

An Overview of Medica Afghanistan's Work

July – September 2016 Newsletter

Working in Favor of Our Clients

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 survivors of Sexualized and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) and advocacy initiatives for promotion of gender equity. We provide these services in Herat, Kabul and Mazar e Sharif provinces.

Between July and September we helped 547 with their legal and domestic conflict issues and 487 clients with their mental health issues. We continued empowering women through literacy education, awareness about basic rights and healthcare.

Helping Women and Girls to Access Justice

A large number of women were empowered by receiving legal representation and legal advice through Medica Afghanistan's Legal Aid Program. The women gained the ability to guide other disadvantaged women and girls to solve their legal problems through referring them to our mediation center. In addition, some of the women and girls who had economic problems were referred to other organizations for securing an employment. One of our clients who was employed by the Ministry of Interior (Mol), supported our three other clients with their job search. As a result, they were employed at Mol as well.

Case Story

Azita is a 35-year-old mother of two. Twenty years ago, her parents forced her to marry her cousin. Her husband was addicted to drugs. Whenever he could not afford to supply drugs, he would sell the house items. When Azita would try to prevent him, he would beat and imprison her at home with the two children.

The situation became unbearable for Azita. She sought Medica Afghanistan's support. She suffered from insomnia and excessive stress. Our social worker introduced her to our colleagues at our Psychosocial and Health Program. As a result of the counseling, her psychological status improved. Our defense lawyer offered legal advice to Azita and her husband based on Sharia Law and EAW Law. Further, Azita's husband was made aware of the consequences of using violence.

Our social worker referred Azita's husband to hospital for addiction treatment. After two months of treatment his health condition became better. Through mediation Azita and her husband reached an agreement. She re-integrated with her family.

Before, due to family conflict, Azita's children were deprived of education. Medica Afghanistan's social worker helped her with re-enrolling her children to school.

Azita and her husband said that they were thankful of Medica Afghanistan's staff. *"They are honest women. They work hard to prevent the disintegration of families. We are grateful to have such women in our country,"* said Azita.

Offering Psychosocial Health Support to Survivors of SGBV

The Psychosocial and Health Program of Medica Afghanistan offers support to women and girls who suffer from mental health problems as a result of trauma and every day violence. Our counseling centers are located in Women Garden, in MOWA, three prisons, three shelters and in four governmental hospitals. There, our counselors jointly work with the medical doctors to offer counseling for female patients who suffer from psychosomatic symptoms as a result of trauma.

Statement of a Client

My sister is suffering from domestic violence for three consecutive years. Last week, her husband brutally beat her and broke her hand. I will share with her the legal information I received from Medica Afghanistan. I will encourage my sister to file a complaint with the EVAW department.

Statement of a Client From Our Literacy Education Project

“Before joining the literacy class, I didn’t know about women’s rights in Islam. My husband had a destructive behavior towards my children and I. I decided to become separate from him. However, I was concerned about the future of my children. Then, through some awareness raising sessions in our literacy class, I learned about women’s rights and I was able to talk with a defense lawyer. The defense lawyer invited my husband and I to the mediation center. The lawyer informed my husband about violence and its consequences. A social worker spoke with us in different sessions. By the end of the mediation, my husband’s negative behavior changed. I am happy now.” Medica Afghanistan’ client

Advocacy for Elimination of Violence Against Women

Position Paper on Bifurcation of the EVAW Decree and Incorporation into the Penal Code: Inclusion of EVAW Law in the parliamentary agenda for debate – as was raised earlier this year – would have negative consequences. It was also decided that the preventive and punitive parts of EVAW decree would be separated and only the latter would be incorporated into the Penal Code. We took a [stand against this decision](#). We demanded that EVAW Law should be protected as a standalone law, but to read in conjunction with the panel code. We advocated with government judicial institutes such as Criminal Law Reform Working Group (CRLWG) of Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to include a provision in to the Penal code, which makes reference to the standalone EVAW Law. Our position paper caught the attention of actors in the government and non-governmental sector. As a result of the position paper and other civil society allies’ push, EVAW Law was dropped from the parliament agenda and now has become part of MOJ agenda for discussion.

Medica Afghanistan’s Suggested Amendments to Criminal Procedure Code: As a member of Criminal Law Reform Working Group (CRLWG), we contributed to the reform process of Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). We suggested amendments to CPC to make it gender sensitive.

