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## Violence Against Women on the Rise in the Dominican Republic

by Crosby Girón

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Participants in the first Latin America and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros (Encounters), which took place in 1981, declared Nov. 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. They were honoring three sisters from the Dominican Republic—Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa Mirabal—who lost their lives on that day in 1960 for defying the Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1930-1961) dictatorship.

Since then, the UN has singled out Nov. 25 as a day to speak out against gender-based violence throughout the world and to demand public policies to fight it.

Yet according to a report published by the UN Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, and the Dominican office for women's issues (Ministerio de la Mujer), femicide rates in the Dominican Republic are on the increase, and two out of five women killed in the country are victims of domestic violence.

The report concludes that although the Dominican Republic has the necessary mechanisms and policies in place to fight gender-based violence, the country continues to have one of the highest femicide rates in the region. El Salvador has the worst statistics for Latin America ([NotiCen, Jan. 5, 2017](#)). According to UNDP figures, 88 femicides were reported in the Dominican Republic in 2016 and 83 from January to October 2017.

### *Violence in the home*

Statistics published by the health ministry (Ministerio de Salud Pública) show that 35% of Dominican women have been subjected to violence by their partners, while 26% reported they had had at least one experience of physical violence.

Figures released by the Attorney General's Office in 2016 are even grimmer, showing that 1,078 femicides were recorded in the Dominican Republic between 2005 and 2015. More than half of the murders, it said, were committed by the women's current or former partners. Dominican girls aged 15 to 19 are the most vulnerable in terms of suffering violence during pregnancy (11% as opposed to 6.3% percent of women aged 40 to 49).

One in 10 Dominican women have suffered sexual violence at some point in their lives, and around one in 20 had done so during the 12 months before the survey. In most cases of rape (80%), the perpetrator was the victim's partner or former partner.

The Centro de Estudios de Género (CEG-INTEC) a center for gender studies at the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo assessed the situation of Dominican women in 2016 and concluded that femicide decreased in all countries in Latin America, with the exception of the Dominican Republic.

According to other statistics published by the health ministry, women whose partners were more educated were less likely to suffer domestic violence (43% of women whose partners had no education reported domestic violence, as opposed to 25% of women whose partners had completed higher education).

The study also revealed that 60% of the women surveyed said their partners exerted some sort of control over their lives. That included jealousy or rage if the woman spoke to other men (40%), demands to know the woman's whereabouts at all times (34%), not allowing the woman to see her friends (27%), and not trusting the woman to handle money (27%).

### *Failing legal framework*

The statistics regarding violence against women in the Dominican Republic could be higher, as many reports don't include the number of women injured as a result of domestic violence who subsequently die from their injuries. Those deaths are not included in the total number of femicide victims.

The fact that the Dominican penal code was modified to ensure that gender-based violence—or domestic violence, as it is also known—is treated as a punishable crime has not been enough to stop the rising levels of violence. For this reason, activists say the country does not have an effective legal framework to protect women.

Some of the laws on gender-based violence date back to the 1980s. This includes Law 88-03, which creates temporary shelters for victims of violence, and Law 137-03, which penalizes human trafficking.

Cynthia Velasco, director of Colectiva Mujer y Salud ([NotiCen, Feb. 9, 2017](#)), told the Spanish news agency EFE that the high number of femicides in the country “is the result of the authorities' lack of due diligence in terms of prosecuting perpetrators.”

Velasco said that women continue to be killed “because under the current system, there are no consequences. ... It's time for the authorities to respond in a holistic and effective way.”

José Hernández, a former prosecutor, has proposed the creation of a specialized police to assist women who are victims of violence, as he believes women “do not receive proper assistance” when they go to a police station to report a crime. Hernández said Congress should approve a number of laws relevant to women's rights, including one to create an integral system that would work for the prevention and eradication of violence against women and offer assistance and support for victims.

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