

# Focus

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### Editorial

#### **Fighting Violence Against Women**

Violence against women is a scourge of society. Laws tolerate violence against women by failing to consider it a crime or by punishing it lightly. Society tolerates this violence by being silent about it.

Women and their organizations demand that any form of violence against women (or any member of the family) be ended in practice and in law. They question the social and cultural bases of violence against women. They urge the public to discuss the effects of such violence on women and members of the family. They seek the understanding of people on the need to take action, or to improve measures, against it. They lobby for law reform—to enact new laws, or revise or repeal old laws—in order to appropriately penalize such violence.

Decades earlier, the United Nations called on countries to make violence against women a criminal offense and to take active steps to prevent its occurrence. At present, there is still much work to do to eliminate violence against women.

Violence against women, as a grave human rights violation, has to be addressed at various levels. There must be initiatives directed at the national government as much as the local government. There must likewise be efforts at dialoguing with people in the community regarding socio-cultural norms and practices, and other causes of this violence.

While women and their organizations have taken the lead in eliminating this violence, the pursuit of this difficult task needs the involvement of the society as a whole.

# Violence Against Women in Kazakhstan: Is it Getting Worse?

Aizada Arystanbek

As an introduction to my essay, I would like to emphasize that Kazakhstan may have all the symptoms of the “shadow pandemic”<sup>1</sup> of hate or distrust for women (misogyny) similar to other Central Asian and other post-Soviet “-Stans” (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). However, it would be remiss to treat its case as a blueprint for every Central Asian country. As someone who was born and raised in Kazakhstan, I understand my privilege of being from, what is often described, one of the most stable and prosperous authoritarian countries in the subregion. I would also like to highlight that, as tempting as it may seem, judging a whole subregion based on one country would always be fallacious. Thus, I offer my essay to anyone who wishes to learn more about what is happening to women in Kazakhstan. I also would like anyone who reads it and is not from Central Asia to keep in mind that contexts shift and to treat it as one of many narratives of Central Asian women who deserve to be heard and understood.

## Violence against Kazakhstani Women

Violence against women (VAW) is globally recognized as a violation of fundamental human

rights. Progress towards dismantling patriarchy and achieving gender equality is not a step-by-step fight where first comes eradication of violence followed by some “minor” problems such as equal pay and representation. Gender equality can only be achieved by fighting for all women’s rights at the same time. However, gender-based violence continues to be a particularly cruel and pervasive issue that plagues every society today.

Some even say that it seems to be getting worse and hopeless given the number of stories that are being shared through social media today about women falling victims to domestic abuse, rape, and murder. However, as I would argue, what we are seeing in Kazakhstan today is not necessarily an indicator of hopelessness. On the opposite, it could be that for the first time in decades, there is more hope than there ever was before.

In my research on the ways through which the nationalist rhetoric in Kazakhstan normalizes gender-based violence with “re-traditionalization,”<sup>2</sup> a discourse analysis of the social media content on Instagram and Facebook demonstrated a dangerous pervasiveness of victim-blaming and equating

misogynistic practices with core Kazakh cultural values. Kazakhstan, similar to many other countries in the world right now, has not been immune from the rise of right-wing nationalism that utilizes women’s bodies as markers of cultural and ethnic borders. Kazakhstani women who share their stories of abuse and trauma are continuously gaslighted and their innocence is questioned in the public discourse, while proper legal punishment is rarely meted out.

One of the most controversial recent cases is the 2018 Talgo case about the rape of a woman by two train conductors in her own train compartment during a night trip.<sup>3</sup> The details of what happened that night and the woman’s behavior including drinking habits, age, and intellectual abilities have become a topic of avid discussion. The victim has been blamed for such irrelevant things as not closing the door of her compartment and talking to the conductors hours prior to the attack. This case serves as a good example of how gender-based violence is perpetuated among people by discussing this violence in connection with everyday conversations on the roles of women in society. The Kazakhstani government view on this issue seems to myopically focus on women as

mothers, wives, and daughters rather than fully equal members of the society, which is what the Constitution of the country provides at least on paper. For instance, the high divorce rate continues to be discussed as a gender equality issue that needs to be overcome with multimillion budgets and resources propagating “traditional ethnocultural values,” which imply heteronormative<sup>4</sup> gender roles of a man being the breadwinner and the leader of the family and a woman being a malleable figure whose main purpose is to raise children. There is no critical discussion of the reasons why so many women choose to leave their marriage and the relation of the divorce rate to a high rate of domestic abuse in the country.

