



Sixty-five thousand women are murdered in the world every year. Twelve women die daily in Latin America and the Caribbean. A woman dies at the hands of her partner or ex-partner in Colombia every two-and-a-half days; a woman is killed in Argentina every 30 hours, and in Mexico, suspected homicides of women number six per day.

WOMEN AT RISK OF EXTREME VIOLENCE

Beatriz Londoño, professor at the Faculty of Jurisprudence of the Universidad del Rosario, provides a stark outline of the violence to which women are subjected.

The numbers are chilling: every year, 65,000 women worldwide are murdered just for being women.

The statistics are horrifying in Latin America and the Caribbean: 12 women die daily for the same reason. In Colombia alone, every two-and-a-half days a woman dies at the hand of her partner or her ex; in Argentina a woman is killed every 30 hours; and in Mexico suspected homicides of women number six per day.

The world is witness to constant aberrant and inhuman acts of homage to the cult of machismo, such as in Mecca, where police preferred to see young girls burn to death rather than let them emerge from their burning school and be seen naked (i.e. without burkas) by male spectators of the fire. There are, for example, cases of human trafficking, a booming business, especially in girls under 12 years of age. Or using women as the spoils of war. Or the cases of women's faces and bodies attacked with acid to disfigure them and make them undesirable and "useless" in the eyes of men. And there are also the "well-off boys" who decide one day to stop the car and pick up a young girl—the incarnation of innocence—to rape, torture, and murder

her. Then, of course, the men who consider their wives' and daughters' bodies to be their property. The list is long and universal.

WOMAN: A CONSUMER PRODUCT

Women are treated like any other consumer product, as marketable goods, so much so that today they must even "go on the market" with labels and manuals, ready for any contingency. "Handle with care, delicate, vulnerable, sensitive product" should be tattooed on their bodies to avoid them suffering sexist affronts for the simple reason of being a woman.

Relevant procedures are, in fact, available on internet, while a first-aid guide for female victims of acid and other chemical

attacks is soon to be published (written by Natalia Ponce de León, Beatriz Londoño, Juanita Ospina, and others, and financed by El Rosario's External Support Fund.

One such guide already exists, the purpose of which is to provide information on the rights of those victims of attacks with chemical agents who, by the way, do not refer to themselves as victims but as survivors. It is called The Rights of Victims -Survivors- of Chemical Attacks, and is the work of the Natalia Ponce de León Foundation, the Public Action Group, and the Legal Consultancy of the Universidad del Rosario.

Crimes of male power and domination are known as femicide, and are committed by

CRIMES OF MASCULINE POWER AND DOMINATION ARE KNOWN AS FEMICIDE, COMMITTED BY MEN AGAINST WOMEN JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN

The world is witness, inexplicably, to constant aberrant and inhuman acts against women, such as the "well-off boys" who decide one day to stop the car and pick up a young girl—the incarnation of innocence—to rape, torture, and murder her.



men against women just because they are women. Any reasonably-aware human being might expect these kinds of atrocities to be abating. But they are not. Their rising frequency is shown by the studies of fortunately increasingly-detailed research carried out by individuals and entities in numerous countries.

VIOLENCE CANNOT BE CONCILIATED

Beatriz Londoño Toro, professor and member of the Human Rights Research Group at the Universidad del Rosario, is the academic editor of the book *The Role of Judges against Intimate Partner Violence in Colombia, 2005-2009* [El papel de los jueces contra la violencia de pareja en Colombia, 2005-2009], which exposes cases of revictimization of women by the Colombian State. Family welfare agencies, for example, usually issue subpoenas to victims with instructions to deliver them to their aggressors, which clearly puts them at imminent risk. In addition, they strive for reconciliation between the parties, as if violence could be conciliated.

In the courts, judges often do not apply the law from a gender standpoint. On the contrary, their rulings are full of prejudices and match their sociocultural tendencies, sentencing in mechanical fashion.

All of the above reflects the scant judicial weight afforded to cases of this legal territory, those not actually settled within a regulatory framework but in relation to social, psychological, and cultural matters.

