

Addressing Chronic Violence from a Gendered Perspective

Fostering People-Centered Approaches at the National Level



Women
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Program



KROC SCHOOL
Institute for Peace and Justice

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Authors

Elena B. Stavrevska, Nattecia Nerene Bohardsingh, María Dolores Hernández Montoya, Tania Cecilia Martínez, Briana Mawby and Aliza Carns

Contributors

Patrick N. Lalor

International Partners: Phoebe Donnelly (International Peace Institute [IPI]), Eryn Papworth (IPI), Susan Marx (The Carter Center), Moezza Siddiqi (The Carter Center) and Pilar de la Torre (European Forum for Urban Security [EFUS])

Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies contributors: Necla Tschirgi, Andrew Blum and John Porten

Report Designer: Jennifer Kotting LLC

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About

The Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) launched in 2001 with a vision of active peacebuilding. In 2007, the Kroc IPJ became part of the newly established Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, a global hub for peacebuilding and social innovation.

The core of the Kroc IPJ mission is to co-create learning with peacemakers — learning that is deeply grounded in the lived experience of peacemakers around the world, that is made rigorous by our place within a university ecosystem and that is immediately and practically applied by peacemakers to end cycles of violence. The Kroc IPJ is the bridge between theory and practice at the Kroc School, driving the Kroc School's mission to shape a more peaceful and more just world.

Together with local women peacebuilders and renowned international women, peace and security organizations, the Kroc IPJ identifies the most critical peacebuilding challenges facing women leaders around the world. We then co-develop applied and actionable research to identify evidence-based solutions.

Since 2002, the Kroc IPJ has hosted the Women PeaceMakers Fellowship program. The Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for women peacebuilders to engage in a cycle of learning, practice, research and participation that strengthens peacebuilding partnerships. The Women PeaceMakers Fellowship facilitates impactful collaborations between women peacebuilders from conflict-affected communities and international partner organizations. The Fellows also co-create research intended to shape the peacebuilding field and highlight good practices for peacebuilding design and implementation.

This report was co-created by the three 2022-2023 Women PeaceMaker Fellows — Nattecia Nerene Bohardsingh from Jamaica, María Dolores Hernández Montoya from Mexico and Tania Cecilia Martínez from Honduras — and was supported by members of leading international peacebuilding organizations, who provided their own expertise and perspectives to shape this work. This report is based on the lived realities of women peacebuilders and peacebuilding partners, providing both concrete recommendations for an international audience and in-depth, context-specific analysis through the case studies.



Executive Summary

Violence has traditionally been viewed through the lens of armed conflict or specific, concrete violent incidents. However, it is necessary to understand that violence may be a chronic phenomenon— a persistent, deeply ingrained aggression affecting daily lives. Chronic violence, as conceptualized in the work of authors including Tani Adams and Jenny Pearce, is embedded in societal structures, often perpetuated by socio-economic disparities, political instability and cultural norms.

This report contributes to the study of chronic violence in three distinct ways: this research centers gendered experiences and perspectives on chronic violence; the findings are based on the insights and research of authors living in contexts experiencing chronic violence; and the report focuses primarily on the connection between national- and international-level policies and frameworks to address chronic violence. Women and marginalized gender groups experience a particular type of chronic violence, stemming from deeply rooted patriarchal structures. These experiences, while diverse, share a common thread: they are manifestations of systemic oppression and inequality, from domestic violence to broader societal discrimination.

The report makes the case for reconceptualizing violence in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and gender equality fields, building upon feminist conceptions of the continuum of violence to recognize that societal structures, systemic discrimination and even pervasive cultural norms can be sources of violence. This comprehensive view has significant implications for policy, demanding multisectoral strategies that address not just symptoms but the root causes. This report illuminates the pervasive issue of chronic violence, especially its gendered dimensions, and advocates for comprehensive approaches to understanding and addressing it. Multidimensional strategies, inclusive policies and a global commitment are needed to elevate women's roles across sectors, from community development to high-level peace negotiations. Understanding the deep intricacies of violence can serve as the bedrock for constructing sustainable, equitable peace.

The analysis presented here reveals the following key findings:

- Chronic violence is pervasive and endemic, not episodic.
- Chronic violence affects women and LGBTQ+ people in distinct ways.
- A nuanced understanding of violence is necessary.
- Women are key actors in addressing chronic violence.
- Holistic, people-centered approaches at the international, national and local levels are imperative.



The following recommendations for international organizations, funders and national governments are based on this evidence and analysis:

● Recommendations for international organizations and funders in the peacebuilding field

- Expand programming and funding to address violence even in communities that are not considered to be experiencing armed conflict, recognizing the gendered reality of chronic violence.
- Explicitly consider gender and intersectionality when creating programs to address chronic violence to ensure that the programs are not reproducing gender and intersectional inequalities.
- Develop an internal mechanism to evaluate, monitor and ensure that the international organization/funder does not perpetuate chronic violence through its actions.
- Explicitly consider violence as a continuum when creating programs to address violence, focusing on everyday, normalized forms of violence, more lethal forms of violence and the social and cultural norms that contribute to the normalization.
- Ensure that women-led organizations are included as partners in programming to address chronic violence.
- Ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of the integration of international frameworks relevant to chronic violence into national policy and programming.
- Establish learning mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of integrating international frameworks relevant to chronic violence into national strategies, addressing gendered chronic violence.

● Recommendations for international organizations and funders in the WPS and gender equality fields

- Include countries and communities experiencing chronic violence when considering sites for programming and funding.
- Expand funding for research and programming related to gendered chronic violence.
- Recognize the role of women in addressing chronic violence and provide support to community-level organizations and individuals working to prevent and mitigate violence.
- Include women who are addressing chronic violence in networks, programs and other opportunities focused on women peacebuilders.



Recommendations for national governments

- Recognize the interconnectedness of forms of violence and the expansive nature of gendered chronic violence.
- Incorporate a broad definition of gender-based violence, as outlined in CEDAW's General Recommendations, into national and legal frameworks.
- Develop and implement comprehensive national action plans in collaboration with civil society groups to specifically address gendered chronic violence. Ensure implementation of national policies in a way that is aligned with international standards.
- Ensure that these policies address the diverse experiences of women, using an intersectional approach.
- Draft and implement legislation that upholds the rights of women and people of marginalized genders.
- Engage closely with community- and municipal-level stakeholders to design, implement and monitor policies and programs addressing chronic violence.
- Ensure that justice mechanisms are accessible, survivor-centered and free from discrimination and bias.
- Train legal professionals on the nuances of gendered chronic violence and its multi-dimensional nature.
- Establish support systems for survivors of violence through programs such as crisis centers, helplines or long-term support groups.
- Create mechanisms for feedback and monitoring of policies and programming that address chronic violence in collaboration with civil society groups.
- Create public spaces that are safe for everyone, irrespective of their gender.
- Facilitate dialogue between citizens and authorities to (re)design policies focused on community safety.



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Introduction

In a rapidly evolving global landscape, violence and conflict have consistently served as potent disruptors of societal cohesion, prosperity and well-being. Yet, it is important to underscore that violence is not merely episodic, flaring up in isolated incidents or confined to specific geographies. Instead, many societies are shaped by chronic violence — a pervasive, systemic form of violence that infiltrates daily lives and corrodes the very fabric of communities, including both violent deaths and frequent acts of violence not necessarily resulting in death. Chronic violence occurs in households, neighborhoods, schools, and community and national public spaces. Rooted in multifaceted socio-economic, political, cultural, gendered and racialized systems, this form of violence differs from war or conflict, is often normalized and can be hard to eradicate due to its embedded nature in everyday routines and societal structures. This report focuses primarily on the connection between national- and international-level policies and frameworks to address chronic violence.

In this report, chronic violence is understood and shown to be both a gendered and gendering phenomenon – chronic violence is gendered as the experiences of it are informed by the gender hierarchies in the society and, at the same time, chronic violence is gendering in terms of reinforcing gender and intersectional inequalities, including patriarchal structures and social relations. In this context, the understanding of chronic violence used in this report is also informed by the concept of gendered continuum of violence, which emphasizes that everyday, normalized acts of violence against women are interconnected and exist within a continuum of gendered violence. The two concepts help highlight how violence is not an isolated or episodic event but is deeply ingrained in the fabric of society, thereby affecting and being affected by gender.



Nevertheless, there exists a tangible gap in policymaking and literature — one that fails to comprehensively address the intertwining understandings and manifestations of chronic violence and gender. When gender is given thought, it is overwhelmingly spoken of in terms of gender-based violence¹ and does not speak to the full gendered experience. Little research has focused on gendered dynamics or the active roles women play within contexts experiencing chronic violence, with few exceptions.² Furthermore, the complexities introduced by intersecting identities, such as race, socio-economic status and location, remain largely underexplored, thereby limiting the scope of solutions and interventions. There is consensus that collective action and collaboration between organizations and across sectors of society are critical for comprehensively addressing elements of chronic violence³ and some attention is given to regional⁴ and international level approaches, but there is a distinct lack of focus on national-level action, with few exceptions.⁵

This report aims to bridge both of these gaps by providing an in-depth, multidimensional analysis of the gendered implications of chronic violence especially at the national level, as well as the evolution of the understanding of gendered chronic violence at the international level. In doing so, the report analyzes how the understandings of violence, and gendered chronic violence in particular, present in three leading international (at least in part) gender-related policy and legal frameworks, such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, have evolved over the years. This is especially important considering the expectation of these frameworks' translation into national laws and policies. The analysis of each of the three frameworks is followed by a specific case study that speaks to a particular national context. The CEDAW analysis, for instance, is followed by a case study in which Woman PeaceMaker Fellow Nattecia N. Bohardsingh critically examines the legislative landscape of gender-based violence (GBV) in Jamaica, highlighting its fragmented nature and its insufficient protection for marginalized groups, while revealing the gap between legal frameworks and their actual implementation in addressing widespread GBV issues. Then following the SDGs analysis, Woman PeaceMaker Fellow María Dolores Hernández Montoya explores the dissonance between authorities' understandings and official statistics on chronic violence and the lived experiences of residents in Guadalajara, Mexico, highlighting community-led initiatives as beacons of hope amid deeply rooted systemic issues. And finally, in the case study that follows the WPS analysis, Woman PeaceMaker Fellow Tania C. Martínez examines the pervasive issue of chronic violence in Honduras, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of young women leaders, and advocating for a multi-faceted, youth-centered approach that emphasizes gender equality, community engagement and policy reform to address the systemic roots of violence and promote social cohesion.

A comprehensive understanding of chronic violence, when viewed through a gendered lens, is paramount in devising effective strategies for peace, social cohesion and sustainable development. Solutions should be multidimensional, responsive and people-centered, pivoting from traditional paradigms to localized, gender-inclusive strategies. While the case studies provide specific insights into regional contexts, the broader themes and arguments transcend geographies, urging a global re-evaluation of our understanding of violence and the frameworks we employ to address it.

Central to the report's contribution is its reframing of violence not only to recognize chronic violence, but also to emphasize its gendered and gendering implications. The report elucidates that violence must be recognized as a systemic issue, deeply rooted in multifaceted causes and outcomes. Responses to only symptoms would be insufficient. Solutions and interventions ought to prioritize people-centered approaches that acknowledge collective and individual traumas and champion paths towards healing and violence reduction. In doing so, the report contends that reconceptualizing chronic violence in tandem with gendered narratives allows for a more holistic understanding, fostering strategies that are not only remedial but also preventive in nature. Furthermore, the report underscores the transformative potential of women's leadership in crafting sustainable solutions. It articulates the imperative of integrating women's and LGBTQ+ persons' experiences and perspectives in peacebuilding and policy formulation processes, especially at the national level.

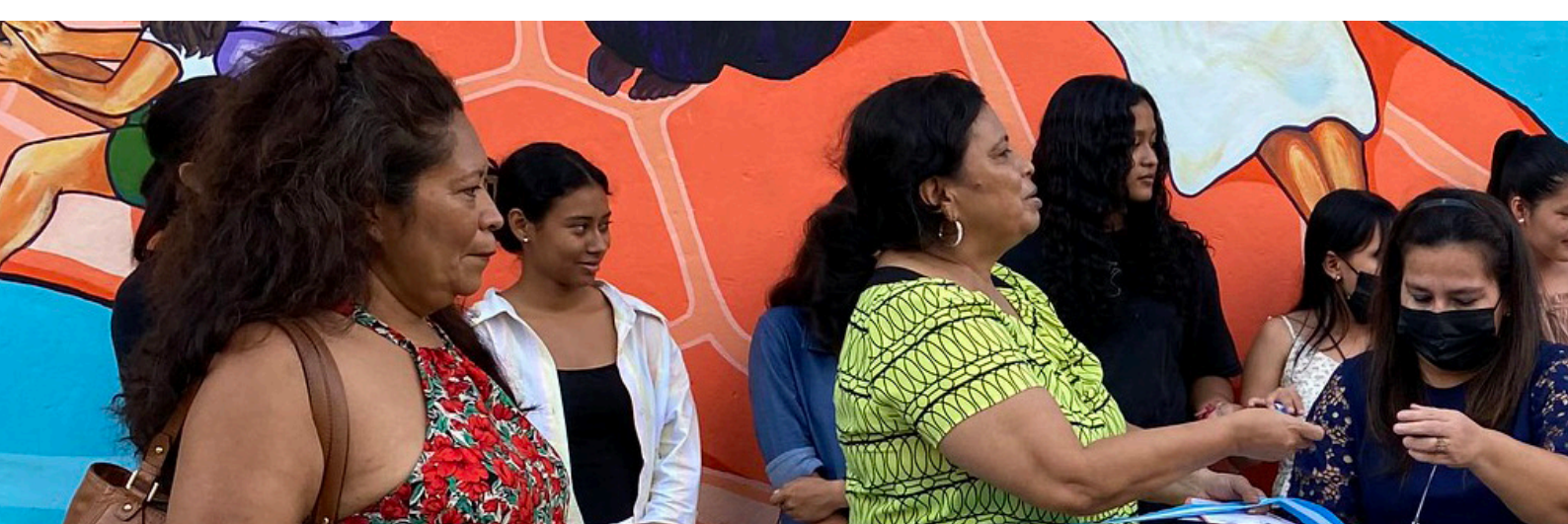
Methodology

The overarching research question that structured this study is:

How are policies and laws related to gender equipped to address the issue of chronic violence?

