of males report *‘domestic violence’*; **39%** of females also report *‘domestic violence’* (see table 8).
- In VTE, **56%** of males report *‘domestic violence’* and *‘intimate partner violence’* as the most prevalent form of violence in the community, with **43%** of women also reporting *‘domestic violence’* (see table 8).
- *‘Drugs’* and *‘alcohol’* were reported as the **most common factor enabling VAW** in both sample areas across all respondent groups. *‘Cultural norms’* and *‘unemployment’* were among the least.
- **69%** of all respondents identified *‘women & adolescent girls’* as the **group most at risk of experiencing VAW**. *‘Elderly persons’* followed by *‘adolescent men and boys’* were identified as second and third highest risk. *‘LGBT persons’* and *‘Persons with Disabilities’* were identified as being the least at risk.

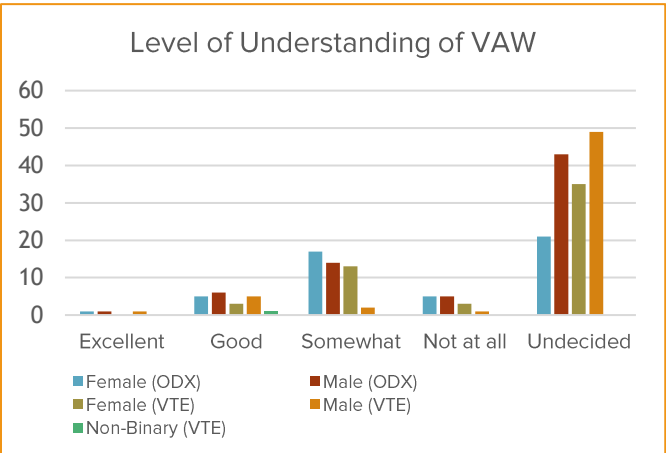


Table 7: Level of understanding of VAW, across all sample areas

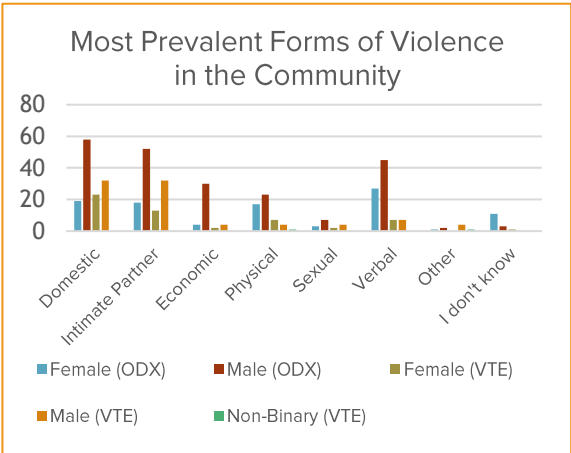


Table 8: Most prevalent forms of violence in the community, across all sample areas

Focus Group Discussions

Based on previous baseline studies conducted by GDA, VAW is most commonly understood as some form of physical or verbal altercation. It is often identified as occurring between husband and wife, and sometimes it extends to children. Understanding of VAW decreases in rural, remote, and in many ethnic communities, as violence against women is normalized (by both women and men) as a common cultural practice instead of a harmful patriarchal norm rooted in power imbalance and toxic masculinity.

The results of the focus group discussions not only confirm the assumptions made in the desk review, in addition to conclusions of past research initiatives, but also reveal the effectiveness of gender training. When respondents were asked to identify the different forms of violence, the majority of participants indicated sexual abuse or rape, verbal abuse, and emotional abuse. Interestingly, destruction of property and gossip were also noted as common forms of violence. While almost all respondents named women and children as the primary victims of VAW, several also named elderly people and persons with disabilities. The primary causes of violence were listed as (in order of most to least common): alcohol, drugs, infidelity ('taking another wife'), socio-economic strife (unemployment, poverty, and financial hardship), misunderstanding, low levels of education/understanding of gender, mental illness ('anxiety'), food insecurity, and not attending village meetings.

Comparing the results of the female respondent groups to the male group, male respondents had a significantly deeper understanding of VAW than females. Male respondents were able to identify 4 forms of VAW (physical, mental, economic, and sexual), and even went so far as to note VAW (and domestic violence, specifically) is enabled by a power imbalance between husband and wife. All male respondents in Houn district reported that violence exists in their community – most commonly as domestic violence against women and children – however they also reported that VAW against men and boys is quite prevalent. Several respondents stated that wives frequently hit their husbands, and mothers have been seen hitting their sons and daughters. Factors enabling this type of violence were listed as: jealousy ('wife is jealous that husband talks to other women'), laziness ('not helping with chores'), drunkenness, spending too much time with friends, and adultery. Male respondents in this group also noted that the impact of violence falls mostly on neighbours and community members, as they feel stressed about the situations around them.

Respondents with the most comprehensive understanding of VAW were from the male focus groups in Mad district. This is primarily because the majority of respondents were past participants of GDA's *Gender Rights Project* (as reported by respondents). Almost all respondents could easily define VAW on a more technical level than other groups. Many respondents stated that violence is not prevalent in their community beyond small disputes within families, which are generally over land and do not escalate beyond arguments. However, one respondent noted that women are often harassed in restaurants, which they felt constituted a form of violence. When asked about the frequency of violence in their community, female respondents in ODX reported physical abuse

resulting from alcohol happens on average once/month and domestic violence occurs at least 2 times/month. According to male respondents in ODX, the frequency of domestic violence (both physical and verbal) is between 3-6 times/month at minimum. Neither respondent group in VTE were willing to comment on cases of violence. It was not determined if it was due to the sensitivity of the topic or if they simply did not know.

Key Informant Interviews

Village authorities in Houn district defined VAW similarly to villagers in the focus group discussions. The most prevalent forms of violence in the community are physical, economic and mental; no respondents noted sexual violence was common. In Mad district, all village authorities interviewed defined VAW as ‘arguing’, ‘insulting’, or ‘fighting’. The low understanding of VAW was reflected in responses to the most prevalent forms of violence in the community, which were reported as ‘theft’, ‘drug addiction’, ‘land disputes’, and ‘arguments between husband and wife’.

In Houn district, authorities managed an average of 1-4 cases of violence in the last 3 years, which were mostly resolved by the Village Chief or VMU. Sometimes the Village Police or VLWU were involved in overseeing the mediation, however the VLWU is the least likely to be responsible for resolving conflicts. This is reflective of the minimal role women lay in the justice system. Typically, the only role reserved for women is as an LWU representative, holding very little agency, decision-making power, and influencing capacity.

When asked about the process for documenting cases, all respondents noted that reports of violence are documented in some form or another, however, there is very little consistency. As such, sometimes reports are written in great detail, and sometimes a verbal account is all that exists. When probed further, authorities revealed that since there are no clear guidelines on documentation, and investigative processes look different in each local context. Also, it is common for both the Village Chief and the VMU to be responsible for reporting, so the outcome of the report is dependent on which focal point was tasked at the time.

In Mad district, an average of 3-6 incidents of violence were reported in the last 3 years; however one respondent expressed that if land disputes are included, then cases are upwards of 2-3 incidents per month. Almost all respondents in both sample areas report never receiving reports of violence against men or boys. A few respondents noted they managed 1-2 cases where violence was involved, however when questioned further, it was revealed that gender was not a factor. Only one respondent in Houn district noted responding to 3 cases of violence against LGBT persons in the last 3 years.

The majority of respondents in both sample areas also stated “[they’ve] never responded to a case of VAWG”, with the exception of one respondent in Mad district that handled one report: VAW in a divorce case; and one respondent in Houn district that received 2-3 reports of VAW in a family dispute. Several others in Houn district expressed that although they never managed a case of

VAWG, they were asked for advice by villagers on several occasions. All respondents in Houn district and 75% of respondents in Mad district report receiving some type of training on VAW.

Unlike village authorities, district and provincial authorities in both sample areas had a rather thorough understanding of VAW, and definitions provided by the Prosecutor and DJO were quite detailed. In VTE, most authorities only had experience managing cases of VAW in the context of human trafficking. However, all respondents noted the correlation between poverty and alcohol or drug abuse with incidents of domestic and intimate partner violence. Authorities in ODX also noted early marriage, traditional norms, gender inequality, customs, and gambling as key enabling factors. Most respondents noted all cases of violence are documented, with one stating that victims are monitored after receiving assistance. However, most respondents in VTE shared that they had never actually handled a case of VAW that was referred to them by the village. In ODX, authorities stated the frequency of cases of violence average 2-30 in the last 3 years, with 3-10 involving sexual violence, and up to 30 cases involving violence against LGBT persons. Almost all respondents in both sample areas received training on VAW, with several participating in specific training on human trafficking.

Knowledge of Laws & Justice System

Individual Surveys

- 56% of all respondents were *‘undecided’* on their **level of understanding of the laws on VAW**; **0%** of respondents reported *‘excellent’*, **23%** reported *‘somewhat’*.
- In VTE, **43%** of females responded *‘yes’* when asked if they had **good access to information on laws and justice processes**; however, **41%** responded *‘I don’t know’*; **70%** of males responded *‘yes’*.
- In ODX, **45%** of males responded *‘no’* when asked if they had good access to information on laws and justice processes, however **39%** responded *‘yes’*; **41%** of females responded, *‘I don’t know’* and **35%** reported *‘yes’*.
- 66%** of all respondents responded *‘yes’* when asked if the **VA and VMU had knowledge on the laws on VAW**.
- 68%** of all respondents identified *‘Village/district Authorities’* as their **primary source of information on laws and justice processes**.
- 69%** of all respondents identified the *‘Village Chief’* as the **person responsible for ensuring their knowledge of laws on VAW**, followed by **25%** identifying *‘district Authorities (MOJ)’*.
- 76%** of all respondents **feel safe and protected against VAW by the current laws** - including **86%** of female respondents.
- 64%** of all respondents **received or know someone who received formal training on VAW laws and legal process**.

