



# NGO gives mental health support to victims of sexual violence

SAGIP Babae Foundation, a Philippine-based non-government organization (NGO), will grant aid and relief to Filipino women who have suffered from domestic violence, sexual harassment, or sexual abuse.

“We are here to make women realize their true value, and getting back on their feet is one of our main goals for them,” said Francesca Fugen, co-founder of Sagip Babae Foundation, at the NGO’s July 29 launch.

Its Facebook community will hold webinars and bi-monthly group sessions, and offer self-care strategies, well-being and holistic healing education.

Aside from matching beneficiaries to the appropriate partner experts, the foundation will also shoulder all expenses for therapy and medication within a woman’s first month of participation, as well as half of the costs in the second and third months.

“We would like to be able to provide a safe space or shelter for women who are affected, but as of right now, we just have a physical office that is located in Las Piñas. It’s small, so we cannot house anyone or use it as a shelter yet,” said Ms. Fugen.

Jun Angelo “AJ” Sunlao, a psychologist and mental health advocate,

and Charlene R. Lucas, a psychologist and international clinical traumaologist, will serve as the group’s in-house experts.

The foundation, which operates mainly online, plans to expand its advocacy to minors in the future. However, technicalities and legalities that require involvement of social workers from the government and even parental consent complicate matters.

“We can start with women aged 18 and above. We can’t help everyone yet. As of right now, we would like to be able to get our foothold,” said Ms. Fugen.

Around 25% of Filipino adults cite violence against women as a pressing problem during the pandemic, according to a Social Weather Stations survey released by the Commission of Population and Development in March 2021.

The foundation will reach out to these women and offer resources for safeguarding their mental health, Sagip Babae Foundation said in a statement.

To sustain operations long-term, the group is accepting pledges, whether through monetary donations, raising awareness for the cause, or joining as a volunteer. — **Brontë H. Lacsamana**

OPINION

## Preparing for monkeypox

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently declared the escalating global monkeypox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

According to the WHO, there are now more than 19,000 reported cases from 78 countries and territories.

On July 29, the Department of Health (DoH) reported the first case of monkeypox in the country — a 31-year-old Filipino citizen who returned from abroad on July 19.

Currently, the vast majority of reported cases are in the WHO European Region, mainly but not exclusively among men who have sex with men (MSM)

seeking care in primary care and sexual health clinics. Data showed that children can also be at risk for monkeypox if they have close contact with a person who has symptoms. They are also more prone to severe disease compared with adolescents and adults.

The WHO said that a high proportion of cases have been reported from countries without previously documented monkeypox cases. Countries

such as Singapore, Thailand and Japan have also reported their confirmed cases.

A PHEIC is “an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other [countries] through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response.” This definition implies a situation that is serious, sudden, unusual or unexpected; carries implications for public health beyond the affected state’s national border; and may require immediate international action.

The DoH has been preparing for the monkeypox virus since this May, when countries started reporting an uptick in cases. These preparations are aligned with the WHO’s list of temporary recommendations which include aggressive information, communication, and educational campaigns about the disease in coordination with other relevant government offices and private partners.

DoH officer-in-charge Dr. Maria Rosario Singh-Vergeire reported that health experts have been holding online town halls and meetings

with healthcare workers, regional health offices, and local health officials in the past weeks to inform and help them detect and stop the virus from spreading.

Avoiding contact with symptomatic individuals, practicing good hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and using personal protective equipment (PPE) when caring for patients can help prevent monkeypox infection.

According to the WHO, monkeypox is a viral disease with symptoms similar to those seen in the past in smallpox. Smallpox is an acute contagious disease which was one of the most devastating diseases and caused millions of deaths until it was eradicated.

It added that the smallpox vaccine developed by Edward Jenner in 1796 was the first successful vaccine for the disease. In 1980, the WHO declared smallpox eradicated.

The WHO said that a vaccine was recently approved for preventing monkeypox with some countries recommending vaccination for persons at risk. It added that many years of research and development have led to the avail-

ability of newer and safer vaccines for smallpox, which may also be useful for the prevention of monkeypox. Past data from Africa suggests that smallpox vaccine is at least 85% effective in preventing monkeypox.

Experts believe that vaccination after a monkeypox exposure may help prevent the disease or make it less severe. People who are at risk such as those who have been close contacts of a person with monkeypox should be considered for vaccination.

As for the treatment, the European Medicines Agency approved an antiviral that was developed to treat smallpox as a medicine for monkeypox.

A number of biopharmaceutical companies have started research for a monkeypox vaccine. Moderna, for example, announced that it is investigating potential monkeypox vaccines at a preclinical level.

Meanwhile, Roche announced that it has developed a new suite of tests that detect the monkeypox virus and aid in following its epidemiologic spread. Abbott Laboratories also disclosed that it is actively developing a test for monkeypox.

The Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP) is monitoring global cases, as well as the government’s directives and response plan to the monkeypox threat. As what is being done in the current pandemic, PHAP is working with the DoH and other agencies in securing possible diagnostics, vaccines and treatments while promoting awareness about the disease.

Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic could also help the country prepare for monkeypox and other future health threats. Among these important lessons are the pursuit of public-private partnerships, biopharmaceutical innovation, regulatory flexibilities, and vaccination confidence.

**MEDICINE CABINET**  
**TEODORO B. PADILLA**

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), which represents the biopharmaceutical medicines and vaccines industry in the country. Its members are at the forefront of research and development efforts for COVID-19 and other diseases that affect Filipinos.



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