In analyzing this question at the international level, the research team specifically looked at whether chronic violence is mentioned at all in a select few international policy and legal frameworks, then how violence is considered in the context of the given framework, and finally, if there is any consideration of gender in the understanding of violence. In addition to these, each case study author created separate, context-specific research questions derived from the overarching research question of the report.

The research took place in three stages. The first stage included a desk review in order to identify the most relevant and useful literature on chronic violence, including journal articles, reports and other literature created by academics, UN agencies, research organizations and civil society organizations working on chronic violence with a gendered lens. In the second stage, the research team conducted document and content analysis of three leading international (at least in part) gender-related policy and legal frameworks – (1) the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendations; (2) the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and (3) the UN Security Council resolutions that are part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. These three frameworks were selected as some of the highest-level international frameworks that either fully or partially consider violence in relation to gender, and that are expected to have influence on the national level. Additionally, the specific documents and policies analyzed within each framework were selected as those most closely connected to various forms of violence and/or connected to gender. The document and content analysis helped the research team narrow down the relevant documents and policies.



The analyzed documents and policies specifically included:

- The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendations (GRs), including GR No. 12 (1989) with focus on violence against women; GR No. 19 (1992) with focus on violence against women; GR No. 27 (2010) with focus on older women and protection of their human rights; GR No. 30 (2013) with focus on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations; GR No. 33 (2015) with focus on women's access to justice; GR No. 34 (2016) with focus on rural women's rights; GR No. 35 (2017) with focus on gender-based violence against women, updating GR No. 19; GR No. 37 (2018) with focus on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change; GR No. 38 (2020) with focus on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration; and GR No. 39 (2022) with focus on Indigenous women and girls' rights.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5 (Gender Equality); SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities); SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities); and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).
- The Women, Peace and Security agenda, including all ten resolutions – UNSCR 1325 (2000); UNSCR 1820 (2008); UNSCR 1888 (2008); UNSCR 1889 (2009); UNSCR 1960 (2010); UNSCR 2106 (2013); UNSCR 2122 (2013); UNSCR 2242 (2015); UNSCR 2467 (2019); UNSCR 2493 (2019).

Simultaneously, 2022-2023 Women PeaceMaker Fellows Nattecia Nerene Bohardsingh, María Dolores Hernández Montoya and Tania Cecilia Martínez each developed and carried out research for case studies focused on the national level and shaped around their interests and experiences. In their research, the Fellows conducted surveys, interviews and focus groups with identified relevant interlocutors in each of their contexts. All the data was gathered in person and online in the languages spoken in each context. The specific methodology employed for each case study is outlined within the respective text of each.

The report embodies the Fellowship's core feminist ethics of care, emphasizing genuine dialogue, interpersonal bonds and valuing lived experiences. This, as shown in the case studies in particular, was reflected in the way the research was carried out, but also in the manner in which people's voices and lived experiences were translated into text in this report. Furthermore, the Fellowship, and thus this report, adopts a pluralist approach to knowledge, acknowledging that everyone is a knowledge producer and that much knowledge production is an invariably collective endeavor. With that in mind, during the research process, participants were regarded as equal contributors to knowledge, treated with care, respect and dignity.



Chronic violence and gender

In the context of this report, chronic violence is both a gendered and gendering phenomenon, whereby chronic violence is experienced differently by different genders and at the same time, the manifestations of chronic violence and their normalization reproduce intersectional gendered inequalities and patriarchal structures. This section outlines how chronic violence has been understood in existing literature before proceeding to highlight how it intersects with gender and the understanding of a gendered continuum of violence, which stresses that acts of violence against women are not isolated incidents but are part of a continuum of gendered violence. While there is significant research on how individuals experience chronic violence, there is much less scholarship on chronic violence at the national level and even less that address chronic violence at the national level using a gendered lens. This report helps to fill this gap.

This section and the report as a whole show that, at their core, the gendered continuum of violence and chronic violence converge on a shared principle: violence is neither episodic nor isolated but is deeply embedded and normalized within the fabric of society. Through a lens that emphasizes this interconnection, it is possible to appreciate the depth and breadth of gendered experiences of chronic violence. Considering the gendered continuum of violence alongside chronic violence deepens the insight into the nuanced ways gender shapes and is shaped by prolonged exposure to violence. To disentangle and address chronic violence effectively, there is a pressing need to understand and challenge the intricate webs of gendered violence, from the most “minor” expressions to the most overt manifestations. Recognizing the profound interconnectedness of the gendered continuum of violence with chronic violence also underscores the imperative for holistic interventions. Such interventions must be multi-dimensional, targeting not just the immediate, overt forms of violence but also the subtle, normalized gender dynamics and structures that perpetuate cycles of violence.

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Understanding chronic violence

Many communities experience high levels of violence and violent death despite not being considered “at war.” In 2012, for instance, around one quarter of people globally, or more than 2 billion people, were considered to be living in conditions of chronic violence.⁶ Countries across the world experience significant disruptions to daily life due to armed violence, which closes civil society space, creates displacement and crises at the household, neighborhood and country levels, and restricts freedom of movement. These effects are often gendered, closing opportunities for women’s engagement and increasing rates of gender-based violence and domestic violence.⁷ While this type of violence has been discussed using a range of terms and intersects with topics such as community violence, citizen security, homicide rates and limitations on democratization and human development, this report uses the term “chronic violence.”⁸



Chronic violence includes both violent deaths and frequent acts of violence not necessarily resulting in death, including in households, neighborhoods, schools, and community and national public spaces.⁹ This includes contexts where violence has become embedded in interactions between people and between inhabitants and the state structures, whether at the national or local level.¹⁰ As this report will discuss, chronic violence also occurs and is prevalent in places that are not considered “at war” or “conflict-affected.” Chronic violence should be considered across space, time and intensity levels.¹¹

Understanding chronic violence requires an assessment of multidimensional causes and effects of violence, from the individual and household levels to the national level. Chronic violence is most common in communities, neighborhoods, countries or regions with long-term state fragility and among people without the power to change these conditions in the short or medium term.¹² Additionally, Adams writes that “socially excluded groups – aboriginal groups, ethnic minorities, international migrants, refugees, internally displaced and stateless and marginalized peoples – as well as women and children throughout the world are particularly vulnerable.”¹³ Chronic violence:

- is provoked and reproduced by multiple factors, from social inequality to disjunctive democratization;
- becomes embedded in multiple social spaces, undermines social relations and provokes destructive behaviors that become perverse norms among vulnerable populations, some of which can be transmitted intergenerationally; and
- obstructs and undermines public engagement, citizenship and social support for democracy.¹⁴

This type of violence has both acute and chronic manifestations; it occurs over a long period and continues to disrupt lives. It is important to note that “although chronic violence builds on historical legacies of social and political violence, oppression, exclusion and armed conflict, it is also molded by contemporary dynamics such as rapidly evolving forms of governance, informational technologies, climate change, the intensified dynamics of globalization,” and other processes.¹⁵ Addressing chronic violence requires a holistic lens that takes both a long-term view and a focus on immediate needs, offering both mitigation and adaptation strategies. If approached holistically, it should also consider the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism in relation to chronic violence.

It is worth noting that there are multiple bodies of literature on topics that are connected to chronic violence, though they often do not use the term “chronic violence.” While it is outside the scope of this report to delve into these other bodies of literature, it is important to note that literature on human rights, democracy and threats to democracy,¹⁶ violence prevention,¹⁷ household and intimate partner violence,¹⁸ interpersonal violence or homicide,¹⁹ and community violence²⁰ often address issues that are commonly raised in literature on chronic violence and can help delineate the causes and effects of chronic violence. These fields – the community violence literature in particular – have developed a large body of research on chronic trauma²¹ and the effect of community violence or violence exposure on social, emotional or mental health,²² especially for children,²³ youth,²⁴ and adolescents.²⁵ As a result, many of these studies are focused on addressing violence as a public health priority.²⁶ There is a significant body of research on community violence in the US,²⁷ especially in predominantly Black communities,²⁸ with fewer focused on Latino/Latinx/Latine communities²⁹ and Native American experiences.³⁰ Many of these studies focus on urban environments.³¹ Most of the literature on community violence is not focused on gender, but there are studies specifically on women’s experiences,³² gender-based harassment,³³ and how community violence as a whole has gendered manifestations and effects.³⁴ Few studies address these issues outside of the Americas, with some exceptions, including South Africa.³⁵

Chronic violence and gendered continuum of violence

One of the most pervasive dimensions along which experiences of chronic violence are differentiated is gender. Gender, as an axis of power and identity, plays a crucial role in shaping the patterns, causes and effects of chronic violence. Analyses on chronic violence highlight its insidious nature, where violence becomes normalized as part of everyday life and becomes nearly invisible even to those experiencing it.³⁶ The chronic nature of violence can be observed in the consistent experiences of many women and people across gender identities who face intimate partner violence, harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. Such experiences of violence are frequently normalized due to patriarchal societal structures, where the perceived inferiority of women and people of marginalized gender identities justifies, or at least downplays, violence against them.

Similarly, there are deep connections between individual experiences and structural conditions that perpetuate violence,³⁷ the implications of which for understanding gendered vulnerabilities are profound. Gender hierarchies and structural inequalities are both an outcome and a cause of chronic violence, creating a vicious cycle where gender norms justify violence, and the violence then reinforces these norms. For instance, in communities with deeply entrenched beliefs about cisgender heterosexual male superiority, acts of violence towards women and LGBTQ+ people, such as domestic abuse or sexual assault, can be both a manifestation of these beliefs and a tool to maintain gender hierarchies and patriarchal structures.³⁸

At the crossroads of these discussions lies the concept of the "gendered continuum of violence," which emphasizes that acts of violence against women are not isolated incidents but are part of a continuum of gendered violence that ranges from verbal harassment to physical abuse and even femicide.³⁹ This continuum is fueled by a culture that tolerates, if not encourages, sexist attitudes and behaviors, showing how violence is deeply embedded and normalized in the society. The gendered nature of these violent experiences is rooted in power dynamics, where violence becomes a mechanism to control and dominate, perpetuating gender disparities.

The gendered continuum also provides a framework for understanding the disparate experiences within genders. For women of color, lower socioeconomic status or LGBTQ+ identities, for instance, the experience of chronic violence is magnified due to marginalization related not only to gender but also to other dimensions of identity.⁴⁰ A woman of color, for example, might not only face gendered violence but also racialized violence, making her experience multifaceted. The chronic nature of these violations compounds their impacts, as they are experienced over extended periods.

The vulnerabilities associated with gendered marginalization do not exclusively target women. Men, too, are subjected to specific forms of chronic violence stemming from rigid notions of masculinity. The concept of "hegemonic masculinity" alludes to the societal pressures on men to adhere to dominant forms of male behavior, often associated with aggression, emotional suppression and dominance.⁴¹ Men who do not fit into these molds may face violence or ostracization, revealing another facet of the gendered nature of chronic violence.

In essence, considering the gendered continuum of violence alongside chronic violence deepens the insight into the nuanced ways gender shapes and is shaped by prolonged exposure to violence. To disentangle and address chronic violence effectively, there is a pressing need to understand and challenge the intricate webs of gendered violence, from the most "minor" expressions to the most overt manifestations. Recognizing the profound interconnectedness of the gendered continuum of violence with chronic violence also underscores the imperative for holistic interventions. This also points to policymakers having to address chronic violence as a long-term "normality," using approaches that consider the multiple drivers and effects of chronic violence and leverage interdisciplinary approaches.⁴² Such interventions must be multi-dimensional, targeting not just the immediate, overt forms of violence but also the subtle, normalized gender dynamics and structures that perpetuate cycles of violence.



Gendered chronic violence in international frameworks and translations at the national level

International frameworks, and the way they conceptualize chronic violence and gendered chronic violence specifically, could be key instruments to leverage in addressing gendered chronic violence. This is especially pertinent as these frameworks are intended to be integrated into national-level policies, as well as into funding mechanisms to support the implementation of these policies. In analyzing the ways in which international frameworks are equipped to address the issue of gendered chronic violence, the research team focused on three prominent international frameworks – each of which is discussed in turn – alongside case studies zeroing in on some of the implications on national level.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

This subsection provides a comprehensive examination of how the understanding of violence in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and the subsequent General Recommendations has evolved, elucidating how CEDAW has moved from recognizing only direct acts of violence against women to acknowledging a broader continuum of violence that includes structural, psychological and socio-economic dimensions. Within that rich international-level context that is expected to affect the translation of CEDAW into national laws, As CEDAW is a key tool for integrating gender-responsive mechanisms into national-level policy, the subsection then addresses the national level through a case study focused on Jamaica, in which Woman PeaceMaker Fellow Nattecia N. Bohardsingh scrutinizes the impact of gender-based violence laws on marginalized populations. Through the lens of Jamaican legislation and society, the case study provides a detailed intersectional analysis, revealing glaring gaps and challenges in the implementation of GBV laws and further underscoring the importance of evolving our understanding and approach to combating gender-based violence as a foundational element of addressing gendered chronic violence as well.

The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) is a significant international legal instrument, providing an evolving framework for understanding and addressing violence against women. Since its adoption in 1979, CEDAW has shaped and reshaped the understanding of violence through its General Recommendations (GRs), reflecting an ongoing engagement with the multifaceted nature of gender-based violence. Even though the Convention does not explicitly mention chronic violence, the evolution of the understanding of violence within CEDAW through the General Recommendations reflects a gradual but significant shift towards recognizing the continuum of violence and with that, the gendered aspect of chronic violence.

