

An Overview of Medica Afghanistan's Work

Helping Our Clients to Access Justice

1.1. Achievements:

Medica Afghanistan contributed to the advancement of rule of law and improvement of Afghan women and girls' lives by increasing their access to justice. We offered legal advice, legal awareness, mediation and legal representation in criminal and civil cases to 313 clients in Kabul, Herat and Mazar.

We were gratified that a presidential decree issued on Eid al-Fitr in July 2015 on release and reduction of prisoners' sentences finally came into effect this February due to our efforts. The decree was initially not implemented because of lack of coordination among the judicial authorities in Herat and in Kabul. Our lawyers knew that many of their clients could benefit from the decree, so they kept pushing for its implementation. They followed up with relevant authorities during this time. Finally with the implementation of the decree 12 of our clients in Herat including four of them from Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre (JRC) and seven others were released from prison and one client received reduction in her sentence.



1.2. Challenges:

We faced and are facing a series of challenges with the judiciary system. For instance, our lawyers can't access their clients' files in the investigation department of the prosecution office. This practice violates the client's right and the defense lawyer's right. It is also time consuming for the defense lawyer to get notes of

each document at each stage while following up the client's case.

Our lawyers lack access to the final decision of the Supreme Court regarding the cases. When the Supreme Court announces decision it is immediately archived and the decision is not shared with lawyers or the clients. The lawyer and the client have to access it through the general attorney, which takes is a lengthy process.

To follow a civil case in the court, the presence of both parties is mandatory. However, in many of cases of our clients the husband denies to be present at the court. The legal department tries to find the whereabouts of the husband, but the husband disappears or leaves the country only to avoid the court session and thus the consequences. Until the presence of the husband, the client has to wait without knowing her fate or any solution on her case.

In cases that the court decision is in favor of our clients, their husbands do not agree and appeal. Then they disappear and avoid the court sessions. Yet until the presence of the husband after few months the client must follow the procedure again. This is time consuming and impacts our clients emotionally as well.

Improving Our Clients' Mental Health Through Psychosocial Services

2.1. Achievements:

We were able to extend our psychosocial services to 360 clients in Kabul, Mazar and Herat offering them on the bed counseling, group and individual counseling on mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

We were receiving an increasing number of female clients from Kabul University and students complained about mental health symptoms. We realized that the problem was larger in scale and we had to support these

students. Therefore, in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health we opened a psychosocial services centre at Kabul University. Our psychologists worked with 12 female university students and the cases are still on going. The clients reported high levels of stress, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, sleep problem, and lack of trust on instructors as they had experienced humiliation at the hands of some instructors.

As a result of the counseling the students were able to deal with fear and anxiety triggering situations, improve communication skills and reduce stress. They were able to improve their coping mechanism in challenging situations and refocus on their studies.



2.2. Challenges:

Our main challenges during the first quarter has been with our on the bed clients. Most of our clients receive one or two sessions of counseling and once they're discharged from the hospital they do not follow up. The reasons could be stigma and shame attached to psychosocial problems, not having family's permission to visiting us. During the exchange of contact information such clients are usually not allowed by their in-laws to share their contact details with us. Thus, the process remains uncompleted, while with most of the cases where the patient has attempted suicide follow up with the counselor is critical.

2.3. Literacy Project

With an aim to empower our clients who have received one of our legal or psychosocial services, we introduce them to our literacy education service. In the first quarter of this year we enrolled 240 students in 12 districts in Kabul,

Herat and Mazar. We've appointed 12 to teach these students. The literacy education helps our clients to open up more opportunities for themselves, and improve the quality of their lives.



Advocacy and Awareness Raising for Women's Rights

3.1. Achievements:

Medica Afghanistan is a member of Mental Health Technical Working Group of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH). The Executive Director of the organization participated in all-day working group meetings at MOPH. During the past three months she played a dynamic role in contributing to suicide prevention strategy with the ministry and shared Medica Afghanistan's intervention strategy for working with suicidal clients and analyzed the position of clients based on gender and legal aspects for this strategy.

Medica Afghanistan has contributed to the strategy since the beginning of its development in June 2015. Finally, the drafted strategy was prepared and reviewed through consensus building workshop between civil society and government authorities on 13th and 14th of March. This strategy is critical for saving the lives of many Afghans and we look forward to the action plan for ensuring its full implementation.

Our team participated in One Billion Rising (OBR) walk on 14th of February in Vadodora city of India. They were accompanied by colleagues from medica mondiale, and over a 100 Indian men and women from diverse backgrounds,

students of Navrachana University, Forum Foundation, and Action Aid staff members. The walk was arranged as part of global OBR revolution to defy violence against women worldwide.



On the occasion of the International Women's Day, we along with Afghan Women's Network, and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations released a position paper demanding justice for Farkhunda and other women victims of violence.

In March we facilitated an information session for Sayed Jamalludin Teacher Training College (TTC) staff and academics about our advocacy initiatives. We spoke about the fundamentals of advocacy, the purpose of our advocacy work and our approaches, strategic goals, achievements as well as challenges. Our team presented information about our participatory or stakeholder advocacy approach with other CSOs and advocacy on approval of Family Law and implementation of EAW Law.