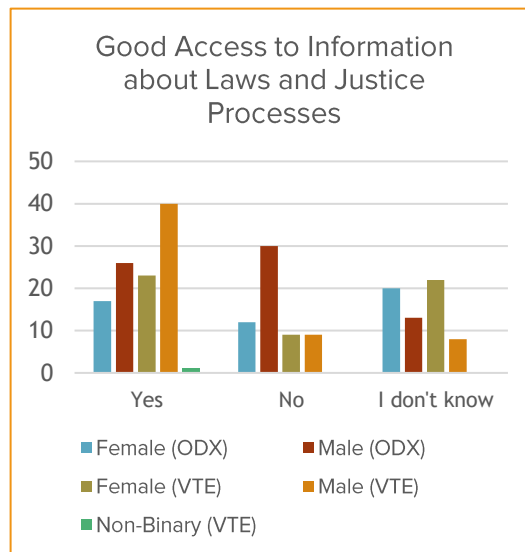


Table 9: Good access to information about laws and justice processes, across all sample areas

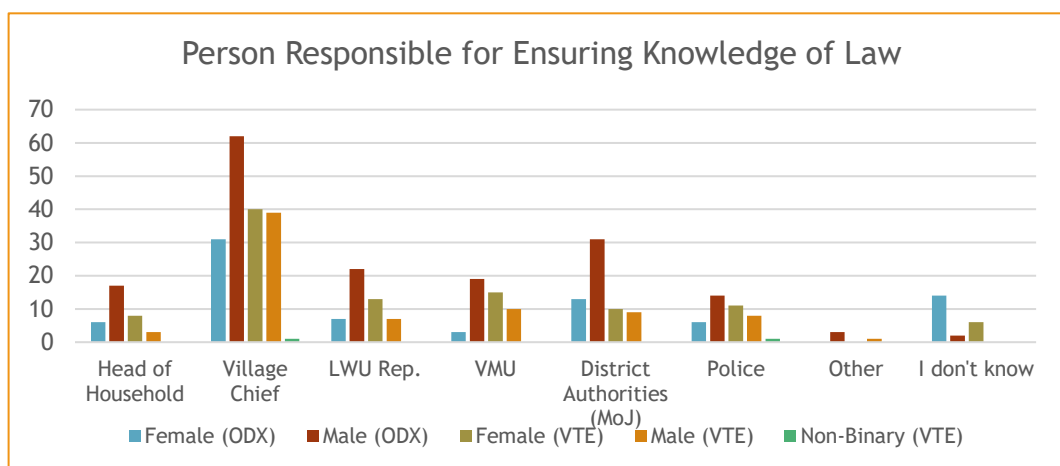


Table 10: Person responsible for ensuring knowledge of laws, across all sample areas

Focus Group Discussions

Similar to the results on the understanding of VAW, knowledge and awareness of the laws on VAW and justice processes is considerably low, and more so among rural and remote ethnic minority communities. Based on evidence from the desk review, there are clear differences in the level of understanding between women and men, as women are often less educated, have less access to sources of information, and participate less in village meetings and activities. However, responses from women's and men's groups in both sample sites indicated otherwise.

Based on the focus group discussions from both sample areas, respondents are aware that laws exist to protect women from violence, however only a few female respondents in Houn district reported having 'basic knowledge', and all female respondents in Mad district reported having 'no knowledge at all'. Only one female respondent from Houn district was familiar with the judicial process because she had first-hand experience from participating in a mediation. The reason for the mediation was not disclosed. All other female respondents reported having 'little to no access to legal information'. Many of the women's groups in Mad district noted their minimal knowledge was 'due to a lack of legal awareness training', although one respondent stated that "even if training was available in the village, it would have likely been only for our husbands". After this statement was made, all respondents indicated a strong interest and desire for training, and dissemination of the *Law on the Protection of Women*.

There were stark differences in the level of confidence female respondents had in the level of knowledge of the village authorities. In one sample area, female respondents considered authorities to have low- to mid-level knowledge of the laws and justice process, whereas female respondents of the adjacent sample area were confident in their village authorities because they knew they had all participated in legal training. However, it should also be noted that despite the many respondents expressing their satisfaction, several others expressed that while authorities had undergone training on justice processes, their understanding of the law remained quite low, and many cases remain unresolved as a consequence.

In both sample areas, the HOV or Village Chief was identified as the primary person responsible for ensuring community understanding of the laws and justice system. Subsequent focal points included VMU, Village Security, Village Police and VLWU. Notably, only one respondent group identified 'police' as holding responsibility for ensuring knowledge of the law. This may be because police are viewed only as 'enforcers'. In Houn district, women primarily received information through village loudspeakers, Facebook, and village activities (training). In Mad district, all female groups indicated 'participating in training' as their primary source of information, followed by television, Facebook, loudspeaker, and internet searches. All female respondents from both

"...even if [legal] training was available in the village, it would have likely been only for our husbands..."

Female Respondent,
Focus Group Discussion,
VTE

sample areas expressed that their knowledge would be improved through widespread dissemination of laws, specific training through a dedicated project, and ‘visual performances’.

Similarly, male respondents in Houn district were aware that laws related to violence could not identify any. In Mad district, only a few male respondents said that they had ‘mid-level knowledge’ while all others noted they had ‘no knowledge at all’. Many respondents explained the reason for not having more knowledge is because ‘it’s the responsibility of the VMU’. However, the same respondents also noted that while the VMU know the rules of village, ‘no one really knows the laws of the country’. This is reflected in both sample areas by the ratio of resolved to unresolved cases, however both groups noted that bribery was also a factor in the outcome of cases.

In Houn district, access to information on VAW laws is quite varied: although information is published by the district 2-4 times/year and disseminated by loudspeaker, television, and radio, it is very technical and not easy to understand. Others noted that although they had some access to information on the laws, they had no idea how the judicial system worked or how to access it. For many sample sites in mountainous areas, the lack of access to internet and phones was an important aspect to consider in how communities remain informed, as well as the reliance this placed on authorities as key sources of information. Concerns were also expressed about the particular challenges faced by elderly people in accessing information in general.

In Mad district, legal information is published 2-4 times/year and disseminated mostly through village authorities. Throughout the discussions, respondents expressed that the availability and access to information is not reflective of their level of understanding. When information is shared by district and village authorities, it is typically presented ‘lecture-style’ which people find too theoretical and generally uninteresting. This is an important factor to consider in the approach stakeholders take to improving legal knowledge and understanding.

All respondents consider the HOV, Village Committee, and VMU as the persons responsible for ensuring community members have access to legal information. Groups in both sample areas noted that understanding of the laws and justice system could be improved by diversifying the ways information is presented (e.g.: posters, voice recordings, pamphlets for households, training workshops and drama performances). Again, respondents had a strong preference for visual presentations and group discussions so they could engage and share with one another. Notably, past participants of GDA’s *Gender Rights Project* found the training methodology like having partners who have been trained through the tools, methods and details of the project contribute to guiding the target group in conjunction with the relative district offices team to help explain the perspective of the ethnic language. most effective in that all participants learned a lot simply because of how the information was delivered.

Key Informant Interviews

Village authorities in both sample areas considered themselves quite familiar with laws related to had experience applying the ‘Law on Protecting Women and Children’, ‘Criminal Law’, ‘Family Law’, and ‘Law on Gender Equality’ in responding to cases of VAW. Notably, one respondent shared that “since customary law is applied in the village, [we] don’t use any formal rules or laws”. In VTE, at least one person responsible for managing cases of violence had participated in training related to the law; when this wasn’t the Village Chief, it was a member of the VMU or village police. In ODX, at least one member of the village authorities participated in training on VAW laws, enforcement, and/or supporting survivors; however, further discussion revealed that when the trained person of authority was not a member of the VMU (as they lead on all reports of violence), an instruction book was applied instead.

“...since customary law is applied in the village, [we] don’t use any formal rules or laws...”

Respondent from Key Informant Interview

Furthermore, all sample sites in ODX lacked any specific policies for procedures for responding to cases of VAW. Based on the evidence compiled in the desk review, it is fair to assume that approaches are likely focused on ‘restoring family and community harmony’, which deprioritizes the rights of survivors. Additionally, approaches are unlikely to be gender sensitive or survivor - centred. This is where responses between sample areas differed quite significantly: authorities in ODX relied on traditional practices such as a BaSi Ceremony as a key method for resolution, while authorities from all sample sites in VTE undertook an approach which included community mobilization to ensure the safety of the victim, establishing a support group for the family and facilitating a mediation between all parties involved. Based on the ethnic backgrounds of community in both sample areas, it can be concluded that ethnicity is a factor in determining the approach used to ‘resolve’ cases.

Responses from district and provincial authorities were quite similar in that there was clear awareness of which laws apply to cases of VAW. However, there are no clear policies or procedures for managing cases or responding to survivors (several noted that there should be). Where authorities are unsure of appropriate actions to resolve cases, they most commonly resort to providing counselling to the victim.

PERCEPTIONS OF REPORTING

Individual Survey

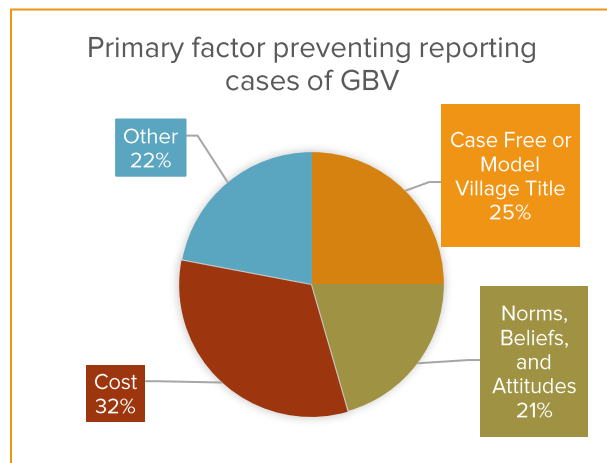


Table 11: Primary factors preventing reporting of cases of VAW

- When asked if **someone experiencing VAW had an obligation to report**, **47%** of all respondents said ‘sometimes, it depends’; **24%** said ‘yes, always’.
- When asked if **someone witnessing VAW had an obligation to report**, **48%** of all respondents said ‘sometimes, it depends’; **18%** said ‘yes, always’.
- **83%** of all respondents identified the ‘Village Chief’ as the **person to report to about incidents of VAW**.

Focus Group Discussion

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic and the stigma of reporting ‘family matters’ to authorities, focus group discussions in both sample areas revealed the contrary. Not only was it agreed that all incidents of violence should be reported, but respondents were also adamant that it was a matter of obligation. Male respondents in Mad district were especially vocal about one’s right to report when ‘their safety is compromised’. Furthermore, the duty to report extends not only to victims but also to witnesses: all respondent groups agreed witnesses must report violence since “everyone has the authority to keep the community safe”. Notably, one respondent group from a sample site in ODX stated that witnesses of violence should not report “because they will be cursed by other villagers”. This could indicate a link to different perceptions of reporting in certain cultural practices, as the respondents in the sample site identified as an ethnic minority group.

