

BUILDING NETWORK for the defense of women's rights and the eradication of sexist violence

Violence against women and girls is probably the most common violation of human rights and the one that affects the largest number of individuals.

It is present in every society in the world, regardless of political and economic systems. Domestic violence cuts across cultures, social classes and ethnic groups. It is an everyday scandal that arises in many different ways and occurs in many areas, but it has a single root: the discrimination that women suffer universally, only because they are women.

There has been some progress over the years, but *de facto* discrimination remains a global reality. The feminist movement and many social organisations have played a crucial role in raising awareness at the social and legislative level, and among international bodies.

Women are entitled to a life that is free of violence and discrimination; to live in a social system free of gender-based unequal power relations; to be valued and educated without gender stereotypes and perceptions; to contribute to the development and well-being of society; and to enjoy universal human rights by participating in the political, social and cultural aspects of life.

What the data say

Society sometimes makes a partial reading and analysis of violence against women. Specific situations are analysed without looking at the framework of a pervasive lack of women's rights.

We mention some data¹ from recent research on domestic violence and citizens' perception of that violence in international and local contexts. The data reveal the need to continue to defend women's rights worldwide.

In the **European Union**², the results of a survey on violence against women conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights give the following data:

¹ We would like to point out that the data gathered in research are often partial as well: the types of violence they mention, the taboo that still surrounds these issues, and even official statistics and the classification of some of these situations.

- An estimated 13 million women in the EU experienced physical violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews. This corresponds to 7% of women aged 18-74 years in the EU.
- An estimated 3.7 million women in the EU experienced sexual violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews. This corresponds to 2% of women aged 18-74 years in the EU.
- 18% of the women in the EU have experienced harassment since the age of 15 and 5% have experienced it in 12 months preceding the survey. These percentages represent 9 million women in the EU-28 were victims of harassment within a period of 12 months.
- Half of all women in the EU (53%) try to avoid certain places or situations, at least occasionally, out of fear of being the victims of physical or sexual aggression. To the contrary, recent surveys on criminal victimization and the fear of offences indicate that the number of men who restrict women's movement is much lower.

According to the survey's analysis of the social perception of gender violence in **Spain**, conducted by the Government Office for Gender Violence³, the data show that there is a widespread perception that many gender inequalities exist. However, many more women (72%) estimate this than men (49%). Specifically, inequality is viewed as more important in the workplace, in the opportunities for professional promotion and reconciliation of family life and work. If we refer to access to positions of political responsibility, less inequality between men and women is perceived. About access to education, the consensus is that there are equal opportunities.

In reference to abuse against women, most of the population (89%) considers that it is very prevalent in Spain, and the majority of the population (92%) considers that it is unacceptable. Rejection of physical aggression (99%) and forcing women to have sexual relations (97%) is widespread. However, threats in partner relationships (6.5%) and

2 The FRA's summary report on Violence against women, an EU-wide survey. Summary of the survey's conclusions. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-results-at-a-glance>

3 Analysis of the survey on the social perception of gender violence, Government Office for Gender Violence, Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/violenciaGenero/publicaciones/estudiosinvestigaciones/PDFS/Percepcion_Social_VG_.pdf

devaluation (9%) are tolerated, to the point that the violence of controlling behaviour is accepted by 31% of the population. On the whole, more than one third of the population (36%) is tolerant toward some typical forms of abuse. The proportion reaches more than half of the population (54%) if verbal abuse is considered.

Finally, regarding the stereotypes of aggressors and victims, most of the population (89%) considers that if "the victims put up with it, it's for the sake of their children". 35% considers that "if women suffer abuse it's because they consent to it". On the other hand, the majority of the population does not exonerate the aggressor for having a mental illness, although 38% of the population does. 58% of the population does not believe that the victims have a low level of education because abuse is considered to be a problem that affects every social class and has more complex roots than education alone. Despite this, 33% believes that the victims do have a low level of education.

In a more local context, an analysis of the data taken from the Cifras 2013 Annual Report: Men and Women in the **Basque Country**, drawn up by Emakunde⁴, shows the following aspects of violence and how it is perceived:

- 12.5% of women age 16 or more in the Basque Country report that they have experienced some gender violence in their lifetime. 7.5% state that it was within a relationship with a partner or former partner, and 1.8% has experienced violence within the family in their lifetime. That is, violence perpetrated by family members who are not their partner or former partner.
- With regard to the workplace, 1.8% of women who work or have worked for a salary indicate that they have experienced violence in their workplace.
- Finally, 2-7% of women state that they have experienced violence in a social or public context in the course of their lifetime.
- A growing concern about violence against women in recent years has had an impact on Basque institutions, organisations and the wider community. Most of the population (82%) considers that gender violence is a very serious social problem. Women voice the seriousness of this fact more forcefully than men do.