As well we offered an analysis of the EAW Law punitive articles that have been integrated into the CPC. The amendments we suggested adopt best practice legislation and reflect the ground realities that our lawyers confront in courts on daily basis. They are a response to where the law has failed in the last five years, what should be changed and why. Indeed, for each article we amended, we asked ourselves if the law could be better for victims of violence, what would it say. Hence, the amendments are to help us better help our clients better and serve real justice for the victims.

We have presented the following amendments to the Criminal Law Reform Working Group (CRLWG), to our donors, UNAMA, AIBA and civil society.

We rely on the goodwill of CRLWG, donors and UN agencies, and civil society to consider and adopt our amendments. This is a small yet valuable step towards protection of Afghan women from violence. We have received a positive response from UNAMA second Vice President, Mr. Sarwar Danish and EU on considering our amendments while reviewing the panel code final draft. Medica Afghanistan's Advocacy in respect of CPC is ongoing.

1. [Suggested Amendments to CPC - EAW Articles](#)
2. [Suggested Amendments to CPC - General Articles](#)
3. [Suggested Amendments to CPC - Sexual Violence Related Articles](#)

Skills to Help Traumatized Women

Besides offering direct legal services to clients, we have created a legal aid fellowship program through which we train the recent Law and Sharia graduates. We help them gain practical experience in legal aid. Through this program we intend to multiply the impact of our services and increase our outreach of legal services to remote areas of Afghanistan. Currently six legal fellows are practicing defense work in Medica Afghanistan office and through coaching by our defense lawyers they received the defense lawyer license from (Afghanistan Independent Bar Association) AIBA.

We also established psychosocial fellowship program to offer in-depth training and help the newly graduates of the Psychology Faculty gain hands-on counseling skills. The program helps with expanding our reach and serving more clients. Four female interns received training on counseling skills in individual and group settings.

In the first four months they started practical work followed by field visits while being accompanied by experienced counselors.

"I was so disappointed and thought that after graduation I would not be able to work in my own field, but now I am very happy for learning and working in the field I studied for four years."
Medica Afghanistan intern

Media Interviews

Humaira Ameer Rasuli, Executive Director of Medica Afghanistan traveled to Berlin along with their German counterparts to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of sexualized wartime violence survivors. They met with the Human Rights Commissioner, Bärbel Kofler, the Foreign

Office and Germany's members of parliament. The delegation called on the German government to provide long-term support for survivors and protect women's rights defenders.

Humaira addressed the lack of determined and sustainable action for protection of women's rights in Afghanistan. She insisted that the German government should maintain a firm tone in consultation and negotiations with the Afghan government and press on respect for women's rights. She also expressed concern over the lack of support for women's rights defenders in Afghanistan. "It is absolutely essential to guarantee protection for women's rights defenders," she said.

During this trip Humaira also met with German Foreign Office; Mrs. Karin Goebel, Head of Division OR06: Human Rights and Gender Issues; Mrs. Yasemin Pamuk, Desk Officer at Division OR06: Human Rights and Gender Issues; Anja Kersten, Desk Officer in the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Policy.

Read more: [Berlin: medica mondiale calls for protection and support for women's rights defenders](#), medica mondiale, 04 October 2016

One of our psychologists spoke to Associated Press about the psychosocial counseling services we offer to women who suffer from mental health issues. In a particular case, a client who was diagnosed by her family to have been possessed by *jinn* received psychosocial support from us and her mental health improved drastically.

Read more: [After years of war, Afghans wary to talk of mental health](#), Associated Press, 18 August 2016

Medica Afghanistan was interviewed by Hasht e subh Daily about the underlying causes of suicide in Afghanistan. We mentioned that there are a variety of reasons; some complicated that lead to suicide among Afghans. They are poverty, lack of access to resources, lack of employment, chronic depression, domestic and sexual violence, to name a few. A higher number of women compared to men attempt suicide, however, oftentimes men succeed in their attempts while women don't.

Read more: [The suicide rate has increased in Afghanistan](#), Hasht e subh Daily, 22 August 2016

Appreciation

Medica Afghanistan's Mazar regional office staff received appreciation letter from Shia Ulema Council of Balkh Province in recognition of their tireless efforts in resolving domestic conflict and problems.

Our Mazar regional office received an appreciation letter from Hajj Department of Balkh for the implementation of training programs in relation to marriage registration, underage marriages and their social and psychosocial impact on women and families.

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