Initially, violence was not explicitly addressed within the text of CEDAW itself, leading to calls for clarification and elaboration on the matter. The response began with GR No. 12 in 1989, which marked the first explicit recognition of violence against women within the CEDAW framework.⁴³ This laid the groundwork for the more comprehensive GR No. 19 in 1992, which defined gender-based violence as a form of discrimination against women, thereby placing it firmly within the legal obligations of the Convention.⁴⁴ GR No. 19 was groundbreaking in its time, recognizing not only physical violence but also psychological and sexual violence.⁴⁵ However, these General Recommendations primarily centered on direct, intentional acts of violence rather than a more holistic understanding encompassing structural and normalized forms.

The subsequent GRs have gradually expanded and nuanced the understanding of violence, moving closer to the concept of the continuum of violence. GR No. 27 in 2010, for instance, which focused on older women, acknowledged that violence can take different forms depending on the context, recognizing economic violence and the vulnerability of older women to various intersecting forms of discrimination.⁴⁶ This marked a shift towards a more layered understanding of violence, considering how it interacts with other factors such as age. GR No. 30 in 2013, dealing with women in conflict situations, broadened the scope even further. It acknowledged the violence faced by women in conflict and post-conflict settings, recognizing the gendered nature of conflict-related violence and extending the understanding to encompass structural violence in the form of legal discrimination and social stigma.⁴⁷

The understanding of violence within CEDAW took a more explicit turn towards recognizing the continuum of violence with GR No. 33 in 2015, focusing on women's access to justice. This recommendation acknowledged the structural barriers to justice that women face, considering not just acts of violence but also the systems and norms that perpetuate and normalize such violence.⁴⁸ GR No. 34 in 2016 on rural women's rights continued this trend, recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of rural women to various forms of violence, including economic and social violence, and emphasizing the importance of context-specific understanding.⁴⁹

A landmark development came with GR No. 35 in 2017, which updated GR No. 19. This recommendation explicitly recognized the continuum of violence against women, identifying gender-based violence as an expression of power imbalances and acknowledging the interconnection between different forms of violence.⁵⁰ It emphasized the structural nature of gender-based violence and highlighted its pervasive presence across various social domains. Subsequent recommendations have built on this understanding, with GR No. 37 in 2018 acknowledging the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk in the context of climate change,⁵¹ and GR No. 38 in 2020 recognizing the complexities of trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.⁵² Both of these recommendations took a comprehensive view of violence, considering structural factors and social norms that contribute to women's vulnerabilities. The most recent GR No. 39 in 2022 on Indigenous women and girls' rights continued to expand this understanding, acknowledging the intersectional vulnerabilities of Indigenous women to violence and considering the unique historical, social and cultural contexts that shape their experiences.⁵³

The progression discussed here demonstrates an increasing awareness of the multifaceted and interconnected nature of violence, encompassing not just physical acts but also structural, psychological and socio-economic dimensions. It highlights the necessity of context-specific, nuanced approaches that recognize the varied and layered experiences of violence faced by women across different social intersections. The journey from the early recommendations, primarily focused on direct acts of violence, to the more recent ones, acknowledging the continuum and complexities of violence, illustrates the ongoing growth and refinement of this international legal framework in addressing the pervasive issue of not only gender-based violence, but also gendered chronic violence more broadly.

Translating the comprehensive understanding of violence within CEDAW to the national level offers an invaluable roadmap for countries to systematically address gendered chronic violence. By recognizing the broad spectrum of gender-based violence, enacting robust legal and policy frameworks, raising societal awareness, reforming the justice system, instituting support systems and fostering collaborations with civil society, countries can embark on a holistic and effective journey towards eliminating gendered chronic violence.



Focusing on the national level in Jamaica, Women PeaceMaker Fellow Nattecia N. Bohardsingh specifically looks at how the existence and implementation of gender-based violence (GBV) laws in Jamaica affect marginalized populations, including not only women but also LGBTQ+ persons. Bohardsingh's [case study](#) critically analyzes Jamaica's legislative measures in combatting GBV, particularly within the framework of chronic violence. With Jamaica registering alarmingly high rates of violent crime, including against women, girls and marginalized groups, GBV emerges as a profound societal concern rooted in gender inequalities, power dynamics and entrenched societal norms. While the country has exhibited commitment towards addressing all forms of GBV, notably through the *National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence* (2017-2027), the legislative landscape remains fragmented. A predominant emphasis on violence against women marginalizes non-heteronormative experiences of GBV, with significant legislative gaps evident in the Domestic Violence Act's limited definitions and jurisdiction. Despite the availability of protective mechanisms, the implementation is marred by inadequacies in resources and weak follow-through, underscoring an urgent need for a holistic, gender-responsive legislative approach. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the research delves into the intricacies of GBV laws' impact on marginalized populations by interviewing affected community members and experts across various sectors.

Bohardsingh's case study showcases that GBV exhibits differently across populations and is influenced by factors like stigma, discrimination, economic dependence and patriarchal values. Especially vulnerable to GBV are populations such as those living with HIV, sex workers, LGBTQ+ individuals and physically and mentally disabled persons. They often face violence due to societal prejudices, as evident in the experiences of sex workers and those living with HIV. All participants in the study identified intimate partner violence, which encompasses both heterosexual and same-sex partnerships, as the most widespread form of GBV in Jamaica. When examining perpetrators, men predominantly surfaced as the culprits, with the understanding of "men" and "women" extending beyond just gender-normative constructs, reflecting the real experiences of the participants. The case study underscores the essential nature of support and preventive mechanisms to tackle GBV.

Through this case study, Bohardsingh highlights a concerning situation regarding the implementation of GBV laws in Jamaica, emphasizing existing gaps that perpetuate inequality and cycles of unreported violence, particularly for marginalized groups. Bohardsingh contends that the current Domestic Violence Act is insufficient in its reach, advocating for broader, gender-responsive legislation to encompass all facets of GBV. The case study further identifies that the issues are exacerbated by non-enforcement of policies or prejudicial behaviors exhibited by some officials in the law enforcement, healthcare and justice sectors. The research findings underscore the pivotal role civil society organizations play as first responders due to the trust vested in them by marginalized communities. As such, the case study recommends the state's collaboration with these entities to develop best practices. Despite the government's initiatives to establish and review laws, Bohardsingh calls for actionable steps to realize a more equitable and violence-free society. This includes an educational campaign on GBV, refining the police's mandate to genuinely "serve and protect," enacting comprehensive GBV legislation and ensuring inclusivity and protection for all, especially those from underserved populations.

Sustainable Development Goals

This subsection delves into the complex interplay between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the lived realities of chronic violence, particularly as it pertains to various forms of social inequality. Examining the SDGs through a multi-dimensional lens, the subsection highlights how different goals intersect with the issue of violence, including gender-based violence, inequality and safety in urban communities. The international-level analysis is then complemented by a case study by Woman PeaceMaker Fellow María Dolores Hernández Montoya, who focuses on Mexico—specifically the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco. Hernández Montoya reveals a dissonance between official narratives of violence and safety and the experiences of local communities, particularly women. Her findings underscore the urgent need to redefine systemic violence and develop localized, gender-inclusive strategies for intervention.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations in 2015, were designed to address a wide array of global challenges, including poverty, hunger, health, education and more. Among these challenges, the question of violence and its many manifestations finds relevance in multiple SDGs. Notably, SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) stand out for their direct or indirect emphasis on understanding, addressing and mitigating violence.⁵⁴ While not directly engaging with chronic violence – much less gendered chronic violence – the SDGs offer a multilayered understanding of violence, marking a significant departure from previous frameworks. By situating violence within goals related to gender, inequality, urban development, and peace and justice, they offer a nuanced recognition of how violence, in both overt and structural forms, impedes global sustainable development.

SDG 5 is centered on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. One of its targets (5.2) explicitly focuses on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres, including trafficking in persons and sexual and other types of exploitation. This focus on violence against women was a significant shift from the SDGs' predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, which had no specific targets related to gender-based violence, despite evidence of its rampant prevalence worldwide. The indicators under SDG 5 also look at the proportion of partnered women subjected to physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, showing a micro-level understanding of domestic violence.⁵⁵

SDG 10, which promotes reduced inequalities, addresses violence implicitly. While not explicitly mentioned, the goal recognizes that marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples and the LGBTQ+ community, are often at heightened risk of violence due to systemic discrimination.⁵⁶ By promoting social, economic and political inclusion irrespective of age, sex, disability, race or any other status, SDG 10 indirectly challenges the structures that perpetuate violence against these marginalized groups.

In the context of SDG 11, which strives for sustainable cities and communities, violence is understood in terms of public safety. Target 11.7 specifically talks about providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces, particularly for women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.⁵⁷ Here, violence is construed as a potential disruption to public safety and a barrier to creating inclusive urban environments. The urban continuum of violence – ranging from everyday forms of harassment to more overt forms of crime – is encapsulated in this goal, although perhaps not as explicitly as in other SDGs.

Arguably, SDG 16 features the most comprehensive understanding of violence, promoting peace, justice and strong institutions. The goal not only acknowledges direct violence but also the structural violence embedded in unjust institutions. Targets under this goal aim to reduce all forms of violence (16.1), end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and various types of violence against children (16.2) and promote the rule of law while ensuring equal access to justice (16.3). Notably, SDG 16 also addresses the issue of chronic violence by focusing on reducing illicit arms flows and combating organized crime, which are issues explicitly mentioned in the chronic violence literature. Its indicators measure, among other things, the number of victims of intentional homicide and the proportion of the population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the past 12 months, emphasizing both immediate and long-term facets of violence.



While the SDGs represent a monumental step in recognizing the multifaceted nature of violence, they struggle to encompass the many facets of violence and inequality across different contexts. Some argue that the focus on certain types of violence, especially in the Global South, might perpetuate stereotypes or oversimplify complex, culturally rooted issues.⁵⁸ Others believe that while these goals address direct forms of violence, they may not go far enough in addressing structural and cultural violence deeply entrenched in societies.⁵⁹ In addition, implementation is lagging. A 2023 report by the United Nations Secretary-General stated that of approximately 140 SDG targets for which data are available, only 12 percent are on track to be achieved by the intended goal of 2030. In the same report, the Secretary-General called for integrated policies and actions to address inequality and advance the rights of women and girls, among other goals. This report shows that none of the targets associated with SDG 16 have been met or are on track to be met. Similarly, a very small percentage of targets have been met or are on track to be met for SDGs 5, 10 and 11.⁶⁰ The SDGs articulate a nuanced understanding of violence by bringing multiple facets of violence into conversation, but it uncertain that this potential will be actualized.



Situated at the intersection of the SDGs discussed above, Woman PeaceMaker Fellow María Dolores Hernández Montoya goes a step further in her [case study](#) by looking at not only the national level, but also at the neighborhood level. Hernández Montoya analyzes how chronic violence and safety are understood at the national level in Mexico and identifies the intersections with the local level in order to identify how these issues intersect and impact the lives of people at the neighborhood level.

Hernández Montoya's case study critically examines how chronic violence and safety are conceptualized at Mexico's national level, drawing attention to the intersections of these issues with local lived experiences, specifically in Guadalajara, Jalisco. Hernández Montoya's case study unveils the complex nature of chronic violence in Mexico, juxtaposing the data-driven realities presented by authorities with the lived experiences of its citizens. While official statistics, such as those from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, often paint a picture of improvement, the ground realities starkly contrast these narratives. Notably, the 2022 National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Safety reported that a staggering 61.2% of Mexico's adult population identified insecurity as their primary concern. In Guadalajara, while some data suggested a marginal improvement in safety, a closer examination of residents' daily challenges revealed widespread dissatisfaction, encompassing issues from economy and health to education, housing, and, of course, safety. The case study also highlights the troubling normalization of chronic violence among local communities, where individuals resort to individualistic coping mechanisms, further perpetuating the cycle of violence. Despite these grim realities, Hernández Montoya observes signs of hope as community-led initiatives endeavor to shift the narrative, underscoring the necessity to transition from traditional security paradigms to localized, gender-inclusive strategies.

In Hernández Montoya's research on the gendered implications of chronic violence in Mexico, within local contexts, chronic violence severely affects women, manifesting as physical, verbal and financial forms of aggression, with places conventionally deemed as "safe" such as homes, paradoxically becoming precarious spaces for women. Trust in authorities remains compromised, with communities instead relying on familiar networks. The chronic nature of violence is found to be corrosive, fracturing social relations and entrenching destructive behaviors within vulnerable populations, with potential intergenerational ramifications.

To effectively address the issues outlined above, Hernández Montoya contends that violence must be redefined and recognized as a systemic issue deeply rooted in multiple causes and outcomes. In that direction, addressing chronic violence should prioritize a people-centered approach, acknowledging collective and individual trauma and promoting paths towards healing and reducing violence. Recommendations include updating institutional and legal frameworks, fostering dialogue between citizens and authorities and designing policies centered on community perspectives. Civil society and academia should work towards a deeper understanding of chronic violence to design innovative interventions, while communities, especially the youth, should actively engage in building social ties and reshaping their relationships with neighbors. Significantly, Hernández Montoya underscores the importance of elevating women's experiences and leadership to craft inclusive community initiatives that can mend the scars left by chronic violence.