According to UN Women, about four hundred women in Kazakhstan are killed annually as a result of domestic abuse.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, Nursultan Nazarbayev, then President of the country and holder of the title “Leader of the Nation,” decriminalized domestic violence and made it a mere administrative offense, which effectively contributed to the casualization of domestic abuse.<sup>6</sup>

### Policy against VAW

2019 was a tumultuous year for Kazakhstan with the transition of power from Nazarbayev to Qasym-Zhomart Toqayev and a growing unrest among the public spilling into peaceful protests and a surge of political and civil activism.<sup>7</sup>

VAW seems to have become one of the front issues in the

turning point of independent Kazakhstan’s history. For the first time in years, President Toqayev addressed rape as an important problem and called for more stringent and thorough punishment for it. However, the progress so far seems to be artificial in nature. Not long after his condemnation of rape of women (which also instilled heteronormativity<sup>8</sup> on the issue), President Toqayev signed a new law with a provision that changed the previous penalty of fine to a simple warning for first-time domestic violence abusers. With such continuous decriminalization of gender-based violence, the Kazakhstani government appears to be going backward by reforming existing laws to offer even less protection for women.

However, I believe that the most important thing to understand here is that the actual situation of women in Kazakhstan lies beneath the laws and policies. These laws and policies can only account for so much that is happening in a country with rampant corruption and constant crackdowns on civil liberties. On paper, Kazakhstan has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and has continuously pledged allegiance to the goal of achieving gender equality in the country.<sup>9</sup> This has helped Nursultan Nazarbayev and his authoritarian regime to window dress the country as an appropriate ally and partner of liberal democracies of the West.

While the legal protection of victims of gender-based violence grows weaker, a more important issue is the

underreporting and misunderstanding of such violence. It has become normal in the daily life of Kazakhstani people to hear misogynistic jokes and “vines”<sup>10</sup> that depict survivors of gender-based violence as hysterical, conniving or both.

### Movement for Change

A crucial element that lies beneath the surface is a rapidly growing feminist movement in the country. It is important to note here that while social media has been disseminating in recent years ideas and information on gender equality from various sources, Kazakhstani feminist activists have been working for decades away from the limelight. They have been helping other women and advocating for gender equality by establishing non-profit advocacy organizations, opening makeshift shelters and crisis centers, etc. Recently, social media has been providing an unprecedented level of exposure to feminist organizations and activists in Kazakhstan that keeps the public conversation about violence against women going. From art projects to petitions and marches, women in Kazakhstan are taking more virtual and physical public spaces than ever before. This novel exposure of the extent of suffering from VAW in Kazakhstan may be disheartening to many and give a feeling of hopelessness. However, in the past year, I have personally noticed more and more people actively engaging with questions of feminism, gender equality, and violence against women in different

forms and degrees of involvement. Education about these issues takes place in real-life meet-ups, press conferences, social media posts, online lectures and panels, and articles in online magazines. It is still sad to see that the burden of raising awareness about violence against women lays on the shoulders of women themselves. But the women in Kazakhstan have been turning this burden into a momentum of change.

The first International Women's Day feminist march was held in Almaty on 8 March 2020 with more than two hundred participants.<sup>11</sup> Before that, on 28 September 2019, a peaceful feminist protest against gender-based violence was organized in the same city for the first time in the history of independent Kazakhstan.<sup>12</sup>

### Reflections

Women have carried a significant weight of organizing and pushing pro-democratic change in the country for the past year, which fits the ubiquitous historical pattern of women being the faces and engines of change. From Asya Tulesova, a political and environmental activist who is unjustly prosecuted by the Kazakhstani government, to Assem Zhapisheva, Dinara Smailova, Zhanar Sekerbayeva, and many others, women in Kazakhstan are by no means passive subjects of the regime and the patriarchy.

Thus, while it seems that so many more people become victims of gender-based violence and the government is



Kazakhstani women marching against VAW and sexism on 8 March 2020 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. (Photo: Yuna Korostelyova, Vlast.kz)



Peaceful protesters during the first sanctioned feminist demonstration in the history of the country on 28 September 2019 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. (Photo: Informburo.kz)

not in a hurry to protect them and challenge its patriarchal structure, Kazakhstani feminist activists continue the work of educating, raising awareness, and fighting for each other, and, therefore, attracting more and more attention to the issue of

VAW. There is still a long way to go for Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the rest of the world in eliminating gender-based violence, but the work of the grassroots feminist movement in the country cannot remain unacknowledged.

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# Protecting Women in Lebanon

KAFA

Lebanon is not known for exacting efforts in securing the human rights of the people. With all the problems that the country has gone and is still going through, a focus on human rights (more specifically, women's rights) becomes more of an after-thought rather than a priority.