⁴ Cifras 2013: mujeres y los hombres en Euskadi, drawn up by Emakunde (Instituto Vasco de la Mujer), http://www.emakunde.euskadi.net/u72-20010/es/contenidos/informacion/cifras_ant/es_emakunde/adjuntos/cifras_2013_es.pdf

- Society's structural and cultural inequality is one of the main causes of the violence experienced by women. Despite this, the data show that this is not how society perceives the issue. Some erroneous myths and false beliefs regarding violence against women are widespread in society. Gender violence is associated with alcohol and drug abuse, an aggressor's psychological problems, and moments of considerable stress and loss of self-control.

These results demonstrate that, despite the progress in raising the population's awareness of the issue, society should also be aware of other forms of gender violence. The report also concludes that citizens have not analysed the causes of violence and see no connection between inequality and violence. Establishing subordinate and devalued identities based on sex, ethnic group or race, age, class and so forth can lead to a justification of discrimination and contempt toward women. When subordinated identities cross each other, multiple discrimination increases the situation of vulnerability.

Finally, it bears mentioning that although it is a social problem, reference is still made to individual reasons to justify the perpetrator of violence and make the victim responsible for it.

Legislation and socio-political change

The international community has acted in a variety of ways. There are treaties aimed at eliminating sex discrimination and violence against women, their causes and consequences. The principle of non-discrimination has also been integrated into other instruments.

- CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN, 1979).

It is an international bill of rights for women and a mandatory point of reference for equality between men and women. General Recommendation 19 of the Convention refers specifically to violence against women as a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men. It recognises that "it is of little use to women to proclaim their civil and political freedoms, and their right to education and health, if their right to life, freedom, and their physical and mental integrity are not ensured first". In this sense, it highlights the comprehensive and interdependent nature of the rights conquered by humanity and the manner in which gender violence hinders women from exercising those rights.

Violence against women is recognised as a manifestation of historically unequal relations of power between men and women, and constitutes a violation of human

rights and fundamental freedoms that prevent women from enjoying all or a part of their rights and freedoms.

- Vienna World Conference on Human Rights (UN, 1993)

The first international definition of violence against women. The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights was the tipping point in the recognition that violence against women goes against women's rights.

- Law on Measures for Full Protection against Gender Violence in Spain (2004)

This law considers that gender violence is not limited to the private sphere but also pertains to the public sphere when it defines it as "the most brutal symbol of inequality in our society. It is violence directed against women by the simple fact that they are women, and because their aggressors consider that they lack any right to freedom, respect and decision-making".

The law only focuses on those cases in which there is or has been a relationship of some sort between a man and a woman, leaving out many other types of violence.

- The Basque Country's Law for Equality between Men and Women (2005) (it has a section on violence – Chapter 7 - and also on education for prevention).

The Basque law considers that violence against women is "any gender-based violent act that causes, or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including the threat of such acts; as well as coercion and the arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life". The law includes two sections, one on research, prevention and education; and the other on care and protection.

In addition, several institutions and organisations carry out equality plans that describe how the regulations are drawn up and implemented.

It is not enough for human rights need to be written into international instruments. States need to enact legislation on human rights and ensure that it is enforced. They must also translate the treaties into a defence of women's rights. New policies and laws must be developed, as well as the political will to do so. Funding must be provided for existing policies on equality and the prevention and elimination of violence against women, with special emphasis on prevention.



What we propose

Currently, it is still necessary to analyse and give thought to gender violence, and subsequently transform the aspects that promote this violation of women's rights.

We see a need to establish pedagogical instruments that target the social sectors where violations of women's rights can occur in any society (ours included). We need to discover the implications on women's lives and context, and raise citizens' awareness of women's rights. Society no longer views violence against women in its more visible and brutal expressions – murder and abuse – as legitimate, but much still needs to be done.

However, the dimension of the violence and its many forms still need to be assessed. The ultimate cause of violence, the patriarchal system, needs to be identified and classified as a violation of human rights that has implications for women's lives at every level. We find that more than half of the population in any society is lacking in rights. The magnitude of this reality needs to be assessed and active measures taken to denounce and eradicate it.

Beyond doubt, reframing violence against women as a violation of human rights is a necessary step on the road to a social conscience that opposes violence against women. Obviously, one of the way-points is education on the defence of women's rights

This project seeks to bring about social change for the defence of women's rights via a proposal to raise the wider community and stakeholders' awareness of violations of women's rights and encourage them to question the patriarchal system. We intend to call social and institutional attention to the systemic and systematic violation of women's rights and act as agents of social transformation and respect for Women's Rights.

We plan to hold meetings (spaces for learning) where the role of several actors in society, from their responsibilities and methods of work to the search for respect for human rights. Finally, we will establish the strategies that are needed to transform the letter and the position of each one of us into a reality.

We plan to carry out actions to denounce the violations of women's rights and defend women's rights in order to disseminate all the information and raise the wider community's awareness on the reality of the violation of women's rights.

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