Women, Peace and Security

This subsection critically examines the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, as established through a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs), mapping its evolving understanding of gendered violence. Starting with the landmark UNSCR 1325 in 2000 and culminating in more recent resolutions, the WPS agenda has moved from primarily portraying women as victims of conflict to acknowledging their roles as agents of change. While the resolutions have incrementally embraced a more holistic, systemic and even intersectional understanding of violence, gaps remain, particularly in addressing chronic forms of violence that women face in various settings. The analytical lens then zooms in on Honduras through a case study by Woman PeaceMaker Fellow Tania C. Martínez. Focusing on the experiences of young women leaders in the country, the case study reveals a deeply entrenched culture of chronic violence exacerbated by gender-based inequities. Martínez's work underscores the urgent need for a multi-pronged, participatory approach that engages young women in shaping policy and social initiatives.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda, as enshrined within a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions, provides a significant framework for addressing the complex interplay of gender, peace and security.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda, as enshrined within a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions, provides a significant framework for addressing the complex interplay of gender, peace and security. Beginning with the pioneering UNSCR 1325 in 2000 and continuing with subsequent resolutions, the WPS framework has evolved in its understanding and articulation of violence, especially in relation to gender. UNSCR 1325 (2000) laid the groundwork by emphasizing the disproportionate impact of war on women, highlighting the need to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence and advocating for their participation in peace processes.⁶¹ While UNSCR 1325 does not delve deeply into nuanced understandings of violence, it categorically states the imperative to protect women from violence during conflicts. However, the language within it and the subsequent resolutions that followed for a decade leaned heavily towards portraying women as victims rather than agents of change, thus perpetuating stereotypes.⁶²

The understanding of violence within WPS began to shift ever so slightly with resolutions such as UNSCR 1888 (2009)⁶³ and 1889 (2009).⁶⁴ These resolutions recognized the structural and systemic nature of violence against women during and after conflicts, urging for specialized leadership roles and measures to combat sexual violence in armed conflict. They expanded the narrative from focusing solely on physical acts of violence to a more holistic understanding of gendered violence, albeit without explicitly naming it as chronic violence or part of a continuum.

However, the most significant stride in this regard came with UNSCR 2122 (2013), which explicitly recognized the need to address root causes of violence against women, emphasizing structural gender-based discrimination as a factor exacerbating violence during and after conflict.⁶⁵ This resolution took a more intersectional approach, understanding that violence is multifaceted and often deeply rooted in systemic gendered inequalities. The idea of continuums of violence can be inferred here, though not explicitly named.

One of the most recent WPS resolutions, UNSCR 2467 (2019), further pushed boundaries in its understanding of violence within the WPS framework by being the first – and thus far only – WPS resolution to explicitly recognize that conflict-related sexual violence occurs on a continuum of violence against women and girls. It advocates for a survivor-centered approach to conflict-related sexual violence and underlines the importance of comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, for survivors.⁶⁶ It is also within such resolutions that one can discern a tacit acknowledgment of chronic violence – recognizing that trauma, stigma and socio-economic hardships resulting from conflict-related sexual violence can have enduring effects that go beyond the immediate act of violence itself.

The very same year, UNSCR 2493 was adopted, emphasizing the need for the full implementation of the WPS agenda, including the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence and ensuring full participation and leadership of women in all stages of peace processes.⁶⁷ Although not expressly stated, the emphasis on prevention and the inclusive language suggests a more comprehensive understanding of violence, which aligns with contemporary discourses on chronic violence and continuums of violence.

However, a limitation within the WPS resolutions is the predominant focus on conflict-related sexual violence, which, while of paramount importance, tends to overshadow other forms of violence that women experience during conflicts, in post-conflict communities and in contexts experiencing chronic violence. Chronic violence, which encompasses more than just physical acts and might manifest as psychological, socio-economic and structural forms of oppression and violence, is still largely implicit within the WPS agenda, requiring more explicit attention and action.

From an initial focus on protection and the disproportionate impact of war on women, the resolutions have moved towards more comprehensive, intersectional and, to some extent, survivor-centered understandings of violence, even if not centering or even including chronic violence, as beneficial as the concept might be for the Agenda's goals. While the WPS agenda has made strides in acknowledging the multifaceted nature of violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations, there is still room for further elaboration on concepts such as gendered chronic violence and continuums of violence, making them more explicit in the Agenda and the policies that stem from it. To translate the understanding of violence within the WPS resolutions at the national level, states must embrace a holistic, women-led approach that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of gendered chronic violence. This requires legal reform, societal transformation and a genuine commitment to elevating women's leadership roles across all sectors.



Focusing on the national level in Honduras, Woman PeaceMaker Fellow Tania C. Martínez analyzes the experiences of young women in Honduras amidst the prevailing chronic violence plaguing the country. The crux of this study seeks to understand how young Honduran women perceive and experience this endemic chronic violence, along with their aspirations for a peaceful existence.

In Martínez's [case study](#), interviewees delineate the pervasive issue of chronic violence in Honduras, drawing attention to manifest inequalities, corruption, organized crime and, notably, the lack of quality education available to the populace. Such manifestations of chronic violence are particularly evident through physical, sexual, domestic and structural violence, with an alarming rate of femicides. While the urban-rural divide exacerbates these challenges, the limited access to education, especially for young women in rural regions, diminishes their capacity for critical thinking, empathy and conflict resolution. The young women interviewed highlighted the impact of chronic violence on their daily lives, including a perception of insecurity stemming from normalized street harassment and limited participation in the public sphere. Moreover, traditional machismo values perpetuate gender-based violence, hindering young women's professional growth and access to leadership roles.

Despite these challenges, some interviewees have chosen to address this chronic violence, largely through social, feminist and international organizations. Interviewees emphasized the need for youth-centered approaches that move beyond adult- and urban-focused strategies. While strides have been made in addressing violence against women, greater institutional support and accessibility to services, especially in rural areas, remains imperative. A prevailing sentiment underscored that young women often feel marginalized and unheard in national discussions, although there are organized spaces at the local level that foster their participation. The interviewed young women highlighted the transformative power of education and their increasing engagement in community spaces. They also advocate for mentorship and emphasized the significance of fostering dialogue, political participation and creating safe environments to counteract violence. Furthermore, they champion the value of communal organization and networking, promoting the questioning of harmful societal norms and emphasizing the importance of self-care. Martínez concludes by underscoring the young women's plea for agency in shaping their own developmental agendas and the vital contributions they make towards establishing peace and social cohesion in Honduras.

Martínez underscores the imperative of adopting a multifaceted approach to mitigate challenges, particularly those facing young women. The case study suggests that Honduras must emphasize gender equality and engender a culture resistant to violence to dismantle the structural roots of persistent aggression and pave the way for safer communities. Recommendations for the government include the formulation of inclusive policies that champion equal opportunities and focus on violence eradication, upholding young women's rights, decentralizing efforts to reach rural locales, allocating increased funds for developmental initiatives, fortifying inter-institutional collaboration for efficient intervention, instilling educational programs emphasizing social harmony and empathy and enacting legislation to counteract harassment. Meanwhile, civil society entities are urged to foster inter-organizational collaboration, support young women's groups, impart training for chronic violence management, bolster community-driven endeavors, amplify victims' voices in policy discourses and establish mentorship initiatives and dialogic platforms to galvanize social bonding and reconciliation.

How to build national policies based on a gendered understanding of chronic violence

Translating the understanding of violence within the international frameworks, as discussed in the previous chapter, to the national level is a key tool for addressing gendered chronic violence, but it requires a multi-faceted approach that bridges the gap between international recommendations and grassroots realities. The evolution of understandings of violence within the different frameworks offers robust guidelines that national governments can harness to develop comprehensive and responsive strategies to address the pervasive nature of gendered chronic violence.

First and foremost, the foundational step involves incorporating the broadened definition of gender-based violence, as outlined in CEDAW's General Recommendations, into **national legal and policy frameworks**. This means recognizing not only physical, but also psychological, socio-economic and structural forms of violence. National legislation should reflect this comprehensive understanding, ensuring that all manifestations of gender-based violence are redressed.⁶⁸ Furthermore, states must integrate the evolved understanding of gendered chronic violence from the WPS resolutions into their national legal and policy frameworks. This could involve the establishment or strengthening of national action plans on WPS, ensuring they consider not only conflict-related sexual violence but also other manifestations of chronic violence.⁶⁹ Adopting a legislative stance that addresses both direct and indirect violence can create a more conducive environment for combating chronic gendered violence.

Building on this, it is imperative to develop and implement comprehensive national action plans that specifically address gendered chronic violence. These plans, drawing inspiration from CEDAW's GR No. 35, should recognize the continuum of violence and the underlying power imbalances that perpetuate it.⁷⁰ Such plans must also be adaptable, addressing the diverse experiences and vulnerabilities of women across different societal intersections, as highlighted in CEDAW's General Recommendations focusing on older women, rural women and Indigenous women and girls, among others.

However – as Bohardsingh argues in her case study – as potent as laws might be on paper, they will have little effect unless supported by **strong institutional mechanisms**. Here, the lessons from SDG 16 about promoting peace, justice and strong institutions become crucial. To address structural barriers and chronic violence effectively, the justice system should undergo reforms to be more responsive to the needs and rights of survivors. Drawing from CEDAW's GR No. 33 on women's access to justice, national strategies should ensure that justice mechanisms are accessible, survivor-centered and free from discrimination and bias.⁷¹ National justice systems must be equipped to handle cases of gendered violence sensitively yet efficiently, ensuring victims receive timely justice without re-traumatization. This involves training law enforcement personnel, judiciary and even medical professionals in gender sensitivity, trauma and the intricacies of chronic violence.⁷² Additionally, the establishment of support systems for survivors is vital. These could take the form of crisis centers, helplines or long-term support groups, ensuring that survivors receive the assistance they need, from immediate relief to long-term psycho-social support.



Furthermore, SDG 10's emphasis on reduced inequalities is a reminder that within the broader ambit of gendered chronic violence, there are particularly vulnerable groups — such as women from ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals and disabled women — who might face compounded forms of discrimination. Addressing their unique needs necessitates **intersectional policies that recognize the overlapping identities and oppressions** these groups face.⁷³ Translating the ethos of SDG 11, with its focus on sustainable cities, also requires national and local governments to ensure public spaces are safe for everyone, irrespective of their gender. Urban planning can play a pivotal role here. As Hernández Montoya's case study demonstrates, well-lit streets, gender-inclusive public transportation and community engagement in neighborhood watch programs can, among other things, contribute to the reduction of gendered chronic violence in urban spaces.⁷⁴

Moreover, it is essential for governments to recognize that policymaking is not a one-off task but requires **continuous engagement with the lived realities of its citizens**. This involves investing in data collection, research and regular evaluations to understand the evolving nature of gendered chronic violence and its nuances. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should also be instituted at the national level, ensuring that interventions are effective and adaptable to changing contexts. Drawing inspiration from CEDAW's framework, these mechanisms can serve as tools to hold states accountable for their commitments to addressing gendered chronic violence and ensuring the rights and well-being of all women.⁷⁵ Establishing feedback mechanisms, where survivors and communities can inform and refine policies, can also ensure that strategies remain relevant and effective.⁷⁶

The prevention of gendered chronic violence necessitates addressing its root causes. Structural gender-based discrimination, deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms and economic disparities often exacerbate or underpin such violence. Hence, states should prioritize comprehensive education campaigns that challenge gender norms, promote gender equality and address patriarchal structures.⁷⁷ Awareness-raising campaigns are also crucial components in **addressing the societal norms and behaviors that contribute to chronic violence**. By leveraging the comprehensive understanding of violence as outlined in CEDAW, national campaigns can provide holistic education, challenging deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and emphasizing the broad spectrum of gendered violence.⁷⁸ Collaboration with civil society, particularly women- and LGBTQ+ -led organizations, can further amplify the effectiveness of such efforts.

To that end, **collaboration with civil society organizations, grassroots groups and the local government level** is essential in the overall endeavor of building national policies based on a gendered understanding of chronic violence. Their first-hand knowledge of ground realities can guide policy formulation and ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and effective. Such collaborations can bridge the gap between high-level international recommendations and the lived experiences of those at the grassroots. In this collaboration, the role of women's civil society organizations is paramount. These organizations have historically been at the forefront of addressing violence, providing a bridge between communities and state mechanisms. Supporting and financing these organizations can also accelerate the national translation of the WPS's evolved understanding of violence.

As Martínez's case study elaborates, the efforts to build national policies based on a gendered understanding of chronic violence should also involve the **promotion of women's leadership in peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts**. The WPS resolutions emphasize the importance of women's participation and leadership in peace processes. A practical translation at the national level involves ensuring women have meaningful representation in decision-making bodies and peace negotiations. However, their leadership should extend beyond traditional peace and security spaces. Women's leadership in community development, economic planning, education and other sectors can be instrumental in fostering social cohesion and addressing the root causes of gendered chronic violence.⁷⁹ This is not merely a symbolic act. Women leaders often bring unique perspectives, emphasizing social justice, equity and inclusivity, which can be transformative in healing and reconstructing societies.⁸⁰ In contexts marred by chronic violence, women-led initiatives can pave the way for holistic approaches to peace, emphasizing psychosocial support, community reconciliation and sustainable development. These initiatives are often grounded in lived experiences and thus resonate deeply with affected communities, offering grassroots solutions to systemic problems.

Key findings

This report has drawn on a range of sources, from international legal and policy frameworks to semi-structured interviews, surveys and focus groups with relevant actors to understand the manifestations and responses to gendered chronic violence. The analysis presented here reveals the following key findings:

● **Chronic violence is pervasive and endemic, not episodic**

Chronic violence is deeply ingrained and persistent, distinguishing itself from more widely-acknowledged forms of episodic or overt conflicts. This report challenges multilateral understandings of violence, emphasizing the need to recognize the systemic, entrenched and gendered nature of such violence and translate that into international and national policies, as well as national-level strategies and implementation mechanisms. Chronic violence is intertwined with societal structures and daily lives, influenced by socio-economic disparities, political instability and cultural norms.

● **Chronic violence affects women and LGBTQ+ people in distinct ways**

Gender plays a critical role in the experience and reproduction of chronic violence. Women and LGBTQ+ people often find themselves at the intersection of systemic oppression, discrimination and violence. Whether through physical harm or broader societal discrimination, these experiences exemplify the ways patriarchal structures perpetuate chronic violence. National policies all too often remain “gender-blind,” but a gender-responsive lens is needed for states to ensure that the causes and effects of gendered chronic violence are addressed.

