



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

Police and COVID-19

PAKISTAN'S PREPAREDNESS FOR THE NEW NORMAL



COVID-19

Contents

1. Situational Analysis: A Brief background to COVID-19	4
2. Pakistan's Response to the Pandemic	4
3. Police as Frontline Fighters for COVID-19	5
4. Possible Impact of COVID-19 on Crime	6
5. Key Recommendations for the Police	9

Objectives of the Advocacy Brief

The police are one of the most essential public service providers in the wake of COVID-19. This policy brief provides critical information to help the police understand dynamics of the current pandemic, how the virus impacts the job and poses specific risks to the police. The brief also provides guidelines on how the police can adapt to and manage the pandemic.

1. Situational Analysis: A Brief background to COVID-19

The world is experiencing a potent challenge in the shape of a Novel Coronavirus Disease called COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic is the most serious health challenge the world has faced in almost a century – one that is impacting all segments of the global population. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic on the 11th March 2020. By the end of April 2020 there are expected to be over 200,000 deaths and three million confirmed cases of COVID-19 across the world. In Pakistan, there could be around 15,000 confirmed cases, almost 350 deaths by the start of May 2020.

Apart from human lives, COVID-19 is detrimental to families, education, governments and economies. Currently COVID-19 is killing more people in the developed countries but it is expected to have a significant impact on under-developed and poorer countries as time moves on. The pandemic is not only posing new challenges to the health sector but to all governmental departments be it the police and all other commercial and social sectors.

2. Pakistan's Response to the Pandemic

Pakistan has developed a **National Plan of Action (NPA)** for COVID-19¹. The NPA aims to ensure a coordinated emergency response by increasing capacity to mitigate, detect and care for patients; ensuring hospitals have the space, supplies and necessary personnel; and developing life-saving medical interventions. Different measures have been taken by the federal and provincial governments to overcome the threats posed by COVID-19. Some of the key initiatives include: a) allocation of special funds for federal and provincial health departments; b) trainings of doctors, paramedics and medical lab technicians²; c) development of Standard Operational Protocols (SOPs), nationally for the health department and d) special funds allocation and measures to cope with the economic impact of COVID-19 on the general public, industries and investors; and e) launch of a terrestrial television channel to meet the educational needs of students; from kindergarten level to class twelve.

2.1 NPA and the Police

It is evident that the police have emerged as one of the core institutions to support the government, especially the health departments, to curb the spread of COVID-19. The National Plan of Action (NPA) has been silent on the issue of the capacity building of police and development of nationwide uniform standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the police to effectively respond to COVID-19. The government needs to issue standardized guidelines and provide additional funds for the police to help them meet the challenge successfully while maintaining personal safety. Leadership from the provincial police departments have issued new SOPs for dealing with COVID-19 but a nationwide approach is required to ensure universal application of standards in line with the principles of WHO.

1 <https://www.nih.org.pk/>

2 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/640104-chinese-experts-train-pak-doctors-for-covid-19>

3. Police as Frontline Fighters for COVID-19

Global trends demonstrate that the police have frequent contact with the public, who may be symptomatic or asymptomatic carriers of the COVID-19. Because of this exposure, the police are at a high risk of contracting the virus, with most police forces ill-equipped to fully protect their staff. The New York Police Department has lost 27³ of its members to COVID-19 and over 18% of their workforce, i.e. nearly 7000, have contracted COVID-19. In South Asia the situation is much more challenging for the police, for instance, in India many police officers and their families have been reported COVID positive, including loss of an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) in Ludhiana, India⁴.

The police in Pakistan are no exception to global trends; they were not equipped and prepared to fight the pandemic but they were mobilised to support the government as soon as the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the country. A number of regular and traffic police officers of junior and senior ranks have contracted COVID-19⁵ in Pakistan. At least 13 in Punjab⁶, around 15 in Sindh⁷ and 1 in KP⁸ have been reported positive for COVID-19 and many others have been quarantined on suspicion of contracting the virus. The country has still not reached its peak as far as the number of COVID-19 cases are concerned and thus the threat to the police is expected to increase with the passage of time.