Similarly, all respondents stated village authorities have the right and duty to report cases of violence to the district. However, responses across gender and geographic samples were conflicted as to whether reporting should only be done if cases are serious or unresolved. According to several respondents, cases of robbery and drug abuse are much more likely to be reported to the district than cases of violence, even if the village authorities were able to resolve it locally.



As expected, reasons why cases of violence go unreported include: fear of reprisal (being hurt again), shame, embarrassment, not know the process, social stigma (gossip, criticism, victim-blaming), and because they are not confident a resolution will be reached. Notably, male respondents in Mad district stated that the reasons for not reporting are the same for both women experiencing violence from men, and men experiencing violence from women. Interestingly, it was revealed by male respondent groups in ODX that men are more likely to report cases of violence; specifically, out of 5 reports (this is a quote), only 2 would be likely to come from women.

While some female and male respondents in Houn district noted 'case free' or 'model village' titles had no impact on their likelihood to report violence, others responded it would prevent them from reporting for 'fear of being cursed by the Village Chief', with some male respondents revealing it was the reason they themselves did not report. Although many respondents indicated that there was no impact, the field study team verified that the number of reported cases of VAW decreased after the sample sites in question received their 'model village' designation. Mostly, respondents feared being blamed by others for discrediting the village and embarrassing the Village Authorities. Female respondents in Mad district stated the designation is a major deterrent to reporting because reports of violence will 'damage the image, reputation, and development of the village'. In Mad district, only a few female respondents noted the designation had no impact on reporting, and all but one male respondent group reported the title had no effect on whether cases were reported, since they are solved at the village-level, and it has no impact on the title being removed. Interestingly, one group expressed that although their village may hold a 'case free' title, that it does not mean their village is safe. Note, all sample sites hold 'case free' or 'model village' titles.

Key Informant Interview

Village Authorities in both sample areas undertake the same process for responding to cases of VAW: incidents are reported verbally to the Village Chief, village police, and/or VLWU; the case is documented and provided to the VMC; the VMC or designated person (sometimes Village Chief or elder) will provide counselling, mediation, or conflict resolution. In the event a resolution cannot be reached, cases will be referred to the district. All respondents were familiar with the documentation required to initiate formal legal processes, which include: village mediation documents, application form/request form, report, referral case document, approval document from village authority, and a contract of agreement between parties.

When asked if ‘case free’ or ‘model village’ titles impacted the likelihood for reporting, the strong majority of village authorities identified it was a primary factor preventing survivors and witnesses from reporting cases of violence. This is largely due to embarrassment, fear of victim-blaming/shaming, or protecting the village reputation. When asked if the title prevented them as an authority from reporting cases to higher levels, the strong majority also responded ‘yes’. Several noted that if faced with the decision, they would choose not to report for fear of being blamed by the district, fined by police, appearing weak, or facing the embarrassment of having the title removed. However, it should be noted that several respondents affirmed the title had no effect on their willingness to report or refer cases.

At the district and provincial levels, several respondents acknowledged that ‘case free’ or ‘model village’ titles were a barrier to victim reporting, and that it could impact the willingness of village authorities to report or refer cases. All respondents were well-versed in the documentation required for accepting cases, which includes: proposal letter signed by all parties, referral letter from Head of Village, formal report, village registers, a petition form, and evidence. Other barriers to survivors and/or witness reporting were identified as: lack of understanding of costs (there is a clearly defined rate but some villages/districts will confuse or inflate rates for personal gain), lack of understanding of the law, embarrassment of the victim, traditional beliefs/social perspective (women reporting cases about their husbands is inappropriate), patriarchal norms, fear (of reprisal), shyness, victim blaming/shaming, lack of confidence in the system to support them, money, reliance on husband, lack of knowledge of reporting process, lack of understanding of rights, and village authority not wanting to accept cases.

“If faced with the decision, I would choose not to report cases to the district for fear of being blamed, fined by police, appearing weak, or facing the embarrassment of having our ‘model village’ title removed.”

Village Authority, Key Informant Interview

ACCESSING JUSTICE SYSTEMS

Individual Survey

- **42%** of all respondents were *'undecided'* on their **level of trust in the current justice system**; where **33%** of male respondents reported *'excellent'* and **30%** reported *'good'*, only **6%** and **28%** of females responded the same, respectively.
- **40%** of all respondents were *'undecided'* on the **effectiveness of current laws at protecting survivors of VAW**; where **19%** of males responded *'excellent'* and **30%** responded *'good'*, only **10%** and **18%** of females responded the same, respectively.
- **39%** of all respondents were *'undecided'* on the **effectiveness of current laws at ensuring justice for survivors of VAW**; where **21%** of males responded *'excellent'* and **30%** responded *'good'*, only **10%** and **25%** of females responded the same, respectively.
- **76%** of all respondents feel that the **current justice system framework is effective at supporting survivors of VAW**.
- **77%** of all respondents feel that **perpetrators of VAW are punished fairly**.

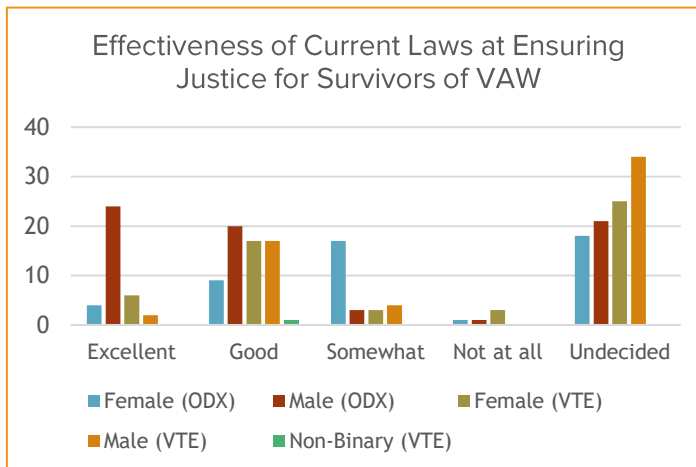


Table 12: Effectiveness of current laws at ensuring justice for survivors of VAW

Focus Group Discussion

For all respondent groups, justice equality, fairness, punishment for crime, honest, unity, helping each other, solidarity, doing the right thing, integrity, admitting guilt, mutual understanding, empathy, respect, neutrality, adherence to the rules and principles, and judgement. Consistent with the conclusions of the desk review, none of the respondents across all sample areas were familiar with the steps for accessing the justice system beyond making an initial report to the Village Chief. Even so, almost all respondents indicated that they would attempt to resolve issues of violence at the family-level first by seeking advice from their parents or relatives before considering a formal report.

Cases of VAW are resolved very similarly in both sample areas: Once the case is reported to the Village Chief, a warning will be issued to the perpetrator and their family, the perpetrator 'will be educated', the parties will participate in mediation, and information will be disseminated throughout the community. In many cases announcements over the loudspeaker will be made addressing VAW, especially in cases of domestic violence. One respondent noted that if VAW occurs in the

community, all the men in the village should be required to participate in a training on gender equality and preventing violence against women. The male respondent group in VTE reported that typically, VAW in the community is resolved by fining the perpetrator, with repeat offenders paying double or even triple the fine.

This indicates that the consequence for VAW is not meant to be restorative for survivors or a deterrent to future violence, but simply prioritizes restoring balance to the family or community. This is just one example of how informal justice systems weaken survivor's right to redress. As evidenced in the desk review, VAW in the customary and semi-formal systems are not considered criminal behaviour. So instead of promoting a culture of prevention, violence is normalized as a 'misdemeanor' by only requiring perpetrators to pay fines to the family.

When asked about how violence is handled in the community, a large number of respondents stated 'in accordance with the village rules'. This indicates that while there is general awareness that the district and province will handle cases in the event they are not resolved at the village, that village rules and procedures are primary. This is supported by responses when asked about feelings and perceptions on the effectiveness of justice processes; almost all female respondents in both sample groups were 'unsure', either because they had never accessed them or because all problems are resolved at the village-level. Responses from both male groups were somewhat divided between feeling justice processes are 'mostly effective' or 'not at all effective'. One male respondent in ODX noted that the reason for this ineffectiveness is because "the rule of law has not been integrated into community practices, and so there is a clear bias and advantage for people who are wealthy or in positions of power, to manipulate the system in their favour".

Perceptions of effectiveness decreased significantly when asked if current justice processes are effective at preventing future incidents of violence. Reasons for the change in sentiment included: current processes do not address behaviour or promote fundamental change, they do not

acknowledge or address linkages with other areas of crime (alcohol/drug abuse, gambling, theft), and they do not consider or aim to reduce enabling factors of violence such as poverty, unemployment, lack of education. Several female respondents in both sample areas noted that "preventing future incidents of violence is mostly dependent on the ability of justice authorities to understand their role and do it well. Therefore, if cases of VAW increase or repeat offenses become more frequent, then we should look to training/educating authorities as a key solution first". Other male respondents in VTE noted that the effectiveness of justice processes decreases the higher the case is referred. Reasons for this fell primarily to the prevalence of bribery.

When asked whether respondents felt perpetrators are punished fairly under the current laws, almost all respondents

"The reason for the ineffectiveness of the current justice system framework is because the rule of law has not been integrated into community practices, and so there is a clear bias and advantage for people who are wealthy or in a position of power to manipulate the system in their favour."

Male Respondent, Focus Group Discussion, ODX

across both sample sites first responded with ‘punishments are fair as long as they are in accordance with the village rules and the law’. Several male respondents in both sample areas considered the punishment for perpetrators of violence as ‘too light’ in that they are not effective at preventing repeat offences. Additionally, two female respondent groups in ODX indicated ‘execution’ was the most appropriate punishment for perpetrators of VAW.

Responses on the most common barriers preventing justice from survivors from female discussion groups in both sample areas were the same: fear (of reprisal, embarrassment, and victim-blaming/shaming), money/financial costs, far distances/no access to transportation, lack of knowledge/understanding of the process, and cultural norms. Responses from the male discussion group in ODX were similar in that they identified money/financial costs, lack of knowledge, lack of support, lack of confidence in the justice system (due to high level of unresolved cases), bribery, cost of mediation on the victim, fear of being beaten again, and no access to transportation as key barriers. Notably, the ‘cost of mediation on the victim’ refers to both the physical and emotional cost of re-traumatization, and the literal monetary cost. A call for inform about the case or educating a perpetrator, and/or arranging a mediation can be quite expensive as not only do the VMU require a fee, but the victim/victim’s family must be prepared to host the mediation. Hosting includes preparing the space and providing a meal for everyone, which requires slaughtering chicken, ducks, cows, or goats. If the mediation is not successful at first, then it must be hosted again until a resolution is, or the parties agree to refer the case to a higher level. However, many respondents of the male group in VTE noted there are zero barriers to accessing justice systems and reporting mechanisms were easy and effective, while only few others noted money or lack of follow-up/seriousness of authorities to resolve cases as key barriers.