● **A nuanced understanding of violence is critical**

It is necessary to expand the definition of violence, which requires states and international organizations to recognize and act on the non-physical forms, such as structural harm, socio-economic discrimination and harmful cultural norms. This broader understanding is crucial for the formulation of comprehensive policies that address both the overt and covert manifestations of violence.



● Women are key actors in addressing chronic violence

Women's roles extend far beyond the status of victims; they are pivotal agents of change in mitigating and resolving chronic violence. The report underscores the importance of women's leadership in addressing violence and in peacebuilding and social cohesion. Women's unique perspectives and grassroots solutions, grounded in their lived experiences, can be transformative in addressing the root causes of chronic violence and should therefore be centered throughout the legislative, deliberative and policymaking processes.

● Holistic, people-centered approaches at the international, national and local levels are imperative

Holistic strategies that are both inclusive and people-centered, at the international, national and the local levels alike are imperative for addressing and resolving chronic violence. To address cycles of violence, it is essential to elevate the roles of women and LGBTQ+ people across sectors and ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Solutions should be multi-faceted, involving legal reform, societal transformation and genuine commitment to women's leadership and participation.



Recommendations

Measures to address chronic violence should prioritize a people-centered approach, acknowledging collective and individual trauma and promoting paths towards healing and reducing violence. The following recommendations are based on the evidence and analysis presented in this report.

● Recommendations for international organizations and funders in the peacebuilding field

- Expand programming and funding to address violence even in communities that are not considered to be experiencing armed conflict, recognizing the gendered reality of chronic violence.
- Explicitly consider gender and intersectionality when creating programs to address chronic violence to ensure that the programs are not reproducing gender and intersectional inequalities.
- Develop an internal mechanism to evaluate, monitor and ensure that the international organization/funder does not perpetuate chronic violence through its actions.
- Explicitly consider violence as a continuum when creating programs to address violence, focusing on everyday, normalized forms of violence, more lethal forms of violence and the social and cultural norms that contribute to the normalization.
- Ensure that women-led organizations are included as partners in programming to address chronic violence.
- Ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of the integration of international frameworks relevant to chronic violence into national policy and programming.
- Establish learning mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of integrating international frameworks relevant to chronic violence into national strategies, addressing gendered chronic violence.

● Recommendations for international organizations and funders in the WPS and gender equality fields

- Include countries and communities experiencing chronic violence when considering sites for programming and funding.
- Expand funding for research and programming related to gendered chronic violence.
- Recognize the role of women in addressing chronic violence and provide support to community-level organizations and individuals working to prevent and mitigate violence.
- Include women who are addressing chronic violence in networks, programs and other opportunities focused on women peacebuilders.



Recommendations for national governments

- Recognize the interconnectedness of forms of violence and the expansive nature of gendered chronic violence.
- Incorporate a broad definition of gender-based violence, as outlined in CEDAW's General Recommendations, into national and legal frameworks.
- Develop and implement comprehensive national action plans in collaboration with civil society groups to specifically address gendered chronic violence. Ensure implementation of national policies in a way that is aligned with international standards.
- Ensure that these policies address the diverse experiences of women, using an intersectional approach.
- Draft and implement legislation that upholds the rights of women and people of marginalized genders.
- Engage closely with community- and municipal-level stakeholders to design, implement and monitor policies and programs addressing chronic violence.
- Ensure that justice mechanisms are accessible, survivor-centered and free from discrimination and bias.
- Train legal professionals on the nuances of gendered chronic violence and its multi-dimensional nature.
- Establish support systems for survivors of violence through programs such as crisis centers, helplines or long-term support groups.
- Create mechanisms for feedback and monitoring of policies and programming that address chronic violence in collaboration with civil society groups.
- Create public spaces that are safe for everyone, irrespective of their gender.
- Facilitate dialogue between citizens and authorities to (re)design policies focused on community safety.



Conclusion

Chronic violence affects lives in households, neighborhoods, schools, and community and national public spaces, normalized and embedded in everyday routines and societal structures. This report shows that chronic violence is both a gendered and gendering phenomenon through which acts of violence are interconnected and exist within a continuum of gendered violence.

Solutions should be multi-faceted, involving legal reform, societal transformation and genuine commitment to women's leadership and participation. This report calls on international organizations, funders and national governments to expand their vision of peacebuilding and to include countries and communities experiencing chronic violence when considering priorities for peacebuilding programming and funding. The principles and practices enshrined in international frameworks such as CEDAW, the SDGs and the WPS agenda can be integrated into national-level policies to support holistic and people-centered approaches. It is also critical to recognize the roles of women in addressing chronic violence and to provide support to community-level organizations and individuals working to prevent and mitigate violence. Holistic, multisectoral policies are critical for reshaping communities and building more peaceful societies.





Jamaica

Case Study:

Leveraging national comprehensive legislative frameworks to end gender-based violence in Jamaica

CASE STUDY

By Nattecia N. Bohardsingh, with the support of Patrick N. Lalor

Assessing the existence, implementation and impact of gender-based violence legislative frameworks on the lives of marginalized populations in Jamaica



Context

This case study offers an intersectional analysis of the role of legislation in Jamaica in the elimination of gender-based violence (GBV), which is seen to be a manifestation of chronic violence.⁸¹ “Chronic violence” in this context is used to characterize the crisis of escalating social violence manifesting in a society as sustained violence, recording across several spaces including schools, communities, households and other private and public spaces.⁸² As Tani Adams writes, “[i]n Mexico, Colombia, Central America, the Caribbean and elsewhere in Latin America, people are riveted by spiraling social violence and the threats it poses to democracy.”⁸³ Jamaica has one of the highest rates of reported violent crime in the Western Hemisphere, with some communities affected by violence for decades.⁸⁴ For years, the country has been grappling with sustained reported violence,⁸⁵ which includes violence against women, girls and other marginalized populations from various age groups.⁸⁶ These violent practices include murder, shooting, rape, sexual assaults and other physical and bodily harm. While the majority of violent crimes are committed in the context of organized and semi-organized gang violence, usually between and among young men,⁸⁷ violence is constantly perpetrated against women, girls and other marginalized populations in the country. Jamaica is seen to have one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence globally,⁸⁸ and according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), has the second highest rate of femicide in the world.⁸⁹



In this respect, GBV refers to those harmful acts of violence directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender and is often rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful societal norms. Although the term is mainly used to underscore structural, gender-based power inequalities that place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence, it also covers targeted instances of violence against men, boys and people of different sexual orientations and gender identities.⁹⁰ This violence manifests in various forms, including domestic violence (physical, sexual, financial, emotional, verbal); sexual assault; trafficking in persons; child abuse; sexual harassment; and, acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes.⁹¹ The known consequences of experiencing GBV include death, injury, HIV infection, unwanted pregnancies/miscarriages, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal thoughts, negative self-perceptions and insecurities.⁹²

GBV is recognized as one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally.⁹³ It affects people's lived realities differently based on intersecting identities and has significant impacts on a country's ability to attain its human development goals. According to the United Nations Population Fund,

Gender Based Violence is a problem across the Caribbean region. Intimate partner violence, domestic violence, sexual violence among others are the most common forms of Gender Based Violence in the Caribbean region. Recent studies conducted in Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago indicate that 27-40 percent of women reported to have experienced violence at the hands of their partners.⁹⁴

Further, in a survey of the situation in Jamaica, it was concluded that: "[o]ne in four women (25.2 per cent) has experienced physical violence by a male partner and 7.7 per cent has been sexually abused by their male partner. Lifetime prevalence of intimate physical and/or sexual violence was 27.8 per cent."⁹⁵

The Parliament of Jamaica has taken steps to adopt and implement legislative, policy and other measures towards dealing with the problem of GBV in the society.⁹⁶ Of note was the launch of the *National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence (NSAP-GBV) 2017-2027*,⁹⁷ with strategic priorities towards prevention, protection, intervention and legal procedures, along with protocols for data collection. However, there is still no legislative follow-up to the strategic initiative to enact a general national legislation to deal with GBV in all its manifestations and ways in which it affects various populations. Current GBV laws are still organized in a piecemeal fashion, and at the advocacy level, the focus is often on violence against women (VAW), because the phenomenon is deemed to be harsher on women and girls in the society. However, there are concerns that discourses around GBV in the Caribbean often fail to recognize GBV outside of heteronormative framings that ultimately exclude the experiences of transgender, intersex and non-binary people, for whom gender is central to their experience of violence.⁹⁸

The *Domestic Violence Act (DVA)*,⁹⁹ which was enacted to provide protection to victims of physical and mental abuse from persons they reside with, or relate to on an intimate or familial level also does not currently take into account the intimate partner violence which occurs outside of heterosexual unions and therefore excludes from remedy some persons who may experience violence in the domestic setting. Namely, according to the Interpretation Section of the DVA:

"spouse" includes (a) a woman who cohabits with a man as if she were in law his wife; (b) a man who cohabits with a woman as if he were in law her husband; (c) a former spouse"

"visiting relationship" means a relationship between a man and a woman who do not share a common residence..."¹⁰⁰

The DVA is also seen to be limited in scope in its jurisdiction and protection mechanisms. Although the Act offers remedies such as Protection Orders and Occupation Orders, it lacks proper mechanisms to follow through with these remedies if and when they are granted. There are also concerns about the lack of adequate resources to support the intention of the law. According to retired Deputy Commissioner of Police Novelette Grant in an interview with the *Jamaica Observer* in 2020,

There is no refuge for people who are living in a house with a man who is abusing her, or a man who is living in a house whose life is miserable. Where can you go? That is the dilemma. Everybody saying people should leave, but leave and go where? The current legislation is weak; the current social services not adequate.¹⁰¹

In addition, legislations that deal with other forms of violence, such as physical and sexual violence,¹⁰² are not gender-responsive and therefore do not take into consideration all parts of the population that may be at increased risk of violence based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender, type of work, HIV status and disabilities.

Methodology

The central research question that this case study sought to address is as follows: How does the existence and implementation of GBV laws in Jamaica affect marginalized populations in the country? The specific research objectives were to:

- Interrogate the institutional and structural issues that contribute to GBV in the Jamaican society.
- Interrogate the experiences and/or perceptions of GBV in marginalized communities.
- Explore preventative and support mechanisms against GBV in marginalized communities.
- Identify the shortfalls of the current piecemeal legislative approach to dealing with GBV.
- Advance proposals towards strengthening the legislative framework to eliminate GBV in Jamaican society.

Data collection for this research relied on in-depth interviews with two groups of participants: members of marginalized populations who have experienced GBV and experts from the fields of law, academia, civil society and religious leadership. The researcher conducted seven interviews with experts and ten interviews with members of marginalized groups – persons living with HIV (PLHIV), members of the LGBTQ+ community, sex workers (SW) and persons living with a disability (PLD) from five parishes across the island of Jamaica (Kingston, Saint Andrew, Saint Catherine, Saint Ann and Saint James). Some participants from the marginalized groups identified as belonging to two or more of the listed populations and have contributed perspectives from all the populations that they identify with. These respondents were between the ages of 18 and 49.

The expert participants included the following profiles:

1. Father Sean Major Campbell, clergyman with over 30 years' experience in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands with a particular focus on human rights work and advocacy.
2. Joy Crawford, the Co-Founder/Development & Training Director at Eve for Life, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Jamaica with a primary focus on creating the space for young women who are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, child sexual abuse and exploitation, incest, rape and GBV.
3. Dr. Natasha Mortley, a sociologist (by training), gender scholar/expert/researcher and the current Research Fellow at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies Regional Headquarters, whose work includes studies on men and masculinities in Jamaica and Trinidad.



4. Latoya Thomas, an attorney-at-law in Jamaica who currently provides legal support in cases of human rights violations for marginalized population in her capacity as Legal Support Officer at Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL).
5. Marilyn Thompson, a social worker at Jamaica AIDS Support for Life with decades of experience working on projects dealing with GBV.
6. Carol Watson Williams, a social research consultant who has worked broadly on gender, development and social policy and was the National Coordinator for the first violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevalence survey conducted in Jamaica.
7. Jade Williams, an attorney-at-law in Jamaica who currently provides legal services and training on issues related to the human rights of marginalized populations in her capacity as Policy Specialist at Jamaicans For Justice (JFJ).

The interviews were conducted in English, but some interviewees gave their responses in Jamaican Patois, and this was reciprocated by the interviewer and replicated throughout all the groups. Some potential participants from marginalized groups gave consent but were not able to participate in the interview process due to their own personal circumstances. Some women participants experienced challenges meeting with the researcher because of their roles as caregivers and/or breadwinners. On two occasions, the interviews had to be rescheduled due to the fact that the participants still lived with the perpetrators and would not be able to leave the home to come to the interview site and/or were not able to conduct interviews online during the times when the perpetrator was at home.

Some of these challenges were foreseeable, as the researcher had previous work experience as a lawyer and legal support officer for marginalized populations from all the groups interviewed and has had experiences in conducting data collection in instances where adequate protection and mechanisms had to be put in place in the interest and wellbeing of participants. In those regards, the in-person interviews and some online interviews were conducted at safe and familiar sites with the help of a “gatekeeper” to ensure comfort and privacy. In the publication of findings, steps were taken to use pseudonyms or initials where possible to preserve the identity of participants, and in several cases, some interviewees were kept completely anonymous. The researcher’s work in human rights advocacy and activism for marginalized populations allowed for good rapport between participants and the researcher, which made it easy to identify the needs of the participants before and during a given session. This assisted with progressing, postponing or cancelling interviews when it was assessed to be in the best interest of the participants to do so.