Pakistan's National Plan of Action (NPA) for COVID-19 expects the police to play a vital role in combating the pandemic through surveillance; enforcing lockdown; protecting life and property; and quarantining people in their localities⁹. The NPA asks them to do public awareness raising on COVID-19, however, the document lacks a clear guideline on safety precautions and content for the police to carry out the awareness raising in a safe, targeted and effective way. The police also support the distribution of cash, food and medical supplies. They are adapting to the pandemic but are not yet fully prepared in terms of training and access to information and personal protection equipment.

3.1 Risks to the Police

The following activities and situations describe the multiple risks that police officers face with respect to contracting COVID-19:

- Enforcing lockdowns in a country where the general public is neither fully aware nor supportive;
- Dealing with many suspects/criminals physically or in close proximity due to nature of their job;
- Interacting on a daily basis with thousands of members of the public who may be symptomatic or asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19 at cash/ration collection points, quarantines facilities, sealed localities, police stations, checkpoints, hospitals and airports;
- Delivering goods to COVID-19 hit areas;

3 <https://www.kiro7.com/news/trending/nypd-suffers-27-deaths-covid-19-including-911-cancer-survivor-virus-hits-hard-across-us/ZNZVPZVAFJFHNJBUM7J63QPKI/>

4 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-india-ludhiana-acp-dies-covid19-1668414-2020-04-18>

5 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/639766-death-toll-from-covid-19-mounts-to-43-in-pakistan>

6 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2200696/1-eight-pindi-cops-test-positive-covid-19/>

7 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1550828/sindh-police-turns-focus-on-testing-after-15-policemen-diagnosed-with-covid-19-in-karachi>

8 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2186467/1-mardans-sp-operations-tests-positive-virus/>

9 The National Plan of Action for COVID-19 (Pakistan)

- Undertaking contact-tracing through interviews and other means to identify people who have come in contact with a COVID positive person to put them under self-isolation;
- Undertaking crowd control duties without appropriate training to deal with the protestors, peaceful public and culprits during the pandemic;
- Carrying out their tasks without sufficient access to the required personal preventive equipment e.g. masks, gloves, hazmat suits, goggles, sanitizers etc.;
- Tackling with the pandemic while lacking formal training on the best practice for precautionary measures;
- Working and living in congested premises;
- Working for 10-12 hours a day due to a limited workforce;
- Doing a mentally and physically exhausting and stressful job, while majority of the officers are away from their families;
- Not taking proper sleep due to workload, which weakens their immune system.

In a televised address, the Prime Minister of Pakistan feared that the cases of COVID-19 may drastically increase in May 2020¹⁰. The strength of police personnel across the country is approximately 500,000¹¹. The approximate provincial breakdown is 124,000 in Sindh, 37,000 in Balochistan, 195,000 in Punjab, 80,000 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 12,000 in Islamabad. These police organizations across the country need immediate structured and coordinated support from the government, policy makers, civil society and international organizations, including United Nations for trainings, equipment and well-defined nationwide relevant and practical SOPs at different levels to manage the evolving risk of COVID-19.

Caution: The police, if not prepared and well-resourced, may face short and medium-term shortage of workforce due to infections within the department and will run the risk of not being able to efficiently perform the duties entrusted to them.

4. Possible Impact of COVID-19 on Crime

Speculating about the impact of such an unprecedented situation on the level of crime in society is difficult because of a great diversity in national responses across the world. In some countries, public life has ended for all practical purposes, while other countries have taken a more relaxed approach. Nonetheless, some lessons about crime trends can be drawn from analyses of other crises, including sudden economic downturns and natural disasters. Ten of the most important potential dynamics of crimes during lockdown and COVID-19 include¹²:

1. **From street crime to domestic crime:** “Stay at home” restrictions in some countries have curtailed the opportunities for crime in public spaces while increasing risks in the domestic sphere.
2. **Distracted law enforcement:** The reorientation of law enforcement attention from routine crime response to social control measures will make some crimes more difficult while facilitating others.

