

# An Approach to Violence Against Women

## Un Acercamiento a la Violencia Contra la Mujer

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### Abstract

Violence against women seen from a reflexive position, specifying their different edges and factors involved, a phenomenon that is dynamized in a complex way through the social and cultural constructs of inequality towards women. The article aims the approach to the factors associated with violence against women, from a gender perspective, exploring the effects that they have on women's health. Little progress has been made in the implementation of law 1257 of 2008, and there have been serious difficulties that minimize the different expressions of violence. The structuring of programs is needed to achieve gender equality standards, better opportunities for women's self-realization, and a strong legal framework that defends and reinstates the rights of victims.

**Keywords:** Violence against women; intimate partner violence; health; disease burden; social tolerance; prevention and intervention.

### Resumen

La violencia contra la mujer vista desde una postura reflexiva, precisando sus diferentes aristas y factores involucrados, un fenómeno que se dinamiza de forma compleja a través de los constructos sociales y culturales de inequidad hacia las mujeres. El artículo tiene como objetivo el acercamiento a los factores asociados a la violencia contra la mujer, desde una perspectiva de género, explorando los efectos que desencadenan en la salud de las mujeres; se describen pocos avances en la implementación de la ley 1257 de 2008, y serias dificultades que minimizan las diferentes expresiones de violencia. Es necesaria la estructuración de programas para lograr normas equitativas en materia de género, mejores oportunidades para la autorealización de las mujeres, y un marco legal sólido que defienda y restablezca los derechos de las víctimas.

**Palabras Clave:** Violencia contra la mujer; violencia por parte de pareja; carga de enfermedad; tolerancia social; prevención e intervención.

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## Introduction

Undoubtedly, women have been linked to the labor, political and social spheres, declaring their autonomy and building new styles of self-realization, however, and unfortunately, violence continues to frighten women's daily lives with fear and frustration. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013, p.2) approximately 35% of women globally, at some point in their lives have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner or somebody else. 30% of all women who have established a relationship have received physical and/or sexual violence by their partner and in some parts of the world this data can reach up to 38%, and even most alarmingly, 38% of all female homicides are due to violence by their partner.

Violence towards women continues to be a subject of study. It is sought to understand the factors associated with this complex phenomenon, to have theoretical notions that allow the development of strategies for its prevention and intervention. The findings show that violence against women is a problem composed of several aspects, in which cultural constructs have a strong influence, through the control of actions, emotions and the body of women, triggering subordination and mistreatment by men.

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, it is defined as:

*“any act of violence based on belonging to the female sex which has or may result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether they occur in public life or in private life. “ (United Nations, 1993, p. 2).*

## A theoretical view of violence

Galtung, who is one of the pioneers in social studies for peace, recognizes human nature through a triad of elements: peace-violence-humanity. According to conflict theory, he argues that those elements emerge constantly in the history of mankind, and can be transformed into violence or metaconflicts, which is related by the categorical dehumanization. Within the approaches, he exposes the presence of levels of human interactions, and describes the complexity of individual cognitions and emotions to the networks that human beings establish, describing in levels: micro (the person), meso (the group), macro (society, state, nation) and mega (the region, civilization). For Galtung, violence is the “avoidable affront to human needs”, and has three dimensions, direct, structural and cultural violence. Direct violence is one that is manifest, is visible, is revealed as physical, verbal or psychological violence; Structural violence is related to the intrinsic actions of the social, political and economic systems that govern societies, nations, and the world; And cultural violence is associated with the attributes that are part of the culture and symbolism that accompanies the experience, which includes religion, art, science, language, among others, used to legitimize direct or structural violence (Calderón, 2009). As regards violence against women, it is argued that this type of violence has a complex dynamic, supported by inequalities and expressions of discrimination in relation to gender, in association with the patriarchal culture (Presidential Counseling for Equity of Women, 2015).