Gendered manifestations of chronic violence

GBV is a manifestation of chronic violence, which, according to Adams, “undermines social relations and provokes perverse social behavior that is naturalized among vulnerable groups and becomes a perverse norm that can be transmitted intergenerationally.”¹⁰³ It is gleaned from the findings that GBV is manifested on a population-by-population basis and some of the expert interviewees (especially civil society leaders) were keen on highlighting the specified elements that required attention in order to end GBV. Joy Crawford from Eve for Life highlighted the ongoing role of patriarchy in the lives of young girls, which creates further issues for their development.¹⁰⁴ According to Crawford:

For young girls, emotional pressure of what a girl looks like starts in the home, churches. Questions surrounding her role as a girl: is she doing female work in terms of washing cooking cleaning. The responsibilities to the brothers and younger siblings, etc. The question of is she submissive to the males in the family, etc are widely considered. Any girl child who goes out of that norm could experience emotional and physical violence. The girl child becomes open to sexual violence and/or financial violence. Gender inequality and power relations play a major role in violence.¹⁰⁵

Respondents from marginalized populations listed stigma, discrimination, economic dependence and financial needs as some of the factors that made them or people in their community more likely to experience GBV. This was highlighted as a reality for PLHIV, sex workers, LGBTQ+ persons and physically and mentally disabled persons. For sex workers, gendered violence is seen to manifest in the home, in the community (on the streets), during sex work and even when reporting GBV to the police.¹⁰⁶ Keisha, a respondent from the sex worker population in Kingston, highlighted 20 years of abuse in a 25-year relationship and also recounted murder and violence against her colleagues on the streets.¹⁰⁷ Stigma and discrimination were seen to be the driving force behind sustained violence against persons based on their HIV status. GBV was seen to be a consequence of living with HIV. Four interviewees from the Kingston,¹⁰⁸ Saint Catherine,¹⁰⁹ Saint Ann¹¹⁰ and Saint James¹¹¹ regions saw their HIV statuses as the vehicle to the violence they encountered from partners, families, clients, the police and the general community. These respondents highlighted that the stigma and discrimination led to isolation and in some respects significantly impacted their health and ability to seek help.

In the introductory stages of the interviews, participants were asked to identify the most common forms of GBV in their community. When asked this question, all participants indicated that intimate partner violence¹¹² (physical, sexual and emotional abuse or controlling behaviors by an intimate partner) was the most common form of GBV in Jamaica. In this respect, intimate partner violence includes both heterosexual and same-sex partnerships. Child abuse was also highlighted as a form of GBV that needs attention. According to T.L., a disabled participant from Saint Ann who is both a survivor and a GBV case/community worker in the parish, since the start of 2023 she has encountered at least four cases of child abuse, along with women who have been beaten by their partners.¹¹³

When participants were asked about the perpetrators of GBV, men were identified as the perpetrators and women were identified as the victims or survivors of GBV. This identification of “men” and “women” was not limited to the gender normative constructs present in the *Domestic Violence Act* but were represented based on how GBV was actually manifested in their lives and work. It was highlighted that in same-sex relationships, the violence is usually perpetrated by the person who is perceived as more masculine and holds the power and/or the financial means in the relationship. According to a transgender woman from the parish of Saint Catherine who was interviewed for the study, she has stayed in her abusive relationship for nine years (including at the time of the interview) because of her lack of power in the relationship and the lack of alternative housing and other financial opportunities, which she indicates is the general reality of transgender women in Jamaica.¹¹⁴

Gendered impact and/or responses to chronic violence

Support and preventative mechanisms

Preventing and responding to GBV requires that services be made available and accessible to victims and survivors. Joy Crawford explained that according to her years of experience, there are multiple ways to support survivors, especially vulnerable women and girls.¹¹⁵ She highlighted that survivors’ help-seeking behavior for instances of GBV varies and is subjective to the type of violence encountered.¹¹⁶ Contrary to popular belief, some experts highlighted that the church, women’s organizations and family members are places where victims and survivors are least likely to seek support. The church in particular was highlighted as one of the main proponents of anti-LGBTQ+ rights sentiments in the country and standing in opposition to the realization of the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms of all Jamaicans.¹¹⁷ According to Father Sean Major Campbell, in his experience as a religious leader, human rights advocate and counsellor:

Not all vulnerable population go to seek help because gender roles matter...the one who is feminine presenting is often the victim and in our cultural context, how does that individual go to the police to say my lover is beating me? How does that person go to the church which is a big stakeholder in counselling work...the church who will condemn them... and they definitely will not call family members.¹¹⁸



The majority of the respondents from marginalized groups indicated that they feel safest going to an NGO for guidance and support around medical and legislative remedies. They cited a fear of stigma and discrimination when deciding where and how to seek health and legal redress for instances of GBV. Although some are aware that the police or health facilities will be part of the response, they express comfort in NGO spaces as first responders. The majority maintained a lack of trust in the police to assist with instances of intimate partner violence due to the perceived incapacity of the police to deal with their matters without prejudice. Bless, a woman living with HIV from the parish of Saint Catherine who has experienced GBV, indicated that:

Well, for me I don't trust the police station, so I would not go there. I would rather go to Jamaica AIDS Support for Life to make a complaint. Sometime you go to the police station and most time they can't do nothing about it and even so it does not make sense.¹¹⁹

Also, according to Keisha, another respondent from the Kingston area who identified as a sex worker:

I live with my babyfather for 25 years...I take him up as a good babyfather but afterwards ...me and him start war constantly until it all reach a court house. When the judge decide she ago lock him up mi haffi beg fi him and cry cree...and when mi cry cree and tell the judge say him change...just because mi noh have anybody else fi finance di kids dem...di man come back and beat mi next week.¹²⁰

She explained in Patois that she was sure she could not have gone back to the police station to report the perpetrator again because:

Di police dem woulda run mi wey, because mi beg fi him...so at the end a di day mi just have to live wid it [the beating] and know say Father God wi take care of it.¹²¹

Her situation lasted for 20 years. She recalled that the violence only stopped when she had a major operation in the hospital and the perpetrator seem to take pity on her and stopped the violence against her.

When participants were asked to explain what they had done or what persons usually do to protect themselves from instances of GBV, some respondents from the marginalized populations¹²² expressed the fear of "fighting back" when attacked by perpetrators or calling the police due to the other implications attached to such actions. Some of the respondents¹²³ indicated that they were totally dependent on the male perpetrator for financial support and therefore could not put any physical protective systems in place. Other respondents¹²⁴ highlighted the inability to protect themselves from sexual violence and, in the case of PLHIV, from unprotected sex, which could lead to HIV transmission and/or interruption of their viral levels. Marilyn Thompson, the social worker at Jamaica AIDS Support for Life, indicated that protective mechanisms, especially for women looking to leave ongoing violence, are not always about fighting back, but include educational advancement, which enables women to get jobs and creates independence to support their ability to leave.¹²⁵

Awareness of existing rights and protection mechanisms

When asked about awareness around the laws, policies and the authorities to protect persons from GBV, all participants were aware that laws and policies existed to prevent or protect from GBV, but some respondents from the marginalized populations¹²⁶ were unable to identify the names of any laws or whether in actuality they provide remedy.

The expert participants had particular concerns about the insufficiency of the laws to cover the broad scope of GBV.¹²⁷ Of particular note was the *Domestic Violence Act*, which is the primary legislation that currently addresses some forms of GBV. Some expert respondents contends that the DVA in its scope does not offer sufficient remedy to persons in all types of unions and concluded that expanding the understanding of GBV beyond VAW will embolden the need for comprehensive legislative framings to address all victims of GBV.¹²⁸ According to Jade Williams, policy and advocacy specialist at Jamaicans for Justice, the laws and policies in Jamaica, including the *Domestic Violence Act*, should be strengthened. In particular, the implementation of order of occupation and orders of protection should be strengthened to better ensure the safety and security of survivors.¹²⁹ Williams highlighted that “the survivors have to serve the Order or ask police who are not bound to assist,” which means that there is a risk to a survivor who will have to interact with a perpetrator to serve an order from the courts. In such instances, this further revictimizes survivors and can lead to them not pursuing the matter out of fear.

The dismissive attitudes of police officers towards male and female survivors were also highlighted as a deterrent to the application of the Act, even though police have a general mandate to deal with all instances of violence, gendered or otherwise. Overall, all participants were aware of the role of the police to serve and protect in instances of disputes but had varied responses based on their own experiences with the police or their area of work. The role of the police as first responders in instances of GBV is seen to be an important step to achieve redress and therefore will determine the outcome for survivors and the effectiveness of the various mechanisms. As reported in 2020 by the *Jamaica Observer*, women and other groups are constantly turned away from police stations by the police without any opportunity of redress.¹³⁰

Institutional and structural issues and shortfalls in the laws

Both the expert interviewees and members of marginalized populations agreed that legislation does not provide protection or support without effective implementation and support mechanisms. In particular, Dr. Natasha Mortley, a research fellow at the Institute for Gender & Development Studies, explained that stigma and discrimination – especially among people of higher socioeconomic status – lead survivors, particularly queer women, to fear ridicule if they report their experiences of GBV. People living with disabilities also face barriers to reporting because of a frequent lack of evidence and communication issues.¹³¹ Mortley emphasized that seeking care can be difficult because Jamaica does not “have a culture of therapy”, especially for men and when. Additionally, persons simply do not trust the legal and justice system, highlighting the need “to bring back trust in the legal and justice system.”¹³²

Overwhelmingly, interviewees from marginalized populations reported that they do not have faith in the current laws of Jamaica to address GBV appropriately. However, the gender experts in academia offer further explanations of the lack of faith in the current laws by suggesting that the problem is, in fact, not with the law itself, but with its application, as suggested by Watson Williams.¹³³ She believes there are certain nuisances and that sometimes the issue comes from there being no gendered understanding of GBV in the application of the laws.¹³⁴ Mortley also pointed out that the laws are changing, but it is not just about changing the laws; it is about changing the system.¹³⁵ She explained that “we need a justice system that is more responsive” and that duty bearers, such as judges, magistrates and lawyers, need training on gender and human rights issues to gain sensitivity and awareness.¹³⁶



Conclusion and recommendations

Gaps, in particular intersectional gaps, in the implementation of GBV laws in Jamaica further inequalities and cycles of sustained and unreported violence, especially for marginalized populations. The need for gender-responsive legislations to deal with pervasive issues that impact the human rights and dignity of all Jamaicans is critical. The *Domestic Violence Act* is found to be limited in scope in its jurisdiction and protection, and there is an urgent need to enact a general national legislation to address all forms of GBV. The findings suggest that the issues faced by marginalized population are usually compounded when the policies already operationalized by Parliament are not enforced or are obscured by prejudicial and discriminatory conduct by some law enforcement officers, health care service providers and officials in the justice system. Civil society organizations that create spaces for marginalized populations are overwhelmingly seen as the first responders in the nation. Due to the trust that marginalized groups have in these organizations, it may be beneficial for state agencies to work closely with civil society on best practices towards the elimination of GBV in Jamaican society. Although there are efforts on the part of the government to create and review legislations, an opportunity exists to move from paper to action in creating a more equitable, just and violence-free society for all Jamaicans. There is a need for an education campaign on GBV, tailored to the needs of all members of society. There is also an opportunity to reshape the police's role to better serve as a mechanism of prevention and protection.

The following are recommendations for improving legislative frameworks, access to justice and wellbeing:

Recommendations for the Government and the Parliament

- Enact all-encompassing, more inclusive and gender-transformative GBV legislation that deals with all forms of GBV affecting the various populations in society.
- Conduct legislative review towards more gender-responsive remedies.
- Broaden the definition of the protection and preventive mechanisms available to offer more protection to persons from marginalized groups who are not protected under the current *Domestic Violence Act*.
- Implement policy and training initiatives to break the cycle of stigma and discrimination meted out in the health care sectors, law enforcement agencies and the justice system against persons living with HIV; sex workers; persons from the LGBTQ+ communities; people living with disabilities and other inadequately served populations.
- Initiate awareness-raising campaigns and trainings for community members on their rights according to Jamaican law.
- Conduct audits on the government's first response mechanisms to understand GBV response in practice compared to theory.
- Conduct audits on the legal and criminal justice systems to ensure effective case management and remedies.
- Work with the NGO sector to center the voices and experiences of marginalized in policy processes.

Recommendations for the community leaders and the general community

- Embark on community sensitization/learning initiatives to break cycle of stigma and discrimination meted out to persons living with HIV; sex workers; persons from the LGBTQ+ communities, people living with disabilities and other inadequately served populations in the community.
- Work towards preventing and ultimately ending all instances of GBV in the community against persons based on their real or perceived HIV status and sexual orientation.
- Embark on targeted community interventions and/or campaigns to address the issues surrounding cultural and social norms to end GBV.
- End the culture of silence as it relates to intimate partner violence in the various communities' island-wide.
- Embark on community initiatives that are inclusive and beneficial to all members of the community regardless of race, class, sexual orientation and other status.