¹⁰ <https://www.geo.tv/latest/283560-pm-imran-urges-critics-not-to-politicise-coronavirus-pandemic>

¹¹ A comparative study on Police in Pakistan by Rozan. The data was taken from concerned police headquarters

¹² UNODC’s study on the Impact of COVID-19 on Crimes

3. **Unemployment, economic strain, and survival crime:** A sharp spike in unemployment may precipitate a rise in acquisitive and profit-oriented crime in countries where social safety nets are not sufficient to ensure livelihoods, with a possibility of looting and riots in areas where the population is especially economically disadvantaged and marginalized.
4. **Profiteering by organized crime:** The demand for new products and services in an environment of tightened controls on movement and markets will produce opportunities for organized crime.
5. **Circumventing border controls:** Tightened border controls will reduce certain trafficking flows while increasing profits for those able to circumvent them.
6. **Opportunistic cybercrime:** Cybercriminals have already been seen leveraging the public need for information and resources. The increase in the number of online buyers may also lead to increased cybercrimes in term of financial frauds, harassment, sexual exploitation and blackmailing.
7. **Corruption and misallocation of public funds:** Fraud and embezzlement related to the mass transfer of public money to individuals and firms affected by the crisis, such as mass bailout funds, pose perhaps the most significant risk in financial terms as already reported in Pakistan¹³.
8. **Explosive situation of the prisons:** The impact of COVID on overcrowded prison systems is likely to be devastating, risking lives of the inmates and seriously hampering rehabilitation efforts.
9. **Loss of liberties:** The rollback of civil liberties during lockdown could have long-term ramifications for criminal justice and civil rights. Authoritarian tendencies to deal with panic caused by the deadly pandemic may lead to widening the gulf between the citizens and the police assigned to implement lockdowns as part of the COVID-19 suppression strategy¹⁴.
10. **Entrenchment of parallel governance:** Non-state groups are likely to strengthen their hold over neglected areas. Certain groups may challenge the writ of the government and enhance the risk of further spreading the virus. Resistance and violent response shown by religious groups at certain places, including assaulting police officers who were trying to implement the policy of lock downs is a case in point.

13 <https://www.brecorder.com/2020/04/13/588982/dr-nishtar-expresses-resolve-to-fight-embezzlement-in-ehsaas-emergency-cash-program/>

14 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/pakistan-doctors-beaten-police-despair-untreatable-pandemic>

4.1 From Street to Gender-based and Domestic Crimes

In many countries, including Pakistan, people are spending the bulk of their time at home, this will necessarily affect the location where crime occurs. Some crime, such as violence on the streets or in public hot spots, is likely to decrease, whereas crimes that take place in the home, such as gender-based and domestic violence, will likely increase.

The 2019 Global Study on homicide showed that, in the countries with the highest homicide rates, majority of the cases were of men's murders. In countries with lower rates, women are almost as likely to be homicide victims as men. At the global level, men represent 81% of the homicide victims, but when it comes to domestic homicide, women represent 82% of the victims. Six out of every ten women killed worldwide are murdered by an intimate partner or other family member.

Irrespective of the COVID 19 context incidents of domestic violence have been occurring across Pakistan at an alarming rate.

In Pakistan, mental health professionals are saying that they have seen a rise in the cases of domestic abuse in the wake of the COVID 19 lockdown. *'Domestic abuse has already been a serious problem in Pakistan; more cases are surfacing in this time of anxiety and depression for all.'*¹⁵ The COVID pandemic deepens economic and social stress. This coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, means exponential increase in gender-based violence putting the lives of women and girls at risk.

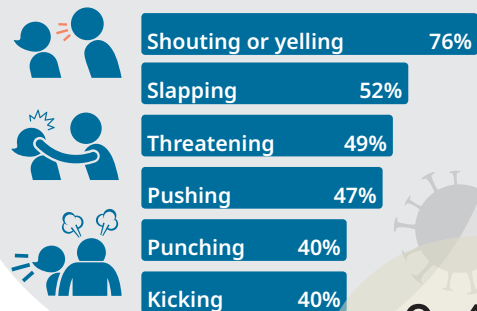
4.2 Child Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) rate in Pakistan continues to be seven children per day, as reported in the statistical report of January to June 2019 by Sahil, a Pakistani NGO that has been working on CSA since 1996¹⁶. The report

90%
of women in Pakistan have experienced some form of domestic violence, at the hands of their husbands or families.

47%
of married women have experienced sexual abuse, particularly domestic rape.