Maintaining that social construction around the roles of women and men in society of generational transmission is part of the factors that engender and maintain actions of domination and mistreatment towards women. De Keijzer (2003) reaffirms this by stating that from birth, culture implants beliefs and patterns for women and men, generating pressures and limits in relation to their sex, which are reinforced by the hegemo-

nic model of masculinity, in which the male is represented as “An essentially dominant being that serves to discriminate and subordinate women and other men who do not adapt to this model” (De Keijzer, 2003, p.2).

Similarly De Keijzer argues that this hegemonic model of masculinity generates pressures towards men in the manifestation of their emotions, especially in fear, sadness, and even tenderness, affecting their emotional intelligence. These pressures lead to problems of violence and addictions, which impact on their relationships and the financial life of their families (De Keijzer, 2003, p7). It is thus established that violence against women is created as an element of control, domination, and submission to the relationship of inequality, established by the precepts with respect to male superiority, which is part of the patriarchy and can be aggravated by social status, ethnicity, age, among other factors. (Freitas, 2016).

According to the Integrated Feminist Ecological Model, the approach is multicausal, considering the phenomenon of violence against women as the product of the interaction of various factors at different levels that incorporate the analysis of the aspects of victims and aggressors. In addition of the contexts in which violent events occur, it argues that violence against women arises in the interaction between individual experiences and their closest relationships, the social and economic environment, and the cultural environments in which events occur. Violence, (United Nations Fund and Spain, 2010, p.40) approaches that are intertwined with Galtung’s theory of violence.

### **Developing data**

Unfortunately, violence against women and girls occurs around the world and in many ways, including forced marriages, honor killings, female genital mutilation, trafficking and sexual harassment, as well as intimidation, harassment and cyber stalking (Menengage, 2014, p.34).

Violence against women has become a public health and human rights concern, most of which is violence perpetrated by their partner (WHO, 2013, p.2). The results of the National Survey of Demography and Health (ENDS, in Spanish) Colombia 2015 reveal data on the forms of violence against women by their partners, 64.1% from psychological violence, 31.9% have been physically assaulted, 31.1% have been victims of economic violence, and 7.6% report events of sexual violence; (4.5% reported having been sexually abused and 17.9% were sexually harassed) (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Profamilia, 2016, p.80).

Even a study of 10,000 men from different populations in six Asian and Pacific countries confirms the high rates of marital violence, so that between 26% in rural Indonesia and 80% in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, the men reported that they had used physical or sexual violence against a female partner, and nearly a quarter of those interviewed reported having raped a woman or a girl (Fulu, E., et al., 2013).

### **Impact on Women’s Health**

There is evidence that violence significantly impairs women’s health, Schraiber et al. (Costa et al., 2016) argues that violence against women tends to be severe and repeated, with effects on women’s physical, psychological and reproductive health, which may persist even after violence has stopped.

The findings of different studies reveal the appearance of different symptoms and diseases associated with violence, including acute pelvic inflammation, anxiety symptoms, low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, preterm birth and low birth weight (Rodríguez, Márquez and Kageyama, 2005). Sleep disorders such as insomnia, increased number of diseases and use of more medications, feelings of insecurity and perceptions of poor social support have also been found (Matud, 2004), as well as physical injuries, unwanted pregnancies, induced abortions, sexually transmitted

infections including HIV, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, harmful use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco, and even death, coupled with high economic impact in countries, due to the costs in health, social and legal services, in addition to lost income (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013, page 4).

In relation to ENDS 2010, the results of ENDS 2015 show an apparent decrease in the consequences of violence in women surveyed between 15 and 49 years; however, both physical and psychological effects are the most emerging (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Profamilia, 2016, 81).

