Session 1: STI Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic (9:45-11:00)

Kirthi Jayakumar on behalf of Saahas

COVID-19 is much like any other emergency and has proven to be a major enabling environment for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Evidenced by massive spikes in the number of calls to helplines world over, this phenomenon became apparent within a few days of implementing national lockdowns: buttressed by the exclusion of support services for survivors from the scope of "essential services." Having worked as a SGBV liaison and consultant on ground in India, I have three key lessons to share from my work during the pandemic as a frontline worker to support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. ***One,*** tech holds tremendous promise for the proliferation of aid and support for survivors of SGBV. By verifying and making functional helplines available via a mobile and web-based app, a chatbot for Facebook and Telegram, and via a web-based app, the iteration of relying on friends and family and repeatedly having to narrate one's story was set aside and help was accessible more quickly. ***Two,*** the power of community cannot be underestimated. Following bystander intervention trainings, resident associations came together to create unique approaches to identify and support survivors from among their circles on a priority basis. ***Three***, a combination of tech-based support around reporting and accessing resources can go a long way in supporting survivors in times of emergency, particularly when it is not safe for them to leave their homes even if they want to leave their homes. Gendering technology also means that it must be made accessible, comprehensible, and designed in ways that are friendly to the trauma of a survivor. For stakeholders that have the position, funding, and power to implement this, I earnestly implore investing, deploying, and implementing feminist and peace tech solutions to support survivors of gender-based violence in reportage and accessing support and help.