“Preventing future incidents of violence is mostly dependent on the ability of justice authorities to understand their role and do it well. Therefore, if cases of VAW increase or repeat offenses become more frequent, then we should look to training/educating authorities as a key solution first.”

Female Respondent, Focus Group Discussion

Key Informant Interview

When describing their role in the justice system, village authorities in one sample site provided a detailed list which included: following the framework appointed by the central level, instructing villagers when a problem arises, negotiating and mediating cases, protecting and looking after the community, disseminating the law, being transparent with people, helping to resolve conflicts, maintaining peace and safety, and building trust with villagers. In contrast, almost all respondents in the other sample site indicated their primary role is simply “to mediate”.



The process for responding to cases was similar in both sample areas: make a report, conduct an investigation (by appointing an investigative unit), discuss with the parties and their families, sign a mediation agreement or and make an arrest/refer the case to the district only if it is serious or cannot be resolved. The process is the same whether the incident is reported by the victim or a witness. All respondents described a level of coordination and agreement between all actors (Village Chief, VMU and police) are important because they each have their own role and responsibility.

Challenges for ensuring survivors have access to justice systems included: fear, embarrassment, not wanting others to know, language, lack of knowledge, relationship between village authorities and villagers, only observing village rules and not the law, ‘women’s mindset’, money, and fear of gossip. Punishment for perpetrators included: fine, imprisonment, behaviour modification (education), formal warning, and ‘traditional methods’.

District and Provincial Authorities indicated the primary actors responsible for supporting victims are police, VLWU, VMC, family, DJO, and DLWU. The desk review indicated ‘lack thereof’ could be a barrier for survivors as cases are regularly discussed in public in the village. When this concern was raised with authorities, all respondents noted how strongly and seriously they uphold their duty to maintain confidentiality. Methods for ensuring confidentiality included: ‘the court staff will be ethical’, ‘confidentiality of information is protected by the law’, ‘authorities should conceal the victim’s identity/status’, ‘victims and perpetrators will be separated’, and ‘authorities should prevent information from being public’. All respondents were confident in their ability and the ability of their offices to maintain and uphold expressed it as a key priority. All respondents stated that they considered punishments fair ‘so long as it is in accordance with the law’. Lastly, several

respondents in ODX received specialized training on responding to cases of VAW, however “it was a long time ago and only offered under a dedicated project”. Respondents in VTE were unsure if any justice authorities received specialized training on responding to survivors of VAW.

ACCESSING SOCIAL SERVICES

Individual Survey

- **52%** of all respondents believe that **survivors of VAW have access to social services**.
- **59%** of all respondents consider ‘distance’ as the **primary barrier to accessing social services for survivors of VAW**; of this, **68%** were females.
- **52%** of all respondents were ‘undecided’ on the **effectiveness of social services in supporting survivors of VAW**; where **24%** of females responded ‘good’, **17%** responded ‘somewhat’.

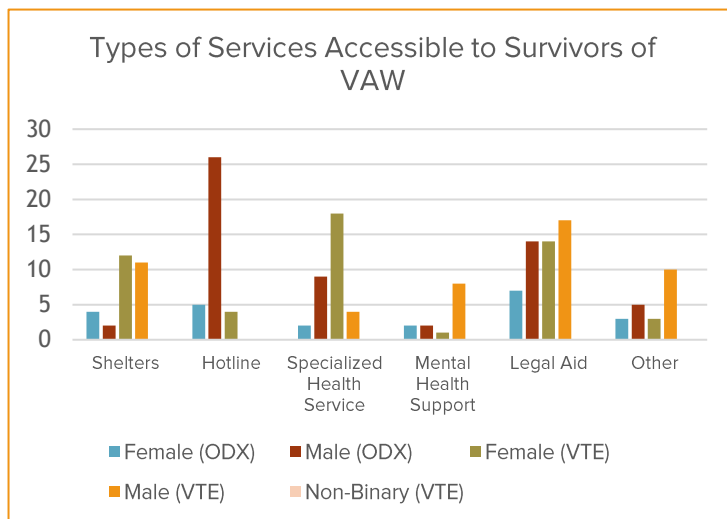


Table 13: Types of services accessible to survivors of VAW

Focus Group Discussion

All respondents across both sample sites agreed that survivors of violence should have access to all proposed social services: legal aid, shelters, specialized health services, and psycho-social/mental health services. Female respondents have a greater understanding of how to access health services than justice violence occurs. Several male respondents noted that financial cost is a key factor for those accessing social services, and highlighted the importance of accessibility stating, “there should be a mobile team or a car service for those who do not have a car or know how to drive”. Generally, all respondents noted such services would be great, however they were unaware of any such facility existing close enough to them to access. While there was minimal awareness that such facilities may exist, respondents concluded that they are either inaccessible or inconvenient because of ‘distance and bad roads’. Several female respondents even offered their services to volunteer if any facilities did exist. As such, counselling is sought from elders and safety/shelter is provided by relatives.

Several male respondents noted the priority that should be placed on establishing shelters, as safety is the most important aspect of providing support to survivors. Others identified psycho-social support and legal aid as the most important. One respondent suggested a community support team should be established to support victims through the healing and justice process. When asked about how current social services could be improved, all respondents in ODX identified improving the health care sector was critical, specifically for ‘medical staff to change their attitudes and the way they speak to survivors’. This implies a need to train medical staff on survivor-centred approaches to care. Others noted that health services are of poor quality in general and therefore could not provide effective care or support to victims of violence. Several respondents indicated that seeking medical attention is a matter of severity – only if a victim is bleeding or unconscious. This is consistent with the conclusions of the desk review which indicate that VAW is not considered a form of violence unless it meets a certain ‘threshold’ for what is considered serious.

One female respondent emphasized employment services to support women who want to stay separated from their spouse be established since dependence is a significant reason why victims remain in abusive situations. Feedback on other areas of improvement included: making health facilities more accessible, more loudspeakers for Village Chiefs to make announcements regarding VAW, reducing costs, addressing the quality of health services and attitudes of staff, and mobilizing an advocacy team to disseminate information at least 3 times per year.

Key Informant Interview

While village authorities in ODX were not aware of services for survivors of VAW beyond the health clinic/hospital, authorities in VTE also identified the district hotline. However, it was revealed that only the Village Chief knew the number for the district hotline and if someone wanted to call, they would have to ask him/her first. All respondents stated that “there are no such facilities to provide accommodation for survivors whose lives may be in danger, so instead they will stay with family members”. Authorities expressed their willingness to support victims seeking shelter because “it is their duty to assist”. Another respondent offered the village club space as an option if needed. All respondents stated that the only service they have referred to victims is the health centre.

As villages commonly lack private spaces for reporting, incidents of violence are usually disclosed in the home of the Village Chief, person reporting, or a family member. In some cases, the village office may also be used. If a survivor required transportation to shelter or health services, the Village Chief or a relative would arrange it, however “the victim would be required to compensate for gas”. Authorities in VTE indicated they would contact the district for

“Only the Village Chief knows the number for the district hotline, so if someone wants to call, they must ask him first.”

Village Authority, Key Informant Interview, VTE

support but mobilization within the village is also likely. If a victim of VAW disclosed that their life was in danger, authorities would respond by “separating the parties, offering shelter or suggesting they stay with a relative, and speaking with the perpetrator”. If required, the perpetrator might also be detained. Lastly, authorities identified challenges to accessing services as: distance, normalizing violent behaviour, illiteracy, money, travel, and lack of knowledge on accessing justice systems.

District and provincial authorities in both sample areas report never having referred survivors of violence to social services. No respondents have ever worked with service providers to support survivors of VAW, and only one respondent was aware of a service provider that received training specifically for responding to cases of VAW. When asked about policies and procedures in place for service providers in supporting victims of VAW, one respondent in VTE noted they must provide legal counselling; all other respondents across both sample areas noted no such policies exist, however several expressed that there should be.



IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON VIOLENCE

Individual Survey

- **60%** of all respondents responded 'no' when asked if the **COVID-19 pandemic increased VAW in the household**; of this **58%** were females, however **38%** of females responded 'yes'.
- **56%** of all respondents responded 'no' when asked if the **COVID-19 pandemic increased VAW in the community**; of this **54%** were females, however **37%** of females responded 'yes' as well as **51%** of males in VTE.
- **50%** of all respondents feel there have been **efforts (by community members, authorities and/or police) to address the prevalence of VAW since the COVID-19 pandemic**; of this, **62%** were females.

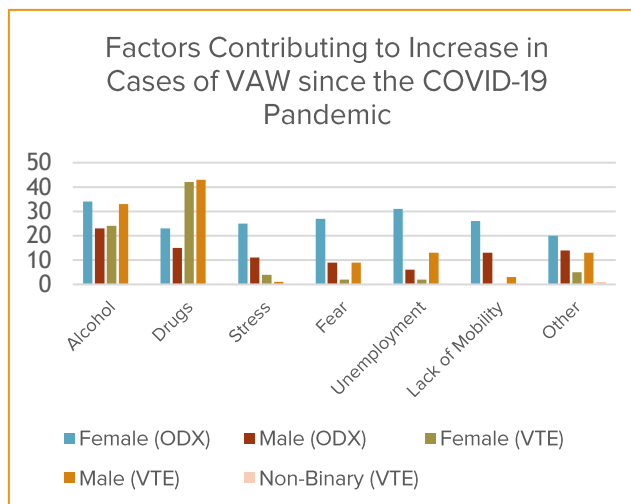


Table 14: Factors contributing to the increase in cases of VAW since the COVID-19 pandemic

Focus Group Discussion

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on households and communities in both sample areas are reflective of the impacts felt all across the world. According to one respondent in ODX, “the pandemic has divided both families and the community ... there is a lack of harmony and interdependence”. Fear, anxiety, economic hardship, food insecurity, financial insecurity, lack of mobility, and inflation are all factors which have contributed to an increase in the likelihood of violence. Almost all respondents in both female and male groups noted that stress and fear increased tension among family members and led to arguments, verbal abuse, and an increase in alcohol consumption. Individual mental health faced some of the worst consequences as worry, anxiety, depression, insomnia, paranoia, headaches, irritability, and poor health from a lack of nutrition was a direct result of prolonged lockdowns and isolation. People were not only afraid of the virus itself but were afraid that they would be the cause for passing it along to someone else.