## Violence Against Women

Gender-based violence, domestic violence specifically, is a big problem in Lebanon much like anywhere else. Statistics concerning this problem speak for themselves; however, it is important to remember that as much as we would like to get accurate data and analyses, we must recognize the stigma surrounding this taboo topic. This stigma causes many women to choose not to come forward out of fear of repercussions of various types (sexual, verbal, physical or psychological assaults and withdrawal of financial support). Complaining against domestic violence means more suffering from violence by the women. Even though some of these acts are penalized under Law 293 (the Lebanese law on domestic violence), men have escaped prosecution under this law. This makes the law complicit to the acts of domestic violence in some cases.

In 2019, the support center of KAFA received 1,107 new cases with 26 percent of the women

experiencing various types of physical abuse including choking (3 percent), beating (9 percent), scarring (8 percent) and attempted murder (2 percent). KAFA helped the Internal Security Force (ISF) of the country establish a telephone hotline for these women (1745), which now has personnel assigned to answer the phone calls. KAFA has its own telephone hotline (03018019) since its establishment in 2005.

## Legal Issues

Laws concerning women's issues in Lebanon—including domestic violence, prostitution and exploitation, child custody, among others—can best be described as outdated and backward. This led many

organizations across Lebanon including KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation to start lobbying many years ago for the amendment of such laws, as well as propose new ones, to ensure the safety of women and girls across the country.

To add insult to injury, since Lebanon's personal status laws are based on Christian and Muslim ideals that should govern family-related issues, amending them has become implausible due to the sectarian system that plagues the country. Lebanese laws are like an onion: the more you peel it, the more layers appear, and some layers are close to impossible to remove. This is why the NGOs have to do the work required to serve and protect the women in the country regardless of their



A big demonstration held on 8 March 2014 in Beirut on the draft law to protect women from domestic violence before its enactment on 1 April 2014.

race, social status, age or nationality.

Before the domestic violence law (Law 293) existed, the absence of an adequate law on domestic violence was a threatening barrier to women's rights in Lebanon. Pending since 2010, the Lebanese Parliament finally passed the domestic violence law on 1 April 2014. However, KAFA is working to amend Law 293 to rid it of loopholes.

Every year, women's rights gain little successes. For example, in 2017, Article 522 of the Penal Law was repealed after a lengthy campaign and public awareness-raising by NGOs. Article 522 of the 1940s-vintage Penal Law provides that rape is punishable by up to seven years in prison with a higher penalty for raping a minor. However, the article also states that a man who raped an unmarried woman can avoid prosecution for the crime by marrying the victim. Article 522 provides:

In the event a legal marriage is concluded between the person who committed [crimes including rape, kidnapping and statutory rape], and the victim, prosecution shall be stopped and in case a judgment [of conviction has been] rendered, the execution of such judgment shall be suspended against the person who was subject to it.

While Article 522 was repealed, its provision was retained in two articles, Articles 505 and 518, of the Penal Law. KAFA issued a statement on this issue:<sup>1</sup>

Article 505 refers to mating with a minor as a crime punishable by the law, and



Placard saying "Killing women because they are women continues. Amend Law 293." Demonstration in Beirut, early 2019.

mentions this crime under the "rape crimes" sub-chapter. However, the amendment of the Article as approved by the members of the Administration and Justice Commission and adopted by Parliament, places the offender again in front of two choices: Imprisonment or marrying the victim if she is aged between 15 and 18 ...

Laws and legal provisions such as these exist in the Lebanese legal system, and the general public may or may not be aware of them (as in the case of public ignorance of Article 522). A notable example is the child marriage law. To this day, NGOs have been advocating the raising of minimum age of marriage to eighteen years. Unfortunately, marriage is under the personal status legal system, where the applicable personal law depends on the religion and sect of the people involved. Each religious or ethnic community has its own personal law. KAFA continued its lobbying and advocacy campaigning on this issue in 2019. It is advocating the

passage of a unified personal status law. This proposed law would ensure equality among family members regarding marriage, divorce, child custody, finances and security regardless of their religion or sect.

### Campaign

It is important to acknowledge that online campaigning has played a huge part in advocating for all aspects of women's rights in Lebanon. Whether it be the anti-child marriage campaign or the "Abolish 522" campaign, their presence in the internet has played a monumental part at gathering and assembling masses of people, educating people online, and spreading awareness about various other issues. This is why the status of women's rights in Lebanon has changed the most this past decade more than before. It is also important to include the women's marches that have been happening yearly on Women's Day. Many organizations have been successfully calling on people to participate, normalizing activism and spreading the good word.