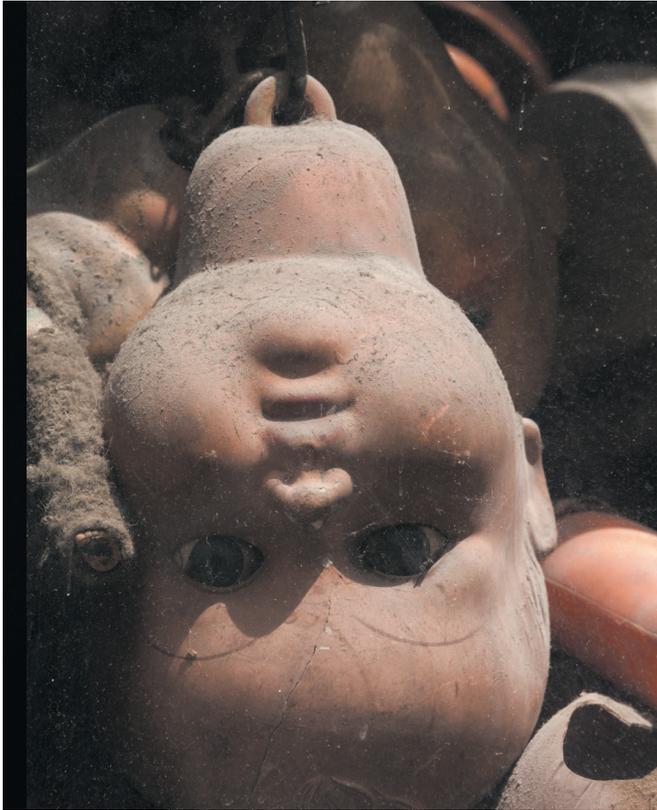
Domestic violence cases are devalued in the legal system, precisely because most of them deal with issues involving women. In general, it is thought that these are ideal for dealing with family issues because they will have a better understanding of them. In truth, however, patriarchal cultural assumptions constructed, integrated, and circulated in society prove to be the overriding factors in judges' decisions.

One female judge, for example, ruled in favor of a jealous boyfriend who brutally beat his girlfriend when he found her dancing with another young man, arguing that the act was the result of the intense pain and fury the boyfriend had experienced at that moment.

However civilized, no country is immune from this kind of outrage. Fortunately, the unlimited wealth of worldwide communication that allows for modern technology helps tear down borders in defending human and environmental rights. In related problems, the discourse of judges worldwide is gradually sharing common ground.

COLOMBIA AND SPAIN ON GENDER ISSUES

The Universidad del Rosario and the University of Málaga recently announced the results of a joint study, the Comparative Study of Colombian and Spanish Legislation on Gender Violence in the Decade from 2004-2014. Participants from the



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→ Professor Beatriz Londoño says that the communication media have played a crucial role in the development of legislation by providing significant amounts of space in their pages for news of violence against women, information that was previously exclusive to the sensationalist press.



Universidad del Rosario included the Human Rights Research Group, the Gender and Family Violence Clinic, and the Criminal Law Group, working alongside the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences' Forensic Research Group from the University of Málaga.

Their starting point was the recognition of state laws and policies as instruments for tackling gender-based violence in Spain and Colombia. They also agreed on the need for effective systems to evaluate the legal, social, and cultural impacts of these instruments over time.

The study pointed to protective measures as central to an effective system against gender-based violence, and in this sense the two countries diverged in terms of the legitimacy and responsibility of those who enact such measures.

In Spain, they are dealt with by courts established to deal with cases of violence, and they are executed by the social services or welfare agencies controlled by local authorities, such as hospitals and legal counseling services run by bar associations. Examples of such measures include the enforced removal of offending parties from households, changes of accommodation, restraining orders, prohibitions on communication, and the suspension of child custody or parental rights.

While in theory Colombia has similar measures, in practice they are not obeyed or they are inadequate, and many women die during the legal process. While government attorneys are responsible for investigating crimes of violence against women, they order protective measures so infrequently that impunity is the norm in such cases.

LONG LIVE IMPUNITY?

Legal impunity is precisely one of the main reasons why women don't make use of institutional structures or report the crimes committed against them. So, it is necessary for both countries to move toward constructing a new model for comprehensive support for victims.

According to Professor Londoño Toro, "both women's organizations and the communication media have played crucial roles in the development of legislation," the media having given significant news space to violence against women, information that was previously exclusive to the sensationalist press (although it must be said that this news is still presented in a way that "excuses" men's behavior). But much remains before justice is done and the world finally realizes that people of both the male and female gender are human beings with the same rights, regardless of their physical make-up. ■

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