Medica Afghanistan's representative participated in a two-day national conference called *Police e Mardum*. The aim was to establish a consultation of people and police about democratic policing. Our representative led a group discussion that resulted in creating a joint position paper about building relationship between the police and the public.

The implementation of the provisions of the statement yet needs to be followed up with the Ministry of Interior.



3.2. Challenges:

During the first quarter of 2016 we were fortunate to not have received direct threats or harassment. However, security issues remain as the biggest barrier against our service provision and advocacy efforts. There were lots of interruptions in our work because of protests, roadblocks and security incidents. We had to regularly change the schedule of our field works, and advocacy meetings, remained over-flexible to continue operating in a challenging environment. The Law Reform Committee under the Ministry of Women's Affairs that reformed laws based on gender suspended its work due to the lack of budget. Medica Afghanistan was a member of the committee and it was an important committee for making laws women-friendly.

Success Stories

4.1. Mediation:

J is 44 years old; her parents forced her into marriage with Mahmood. They have two children together. Since the beginning of marriage they had problems; her husband would physically abuse her, never paid the house expenses. Not only that, he would also sell the house tools to supply his drugs. J's mother in law had a conflict with her as well; she tried to own J's marriage portion, also called *haq e mahr*, which one of women Islamic rights that the husband has to pay. J's marriage portion was 200-meter land that she didn't want to give up. The conflict escalated and it caused J to be kicked out of the house. She went to her parents for support and a friend of her father referred her to EAW

(Elimination of Violence Against Women) unit. From there our lawyers received her case.

In the first stage, our lawyers provided her awareness about her rights and then based on her request our social worker began mediation between her, her husband and in-laws. Our social worker advised J's husband and mother about women's rights including *haq e mahr*, and alimony. Eventually, after seven sessions they reached to an agreement. The mother-in-law made a commitment to not interfere in J's married life and step back from wanting to own J's rights. Her husband also made a commitment to stop abusing her. We introduced him to a rehab clinic. His treatment is showing improvement after a month. Based on J's report he treats his family better now.

J was referred to our psychosocial department for depression treatment. Medica Afghanistan's psychosocial counselor worked with her on her inner and social resources and conducted relaxation exercises with her. Three weeks later she reported to us that she feels more stable and in control of her mental health. We introduced her to a women's tailoring center for work. Presently she is working there and through her salary she is paying the house expenses. In the meantime, her husband is searching for a job.

Recently we received another client whom J referred to us.

Direct statements from our clients:

"I am happy to have learned about my rights especially the right to choose my life partner. Before I thought it was my family's right. Now my father cannot force me to marry his cousin." A client who benefited from our legal advice

"It's so nice that you are all women and you can understand us very well. We can explain our problems to you easily."

"I am very happy that you represented my case; I am released and accessed my rights. Now I understand that as a woman I have rights and value. When I was arrested I lost hope and thought I will spend the rest of my life in prison."

"Hope you will always be here to help people like myself."

4.2. Psychosocial:

S is a young woman who had feelings of guilt and trauma reactions. Our legal department introduced her to us. S has a 6-year-old daughter who was raped from anus by two teenage boys. She said that she asked her daughter to buy bread from bakery on the street across her house. The little girl left and after 30 minutes she noticed that her daughter didn't come back. "I became so worried and went out to find her. When I reached the bakery I saw my daughter crying and her cloths was in blood. I realized what had happened and lost myself."

S complained to police but she was told to leave the case and be grateful that her daughter is still a virgin.

Our counselor worked with S individually for several sessions. Her mental situation became stable and her guilt and hopelessness feelings reduced. She said, "When I asked for the right of my daughter from the court, I was depressed and hopeless, but after attending counseling sessions with you now I gained courage. I will never leave the case. I am not a weak woman anymore and I have realized that I should be strong to ask for my daughter's right and support her emotionally." She was pleased with the support of our counselor, "otherwise I may have left the case and even lost myself" she said.

S's daughter was referred to another organization that offers psychosocial counseling for children.

Direct statements from our clients:

"When I had depression, my husband wanted to marry a second wife. It made me even more depressed. By joining the group sessions I became more hopeful to life. I am attending a literacy course now and feel at peace." The client had lost her father two years ago and since then isolated herself from others due to depression.

"I learned about the harmful effects of tobacco and I am not using it anymore." One of our



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group-counseling clients who used chillum (pipe) for 25 years

“I am more hopeful for my life. I attended literacy course and was recently engaged with the man of my choice.” An 18 year old who used to have depression

About Us

[Medica Afghanistan](#) is a non-for-profit Afghan women-led organization that exists to eliminate violence against women through the provision of psychosocial and health services, legal representation and advice, mediation, advocacy and awareness raising. We practice holistic approach in addressing our clients' needs and helping them lead normal lives. Further, we provide training on gender related topics to different social groups.

For more information about our services contact us at: info@medica-afghanistan.org.