This sort of pressure on politicians is what is needed, especially more recently during the October Revolution in 2019, when another march took place rallying people against rape, other sexual assaults and sexual harassment which are still not taken seriously by the law. This was exacerbated by an event that happened at the time when a serial rapist, with many testimonies and evidence from many victims against him, was still allowed to roam free without punishment. This is not a single instance in Lebanon but a frequent occurrence that has been brushed off for too long and the people and organizations will not rest until the goal of protecting women is achieved.

The COVID-19 lockdown made things harder for women victims of domestic abuse. Being stuck at home 24/7 with their abusive relatives (whether husband, father, etc.), women have been experiencing more and more violence from these individuals. This, in addition to the various economic and security issues in Lebanon, the lockdown put the women in more harm's way with the temper of these men having risen for the worse. KAFA observed a rise in domestic abuse reported through calls to its helpline over the last few months, with the number of calls rising to 1,371 calls in June 2020. However this is a conservative estimate since the lockdown led these women to be watched by the men the whole time, making it increasingly harder to report abuses, whether by Lebanese or Syrian refugee women stuck in their camps. Additionally, the ISF has reported that its telephone

hotline (1745) dedicated to domestic violence complaints has registered a rise of 100 percent in incoming calls, in comparison with the number of complaint calls in March 2019.

Unfortunately, cases of extreme violence also happened, with a father killing his wife and young daughter. But on a more positive note, eleven of the sixteen requests for protection submitted by KAFA to the Public Prosecution have been granted during the month of June 2020.

### Concluding Statements

KAFA condemns the Lebanese government for not protecting the women and not enforcing laws that would ensure their protection. Mere government planning and strategizing do not amount to anything on the ground. The government has to take concrete actions as soon as possible because this gap has a body count; too many women are suffering because of a system built against them. The ministries and other governmental agencies need to step in and help these women by providing refuge/shelter or legal assistance, and by stopping the practice of putting this responsibility on the NGOs. Lebanon is notorious for relying on these NGOs for all these social issues. The Ministry of Social Affairs needs to get its priorities in order and do its job.

As reported by UN Women, Lebanon ranks low in the equality index:<sup>2</sup>

Lebanon is currently placed 145 out of 153 countries on the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index 2020.<sup>3</sup> In

terms of prevalence of domestic violence, 65 per cent of reported incidents are committed by family members, and 71 per cent took place inside the survivor or perpetrator's household. Moreover, 18 per cent of reported cases of Violence Against Women (VAW) involve incidents of sexual violence, of which 8 per cent involve rape (2016).

Lebanon still has a long way to go to achieve equality between women and men as long as the government is not completely repealing outdated laws and providing actual assistance to women in need.

*KAFA (Enough) Violence & Exploitation is a feminist, secular, Lebanese, non-profit, non-governmental civil society organization based in Beirut.*

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# Young Women and Girls in “Pregnancy Conflicts”

Kiyomi Matsushita

What do people, many of whom likely unfamiliar with the words, imagine when they hear “pregnancy conflicts?” Perhaps they think of conflicts of “having or not having” or “raising or not raising” a child.

Piccolare was established in Tokyo as a non-governmental organization with a mission: to stand by and extend support to all women and girls who are in trouble or unsure of what to do with their pregnancy. The word “piccolare” was created by combining the words *piko* (navel, center or core in Hawaiian) and *coccolare* (to cuddle, to treat with great care in Italian). The name of the organization reflects its mission.

To the young women and girls, the “conflicts” they bring to Piccolare are matters of life or death such as “I will lose my job, if they find out about my pregnancy,” “I will lose the place where I stay,” “I want to go to the hospital, but I cannot afford to,” or “Is there any hospital that would accept me?”

In this society, there are “pregnancy conflicts” arising from fear of losing employment or places to live or being deprived of the life they have been barely maintaining. The pregnant women and girls who have these problems are mostly young, between ten to twenty years old.

A nineteen-year-old pregnant woman, calling herself “Stray Pregnant Woman” who worked six to seven days a week as a day worker and stayed at an internet café at night, spoke of her fear of being refused by hospitals. A twenty-two-year old pregnant woman contacted Piccolare during winter while trying to keep warm by staying close to a vending machine in a park. She suffered violence from a man she turned to for help. An eighteen-year-old feared that she might end up not being able to contact anyone because she could no longer pay the phone fee for her smartphone.

Women and girls who worry about their pregnancy and yet unable to consult anyone and bear the “conflicts” within them are not few. And they are not in distant and unknown places but are somewhere nearby.

