

## **Vulnerability of Women who Use Drugs During COVID-19 Outbreak**

I am Ananda Maudy, a woman who use drugs leader working with Action for Justice (AKSI Keadilan Indonesia), a community-based organisation that provides paralegal support to persons that come into contact with law enforcement for drug-related charges. I speak to you today on behalf of my community of women who use drugs.

We have seen an increase in domestic violence because of the physical distancing and stay at home policies during this pandemic. So, for women who use drugs, violence has increased both at home and in the streets.

COVID restrictions have also made it more challenging for women who use drugs to get drugs. This is caused by financial problems that many women are facing during the pandemic (for example they're lose their income like many other people in the world), combined with restricted mobility policies. Transgender women who use drugs face even greater challenges: they are unable to work, and many cannot access basic government food support because they do not have identity documents.

Women are also experiencing difficulties in accessing essential health services, because health providers restrict the number of daily patient visits. Health workers only prioritize emergency cases, and for them women who use drugs are definitely not on their priority list.

This situation and the uncertainty have affected our community's mental health. Women who use drugs became more stressed, more desperate, and more vulnerable to turn to sex work to fulfil their need for basic necessities and for drugs. The easiest way is for them to exchange sex with the drug dealer for drugs. In the absence of economic support, some women end up trafficking or dealing drugs. Even if women are fully aware that they're the victims, they are placed in situations where their economic independence and agency to act safely are taken away. Not only are women who use drugs the victims of their abusive relationship with the drug dealers, police, and partners, but now they also became victims of a government unprepared for dealing with this pandemic and protecting its most vulnerable citizens.

As my closing statement, I would like to encourage all the people in the world especially women who are facing many problems during this pandemic to help each other. Our little help might be a greatest gift for the people that we helped. Also, I would like to ask all women wherever you are to speak up, the more women speak, the more people will know about the challenges we face and the greater the opportunity to achieve gender equality.