This is indicative of the intrinsic value of ‘community’ that Lao people hold. While respondents noted the impacts the pandemic had on them as individuals and households, they also all noted the impacts felt as a community ‘unit’. Almost all respondents noted a lack of solidarity within the village and increased tension among community members which manifested in verbal altercations,

slander, gossip, and competitiveness. However, despite the increase in tension and friction within and between families, no respondents reported that it resulted in an increase in VAW, both in the household and the community. At most, drunken arguments might have led to minor destruction of property or an exchange of insults, but domestic violence, sexual violence, and abuse as a result of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were not reported by any respondent.

In regard to actions undertaken by authorities, initiatives were almost entirely around preventing the spread of the virus, with little to no activities dedicated to addressing the risk of VAW. All respondents in both sample areas noted authorities disseminated information on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), improving personal hygiene and hand-washing practices, and the importance of social-distancing; however, no efforts to explicitly address alcohol or drug consumption and violence were noted with the exception of one HOV who regularly promoted 'community love, solidarity, cooperation, and forbidding violence' through regular announcements.



Key Informant Interview



According to district and provincial authorities, the most detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was financial insecurity. Of all the authorities interviewed, only one from the district/provincial level stated that the negative impacts of the pandemic posed both direct and indirect effects on VAW. While none of the village authorities noted an increase in VAW in their communities, they did report an increase in the frequency and severity of arguments within and among families, and ‘fights’. It was not specified whether these fights were solely verbal altercation or escalated to physical violence. However, if the fights were between husband and wife, authorities would have identified them as such. While all authorities indicated their efforts in preventing the spread of the violence and keeping community members informed, there was almost no mention of special efforts undertaken to address or prevent VAW. The reason provided for this was “we didn’t need to take any action because it was not prevalent”. The only notable exception was of one district/provincial authority respondent who noted disseminating information on violence to raise awareness.



INDIVIDUAL STORY

“I was married before and I have two children. When I met my husband, I didn’t know he was addicted to drugs. After we got married, I found out he was using drugs for 12 years. We argued quite often and he used to break things around the house when he got angry. My husband got angry with me and his grandmother. The Village Chief gave him a warning and recorded the incidents, but he didn’t stop. The Village Chief reported him and he was put in jail two times. When he got out of prison, we got a divorce because I was scared he would hit me in the future. My husband tried to come back to me but I do not want to be with him. Now my children and I live with my mother.

I felt free to report my husband’s violence towards because I could not take his actions any longer. After reporting to the Village Chief, he immediately sent a report to the police. We lost 1 million LAK to the police when my husband was detained. His relatives got him released from jail, and when he returned home he packed his belongings and left.

My husband was imprisoned for two months for his actions. Afterwards, his relatives took him to a correctional facility. I think he might still be there. I did not receive any compensation and I am afraid that he will return. I feel like a just resolution was reached, and I felt safe and protected throughout the process because the violence did not escalate. The Village Chief accompanied me everywhere I went. I didn’t experience any barriers throughout the process because I reported it directly to the Village Chief, and he handled it afterwards. I do not have any further suggestions, recommendations, or feedback to offer.”

* * *

“There are six people in my family – four women, my son-in-law who often drinks alcohol and insults his wife (victim), and I an an old woman who argues with him (my son-in-law) a lot and He always had a habit of quarreling with family members and he himself often threatened to beat his wife. I grew uncomfortable with the situation of abuse and reported it. I felt comfortable to report and I was glad to have someone to tell who was willing to support me.

Nothing has happened to my son-in-law yet, but we don’t know what will happen in the future. There were no actions taken against him; only that his relatives went to talk to the Head of Village together. They were educated and made a record that he will change his behaviour and it will not happen again. Overall, I’m glad that the Village Chief came to help and went to talk to my son-in-law directly. My daughter does not want to escalate the report to the district and provincial level because she is afraid that her husband will hit her more. This was a key barrier for her. Now, she often hides in the garden or field so she can be away from him.

I think these barriers could be addressed by relatives, the Village Chief and Mediation Unit. Also at the district level, we do not know which party to involve. I do not know how other partners (NGO, CSO etc.) could offer support. For me justice is only achieved when the perpetrator agrees to change, that is when the victim receives justice. My only recommendation is for the Village Chief and Village Police to disseminate the law for Lao citizens on how they will be punished if they commit crimes for any form of violence.”

* * *

TRIGGER WARNING: RAPE

“This is a story about an incident that happened last year involving my husband’s friend. I have one child and my husband owns a shop for people to come and play pool (billiards). On the day of the incident, my husband invited me to go to an event in the evening for a festival, but I did not want to go because the weather is too cool, so I told my husband to go without me. That night, my husband’s friend had some beer and came to the pool shop. Even though guests usually leave the shop early in the winter time, by 7:00pm or 8:00pm there are usually still people there. I was closing the shop up by myself when my husband’s friend came in to sit with me. When he sat down he confessed his love for me.

I was shocked. I said “you have a wife! I have a husband and child!”, but he didn’t care. He tried to rape me but I fought him and cried for help. No one heard me. I ran into another room and locked the door behind me. He tried to open the door but he didn’t have the key. He kept yelling at me to open the door but I stayed there and called my husband. He left before my husband got there. I told my husband everything but he already had a feeling something bad happened when I called him. That night, my husband went to confront his friend about what happened. He was not successful so he returned home. He couldn’t sleep at all that night, thinking about what his friend had done.

I felt comfortable reporting the incident, but I was not happy because other people who didn’t understand the full story would tell me “just don’t worry about it, let it go and move on – it’s not a big deal”. After I reported nothing really happened because the man’s family intervened to try and resolve the problem as quickly as possible. His only punishment was being fined 15 million LAK and being recorded in the village report. For me, the issue was not resolved as it should have been. It all happened so fast because the man knew a lot of people with power and influence, which reduced the case when it reached the district court.

The man pled guilty and could not sue me. There was only a fine because of the bias against the case. I should have received 50 million LAK, but the perpetrator accepted the case and only had to pay me 15 million LAK instead. This settled the case.

Although the man still lives in my village, we do not communicate. Nothing happened again after that and overall I feel safe. If we see each other, we pretend to be strangers. I did not feel protected throughout the process. I was vulnerable and felt betrayed. The man knew so many people with power that the case was so difficult to prosecute. The reporting process was slow. The Justice Office tried to help by advising me on the process, but the village level was not cooperative at all because they didn’t consider it a case of violence and the majority of villagers did not want to help.

I faced a lot of barriers throughout the process. I wanted people to pay more attention to what happened, understand me, and see the significance of the problem. They didn’t take me or the incident seriously. Regardless of who is responsible for what happened, regardless of who they know and their position of power, every victim deserves to be taken seriously, to be heard, and to have a fair process for mediation.

I think these barriers could be addressed by introducing agencies to offer support and assist the victim through every step. The process for justice must be fair and neutral. For me, authorities and development partners can improve justice systems by improving equality. My feedback is to stop

people from offering money to expedite justice processes, because it can be slow and delayed. If you do not have money or powerful people, you will not receive the same level of help and support.”

* * *

“I am married with three children. This incident happened in 2018. My husband liked playing with other girls, he would hide his money from us when he got home, he would drink a lot and he hit me twice. One time he got into a fight, he was bleeding and hurt his leg. We are in the process of getting a divorce, but he already has a new wife. I know he is violent with her too.

I took my three kids and went to live with my parents. My husband took the house to live in with his new wife and sold all of the furniture, even though the house is our property. I applied for child support but the man refuses to take any responsibility. Our divorce certificate is not available yet, but the village authority has all the documentation.

Reporting my husband to the authorities gave me peace of mind because I needed help and support. My husband’s actions were very serious. He has left scars on my body and my mind that I will carry for the rest of the life. I felt unsafe to report because it couldn’t be worse than my husband abusing and yelling at me. Unfortunately, my husband was not punished at all. He only received a warning and was recorded in the village report. Even if the incident was reported to the district Police, they did not do anything.

My situation was addressed but not completely resolved – even though it reached the district level. I don’t feel justice was achieved for me, the outcome was not fair at all. The morality and the dignity that I deserve was not protected by those in charge. I feel that no one can be held responsible for perpetrating or responding to any form of violence. I still feel very insecure and paranoid because my husband is threatening to kill me. The road to finding help is very long and feels very far away. I want nothing more than for supportive justice processes where victims are fully assisted. The situation should be resolved in a timely manner and no one should take advantage of those who have less power during the mediation process – the case must be fair for both parties.

I wish to use my experience to help improve justice systems. I would like to share the problems that occurred in my situation and offer my perspective to the relevant parties for how the processes and procedures can be better. I would like to offer feedback to the parties that provide assistance, and make suggestions for which parties can do more to ensure the case is brought to justice. To me, justice means being fair – it does not lean to one side but must be in the center. Lastly, it was the government to come and help me solve the problems in my case that have not been settled – specifically, that the division of property is fair and that he pays the child support for my children under the age of 18.”

[Additional Information: The husband is a police officer who used his knowledge of the justice system to manipulate the case in his favour. This is why the case has not been resolved yet.]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Villager Recommendations:

- Improve education, information dissemination, training, and activities on VAW and the law.
- Implement stronger warnings for perpetrators (from the HOV) and increase focus on prevention.
- Increase the number of loudspeakers in the village to facilitate information dissemination.
- Implement rules that require village authorities to provide resources, conduct activities, and ensure community knowledge of the laws.
- Increase community watch mechanisms.
- Increase the active involvement of LWU in training and dedicated programs and make them a mandatory permanent member of the VMU/VMC.
- All village authorities should receive training on gender equality, VAW, the laws and justice processes. Training should be mandatory for every member of the VMU/VMC.
- DLWU should support information dissemination that is adapted to the needs and learning capacities of women (e.g.: women who cannot read or speak Lao).
- Development partners should be more engaged in legal awareness raising through campaigns and media broadcasts.
- DJO should adopt different methods for disseminating information and conducting training, such as visual performances or using drama to teach people.
- Educate the community about the specific challenges facing women, and share information related to supporting women who have been abused.
- District authorities should be more involved in guiding village authorities through justice processes and asking them about barriers specific to their community.
- Take immediate measures to fully integrate the rule of law at the village level, and mandate that village rules do not supersede the national law.
- Ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in village meetings. Bring both women and men together for trainings so they can learn from one another.
- Establish more shelters for women fleeing abuse.
- Broaden awareness of the different forms of VAW. Intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and domestic violence must be more widely recognized.
- Undertake initiatives to empower women to report violence and recognize authorities as champions of justice by responding to cases in accordance with the law.
- Increase the frequency of publication and dissemination of the laws.
- Address bribery in the justice system at all levels.
- Monitor participants of legal training to ensure they are sharing their knowledge with others.