## Death from Abuse and Teenage Pregnancies

Government reports show that, among cases of death of infants due to abuse, the proportion of teenage mothers is significantly high. The proportion of these teenage mothers in the total number of births is stable at around 1.3 percent, while the rate of pregnancy among youth involved in cases of infant death due to abuse is at 17 percent (excluding death in collective suicides).<sup>1</sup> Many deaths of infants due to abuse happen on

the day they were born, with fourteen cases out of fifty-two reported cases.<sup>2</sup> Of the fourteen cases, eleven infants were abused by their own mothers, seven of whom were twenty-four years old or younger. And in all cases, the mothers gave birth not in a medical facility but in the toilet or bathroom at home. Approximately 90 percent have not been issued the Mother and Child Health Handbook, or received prenatal health checkups.<sup>3</sup> The deaths can be seen as the result of women and girls giving birth alone, unable to reach out to anyone.

## Imagining Giving Birth Alone

Giving birth at the risk of one’s own life must have been a frightening experience.

The 2017 government report states that “The feeling of not wanting anyone to know about this [pregnancy] was stronger than the feeling of wanting to help the baby.” These words express the degree of their desperation.

If someone found out their pregnancy, they might completely lose their livelihood.

## Are These Women and Girls the Abusers?

Why did they have to give birth at home on their own? Why did not anybody notice their

pregnancy? Why did they have to continue their pregnancy?

Perhaps they would not have ended up as abusers if the methods of contraception were affordable and available, if they did not have to pay for the cost of giving birth, if the society had in place mechanisms that would prevent the isolation of the pregnant women and girls.

I hope that we will be more aware that it is this society that is the real abuser that caused the deaths of the children.

### **Pregnancies: Responsibility of the Women and Girls Alone?**

Pregnant because of *enjo kosai* (being paid for dates), a twenty-year old woman began suffering morning sickness and was unable to earn a living. She started staying at her acquaintances' homes, one after the other. By the time she approached Piccolare, the only thing she had eaten or drank for five days was orange juice. She was about to leave the place she was staying in for a few days. When we picked her up from the place, her lips were cracked and she could barely sit up.

Piccolare is often consulted by "drifting" pregnant young women and girls who have no place to stay and move from home to home of friends or acquaintances who are not their partners, as well as by teenage girls who may fall into such situation. Without the pregnancy, they could have continued earning income and having a place to stay.

Behind most of these "drifting" women and girls are problems that they cannot solve by

themselves such as poverty, abuse, domestic violence, other forms of violence, precarious employment, mental illness and various forms of social exclusion.

Many of the women and girls who managed to come to Piccolare had been unable to ask anyone for help. When people are continuously exposed to poverty, abuse, domestic violence and other forms of violence, they become uncertain on whether they are allowed to ask for help or not. That is why they have been managing on their own, despite numerous difficulties.

But since pregnancy is not a matter they can face on their own, they were forced to ask for help.

We greet each woman or girl with

Thank you for coming to consult us. From here on, let us think together with you about what to do next.

We listen to what they want to do and accompany them to local public offices and medical institutions to secure the necessary social welfare support and services while negotiating with them so that they can avoid suffering any disadvantages. We accompany them to local public offices and medical institutions to secure the necessary social welfare resources. When they are finally able to see a path to move forward, many of them would say, "I thought I was going to be scolded, but I was surprised that I was thanked and praised." They thought they would be berated because they believed it

was their fault that they became pregnant.

The initial contact with the "Stray Pregnant Woman" was through an e-mail message. When I read the words "Stray Pregnant Woman," I could not forget how devastated I was thinking about the desperation and isolation she must have felt. In her e-mail she wrote that she saw on the internet that "stray pregnant women" were refused by hospitals, and this was all their fault. Even though she could not get pregnant on her own, she wrote that it was all her fault. Responsibility is rarely sought from the other party in the pregnancy, and instead placed on the pregnant women alone. These women and girls find themselves in such unreasonable situation.

Is pregnancy the responsibility of women and girls alone? Why do pregnant women and girls have to take responsibility for the pregnancies? And why are the abusers in infant deaths all mothers who gave birth to them?

You cannot get pregnant by yourself. Why is this simple truth forgotten in this society?

### **Irrationality of Stigmatization of Contraceptives and Abortion**

There are other irrationalities involving "pregnancy conflicts."

In Japan, access to contraception and abortion is extremely poor. A campaign to improve access to emergency contraceptive pills collected 67,000 signatures, which were submitted to the government

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# Formulating the Kansai SDGs Citizens' Agenda: Fostering Public Awareness and Creating the Future

IWASAKI Hiroyasu and TAKAHASHI Miwako

The initiative of the Kansai SDGs Citizens' Agenda (K-SDGs) of formulating a Sustainable Development Goals Agenda (SDGs Agenda) began in March 2018 based on a proposal from a non-governmental organization (NGO) at a reception celebrating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Kansai NGO Council. It was motivated by the Council's aspiration to communicate the "civil society" perspective on SDGs to the public. The initiative involves members of the civil society giving thought on the issues that the SDGs seek to solve, raising their voices, sharing their thoughts, and becoming aware of and owning the fundamental significance of the SDGs.