Most common forms of abuse



50%
of women report that violence either increases or does not change when they are pregnant.

0.4%
of women take their cases to courts.

50%
of women who experience domestic violence do not respond in any way and suffer silently.

Sources: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences

¹⁵ <https://images.dawn.com/news/1182318>

¹⁶ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/469129/child-sexual-abuse-rate-in-pakistan-continues-to-be-7-children-per-day/>

reveals that 1304 cases of CSA were reported during the last six months: 729 girls and 575 boys. The report explains that 614 abusers were acquaintances of children while the rest included neighbors, female abettor, driver, religious clerics (*moulvis*), policemen and others. There are a large number of cases of CSA which are not reported to the media and police due to the 'so-called' social and cultural sensitivities attached to the matter.

The available reported data is alarming enough to alert the law enforcement agencies that CSA could be increasingly prevalent during the COVID-19 lockdown because i) a significant number of child abusers are children's acquaintances, and ii) there are many areas across Pakistan where the lockdown is not imposed strictly and children spend a lot of the time out of their homes.

5. Key Recommendations for the Police

The following key recommendations¹⁷ will assist the police in implementing COVID-responsive services with ethos and resilience:

5.1 Communicate clearly and frequently with the staff about COVID-related policies and procedures

- Prepare officers to answer questions about testing kit availability, travel restrictions, quarantine and isolation, personal safety measures including who the public should call for such information
- Consult the National Institute of Health (NIH) and WHO for preparing nationwide uniform Standard Operations Procedures (SOPs) for arrests, transportation, detention, investigation, prosecution, mob management, quarantine facilities management, lockdown imposition, positive and suspects escort etc.

5.2 Training of all officers on the proper wearing, removal, and disposal of personal protective equipment

- Train all officers on proper wear, removal/disposal of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and also disinfection of their weapons, phones, desks, belts, handcuffs, uniform etc.;
- Increase the frequency of disinfecting patrol cars, offices, detention cells, interview rooms, barracks, locker rooms, break rooms, and other department facilities to reduce exposure to the virus
- Help officers to strike a balancing act between protecting civilians and protecting themselves

5.3 Develop a contingency plan for staffing shortages

- Prepare for officers to take caution and report in case of being sick or sickness of their family members
- Consider alternative staffing methods such as shared service provision with neighboring agencies/districts, swing shifts, cancellation of leave and recalling retired officers of the police and forces

¹⁷ <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/organizational-readiness-considerations-for-preparing-your-agency-for-covid-19>

- Evaluate the services that need an on-scene physical presence compared to those that can be handled remotely by phone or online
- Make a pool of off-duty personnel who are on-call and ready to report, if a shift has a shortage of officers
- Cross-train personnel for temporary duty reassignment to assure proper coverage of essential duties
- Conduct load testing of IT and security systems to ensure resources can withstand a sudden increase in remote access to department technologies

5.4 Communicate clearly and consistently to the public on latest information on COVID-19

- Coordinate with federal, provincial and local authorities to ensure accurate and consistent information is relayed regularly
- Utilise the department's Public Information Officer (PIO) to provide information in a timely manner
- Develop a routine to communicate to the citizens regularly and combat disinformation about COVID-19, raise awareness of potential virus-related scams, and highlight credible and effective practices
- Make sample 'announcements' for the police in order to give a uniform and clear message to avoid any panic and misinformation while interacting with a mob or residents of an area or complainants

5.5 Coordinate with federal, provincial and local government as well as the private sector

- Keep communicating with the health department to be aware of the most up-to-date response protocols
- Coordinate with government agencies responsible for maintaining critical infrastructure (transportation, water, power) to understand their contingency plans and potential for increased burden on emergency services
- Assess financial need of the department and seek funds for capacitating a specific department in terms of trainings and equipment for COVID-19
- Develop strong bonds with traders, teachers, youth, religious leaders, local influential, lady health visitors, NGOs and media for imposing lockdown, public awareness raising and other need-based support.

5.6 Modify standard department procedures as needed to reflect current response needs

- Be prepared for community requests to evolve and reflect the needs of COVID-19 patients, including but not limited to transport to hospitals, wellness checks, and delivery of critical items like medication
- Provide testing facility and coordinate treatment to limit the spread of COVID-19 within a detention cell
- Define different scenarios for the police at different points of duties to be prepared for the new challenge. This may include quarantining an area, arrests, transportation of criminals/suspects, dealing with mobs etc.

