

## An Overview of Medica Afghanistan's Three Months' Work

October - December 2015

In the current newsletter we highlight our major activities and achievements towards elimination of violence against women in Afghanistan through our legal aid, psychosocial and health support services for victims of (sexualized) gender based violence and advocacy initiatives for promotion of gender equity. We provide these services in Herat, Kabul and Mazar e Sharif provinces.

[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.

Picture from an individual psychosocial counseling session conducted by Medica Afghanistan



### Legal Aid Services

#### 1.1. Activities and Outcomes:

Medica Afghanistan's legal aid services include legal advice, legal representation and defense, and family mediation. During the last three months:

- 54 women accused of criminal offences were represented in the courts; of them 12 received a

reduction in sentence and 10 were released following investigation and subsequent court appearance.

- Medica Afghanistan lawyers represented 161 women in court, who needed legal defence. Of them, 33 were resolved in favour of the clients.

- 15 women who were victims in criminal cases were represented in court. Of them, 3 were represented at the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) department within the Prosecution Office. Of them, in 14 cases the court made its decision based on the provisions of EVAW Law and ordered punishment to perpetrators accordingly.
- 55 couples received mediation in domestic dispute cases and reached to an agreement.
- 341 women were offered professional advice on their legal predicaments.

Medica Afghanistan lawyers participated in talk shows at Ariana and Azadi Radio. They spoke about forced confession, the stance of Islam, Afghan constitution and other governing laws on forced confession, the behavior of police during search and arrest with Ariana Radio. They spoke about Medica Afghanistan's legal aid initiative to help Afghan women, with Azadi Radio. The lawyers also responded to questions raised by audience during the live broadcasts.

### 1.2. Client testimonies:

*"This is first time ever that someone cared about me and visited me."*

\*\*\*

*"You are like angels who rescued me."* (case: divorce due to harm)

### 1.3. Case Story One – legal aid:

Nadia is a 16-year-old primary school student. She also works at a tailoring shop to economically support her family. She lives in a respectable household with her five siblings. She was preyed on one day when she was going to the market to sell dress with her aunt, as usual. Her aunt let her know that she would be away for a while, and would come back. As Nadia was waiting for her aunt's return police arrested her. Unknowingly she was in a place where immoral activities were carried out.

Medica Afghanistan's defense lawyer was present during the registration of the case. She tried to convince the police of Nadia's innocence. Nadia goes to school and supports her family; her arrest would have negatively impacted her life and her family's. The defense lawyer contacted Nadia's family and asked them to pledge her innocence as soon as possible. She was released on bail.

Nadia was frightened because of the incident. Our social worker discussed with her family about how they should treat her until she can get back to normal state.

Our lawyer tried to convince the prosecutor that Nadia did not know where she was; she did not know her aunt's intent and that she belonged to a respectable family. The prosecution ended there and she was transferred to Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. After three discussion sessions with Juvenile Rehabilitation Center's prosecution members they released Nadia and closed the case.

Presently Nadia is living happily with her family. She goes to school again. Her response to Medica Afghanistan's support was: *"You gave me back my life!"*

#### 1.4. Case Story Two – Social Work:

Marjan is 25 years old girl. She decided to escape her home and go to Mazar; she could not take the increased domestic violence at home anymore. Her case was referred by zone seven of Kabul police to us. She was transferred to safe house and we started mediation. We were able to meet with her father and resolve the case before it would go further to the court.



Picture from one of our mediation sessions

## Psychosocial Services

### 2.1. Activities and Outcomes:

Psychosocial and Health Program psychologists and counselors met with 635 clients in Kabul, Herat and Mazar. The main psychological complaints of the clients were: hopelessness, feelings of guilt, unworthiness, sleep disturbance (oversleeping or insomnia), difficulty in concentration, fatigue and lack of energy, and loss of interest in social activities. They reported feelings of nervousness, stress, body pain and depression as a result of

different types of violence, economic problems they suffered from.

During the counseling sessions, the clients learned about: self- help, coping mechanisms for dealing with depression and trauma, ways to challenge negative thinking and ideas, using the available resources, techniques to stop worrying, improving self-image, and communication skills.

During the counseling sessions, our psychosocial counselors sought to empower the participants through conveying the above learning methods to them. As a result, most of the participants were able to resolve their minor family and life problems. They learnt the value of their lives. They learnt that having good relationship with others could be a big social support especially when they are in a situation where they need to share their feelings and pains with others. They learned that regular exercise could reduce their bodily and muscle pains.

As a result of psychosocial education, the clients became aware of their own psychological symptoms, their emotional and bodily reactions, and better ways of dealing with them. They were taught how to reduce their daily life stress through practicing problem solving methods and exercises.