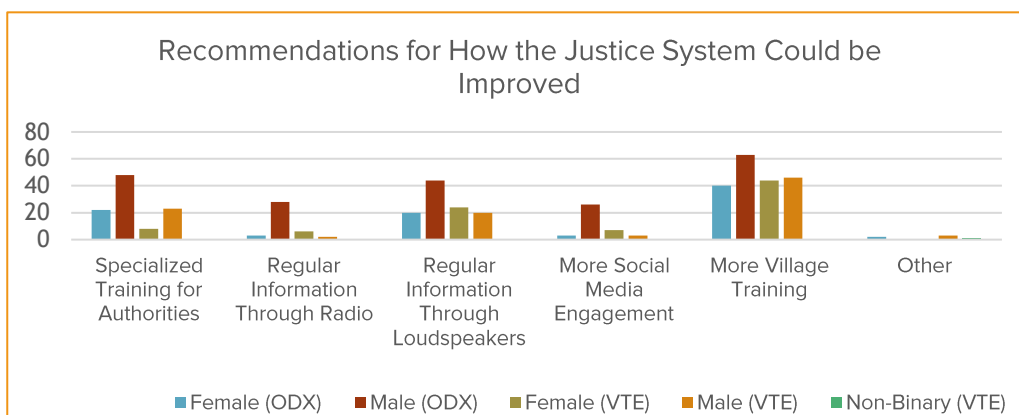


Table 15: Recommendations for how the justice system could be improved

Village Authority Recommendations:

- Improve training and coordination from the district in disseminating information.
- Support villages with a budget for resources to assist victims until centralized social services are established.
- The central level should mandate a greater role for VLWU on VMU improve their capacity to support survivors.
- LWU should provide training for authorities on gender-responsive and survivor-centred approaches.
- Increase training for VMU/VMC to conduct mediation.
- Provide materials (pamphlets, posters, media campaigns) to educate community on reporting processes at every level.
- Improve the capacity of village police to collect data, monitor cases in the community, and provide regular feedback to the district.
- Development partners should undertake more dedicated programs to raising awareness of violence and tackling stigmas that prevent reporting.

District/Provincial Authority Recommendations:

- Address the strong reliance of traditional/customary law at the village level.
- Improve the budget for publishing and disseminating information on the law.
- Address the low level of knowledge and understanding of people on gender equality, VAW, the law, and justice processes.
- Offer resources to support survivors until shelters and other services become available.
- Empower survivors of violence to report, tackle stigmas, and improve reporting procedures.
- Shift social behaviour, and socio-cultural practices that normalize violence against women and children.

- Development partners should undertake dedicated projects to support the capacity of district and provincial authorities to improve justice systems.
- Ensure information on the laws is available in ethnic languages.
- Mandate the removal of fees for VMU/VMC and reporting.
- Improve coordination among authorities and establish focal points for reporting.
- Provide training for authorities at all levels so they are clear on their roles and responsibilities, and the appropriate procedures.
- Improve and increase the frequency of data collection, monitoring, and reporting at all levels.
- Establish a sector to provide accessible legal aid and psycho-social counselling that does not require survivors to travel, for example through Facebook or WhatsApp.
- Provide vehicles so authorities can travel to remote communities safely.
- District officials should promote women as HOV to increase women's political participation and empower others.
- Involve all relevant stakeholders, especially court officials, in activities to disseminate information to women so they may acknowledge the barriers they face in accessing justice processes.
- Women should be involved in leading legal training and information dissemination.
- Identify and address the particular needs of ethnic minority women in understanding and accessing justice systems.
- Increase the representation of women in all justice roles; police, court officials, justice authorities, prosecutors, judges etc.
- Establish a village-district-provincial coordination committee to facilitate counselling on cases and resolutions.
- Establish a legal counselling hotline.
- Create a handbook for authorities that is specific to protecting the rights and interests of women.
- Enact legislation to allow victims access to reporting procedures.
- Establish an external accountability mechanism to monitor and report on the quality and integrity of justice offices.
- Ensure villages have at least 1 loudspeaker to support information dissemination.

GDA Recommendations:

- Per *National Action Plan and Preventing and Eliminating Violence against Women and Children 2021-2025*, increase the number of women officers, representatives, and decision-makers in all justice sector roles.
- Undertake dedicated initiatives to address the root causes of VAW.
- Carry out specific initiatives to address the real causes of Violence against women, such as: reviewing the coordination gap of the parties involved in working together more in the review process, planning and preparing harmoniously through training, sharing the content and tasks of the justice sector together and finding better ways to make people pay more attention.
- Empower survivors of violence to report by tackling stigmas and improving reporting procedures.
- Address the strong reliance on informal legal systems and centralize justice systems away from the village-level. [Village authorities should not be responsible for responding to cases of violence].
- Improve knowledge and understanding of gender equality, VAW, the law, and justice processes.
- Address gaps in legal instruments that leave people marginalized and vulnerable to violence without redress, such as LGBT persons.
- Improve and increase the frequency of data collection, monitoring, and reporting at all levels.
- Ensure villages, especially in rural and remote areas, have at least one loudspeaker.
- Address the particular needs of ethnic women in understanding and accessing the justice system.
- Increase the number of social services outside of urban areas and ensure all service and care providers are trained in gender-responsive and survivor-centred approaches.

CONCLUSION

Similar to the results of the desk review, the study *Examining barriers to justice for survivors of VAW, especially ethnic women in Oudomxay and Vientiane Provinces*, both confirmed conclusions reached by previous research initiatives, and shed light on new aspects that may require further investigation.

Firstly, an overarching aspect of the study that was clear and yet not identified by many respondents such as was the lack of women representatives in all levels of the justice system. This lack of inclusion not only prevents the opportunity for critical perspectives to inform the development of the legal sector while it is in its fundamental stages of evolution, but in and of itself is an indication of an important root cause of the gaps and barriers to the justice system.

Secondly, there is a lack of training for justice officials at all levels, which lessens at each office towards the local level. Although the VMU play a key role in the enforcement of the law, they have very limited knowledge of it or the procedures for enacting it. Consequently, the VMU mediate cases using the same process for mediating conflicts over ownership of animals or stolen property.

Thirdly, the prevalence of informal justice systems and customary law prioritize family unity over survivors' individual protection. This normalizes violence and inherently weakens their right to redress. This is evidenced by the use of fines as a means for resolving cases. Instead of promoting a culture of protection and prevention, violence is accepted as a 'misdemeanor' violation. Not only does this disregard the pain and suffering of the victim but it also does not reduce the likelihood of perpetrators becoming repeat offenders. As such, the penalty for VAW is not intended to be restorative for victims, but simply prioritizes restoring balance to the family and community. The study also indicated that ethnicity plays an influential role in this fundamental barrier to justice and ethnicity.

Fourth, as expected; survivors of VAW have no access to and little awareness of social services including shelters, hotline, specialized health services, and psycho-social support. This is mainly due to a lack of resources. Furthermore, health care providers are not trained in delivering gender-sensitive and survivor-centred care, which leaves victims feeling shame, embarrassed, and disregarded.

Fifth, the minimal sub-national implementation of the *National Action Plan on Violence against Women and Children 2021-2025* has resulted in a lack of diffusion of roles, responsibilities, resources, and monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Lastly, gaps in legal instruments themselves leave individuals marginalized and vulnerable, particularly LGBT persons.

One of the most interesting outcomes of the study was the clear indication that 'case free' and 'model village' designations not only prevent survivors and witnesses of violence from reporting, but also deter village authorities from reporting cases and/or referring them to higher levels.

Additionally, results on the impacts of COVID-19 on the prevalence of VAW were inconsistent with national reports as neither sample area identified an increase in violence as a consequence of stress, tension, the decline in mental health status, and financial insecurity which resulted from the pandemic. Although it cannot be said conclusively that COVID-19 did not lead to increase in VAW because we need to factor in the possibility of people being inclined to deny the existence of violence. LWU hotline data showed increase in calls during lockdown periods.

Respondents provided valuable recommendations which reflect how aware authorities are of the gaps and barriers that exist in the current justice framework. However, it can be concluded that without adequate financial and human resourcing capacity; widespread mobilization; the establishment of coordination and quality assurance mechanisms; greater emphasis on gender-responsive and survivor-centred approaches; and the equal, active, and meaningful inclusion of women and ethnic minorities into all aspects of the continued development of Lao PDR's legal sector, transformative change cannot be achieved.

ANNEX 1: Data Collection Tool – Individual Survey

INDIVIDUAL SURVEY

GENERAL INFORMATION

Date:		Village Name:	
District:		Province Name:	
Interviewed By:		Organization:	

INFORMED CONSENT

Sabaidee and thank you for your time. My name is _____ and I am working for the Gender Development Association. Under an initiative led by UNDP and KOICA, we are gathering information to better understand the barriers preventing survivors of VAW from accessing justice systems. The questions below will focus on 6 areas (Understanding of VAW, Knowledge of Laws & Justice Systems, Perceptions of Reporting, Accessing Justice Systems, Accessing Social Services, and Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence) and includes a section for you to add any comments or recommendations. The results of this study will be used to develop a national training program for justice system authorities and service providers, to better support survivors of violence. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your answers will be kept in confidence. No name or identification will appear in the final report. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. This questionnaire will take approximately **30 minutes** to complete, do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you consent to participate in this study? Yes No

Do you consent to having your photo taken, which may appear in the final report and/or subsequent IEC materials? Yes No

SURVEY

Questions		Answers
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE		
Gender	Please Specify	<input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Other
Age	Please Specify	
Ethnicity	Please Specify	

Do you identify as having a disability?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Marital Status	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Single <input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> Divorced <input type="radio"/> Widow(ed)
Employment (main income)	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Seasonal Worker <input type="radio"/> Casual or Daily Worker <input type="radio"/> Paid Employment <input type="radio"/> Unpaid Work <input type="radio"/> Merchant <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify): _____.
Highest Formal Education Level	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/> Primary School <input type="radio"/> Secondary School <input type="radio"/> Vocational Training <input type="radio"/> University <input type="radio"/> Other: _____.
1. UNDERSTANDING OF VAW		
1.1 How would you rank your understanding of VAW?	Rank 1-5 1=low, 5=high	<input type="radio"/> very poor <input type="radio"/> poor <input type="radio"/> moderately <input type="radio"/> much <input type="radio"/> much more than
1.2 What kinds of violence are most prevalent in your community?	Circle all that apply	<input type="radio"/> Domestic Violence <input type="radio"/> Intimate Partner Violence <input type="radio"/> Economic Abuse <input type="radio"/> Physical Abuse <input type="radio"/> Sexual Abuse <input type="radio"/> Verbal Abuse <input type="radio"/> I Don't Know <input type="radio"/> Other: _____.
1.3 Who is most at risk of experiencing VAW?	Circle all that apply	<input type="radio"/> Women & Adolescent Girls <input type="radio"/> Men & Adolescent Boys <input type="radio"/> Elderly persons <input type="radio"/> Persons with Disabilities <input type="radio"/> LGBT persons <input type="radio"/> Other: _____.
1.4 Have you ever experienced VAW in your household ?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I Don't Know Please explain: _____.
1.5 Have you ever experienced VAW in your community ?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I Don't Know Please explain: _____.