## Inspiration from Hokkaido

Sapporo Alternative School "Yu" in Hokkaido published the pamphlet "SDGs – Setting Local Goals for Hokkaido" in March 2017, which compiled the outcomes of workshops organized over the year. In the workshops, discussions were held on topics such as poverty and disparities, labor and employment/consumption and production, gender/minorities, Hokkaido and Ainu (the indigenous people), energy, climate change/marine resources, bio-diversity, quality

education/ESD and international cooperation and peace. Local goals and action plans were then formulated. Behind these efforts was the conviction that the SDGs were there to affirm the everyday wishes of citizens, such as the hope "to eliminate poverty," "to achieve respect for human rights," "to protect the environment" and "to create a peaceful world," as global common values and goals, and that each one of us as citizens was the main actor in achieving the 2030 Agenda, "Transforming the World."

We did not want to miss the opportunity to learn from this experience, so the Kansai NGO Council invited KOIZUMI Masahiro, the Secretary-General of "Yu" to start our own project. A kick-off meeting for K-SDGs was held on 7 July 2018 at the Higobashi Kanpo Building with forty participants. In addition to the discussion of experiences in Sapporo, KOIZUMI presented a new pamphlet, "SDGs – Setting Local Goals for Hokkaido 2: SDGs in Ainu Context" (published in March 2018). KOIZUMI's message was powerful enough for every participant to keep the SDGs motto "leave no one behind" in mind and to realize the importance of focusing SDGs on local issues from the perspective of social inclusion.

## Efforts to Formulate the Citizens' Agenda

The following workshops were organized for K-SDGs:

- Session 1: Human Rights, Gender  
11 September 2018, Seminar Room, St. Paul's Church, Osaka, with thirty-six participants, and MIWA Atsuko as speaker;
- Session 2: Disasters  
27 October 2018, OSAKA YMCA, with forty participants, and YOSHITSUBAKI Masamichi as speaker;
- Session 3: Multiculturalism  
8 December 2018, OSAKA YMCA, with forty-five participants and TAJIRI Tadakuni as speaker;
- Session 4: Education  
26 January 2019, Higobashi Kanpo Building, with forty participants and NITTA Kazuhiro as speaker;
- Session 5: Sustainable Working Style/Business and Human Rights  
9 February 2019, Higobashi Kanpo Building, with forty participants and OKAJIMA Katsuki and MATSUOKA Hideki as speakers;
- Session 6: Environment

April 2019, Higobashi Kanpo Building, with sixteen participants and SUGIMOTO Ikuo as speaker.

In the workshops, participants discussed the issues after listening to the speakers, and everyone was requested to write about "My Vision of 2030."

On 24 December, 2018, at OSAKA YMCA, a workshop titled "Kick-off Project for Agenda Formulation by High-School and University Students," was organized as one of the programs in the 5th One World Festival for Youth with fifty participants.

### Politics and Economics in Line with the SDGs

The United Nations adopted in September 2015 the resolution, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." In Japan, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Promotion Headquarters headed by the Prime Minister was convened in May 2016, and in December of the same year, the SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles were adopted. The Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) revised its Charter of Corporate Behavior in November 2017 to integrate the SDGs. The SDGs were even used to attract the World Expo to be held in 2025 in Japan, and there have been increasing arguments that SDGs will contribute to economic vitalization.

The SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles raise the principles of universality, inclusiveness, participatory approach, integrated approach,

transparency and accountability for the implementation of the SDGs. The Guiding Principles state that government policies should be made in accordance with the SDGs' perspectives and the government should cooperate with a wide range of stakeholders in achieving the SDGs. They also explicitly note that "in the implementation of the Agenda, NGOs and NPOs will likewise play an extremely important role" in facilitating "collaboration with vulnerable people and advocate on potential challenges and policy options through their networks at the global and regional levels." The Guiding Principles name not only "NPOs and NGOs" but also "private companies," "consumers," "local governments," "the science community," and "labor unions" as stakeholders.

The SDGs pledge to "leave no one behind" and indicate that it is important to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely, the environmental, social and economic dimensions. This is because no one can dispute the fact that we are still a long way from achieving gender equality, and that the environmental, social and economic dimensions are very much out of balance. And that is the reason that the significance of the agreement on the seventeen goals and one hundred sixty-nine targets of the SDGs after discussions in the UN is immeasurably significant, and neither the government nor the business sector can ignore them.