5.7 Create a plan for critical incident stress management

The following points may significantly enhance resilience of the police department:

- Address officers' physical and emotional well-being. Increased pressures and continued obligations outside of work, along with the potential of loved ones falling ill could create stress, fear, and anxiety
- Keep appreciating, motivating and inspiring the workforce
- Activate support services for officers and their families
- Seek support from UN agencies, I/NGOs and other local counselors for stress management of officers
- Create additional awareness on Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)
- Give risk allowance to all frontline officers and incentives to those testing positive or sacrificing their lives.

5.8 Utilise Incident Command Systems (ICS) to aid in department response

- Ensure your department's Incident Command System (ICS) can be activated if needed to assist in command and control, as well as the coordination of limited resources
- Identify which roles and duties are mission critical, if your department does not have an ICS

5.9 Collect data and document response protocols for future review and assessment, if practical

- Pandemics rarely occur, a department can learn a lot about its emergency response by studying past efforts
- Data collection for the police may include the number of COVID-19-related calls for service, outcomes of ICS activation, staffing numbers and call-outs, health and wellness measures of officers, etc.

5.10 Keep focusing on routine job of the police and reviewing new trends of crimes

- The COVID-19 should not get attention of the police management and officers away from their conventional job of crime prevention and redressal
- Keep assessing new trends of crimes during the lockdown/pandemic and respond accordingly

5.11 Pay special attention to crimes of GBV against women, and child abuse

- Develop empathy and understanding in the workforce on the likelihood of increase in the cases of violence against women and children during the times of pandemic due to the reasons already explained in this brief;
- Proactively reach out to the vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons living with disabilities and transgenders in a situation where many of them cannot approach the police in-person or over the phone

- Handle complaints with respect and interview them at a safe place away from alleged offender(s)¹⁸
- Always complete a written complaint and lodge an FIR if a complainant wishes to do so
- Assist complainant and children-at-risk in their removal from the place of violence or ensure that the abuser vacates the place, if feasible, and follow up if complainant opts to stay with the alleged offender
- Warn offenders that domestic violence is a serious crime. Try establishing a helpline for vulnerable groups and disseminate widely;
- Use social media, SMS, radio, cable TV, Whatsapp, newspapers, physical banners/streamers, local civil society and NGOs to disseminate numbers to contact the police in case of any crime against them¹⁹
- Keep in place an accountability and feedback mechanism to ensure everyone's seriousness on the above
- Raise awareness in the police on the special vulnerabilities and security needs of vulnerable groups
- Develop a referral system at police station level with social welfare/women development departments, commissions on the status of women, such as Provincial Human Rights Commission, National Commission on Human Rights, state-run and NGOs' helplines, women shelter homes, crisis centers, counselors, pro-bono lawyers, financial help, medical facilities for managing the cases of violence against women and children.

18 Some of the points are taken from flyer-'Prevention with Protection is Our Right' developed by UNWOMEN and Rozan

19 UNODC's Policy Brief on Gender-based Violence in the Wake of COVID-19








This advocacy brief is prepared by the UNODC's Criminal Justice and Legal Reforms Sub-Programme-II (SP-II).

The Criminal Justice and Legal Reforms Sub-Programme-II (SP-II) works as a strategic partner and advisor to the Government of Pakistan, delivering reforms across the criminal justice chain of institutions. The objective is to promote evidence-based programming to enhance the effectiveness, coordination and capacity of the criminal justice institutions towards administering fair, efficient and transparent access to justice and rule of law for the citizens. The SP-II also promotes robust and preventive measures to foster effective AML/CFT regimes in Pakistan to disrupt and prosecute financial crimes. A gender-sensitive approach cuts across the criminal justice reforms led by SP-II to empower the vulnerable and the less privileged groups through awareness of legal rights and access to justice.

The comprehensive approach of UNODC is aligned with Pakistan's vision 2025. Striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice and Institutions: *"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."* Also contributing to the SDG Goals 3, 5, 8, 11, 15 and 17.



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