1.6 Have you ever witnessed VAW in your household ?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I Don't Know Please explain: _____.
1.7 Have you ever witnessed VAW in your community ?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I Don't Know Please explain: _____.
1.8 What are some factors that enable VAW in your community?	Circle all that apply	o Alcohol o Drugs o Unemployment o Bad attitude o Having mistress o Cultural norms o No understanding of VAW o Other: _____.
2. KNOWLEDGE OF LAWS & JUSTICE SYSTEMS		
2.1 How would you rank your understanding of the laws on VAW?	Rank 1-5 1=low, 5=high	o very poor o poor o moderately o much o much more than
2.2 Do you feel that Village Authorities and VMU have enough knowledge about the laws on VAW?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
2.3 Do you feel that you have good access to information about laws and justice processes?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know If yes, which level o very poor o poor o moderately o much o much more than Please explain: _____.
2.4 Where do you get information about laws and justice processes?"	Circle all that apply	o Facebook o posters in the village o friends o parents o village authorities (LWU, Village chief, police, VMU, etc.) o I don't know o Other: _____.
2.5 Who is responsible for ensuring you are knowledgeable about the laws?	Circle all that apply	o Head of household o Village Chief o LWU rep. o VMU o District Authorities (MoJ) o police o I don't know o Other: _____.

2.6 Have you or anyone in your community received training on VAW laws, legal processes etc.?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know If yes, what was the content?
2.7 Do the current laws make you feel safe/protected against potential acts of violence?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
3. PERCEPTIONS OF REPORTING		
3.1 Does someone experiencing violence have an obligation to report it?	Circle One	o Yes (always) o No (never) o Sometimes (it depends) o I don't know Please explain: _____.
3.2 Does someone witnessing violence have an obligation to report it?	Circle One	o Yes (always) o No (never) o Sometimes (it depends) o I don't know Please explain: _____.
3.3 Where do people commonly go to report cases of violence?	Circle One	o Village Elder o Village Chief o LWU Rep o VMU o Police o Family Member Other: _____.
3.4 Does the title 'case free village' prevent survivors of violence from reporting?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
3.5 Does the title 'case free village' prevent authorities from reporting cases?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
3.6 Are there traditional social and/or cultural beliefs and attitudes that prevent people from reporting cases of violence?"	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
3.7 Does the cost of reporting to VMU	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.

prevent people from reporting cases?		
3.8 Is there anything else stopping people from reporting cases of violence?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
4. ACCESSING JUSTICE SYSTEMS		
4.1 How effective are the current laws at protecting survivors of violence?	Rank 1-5 1=low, 5=high	o very poor o poor o moderately o much o much more than
4.2 How effective are the current laws at ensuring justice for survivors of violence?	Rank 1-5 1=low, 5=high	o very poor o poor o moderately o much o much more than
4.3 Do you feel that the current justice system framework (elder-VMU-police) is effective for supporting survivors of violence?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
4.4 Do you trust the justice system?"	Circle One	o very poor o poor o moderately o much o much more than
4.5 Do you think perpetrators are punished fairly?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know Please explain: _____.
5. ACCESSING SOCIAL SERVICES		
5.1 Do you/your community have access to services for survivors of violence?	Circle One	o Yes o No o I don't know
5.2 If yes, what kinds of services does your community have access to?	Rank 1-5 1=low, 5=high	o Shelters o Hotline o specialized health services o mental health support o legal aid o Other: _____.
5.3 Are there any barriers to accessing these services?	Circle all that apply	o Far away o language barrier o poor quality o we don't know they exist o not always available o Other: _____.

5.4 How effective are these services at supporting survivors of VAW?	Rank 1-5 1=low, 5=high	<input type="radio"/> very poor <input type="radio"/> poor <input type="radio"/> moderately <input type="radio"/> much <input type="radio"/> much more than
6. IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON VIOLENCE		
6.1 Have cases of violence in your household increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know
6.2 Have cases of violence in your community increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know
6.3 If you responded 'yes' to the above questions, what factors have contributed to this?	Circle all that apply	<input type="radio"/> Alcohol <input type="radio"/> Drugs <input type="radio"/> Stress <input type="radio"/> Fear <input type="radio"/> Unemployment <input type="radio"/> Lack of mobility <input type="radio"/> Other: _____
6.4 Have there been any efforts by community members, Village Authorities, Dist./Prov. Authorities, or police to address VAW because of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know Please explain: _____
7. RECOMMENDATIONS		
7.1 What are some ways justice systems for survivors of violence could be improved?	Circle all that apply	<input type="radio"/> More village training <input type="radio"/> regular information through radios <input type="radio"/> more social media engagement <input type="radio"/> regular information through loudspeaker <input type="radio"/> specialized training for VMC / LWU as primary unit / Reporting cases system <input type="radio"/> Other: _____
7.2 Any other comments, feedback, or recommendations?		

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THANK YOU

ANNEX 2: Data Collection Tool – Key Informant Interview (Government Official)

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

GENERAL INFORMATION

Respondent Name:			
Date:		Village Name:	
District:		Province Name:	
Interviewed By:		Organization:	

INFORMED CONSENT

Sabaidee and thank you for your time. My name is _____ and I am working for the Gender Development Association. Under an initiative led by UNDP and KOICA, we are gathering information to better understand the barriers preventing survivors of VAW from accessing justice systems. The questions below will focus on 6 areas (Understanding of VAW, Knowledge of Laws & Justice Systems, Perceptions of Reporting, Accessing Justice Systems, Accessing Social Services, and Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence) and includes a section for you to add any comments or recommendations. The results of this study will be used to develop a national training program for justice system authorities and service providers, to better support survivors of violence. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your answers will be kept in confidence. No name or identification will appear in the final report. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. This interview will take approximately **45 minutes** to complete, do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you consent to participate in this study? Yes No

Do you consent to having your photo taken, which may appear in the final report and/or subsequent IEC materials? Yes No

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Questions	Answers
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	

Gender	Please Specify	<input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Other
Age	Please Specify	
Ethnicity	Please Specify	
Do you identify as having a disability?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Marital Status	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Single <input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> Divorced <input type="radio"/> Widow(ed)
Employment (main income)	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Seasonal Worker <input type="radio"/> Casual or Daily Worker <input type="radio"/> Paid Employment <input type="radio"/> Unpaid Work <input type="radio"/> Merchant <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify): _____.
Highest Formal Education Level	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/> Primary School <input type="radio"/> Secondary School <input type="radio"/> Vocational Training <input type="radio"/> University <input type="radio"/> Other: _____.
Role in the Community	Please Specify	
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS		
Questions		Answers
1. UNDERSTANDING OF VAW		
1.1 What does VAW mean to you?		
1.2 What are some of the factors that enable VAW?		
1.3 What types of cases of VAW do you handle?		
1.4 Is every report of violence documented?		
1.5 How often do you handle cases/report of domestic violence ? In last 3 years (2019-2021)		
1.6 How often to do you handle cases/report of sexual violence ? In last 3 years (2019-2021)		
1.7 How often do you handle cases/report of violence against men/boys ? In last 3 years (2019-2021)		

1.8 How often do you handle cases/report of violence against women/girls ? In last 3 years (2019-2021)	
1.9 How often do you respond to cases/report of violence against LGBT persons ? In last 3 years (2019-2021)	
1.10 Have you or anyone from your office received training on VAW?	
2. Knowledge of Laws & Justice Systems	
2.1 Which laws are used to address VAW and how are they enforced?	
2.2 Who is responsible for enforcing these laws?	
2.3 Have you (or someone in your office/village) ever received training related to VAW (laws, enforcement, supporting survivors etc.)?	
2.4 Are there policies for responding to cases of VAW? If yes, what are they?	
3. Perceptions of Reporting	
3.1 Do you think designating 'case free villages' prevents survivors from reporting violence?	
3.2 Do you think designating 'case free villages' prevents village authorities from reporting cases of violence?	
3.3 How is VAW reported in the community?	
3.4 What kind of documentation is required to initiate the legal process?	
3.5 What are barriers that exist for people reporting cases of violence? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there traditional social and/or cultural beliefs and attitudes that prevent people from reporting cases of violence? Please explain. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the cost of reporting to police prevent people from reporting cases? Please explain • Is there anything else stopping people from reporting cases of violence? Please explain • Are victim/survivors afraid of how they will be treated? Please explain 	
4. Accessing Justice Systems	
4.1 Who is responsible for providing support to survivors during the legal process?	
4.2 How do you ensure survivors confidentiality and protection during resolution processes?	
4.3 What happens to perpetrators when they are caught?	
4.4 Do justice authorities receive training on responding to cases of VAW and/or supporting survivors of violence?	
5. Accessing Social Services	
5.1 Do you ever refer survivors to services such as counselling, shelters, or health care? If yes, how is the referral provided?	
5.2 Do you ever work with service providers on the issue of VAW?	
5.3 Are there policies/protocols for service providers responding to cases of VAW?	
5.4 Do service providers receive training for responding to cases of VAW? If yes, how often do you receive this training? Do you get refreshers?	
6. Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence	
6.1 Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted cases of violence? If yes, how?	

6.2 Have there been any efforts by authorities to prevent or address violence resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic?	
6.3 If yes, have they been effective?	
7. Recommendations	
7.1 What are some of the challenges that you face responding to cases of VAW?	
7.2 How do you think these challenges could be addressed?	
7.3 What aspects of the justice system do you think are most effective?	
7.4 What do you think needs to be done to break the barriers for survivors of violence to access justice systems?	
7.5 Do you have any other recommendations, comments, or feedback?	
7.6 What support is required from the local to central level?	