The Kansai SDGs Platform was launched in December 2017,

led by JICA Kansai. We were asked to be involved, as the Platform wanted NGOs to be part of the management, and so the Deputy-Representative of the Kansai NGO Council became a member of the Platform's organizing committee. We will work as partners with the participating organizations in fulfilling our role of monitoring initiatives such as the World Expo 2025 on whether they are managed in line with the SDGs, and whether they integrate the economic, environmental and social (particularly regarding human rights) dimensions, in order to achieve the SDGs.

### Future of Kansai SDGs Citizens' Agenda

We would like to introduce some voices of "My Vision of 2030": "The proportion of parliamentarians by gender should be 50-50," "achieving a quota system," "guaranteeing opportunities to learn about social minorities," "leaving office at the end of office hours," "gender equality in house work, child care and other care work," "no child on waiting list for child care facilities," "guaranteeing equal pay for equal work and equal pay for work of equal value to women and non-Japanese workers," "implementation of basic income on a trial basis," "a society in which diverse people can work together," "avoid using the word 'normal'," "a society in which non-Japanese residents join community meetings," "networking in preparation for disasters," "trying to help anyone in trouble," "enjoying differences," "providing in-

service training for teachers/educators,” “learning about diversity, dialogue and peace, global citizenship,” “aiming for 100 percent renewable energy,” “a town with 0 percent disposable containers,” “alternative consumer life to pass on to the next generation.”

These examples of voices express our aspiration as citizens to face the lives of the people and strive towards solving the issues in those lives; indeed, the issues are there right at our feet, and addressing those issues is what the realization of the SDGs is about. With people from various backgrounds coming together and sharing the views, we are able to clarify our goals of how and what 2030 should be.

The Osaka Citizens’ Summit was held on 25-26 June 2019, just before the G20 Summit Meeting. K-SDGs was in charge of organizing the workshop “Community and SDGs.”

Approximately ninety people participated, and while we reported on our year-long activity, panelists from Okinawa, Okayama, Toyama and Hokkaido prefectures spoke about the efforts being made in their local communities. We shared our views on the importance of civil society participation in the decision-making process towards achieving the SDGs. Participants also raised the significance of addressing issues of disparities and poverty as well as issues faced by minorities.

The C20 (Civil20) Meeting at which the civil society presented its policy proposals to the G20 Summit was held on 21 to 23 April 2019 in Tokyo, and the Kansai NGO Council was given an opportunity to report on the K-SDGs. After our report, participants from China, New Zealand and Mongolia came up to tell us that they would also like to start formulating local agenda in their own local

communities. It seems that the simple structure of our initiative—community members sharing the awareness of citizenship can launch their own initiatives by gathering to talk—attracted their interest.

In the process of presenting our K-SDGs at the C20 and the Osaka Citizens’ Summit, we have clearly observed that citizenship and local issues are firmly related, and we are determined to move to the next stage by sharing our challenges and outcomes with fellow citizens in other communities. There is a growing tendency to understand the SDGs as being relevant to each one of us, as well as awareness of the importance of sending the voices of the citizens to the policy decision-making processes.

In the meantime, we will continue our discussions regarding K-SDGs, and join hands with consumers, labor unions and schools, to create an agenda that reflects the citizens’ voices. We welcome your participation.

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Group discussion during a workshop. Photo: Kansai NGO Council

# COVID-19 Crisis and Filipinos in Kansai\*

Ma. Reinaruth D. Carlos and Jefferson R. Plantilla

In order to capture the trends on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Filipino residents in Japan, particularly those living in Kansai, a survey was conducted via google form through snowball sampling method. The survey was administered in May 2020.

## Survey Results

The survey results reveal that the problems arising from COVID-19 crisis are not only economic but also psychological. In terms of economic impact, 64.73 percent and 24.07 percent of the respondents identified change in employment conditions and inability to sustain daily needs respectively. On the other hand, psychological impacts were reflected in the choices of anxiety about health, family and future, as well as stress and lack of concentration at work which scored 74.27 percent, 33.61 percent and 25.73 percent of all respondents respectively. With regards to the other concerns, the respondents pointed out missing family (34.44 percent), problem of returning to the Philippines (33.20 percent), and lack of information about the pandemic (15.77 percent).

Furthermore, when the respondents were classified based on their status of residence, it was revealed that long-term residents and

dependents of Japanese nationals and of permanent residents were hit the hardest economically in terms of changes in employment conditions (74.55 percent) and inability to sustain daily needs (34.55 percent), as compared to permanent residents, naturalized citizens and those holding working visas. Meanwhile, in terms of marital status, while married and never-married Filipino residents registered the highest percentage of anxiety due to fear of COVID-19 infection (81.2 percent and 69.3 percent respectively), the divorced/widowed/separated Filipinos have the highest percentage of anxiety due to change in employment status (76 percent). These results emphasize the need to provide immediate assistance to those who belong to these marital and visa categories.

The adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly shown by the following responses: 62.65 percent had decreased income, 30.12 percent had reduced hours of work and 22.89 percent had been dismissed from work. Those who were not economically adversely affected are in much smaller percentages: 14.46 percent had to do telework; 12.65 percent got busier at work; 6.63 percent had longer work hours; and

3.01 percent had increased income.

In addition to economic uncertainties, we cite three interrelated issues – the lack of Japanese language proficiency, lack of support outside the family and limited information about the situation in Japan as contributing factors.

## Some Conclusions

Our results emphasize the need for economic AND psychological support, including the provision of helpful and timely information, for Filipino residents during the COVID-19 crisis, most especially for the most vulnerable groups identified in the survey. Addressing these needs is best done at the local community level where local governments and private institutions and organizations operate. Though resources are limited, access to these local services would help relieve to some extent the difficulties faced by Filipinos in Kansai, particularly the vulnerable ones. Support from the Philippine government is equally valuable and can very well complement the programs of the government of Japan in addressing the difficulties especially of the vulnerable groups.

The immediate task is to organize and disseminate to the Filipino residents accurate and

timely information, especially regarding the available support services offered by the government (local and national) and other institutions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Doing so will be the first step in mitigating not only the economic but also the psychological impacts of the current crisis.

\* Note: This is an edited excerpt of the report of the authors on the survey entitled "Survey on COVID-19 Crisis and Filipinos in Kansai - Summary Report," released in June 2020 in Kyoto city.

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## Young Women and Girls in "Pregnancy Conflicts"

*(Continued from page 10)*

with a letter requesting the improvement of access. I hope immediate action is taken on this matter.

Under the Maternal Health Act, abortion is allowed only for health or economic reasons and in cases of rape. In these cases, induced abortion is allowed to be performed by a designated doctor.<sup>4</sup>

This irrationality isolates the pregnant women and girls who suffer from inner conflicts, leads to the way the society looks at them and shuts them out.

## Changing the Way the Pregnant Women and Girls are Viewed

In May 2020, Piccolare cooperated with another non-governmental organization, PIECES, to open a place called PISARA for young pregnant women and girls who have no place to go and are "drifting."

A pregnant girl who did not get along with her mother and ran

away repeatedly from home spent two restful days at the place. We sent her back to her home, telling her that she could come back to PISARA any time when things got difficult. But she stayed home, gave birth safely, is now raising her child and working towards becoming independent.

Just being able to know that you have a safe place to go any time you want, may empower you to live through the days.

If so, when society's positive view of these women and girls inspires safety, they may find it easier to live, even when their circumstances are severe. For this purpose, it is necessary to make the problems of these women and girls known and visible to the public. Piccolare is currently preparing a "White Paper on Pregnancy Conflicts – from the consultation desk of Pregnancy SOS Tokyo" to be published in December 2020.

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## Endnotes

- 1 See 14th Report on the Deaths by Child Abuse, Special Committee on Child Abuse (in Japanese), August 2018, [www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000173329\\_00001.html](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000173329_00001.html).
- 2 See 15th Report on the Deaths by Child Abuse, Special Committee on Child Abuse (in Japanese), August 2019, [www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000190801\\_00003.html](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000190801_00003.html).
- 3 14th Report on the Deaths by Child Abuse, Special Committee on Child Abuse, op. cit.
- 4 See Article 14(1), Chapter III, Maternal Health Protection, Maternal Health Act, [www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=2603&vm=04&re=02](http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=2603&vm=04&re=02).

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# HURIGHTS OSAKA Calendar

The 10th volume of *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* is planned to be printed before the year ends. This volume includes articles from Cambodia, India, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Jordan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor Leste.

The 100th issue of this newsletter is now available online. See the website of HURIGHTS OSAKA.

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**HURIGHTS OSAKA**, inspired by the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formally opened in December 1994. It has the following aims: 1) to engender popular understanding in Osaka of the international human rights standards; 2) to support international exchange between Osaka and countries in Asia-Pacific through collection and dissemination of information and materials on human rights; and 3) to promote human rights in Asia-Pacific in cooperation with national and regional institutions and civil society organizations as well as the United Nations. In order to achieve these goals, HURIGHTS OSAKA has activities such as Information Handling, Research and Study, Education and Training, Publications, and Consultancy Services.

**FOCUS Asia-Pacific** is designed to highlight significant issues and activities relating to human rights in the Asia-Pacific. Relevant information and articles can be sent to HURIGHTS OSAKA for inclusion in the next editions of the newsletter.

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