Mexico Case Study: Disconnection between national commitments and community experiences in Guadalajara

CASE STUDY

By María Dolores Hernández Montoya

*Addressing chronic violence as a multifaceted issue
affecting all levels of society*



Context

For years, Mexico has been recognized worldwide for high levels of violence,¹³⁷ characterized by the presence of organized crime, particularly drug cartels. International alerts have been issued for travelers to avoid traveling to certain parts of the country, and nine out of the ten cities in the world considered most dangerous in 2022 were in Mexico.¹³⁸

Communities in Mexico not only experience high rates of criminal activity and violence, but also weak rule of law (ranked 115th out of 140 countries evaluated for the 2022 Rule of Law Index),¹³⁹ embedded corruption (ranked 128th out of 180 countries evaluated for the 2022 Corruption Perception Index)¹⁴⁰ and high levels of impunity (ranked 60th out of 69 countries studied for the Global Impunity Index 2020).¹⁴¹ Moreover, Mexico faces additional socioeconomic challenges, such as high levels of poverty: 43.9% of the population lives in poverty, with an income of less than 200 USD per month, and 8.5% lives in extreme poverty, with an income of less than 100 USD per month.¹⁴² Relatedly, the country experiences high income inequality, ranked 45.4 in the 2020 Gini Index, in which zero represents perfect equality and 100 represents perfect inequality.¹⁴³ The understanding of security and safety at the national and international level, and with that, the policy responses, evolved within this context. In Mexico, the national policy level has traditionally addressed the challenges of violence as a “public safety” matter, focusing especially on ensuring public order and protecting material goods.¹⁴⁴ Relatedly, security strategies have mainly been based on containment, reactive actions and punishment, conducted by institutions at the different levels of government.¹⁴⁵

However, national data on crime rates show that the public security model is not preventing crime. In 2022, the common law crime rate¹⁴⁶ was 1,729.96 per 100,000 people, and the federal crime¹⁴⁷ rate was 67.53 per 100,000 people, with 90 percent of crimes estimated to go unreported.¹⁴⁸ For homicides specifically, the national rate is 30.78 homicides per 100,000 people,¹⁴⁹ much higher than the global average. In some states in Mexico, the figure rises over 150 homicides per 100,000 people.¹⁵⁰



In urban areas, the problem of chronic violence¹⁵¹ and safety becomes more complex due to the specific challenges that cities around the world face. In 2007, UN Habitat dedicated its *Global Report on Human Settlements* to highlighting the urgency of addressing the growing problem of violence and crime in cities.¹⁵² The report addresses main threats, causes and impacts of urban crime and violence, insecurity in housing tenure and forced evictions, and natural and human-made hazards. All these elements are inherent to the chronic violence experienced in Mexican cities.¹⁵³ The report also identifies addressing poverty as a determining socio-economic element for the construction of safer cities.¹⁵⁴

Using a gender lens, this case study analyzes how chronic violence and safety are understood at the national level in Mexico and identifies the intersections with the local level in order to identify how these issues interact and impact the lives of people at the neighborhood level. This case study focuses specifically on Guadalajara, Jalisco.

Guadalajara was selected as a case study because it is the second largest city in the country and among the twenty largest in Latin America, which makes it a reference for growing middle-size cities, as well as for larger cities in Mexico and the region.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, its inhabitants are a sample of the diversity of Mexicans, with populations of people from across different parts of Mexico who arrived in Guadalajara through internal migration driven by chronic violence and the hope for economic opportunity. Guadalajara is also home to a significant number of foreign residents and visitors.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the urban part of Guadalajara displays significant inequalities and diversities of experience, home to municipalities that are both the richest and most unequal in the country (like Zapopan)¹⁵⁷ and even the region, with neighborhoods ranked as “the coolest neighborhood in the world” (like the Americana neighborhood in Guadalajara),¹⁵⁸ areas ranked as among the poorest (like Tonalá¹⁵⁹ and Tlaquepaque¹⁶⁰) and most violent areas (like Tlajomulco de Zuñiga).¹⁶¹ It is also important to note that the context of safety, crime and violence is similar to different urban areas across Mexico and Latin America.

Methodology

The researcher conducted a review of secondary literature and collected primary data in order to identify how chronic violence is understood at the national level and how that corresponds to the lived experiences of chronic violence, especially for women, at the local level. Analysis of this data allowed for the identification of intersections between national level (Mexico) and local level (Jalisco and Guadalajara) efforts to reduce chronic violence and foster peace, and particularly the ways in which neighbors – and especially women – understand and navigate chronically violent contexts in Guadalajara. Three neighborhoods were chosen as sites to collect primary data: Jardines del Bosque, Miravalle and San José Río Verde.¹⁶² The selected neighborhoods are categorized at different levels of the state of violence, according to the 2020 Guadalajara Safety Index, which allowed the data analysis to show a contrast across different levels of violence and crime in the city.

Data collection followed two paths. First, the researcher conducted a documentary review of formal records from government, civil society organizations and academic institutions, including reports, censuses, plans and legislations. This review helped grasp the rationale of the national and local institutional and normative foundations in addressing violence and insecurity in Mexico. Second, the researcher collected primary data through interviews and a survey/*sondeo* performed by Demoskópica México. Interviews were conducted with the President of the neighborhood association in Jardines del Bosque, and with experts from the civil society sector (Augusto Chacón, Executive Director of Jalisco Cómo Vamos¹⁶³ and Laura Iveth López Marín, Executive Director of CorpoCreativo¹⁶⁴). Additionally, a focus group discussion was held in Miravalle with three adult women from the neighborhood association.

The survey/*sondeo* at the neighborhood level allowed the researcher to compare the perceptions of violence, environmental conditions, incidence of violence and risk and protection factors of the three neighborhoods. Moreover, the results were reviewed to evaluate correspondence between the figures reported by national and local level authorities and the daily lives and perceptions of people in their neighborhoods. The latter were based on the National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE) questionnaire.¹⁶⁵ The study universe included the population aged 18 and older residing in the selected neighborhoods. The sampling frame for the survey/*sondeo* was built on the *Population and Housing Census 2020* of the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI), and the sampling method was a two-stage probabilistic sample by clusters. The sample size, as recommended by the *sondeo* experts who implemented the tool, was 120 cases distributed across three neighborhoods in Guadalajara (40 cases per neighborhood).

Manifestations of chronic violence

Insecurity in Mexico cannot be understood from only one perspective. The high rates of crime are part of a perverse cycle that is fed by different manifestations of multiple forms of violence that are present in a range of spaces at the local and national levels, including households, neighborhoods, communities, public spaces, workplaces and schools, among others. These manifestations including both macro and micro systems, affecting structural processes necessary in the construction of a society free from fear and free from want.

As this case study shows, there are two realities in Mexico: the reality reported by the authorities and the reality that people experience and perceive in their daily life.

Government actors anchor their arguments for improvement of security in official statistics¹⁶⁶ and the data provided by the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System. But this data might be contextualized in a way that supports those in political power. For instance, it is common to compare the level of violence and crime incidence to previous years and frame the current state of safety as a consequence of what other authorities did during their time in office.¹⁶⁷ Another argument frequently used, mainly by local authorities, is that the legal framework does not allow them to act in relation to given events and that even when it is outside their powers to deal with the situation, they work in coordination with other authorities that are responsible for the issue.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, the high levels of violence and crime have led to authorities celebrating even minimal reductions in the numbers of homicides or finding dozens of people reported missing, even when they find them as dismembered bodies in plastic bags,¹⁶⁹ which has become a regular situation.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, when the figures painting a different picture are raised in the public discourse, it has not been unusual for government actors to suggest that those who brought it up, such as the media or opposition actors, are overstating violence or “safety events”¹⁷¹ in the country.¹⁷² Such behavior invalidates people’s personal experiences, increases the gap between the two realities and damages the citizen-government relationship.

Indeed, official data show that people live a different and tougher reality than the one presented by the authorities. In the 2022 ENVIPE, 61.2 percent of the population aged 18 and over considered insecurity¹⁷³ the most important problem facing them, followed by the increase in prices with 39.6 percent and unemployment with 32.1 percent. An estimated 75.9 percent of inhabitants reported feeling unsafe in the country.¹⁷⁴ This harsh reality is even worse for women, as 70.1 percent of women aged 15 and over have experienced at least one incident of violence¹⁷⁵ and over 10 women are victims of femicide daily.¹⁷⁶ In the case of Guadalajara, Table 1 shows a general picture of the incidence of reported crime in Jalisco for the first quarter of 2023, of which most are concentrated in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara.¹⁷⁷

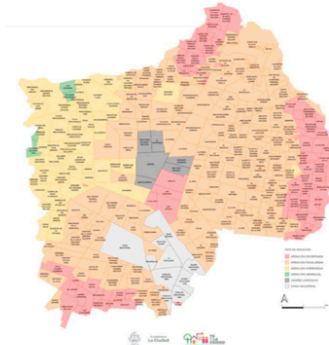


Table 1: Crimes in Jalisco | Comparative 1st trimester 2022 vs. 1st trimester 2023

Crime	1st Trimester 2022	1st Trimester 2023	Rate 1st Trimester 2022	Rate 1st Trimester 2023	Rate Variation
Kidnapping	6	3	0.07	0.03	-50.5
Business robbery	1473	1069	17.28	12.43	-28.1
Femicide (female population)	11	8	0.25	0.28	-28.0
Femicide (general population)	11	8	0.13	0.09	-27.9
Robbery to passerby	2413	1903	28.31	22.13	-21.8
Robbery with violence	4092	3795	48.02	44.13	-8.1
Culpable homicide	374	352	4.39	4.09	-6.7
Homicide	275	293	3.23	2.41	5.6
Vehicle theft	2999	3426	35.19	39.84	13.2
House robbery	668	773	7.84	8.99	14.7
Extortion	132	155	1.55	1.80	16.4
Drug dealing	318	402	3.73	4.67	25.3
Rape	110	154	1.29	1.79	38.7

Source: Jalisco Cómo Vamos | Reporte de Incidencia Delictiva en Jalisco, Primer Trimestre 2023

Figure 1: Neighborhoods Citizen Safety Categorization in Guadalajara (2019 measurement)



Source: Hernández Montoya, M.D.; Bazaldúa Flores, L.A. (2022), from Guadalajara Government.

Continuing with the analysis, Figure 1 shows a 2019 diagnosis of citizen safety performed by the Guadalajara government. It categorizes 441 neighborhoods into four types of neighborhoods based on their relative vulnerability and risk for residents of the neighborhoods to become a victim of crime/violence:

1. Priority attention – red
2. Focused attention – orange
3. Medium attention – yellow, and
4. Management attention – green

This exercise was part of the Prevention of Violence and Crime Program and became the City Safety Index (created with the technical support of UN Habitat). These results indicate that most neighborhoods need to be prioritized and receive specific attention. It was the first instrument of its type that measured these issues at the neighborhood level, using 66 indicators to understand objective measures and people’s subjective perceptions related to social integration, urban environment and public spaces, and vulnerability and risks.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the tool is no longer being implemented at the time of writing, due to government administration changes.

Contrasting Table 1 and Figure 1, the official data appear to show slight improvement (identified by the green color), but when it is complemented by a complete review of the development status of each area and people’s perceptions of safety, the reality is more complicated (identified with yellow, orange and red colors). For example, by 2022 over 80 percent of people in Guadalajara felt satisfied with their life quality, although satisfaction decreased in comparison with previous years.¹⁷⁹ However, people show generalized dissatisfaction in regards to specific issues, such as the economy (inflation, rising prices, low wages), health (insufficient and low quality infrastructure, lack of medicines), education (low levels of quality and high school dropout rates), housing (real estate speculation), mobility (insufficient coverage, poor quality, long transfer times), environment (poor air quality, floods, heat waves, insufficient green areas, water crisis), public spaces (insufficient and abandoned spaces, spaces taken for criminal behavior), urban infrastructure and public services (poor condition of the streets, lack of public lighting, poor waste management), government performance (lack of representation, low citizen participation, high levels of corruption and impunity) and of course, safety (above-average crime rates and a high perception of insecurity).¹⁸⁰

Interviews performed for this study revealed that people have normalized violence in their neighborhoods by comparing the situation in their neighborhood to other neighborhoods that are in worse condition, stereotyping people that live in high levels of violence and insecurity (This can also be seen in Figure 1, as such measurements include both official data and perception). The normalization of chronic violence and stereotyping also have an intergenerational aspect: adults stereotype young people as drug users or perpetrators of crimes or offenses,¹⁸¹ and the youth who were born and raised in a context of chronic violence have developed and normalized self-protection habits and the individualized struggle for survival.¹⁸²

Finally, when people live for a long time with such manifestations of violence and high levels of criminal incidence, it becomes internalized as part of the social dynamics, which perpetuates the perverse cycle.¹⁸³ This exacerbates chronic violence, making harder to achieve peace in Mexico. It is assumed that only the government can change this situation, but individuals adopt coping mechanisms and strategies to protect themselves through individualism, isolation, silence, collective fear, apathy and lack of caring, adapting the habits to an unchangeable reality and thereby not getting involved in developing constructive social relations.¹⁸⁴ But everything is not lost; community members are leading responses to change this complex reality on different fronts, as subsequent sections show.

Gendered impact and/or responses to chronic violence

In Mexico, it might seem that there are solid foundations from the national to the local level to address chronic violence and insecurity ; however, there is no clear strategy, effective policies, sufficient budget or transparent monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices. Although there is a general acknowledgment in the national and local development plans that violence prevention from a peacebuilding perspective and addressing key structural aspects should be and are priorities,¹⁸⁵ most actions are still based on a traditional approach to public security, resulting in no notable advances.¹⁸⁶ The limitations of this approach, as this case study shows, lead to the gendered perceptions and experiences of violence and insecurity not being taken into consideration, which furthers the gap between the authorities' reality and the people's reality.

Authorities' reality: the institutional and regulatory framework

Mexico has created a broad normative framework to address and prevent crime and certain types of violence, from the national to the local level. This framework sets the terms of reference and obligations of national and local authorities in addressing violence and insecurity.