THANK YOU

ANNEX 3: Data Collection Tool – Key Informant Interview (Police/Village Authority)

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: POLICE/VILLAGE AUTHORITY

GENERAL INFORMATION

Respondent Name:			
Date:		Village Name:	
District:		Province Name:	
Interviewed By:		Organization:	

INFORMED CONSENT

Sabaidee and thank you for your time. My name is _____ and I am working for the Gender Development Association. Under an initiative led by UNDP and KOICA, we are gathering information to better understand the barriers preventing survivors of VAW from accessing justice systems. The questions below will focus on 6 areas (Understanding of VAW, Knowledge of Laws & Justice Systems, Perceptions of Reporting, Accessing Justice Systems, Accessing Social Services, and Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence) and includes a section for you to add any comments or recommendations. The results of this study will be used to develop a national training program for justice system authorities and service providers, to better support survivors of violence. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your answers will be kept in confidence. No name or identification will appear in the final report. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. This questionnaire will take approximately **45 minutes** to complete, do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you consent to participate in this study? Yes No

Do you consent to having your photo taken, which may appear in the final report and/or subsequent IEC materials? Yes No

Questions		Answers
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE		
Gender	Please Specify	<input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Other
Age	Please Specify	

Ethnicity	Please Specify	
Do you identify as having a disability?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Marital Status	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Single <input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> Divorced <input type="radio"/> Widow(ed)
Employment (main income)	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Seasonal Worker <input type="radio"/> Casual or Daily Worker <input type="radio"/> Paid Employment <input type="radio"/> Unpaid Work <input type="radio"/> Merchant <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify): _____
Highest Formal Education Level	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/> Primary School <input type="radio"/> Secondary School <input type="radio"/> Vocational Training <input type="radio"/> University <input type="radio"/> Other: _____
Role in the Community	Please Specify	

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions	Answers
1. UNDERSTANDING OF VAW	
1.1 What does VAW mean to you?	
1.2 What types of VAW are most prevalent in the community?	
1.3 Is every report of violence documented?	
1.4 How often do you respond to cases/report of sexual violence ? In 3 years (2019-2021)	
1.5 How often do you respond to cases/report of domestic violence ? In 3 years (2019-2021)	
1.6 How often do you respond to cases/report of violence against men/boys ? In 3 years (2019-2021)	
1.7 How often do you respond to cases/report of violence against women/girls? In 3 years (2019-2021)	

1.8 How often do you respond to cases/report of violence against LGBT persons ? In 3 years (2019-2021)	
2. Knowledge of Laws & Justice Systems	
2.1 Which laws are used to address VAW and how are they enforced?	
2.2 Who is responsible for enforcing these laws?	
2.3 Have you (or someone in your office/village) ever received training related to VAW (laws, enforcement, supporting survivors etc.)?	
2.4 Are there policies for responding to cases of VAW? If yes, what are they?	
3. Perceptions of Reporting	
3.1 Do you think designating ‘case free villages’ prevents survivors from reporting violence?	
3.2 Do you think designating ‘case free villages’ prevents village authorities from reporting cases of violence?	
3.3 How is VAW reported in the community?	
3.4 What kind of documentation is required to initiate the legal process?	
4. Accessing Justice Systems	
4.1 What role do you play in the justice system?	
4.2 How do you respond to cases of VAW once it is reported? From victims	
4.3 When the cases have been reported from witness, how do you respond to cases?	
4.4 How would you describe the relationship between police and district/provincial justice systems (courts, public prosecutor etc.)	
4.5 How would you describe the relationship between police and Village Authorities and VMUs?	

4.6 What other challenges are there related to ensuring survivors have access to justice systems?	
4.7 What happens to perpetrators when they are caught?	
5. Accessing Social Services	
5.1 What kinds of services are available for survivors of VAW in your community? How do survivors access these services?	
5.2 Are there places for survivors of violence to go if their life is in danger?	
5.3 Have you ever referred survivors to social services for them to access? Please explain.	
5.4 Do you have a private space for women to report?	
5.5 Does your village have the ability to support transportation for women victims accessing services?	
5.6 How do you respond if victims say that their life in danger?	
5.7 What other challenges are there related to ensuring survivors have access to social services?	
6. Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence	
6.1 Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted cases of violence? If yes, how?	
6.2 Have there been any efforts by authorities to prevent or address violence resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic?	
6.3 If yes, have they been effective?	
7. Recommendations	
7.1 What are some of the challenges that you face responding to cases of VAW?	

7.2 How do you think these challenges could be addressed?	
7.3 What aspects of the justice system do you think are most effective? (e.g., VMUs, police response, Prosecutors, Other)	
7.4 What do you think needs to be done to break the barriers for survivors of violence to access justice systems?	
7.5 Do you have any other recommendations, comments, or feedback?	
7.6 What support is required from the local to central level?	

THANK YOU

ANNEX 4: Data Collection Tool – Focus Group Discussion

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

GENERAL INFORMATION

Date:		Village Name:	
District:		Province Name:	
Interviewed By:		Organization:	

N o.	Gen der		Age					Do you identify as having a disability?		Ethnicity	Marital Status	Employment	Highest Formal Education Level
								yes	no				
	m	f	10- 14	15- 18	19- 35	35- 55	55 up						
										1. Single 2. Married 3. Divorced 4. Widow(ed)	1. Unemployed 2. Seasonal Worker 3. Casual or Daily Worker 4. Paid Employment 5. Unpaid Work 6. Merchant 7. Other (please specify): _____ _____	None Primary School Secondary School Vocational Training University Other (please specify by not writing number): _____ _____	
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													

INFORMED CONSENT

Sabaidee and thank you for your time. My name is _____ and I am working for the Gender Development Association. Under an initiative led by UNDP and KOICA, we are gathering information to better understand the barriers preventing survivors of VAW from accessing justice systems. The questions below will focus on 6 areas (Understanding of VAW, Knowledge of Laws & Justice Systems, Perceptions of Reporting, Accessing Justice Systems, Accessing Social Services, and Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence) and includes a section for you to add any comments or recommendations. The results of this study will be used to develop a national training program for justice system authorities and service providers, to better support survivors of violence. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your answers will be kept in confidence. No name or identification will appear in the final report. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. Please inform the interviewer if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe at any time, or do not wish to proceed with the interview. This focus group will take approximately **60 minutes**, do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you consent to participate in this study? Yes No

Do you consent to having your photo taken, which may appear in the final report and/or subsequent IEC materials? Yes No

Questions	Answers
1. UNDERSTANDING OF VAW	
1.1 What does VAW mean to you? What does it look like? Does VAW take on multiple forms? If yes, what kinds?	
1.2 Does VAW exist in your community? Who does it affect? What does it look like?	
1.3 What are the factors that enable violence in your household? In your community?	
2. Knowledge of Law & Justice Systems	
2.1 Do you feel that you have enough knowledge on the laws about VAW?	
2.2 Do you feel Village Authorities have enough knowledge on the laws about VAW?	
2.3 Do you feel that you have good access to information about laws and justice processes?	
2.4 Who is responsible for ensuring you are knowledgeable about the laws?	

2.5 What could be done differently to improve your understanding?	
2.6 Where do you get this information? Facebook/social media/ loudspeakers, radio, training session, activity, etc.?	
3. Perceptions of Reporting	
3.1 If VAW happens, should it be reported? Why?	
3.2 Are there any reasons why someone experiencing violence wouldn't/shouldn't report it?	
3.3 Do community members have an obligation to report violence if they know about it?	
3.4 Do authorities have an obligation to report violence if they know about it?	
3.5 Does your village being "case free" change your likelihood to report violence?	
4. Accessing Justice Systems	
4.1 What does justice mean to you?	
4.2 Do you know how to access the justice process?	
4.3 If VAW happens, who is the first person you would seek help from?	
4.4 How are incidents of violence handled in your community?	
4.5 Do you think this process is effective for ensuring justice to victims?	
4.6 Do you think perpetrators of violence are punished fairly?	
4.7 Is this system effective for preventing future incidents?	
4.8 Do you feel that there are barriers to ensuring justice for victims? If yes, what are they?	
5. Accessing Social Services	

5.1 Do you think survivors of violence should have access to specific services like; legal aid, shelters, specialized health services, mental health support etc.?	
5.2 Do you have any knowledge on these services or how to access them?	
5.3 Do you think these services are effective at supporting survivors of violence?	
5.4 How could they be improved?	
6. Impacts of COVID-19 on Violence	
6.1 Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your household/community?	
6.2 Is there increase stress because of COVID-19?	
6.3 Has increased stress/tension led to more arguments/conflicts? Or alcohol consumption?	
6.4 Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted incidents of violence in your household ?	
6.5 Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted incidents of violence in your community ?	
6.6 Have there been any efforts by authorities (Village, Dist., Prov.) or community members to prevent or address violence resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic?	
6.7 If yes, have they been effective?	
7. Recommendations	
7.1 What can authorities do to improve access to justice for survivors of violence in your community?	
7.2 What can authorities do to reduce violence in your community?	

7.3 Do you have any other recommendations, comments, or feedback?	
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THANK YOU

ANNEX 5: Data Collection Tool – Individual Story

INDIVIDUAL STORY: SURVIVOR OF VAW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Date:		Village Name:	
District:		Province Name:	
Interviewed By:		Organization:	

INFORMED CONSENT

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Do you consent to participate in this study? Yes No

Do you consent to having your photo taken, which may appear in the final report and/or subsequent IEC materials? Yes No

Questions		Answers
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE		
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Age	Please Specify	
Ethnicity	Please Specify	
Do you identify as having a disability?	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Marital Status	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Single <input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> Divorced <input type="radio"/> Widow(ed)

Employment (main income)	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Seasonal Worker <input type="radio"/> Casual or Daily Worker <input type="radio"/> Paid Employment <input type="radio"/> Unpaid Work <input type="radio"/> Merchant <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify): _____
Highest Formal Education Level	Circle One	<input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/> Primary School <input type="radio"/> Secondary School <input type="radio"/> Vocational Training <input type="radio"/> University <input type="radio"/> Other: _____
Role in the Community	Please Specify	

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Please describe your experience?

2. Did you feel comfortable to report the case?

3. What happened after you reported it?

4. What happened to the perpetrator?

5. What do you think justice means for you?

6. Do you feel that a just resolution was reached?

7. Did you feel safe and protected throughout the process?

8. Did you experience any barriers throughout the process? If yes, what were they?

9. How do you think these barriers could be addressed?

10. What can authorities and/or development partners (INGO, NPA, UN Agency etc.) do to improve justice systems?

11. Do you have any other recommendations, comments, or feedback?

THANK YOU