

Your Excellency Madame Chair, distinguished delegates, friends, and colleagues, it is an honour to speak on the impact of Covid-19 on the world drug problem. My name is Regina Mattsson and I represent WFAD, an umbrella organisation of NGOs and individuals from across the globe who are united behind the Conventions being celebrated this year. With over 300 member organisations in almost 60 countries, our aim is to strengthen prevention, increase access to treatment, and to promote recovery.

In March 2016, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs declared its commitment to advancing gender sensitive policies, and thus released an issue on women and drugs in the World Drug Report (2 years later). The report showed clear facts: women face more stigmatisation, experience more violence, and are less likely to receive treatment than their male counterparts. The list goes on.

When we met in Vienna last year, right before the world went on lockdown, we organised a side-event about the need to break down barriers that women face in accessing relevant interventions. Our mission remains clear, and in the context of the pandemic, this mission is even more urgent than before.

We have long known that crises exacerbate gender disparities and disproportionately affect women's health, and COVID-19 is no exception.

As the pandemic continues to rage unabated, a 'Shadow pandemic' of violence against women and children has emerged. And while alcohol, drug use and violence are all increasing, health care services, civil society, and emergency units are reaching their breaking points.

In the background of this Shadow pandemic stand all those women who are suffering from violence, many of them simultaneously experiencing - and battling - addiction. Yet despite the crisis and urgent needs posed by the pandemic - **and the resultant increasing** rates of violence and addiction, women **still face** tremendous barriers and stigmatisation hindering access to needed services, including that of treatment and recovery.

As made clear in the World Drug Report 2018, violence is a contributing factor to substance use. Childhood adversity, abuse and/or sexual assaults in childhood or adulthood are all common denominators among women who use drugs.

To support women, children, and youth in our field - and to prevent large groups from developing addiction as a consequence of the violence brought about by Covid-19, it is imperative that we address both problems in a comprehensive way, focusing not only on the determinants of addiction, but also on **those** of violence.

I would like to end by reiterating the importance of prevention and your obligation to protect children as stipulated in the Convention of the rights of the child. And the need to break the barriers that hinder women from accessing **and adhering to** addiction services, while highlighting the **urgency** to offer **gender sensitive, trauma informed, interventions**.

Distinguished delegates, I ask you to fulfil your commitment to advancing gender sensitive policies in all areas - and on this Anniversary of the 1961 and 1971 Conventions, I ask you to fulfil your obligations to these conventions while integrating the articles of the CRC and CEDAW in your strategies. Thank you for your time.