### 2.2. Client testimonies:

*"I thought I was an inactive person; why am I even alive?  
After joining the psychosocial*

*counseling sessions, I decided to take care of myself and I feel better as I learned about my body, feelings and my available resources. I think I am a survival because I passed a hard time”.*

\*\*\*

*“I have learnt that one person’s grieving can be different from another person’s, although we might have similar problems. It was good to hear other women’s perspectives and to speak about my own experiences.”*

\*\*\*

*“After joining the counseling sessions I started to look at my life differently. I try to look at my life’s positive aspects. I try to learn from my mistakes. Now I am not ashamed of my mistakes and they can not affect my feelings.”*

### **2.3. Case Story One:**

Zahra, an 18-year-old unmarried girl visited maternity hospital to deliver her baby. After the operation, the doctors referred her for psychosocial counseling as she suffered fear and hopelessness. Since the beginning of her pregnancy, her mother was repeatedly asking about the father of the child. Each time Zahra would tell her mother that it was the result of her own father’s rape, but her mother would not accept it.

After police investigation it was found out that her father had actually raped Zahra. Her father was arrested and sentenced. Her mother and uncle planned to murder Zahra for disclosing the issue to police. As soon as Zahra learned about their plan she escaped to one of our counseling centers in a hospital. She was at risk, so we referred her to a shelter. Currently, she lives in a shelter and receives psychosocial counseling from us. After receiving several counseling sessions her psychosocial state is much improved now and gradually she is becoming hopeful for her life.



Picture from one of our individual psychosocial counseling sessions

### **2.4. Case Story Two:**

When Karima came to our counseling center in Kabul, she was full of hate against herself, her family, and her child, who was born when she was raped during the wartime. She said, “I hated the whole world and there was nobody who would help me with my problems.”

One of her friends recommended that she should visit one of our counseling centers. In counseling sessions this was the first time that she learned about her rights as a woman and a human being. She was explained how to deal with her emotions and helped to feel dignity despite her dreadful experience. “Individual and group sessions gave us the chance to share our pain and discuss our relationships with our children. Together we found strategies to live a positive life.” Karima said.

In the meantime, she has learned to accept her past and love her child, even if her memories of trauma re-surface again and again. “The counselor healed me inside. Today I live a different life. I have learnt to accept myself.”

\* All names in this newsletter have been changed.

## Advocacy and Awareness Raising

### 3.1. Activities and outcomes:

On the occasion of 25th November, the elimination of violence against women day, which also marks the first day of 16 days of activism campaign, Medica Afghanistan published a case [report](#) on (sexualized) gender-based violence against women in Afghanistan.

The case report included 80 stories of Afghan women and girls who were maimed, raped and murdered, mostly between 2010 and 2015. The case report also included expert opinion on the legal aspect, causes and psychological effects of (s)GBV on victims.

We widely shared the case report with individuals and organizations concerned with Afghan women’s issues, inside and outside Afghanistan.

On 10th December 2015 that marked the human rights day and end of 16 days of activism campaign, we published a [pamphlet](#). It included direct quotes from prominent Afghan men and civil society activists, who condemned violence against women and supported the empowerment of women. We shared the pamphlet with concerned citizens and Afghan women’s rights defenders.

Further, Medica Afghanistan represented civil society of Afghanistan in 16 days of campaign inauguration organized by Afghan Women’s Network, on 25 Nov 2015. Towards the end of the conference Afghan Women’s Network disseminated a press statement calling on National Unity Government and related bodies to take firm action on elimination of violence against women, protection and empowerment of women in Afghanistan.

### Security Challenges

Countrywide, in the last three months Afghanistan continued to suffer from ongoing terrorist attacks and suicide bombings by Taliban and loyalists of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), low profile crimes and political turmoil. ISIS claimed the beheading of seven innocent Afghan civilians in October. This caused uproar throughout the country. This and ongoing suicide bombings continued to

spread horror and as political analysts believe war and terrorism have changed in Afghanistan; anyone can be a target.

Insecurity has had a direct negative impact on our work and daily operations. We have been vigilant and anxious about the security of our staff especially ones who work in the field and have to travel in the city on daily basis. The security threats halt our normal fieldwork from time to time; sometimes we have to cancel and reschedule our direct services. Insecurity and political turmoil also have negative psychological on us; we have to work under a lot of mental stress.

One of our non-security challenges is with mediation process. Women and girls who stay in shelters are not allowed to be received by relatives other than their family members. Sometimes their families are not ready to welcome them back and these women and girls have to stay in the shelter for prolonged time.

### **Appreciation by Government and NGOs**

We value our relationship with all of our stakeholders. Below is a list of appreciation letters that our staff members have received from governmental and nongovernmental organizations for their effective work and collaboration with these bodies, in 2015:

- ❖ Herat Prison officials presented appreciation letter to Medica Afghanistan lawyers
- ❖ Appreciation letter from Herat Juvenile Rehabilitation Center

- ❖ Herat Hospital burn unit presented an appreciation letter to one of our psychosocial counselors
- ❖ Herat Department of Justice presented an appreciation letter to one of our lawyers
- ❖ Herat Women's Movement presented an appreciation letter to one of our lawyers
- ❖ UNHCR Office presented an appreciation letter to one of our lawyers in Herat
- ❖ Elimination of Violence Against Women Department presented an appreciation letter to our legal aid team in Kabul
- ❖ Appreciation letter from Chief of the Criminal Court to our legal aid team in Mazar
- ❖ Appreciation letter from the Directorate of Legal Services to our legal aid team in Mazar
- ❖ Appreciation letter from Legal Department of Ministry of Justice to our LAP team in Kabul