Violence against women also has a negative impact on the family group, affecting the abilities of parents in terms of childrearing patterns and their achievements in education and work. On the other hand, sons and daughters of households experiencing violence may experience higher rates of mental and behavioral problems, a greater tendency to drop out school early, juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy, and may even affect their health due to the depressive and post-traumatic stress symptoms of abused mothers and their

impaired ability to form bonds and to exercise motherhood (World Health Organization, 2011, p.5), effects that impact and trigger violent dynamics that are propagated to new interactions and relationships.

Results from a study in Australia reported that partner violence in women of all ages caused 2.9% of the total burden of illness and injury, and in women between the ages of 18 and 44 years, it was associated with 7.9% of the global burden of morbidity, representing a more notable health risk than risk factors such as hypertension, smoking, and excess weight (Vos et al., 2006, p.743).

Tolerance of violence against women In spite of the various studies on the effects of violence against women (Meekers, Pallin, and Hutchinson (2013); Humphreys and Thiara, (2003); Adams (2012)) it is tended to naturalize their manifestations and minimize their implications, causing a considerable underestimation of the damage caused, especially in health. Violence is present in the lives of many women, in their interactions, relationships and in their families- it is a complex phenomenon that requires timely

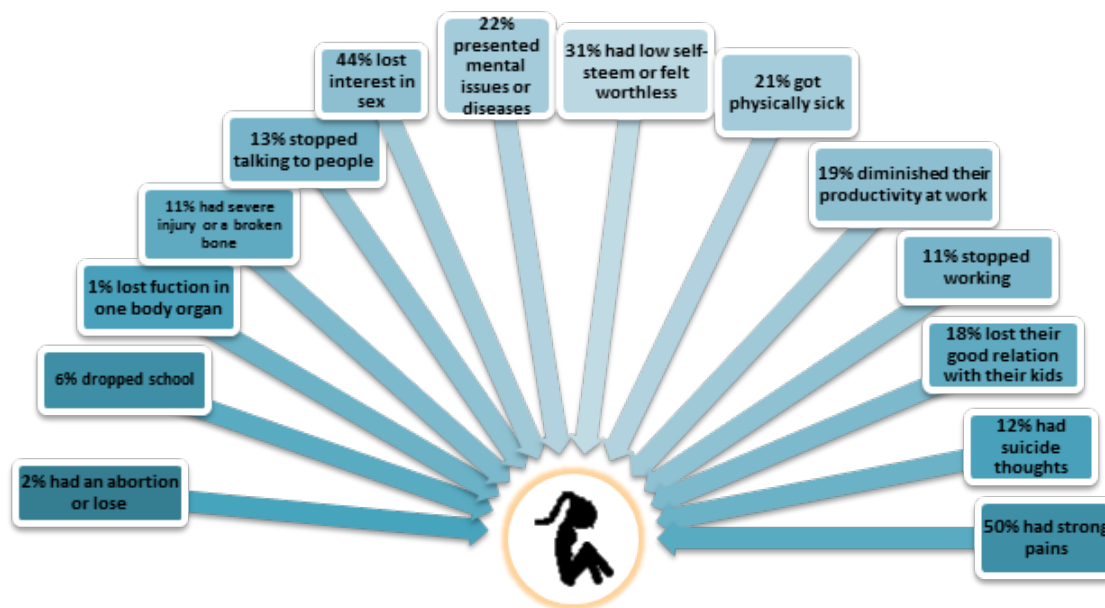


Figure 1. Effect of violence in women from 15 to 49 years  
 Source: Own elaboration. This information is taken from the National Demographic and Health Survey 2015 (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Profamilia, 2016).

intervention, from different spheres and areas that desist from normalizing, minimizing and approving it.

The first study of social and institutional tolerance towards gender violence in Colombia identified imaginaries, practices, and attitudes in the homes and institutions of care for victims of gender-based violence. The results showed that institutions from the staff in charge justify violence against women for reasons of discipline, because of the idea that men attack women because they “have to be respected and demonstrate their authority at home”. Perceptions of women’s enjoyment of violence and minimization of reported violent events are maintained. Even women who reported violent acts did not receive enough information, regarding criminal procedure and their rights, nor they received psychosocial care and/or protection. (United Nations Fund and Spain, 2010, p.153).

Data showed that the processes of care and institutions in charge are part of the barriers to the denunciation and enforceability of their rights, which can lead to women’s lack of interest in formalizing complaints, as well as abandoning initiated processes, thus perpetuating their experiences of violence and fueling their vulnerability and perception of scarce social support.

In the second measure of social and institutional tolerance of violence against women, various barriers of attention were identified in the institutions, the decision to reconcile, as in the first study, the official’s indifference to the case reported, the counter-referral to another area or entity, the request for evidence of the violence event, and even the acceptance of officials not to have the tools to offer care and assistance to the victim. It is exposed that the entity delegated to the women the delivery of the summons to the aggressor, which produce dissatisfaction on the part of the victims for the lack of privacy of their identity and their situation (Presidential Counseling for the Equity of Women, UN Women, 2015,

p.222), that is to say, a further violation of their rights, in addition to the risks to new violence events that they face, generating frustration and little trust in institutions.

In the area of justice, regarding revisions to the implementation of Law 1257 of 2008, which includes measures to guarantee the right of women to live free of violence in both public and private spaces, no significant impact was found in the increase of criminal investigations on aggravated and/or penalized crimes. It was also reported that the procedural status of investigations shows between 80% and 90% of cases in impunity, few criminal investigations in which they are applied the aggravating of crimes or penalties according to the law (Table to the right of the women to a life free of violence, 2012, p.13).

### **Specific interventions**

For all this, the phenomenon of violence against women requires serious interventions, focused on processes that motivate changes from a deeper and specific perspective, according to the social and cultural conditions of the region that can be intervened, recognizing the phenomenon of violence – violence in which we are all immersed, so it is necessary to address different areas of action.

The WHO (2013, p.6) stresses the importance of involving prevention and response to different sectors of society, including the health sector, social services, education, local administrations, criminal justice, and the media, that allow to influence the associated factors.

Similarly, the intervention raises the different levels and risk factors associated with violence, so it recommends the implementation of programs to prevent child maltreatment by developing parenting skills in parenting; in the relational sphere, the development of programs aimed at men, young people and children in the promotion of

gender equality to reduce men's control attitudes towards women, programs that must cover the community sphere, structuring equitable norms on reduction of access to alcohol, as well as the need for a legal policy and program framework to prevent violence against women and provide them with job opportunities, education and access to microcredit (World Health Organization , 2013, p.6).

However, it is necessary to develop actions that surpass the assistance attention, promoting the construction of relationships in the daily life: from the guidelines that are offered to children in front of their gender roles, promoting new masculinities loaded with tenderness and bonding of them, to domestic spaces, opening spaces for social and political participation for women. Plus, timely attention and defense of the rights of women victims of violence in accordance with the existing legal framework, with trained personnel who would be able to prevent further injuries in women and offer the accompaniment to their reality, effects and future decision making.

## Conclusions

Social and cultural constructions based on patriarchy that offer a superior place to man, and obedience on the part of the woman, as well as the established gender roles that generate imbalance and inequality of opportunities especially for women, are considered highly influential factors in violence against women. Although women have made progress in their economic, labor and even reproductive independence, the figures show the presence of violence as a measure of control and domination by men.

Despite the theoretical notions about violence, and specifically in the phenomenon against women, prevention and intervention actions are needed to create strategies directed to these factors, with processes directed to different levels and areas that are immersed in the problem of violence in order to achieve significant reductions.

As for the intervention, it is necessary to implement the legal framework for the care and stabilization of victims, with the purpose of minimizing vulnerability conditions and the presence of alterations of physical and/or mental health, in the face of somatic or psychological manifestation. It is fundamental to offer health services in a timely and quality way, in order to promote and guarantee their well-being.

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