For instance, from the international arena, Mexico has signed and integrated into the national legal framework instruments such as Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals,¹⁸⁷ *United Nations System-Wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements*,¹⁸⁸ *New Urban Agenda Habitat III*,¹⁸⁹ *UN Habitat International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning*,¹⁹⁰ *OHCHR Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*,¹⁹¹ *UNODC Guidelines for Crime Prevention*,¹⁹² *Guidelines for Cooperation and Technical Assistance in the Field of Urban Crime Prevention*,¹⁹³ *UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines)*,¹⁹⁴ *Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider UN Agenda*,¹⁹⁵ the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*,¹⁹⁶ and the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls Global Initiative,¹⁹⁷ among others. At the national level, this framework includes the *Constitution of the United Mexican States*,¹⁹⁸ the *General Law on National Public Security*¹⁹⁹ and the *General Law for Social Prevention of Violence and Crime*,²⁰⁰ alongside their specific regulations and programs that determine authorities' framework for action, the *State of Jalisco Constitution*, related laws, regulations and sectoral state and municipal regulations, and programs and guidelines at the local level.²⁰¹ Additionally, considering the importance gender plays in relation to safety and chronic violence, gender-specific instruments have also been integrated into the institutional and legal framework, such as the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*,²⁰² the *Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará)*,²⁰³ the *Mexican General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence*²⁰⁴ and its Guidelines, and the *General Law for Equality between Women and Men*,²⁰⁵ as well as their equivalent state and municipal laws, regulations and guidelines, to say nothing of Mexico having declared a feminist foreign policy.²⁰⁶

Implementing these frameworks, however, is challenging due to opposition at different levels of government, and because safety and violence issues can be politically controversial. This institutional scaffolding does not respond effectively to chronic violence because actions are not coordinated and are not founded on a clear and shared understanding of how multiple forms of violence impact people what how safety is understood. Also, in Mexico the institutional and regulatory framework seems to be a *letra muerta*,²⁰⁷ contrasting a framework that is both broad and specific framework with the current perception and state of safety and violence in the country indicates that something is amiss.



According to the respondents in this study, most people identified the role of the national and municipal authorities in mitigating violence as being done through police patrols, which corresponds with a traditional security approach. In the Miravalle neighborhood, from the survey and focus group performed for this study, it was identified that where there was a recognition of police presence in the neighborhood, there were higher levels of trust in authorities also reported. Nevertheless, even with such presence, interviewees have also witnessed people committing crimes without facing any consequences. Impunity plays an important role in undermining trust in the authorities.²⁰⁸ In Mexico, an estimated 6.4 percent of total committed crimes were reported, and only 0.47 percent were resolved.²⁰⁹ The rates for violence against women are even worse. And while most authorities do recognize and respond to gender-based violence, the prosecution process often revictimizes women.^{210 211}

People’s reality: How chronic violence impacts the local level

Trust in authorities is broken, as the survey/*sondeo* showed that approximately 45 percent of people reported trust in the authorities. However, over 70 percent across the three neighborhoods reported trust in their neighbors, relatives or friends, compared with over 45 percent who reported trust in the authorities.

Figure 2: Perception of safety in specific places within the neighborhood

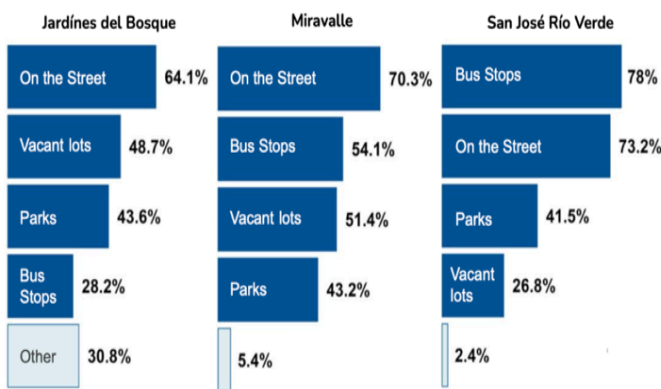
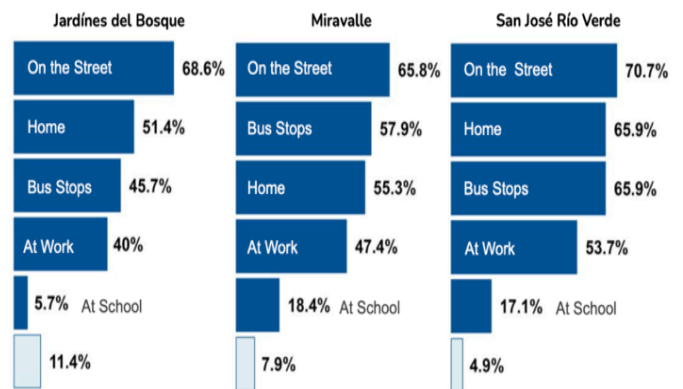


Figure 3: Perception of where in the neighborhood women suffer the most violence



Source: Prepared by Demoskópica México based on the results of the exploratory survey on chronic violence

The survey/*sondeo* in the three neighborhoods in Guadalajara showed that over 60 percent of the respondents feel unsafe, and as the level of neighborhood development improves, the perception of insecurity decreases. Respondents reported that streets, bus stops and parks are considered the most unsafe places in the neighborhood.²¹² Meanwhile, over 67 percent consider their homes a safe place (see figure 2).

When people were asked about how frequently women suffer some type of violence in their neighborhood, percentages of respondents ranging from 65 percent in one neighborhood to 86 percent in another neighborhood consider that women are victims of violence in some degree. Respondents noted that women experience violence most commonly on the streets and at bus stops, similar to the general responses discussed previously. However, the home was listed as the second or third most dangerous place for women – the place considered safest for the overall population was considered among the most dangerous for women. Respondents reported that violence against women most commonly happens through hitting/shoving, insults/verbal violence, sexual assaults, bans/threats, financial control and humiliation.

From these trends, it is possible to see how chronic violence is a condition that “undermines social relations, and provokes destructive behaviors that become perverse norms among vulnerable populations, some of which can be transmitted intergenerationally.”²¹³ In this context, UN Women considers that it is key to take into consideration women’s experiences and address chronic violence through a gender-sensitive lens to produce a greater impact for all.²¹⁴ Women’s reality, as a vulnerable group that has experienced or is likely to experience some type of violence at some point during their lives, can be considered a reference to build safer spaces for all.

The *Being a Woman in Guadalajara* report by Jalisco Cómo Vamos documents the perspectives and experiences of women in navigating their environments and the impact of gender gaps and inequalities on their quality of life.²¹⁵ Mostly, women perceive their quality of life as being lower than that of men in the same age group. This perceived quality of life sinks even lower in the case of women in low- and medium-income levels.²¹⁶ Although the report shows that over 95 percent of women have a source of income, there is a wage gap with men that increases as the number of children women have increases and decreases as women achieve higher levels of education.²¹⁷ Yet more women are forced to drop out of school to take care of the household (women dedicate an average of 30 hours a week for their jobs and over 60 hours of unpaid work in their households).²¹⁸ Women feel more worried than men did about their health, and mental health was also a concern; around 50 percent have sad or depressing thoughts and/or anxiety.²¹⁹ In terms of mobility, public spaces and safety, there is a general perception of deficiency in the city.

In conclusion, in order to close the gap between the two realities it is important to consider people's perceptions of violence and crime at the neighborhood level to (re)build social relations from the grassroots.

Closing the gap: women's leadership

Based on the data gathered through interviews and a focus group in the three neighborhoods under consideration, women's leadership proved to be key in fostering social cohesion and healing from chronic violence trauma. Respondents emphasized that learning from women's leadership experiences can contribute to changing community realities, and they stressed that "women had to take over leadership due to necessity."²²⁰ Therefore, strategies on how to address chronic violence ought to consider not only how women live, how they perceive their family, social and professional life, how they perceive and navigate their neighborhoods, but also how women take leadership in addressing chronic violence.

Interview participants emphasized that women often overcome harsh situations with compassion and often, as respondents explicitly stated, kindness. When thinking about chronic violence as an intergenerational trauma, offering solutions based on empathy and kindness can inspire others' leadership. Some of the inspiring phrases used by the women interviewed included: "*en el pedir está el dar*"²²¹ ("how you ask for something is proportional to how you are going to get what you asked for") and "*con miedo no se puede vivir*"²²² ("you cannot live with fear, you must act to get away of fear in order to live").

Therefore, there is a need to shift to designing solutions that are tailor-made, considering its transversality to the gendered needs in a particular context. An alternative is to move from traditional public security approaches to efforts that recognize and work from individual and community intervention spaces.

One example of women overcoming harsh situations and leading in addressing chronic violence from the grassroots is that of Sandra López, housewife and President of Colonos in the Miravalle neighborhood.²²³ After Sandra became quadriplegic due to an illness, she did not think about becoming actively involved in her neighborhood again. But, in her own words, "if [she] didn't move, no one was going to move for [her]".²²⁴ She is still recovering and heads the neighborhood organization. The organization is about to start working on rehabilitating public spaces to recover Miravalle. Sandra hopes that when the neighborhood starts overcoming its challenges, more people will get involved. She affirms that "we must encourage more young people to get involved, to not be afraid and to be empathetic. If we are only a few people, those few people can do it. We will not stop out of fear. Little by little everything is possible."²²⁵ Sandra hopes that her neighbors can see that Miravalle is not defined by violence, as it has been historically, and that people see the value of the neighborhood and its people.

Indeed, chronic violence is a complex matter that affects all: men, women, LGBTQ+ people, elders, youth, children, poor and rich. Chronic violence threatens individual capacity to thrive and undermines social relations, endangering the ability to assume civic responsibilities and weakening participation.²²⁶ But people want their families and children to thrive, and their collective/community knowledge anchored in their roots, their sense of belonging, and love for their neighborhood are the first ingredients to start healing violence trauma and (re)build social relationships for a peaceful coexistence.



Conclusion and recommendations

As shown in this case study, the problem of violence in Mexico is not only about common law crimes or organized crime, but a set of intersecting factors that contribute to chronic violence and create high levels of insecurity. Sustained violence in Mexico happens in all spaces – private and public – and it is a consequence of different factors such as poverty, inequality, unemployment and impunity, among others.

Given such a complex reality, a first key step is to openly redefine violence and safety. It is imperative not only to make visible all the violent realities that Mexicans across different genders and other identities face every day, but to understand that people are experiencing a systemic phenomenon with multiple causes and effects. It is also necessary to approach the situation according to the reality that is experienced by different people, affected by different existing identities and systems of power, so that response strategies can address their needs effectively and comprehensively. This is the real value of re-conceptualizing violence as chronic violence.²²⁷

A people-centered narrative tells a story of collective and individual trauma in which families and communities need to work together to pave paths of healing and diminishing such context of chronic violence. And one of the key lessons in this research journey is that in order to build inclusive peace paths, it is important not only to close the gap between the authorities' and the people's realities, but also to work for and from a diversity of spaces, as they are all necessary for long-term impact.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this case study.

Recommendations for national and local authorities

- Update, harmonize and effectively implement institutional and legal frameworks.
- Promote work on community violence that considers the individual/collective perceptions at the neighborhood level, as well as the gendered aspects of community violence.
- Foster meeting spaces with citizens, guaranteeing representation of marginalized people, in which dialogue and reflection are facilitated through active listening.
- Design people-centered and gender-aware policies and programs, and foster community leaderships.

Recommendations for civil society and academia

- Develop a deeper understanding of chronic violence, including its gendered aspects, to design effective strategic innovative interventions.
- Advocate for evidence-based decision-making processes related to chronic violence and create processes for monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations for communities, particularly the youth

- Connect with people and groups that you feel share your interests to find ways to address your concerns.
- Center women's experiences and leaderships to build inclusive community initiatives that contribute to healing the trauma left by chronic violence.
- Relate to your neighbors in a way that is informed by the visions you have for a better life for yourself and your loved ones.

Honduras

Case Study:

Voices of young women
in building peace and
social cohesion at the
national and local levels

CASE STUDY

By Tania C. Martínez

*Highlighting the roles of young women leaders
addressing chronic violence in Honduras and
opportunities for building social cohesion*



Context

Honduras and other countries in Latin America suffer from chronic violence. Honduras remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the region. In 2020, 25.2 percent of the Honduran population lived in extreme poverty and almost half (4.4 million people) lived in poverty, according to official data.²²⁸ In addition to high levels of inequality,²²⁹ Honduras also experiences institutional fragility,²³⁰ high levels of mistrust,²³¹ significant internal displacement²³² that leads in many cases international migration,²³³ high rates of impunity,²³⁴ and high levels of insecurity -- including a homicide rate of 35.8 percent,²³⁵ which is more than double the average in the region, 16.4 percent.²³⁶

According to Adams,²³⁷ chronic violence is a phenomenon with multiple causes and effects in a society. This case study focuses on two elements that Adams emphasizes: that chronic violence undermines social relations and provokes perverse social behavior that is naturalized among vulnerable groups and becomes a perverse norm that can be transmitted intergenerationally; and that chronic violence obstructs public engagement and endangers the practice of citizenship and weakens social support for democracy.²³⁸

Adams emphasizes that if policymakers do not address these challenges, it will become increasingly difficult to build peace.²³⁹ In the case of Honduras, poverty and inequality create an environment for chronic violence through different forms of violence, discontentment among the population and the weakening of the social fabric. Addressing these manifestations requires a comprehensive approach that includes policies and programs that promote equal opportunities and social inclusion, along with the eradication and prevention of violence in all its forms. Although the country has made progress on strategies and programs for preventing violence²⁴⁰ (such as domestic violence, sexual violence and homicides), the population cites insecurity, the economic crisis and corruption as the three main problems in the country.²⁴¹ The majority of the population dreams of a country with opportunities and without violence.²⁴²



In general terms, Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups, women and youth are the most marginalized and therefore most vulnerable to chronic violence. Women make up 51 percent of the Honduran population, and of that percentage, 28.5 percent (1.4 million people) are young women.²⁴³ As women in Honduras face challenges in different areas of their lives, politically, socially and economically, the compounded impact of different types of violence (such as femicide, domestic violence, economic violence, psychological violence, emotional violence, physical violence and sexual violence)²⁴⁴ in their lives undermines the possibility of a dignified and peaceful life. Honduras has the highest rate of femicides in the region, six per 100 thousand inhabitants.²⁴⁵ Additionally, the Report of the European Union Observation Mission on the 2021 electoral process indicated that women continued to be underrepresented in politics and that there were high levels of gendered political violence.²⁴⁶ The election of the country's first woman president, Xiomara Castro, who has been in office since January 2022, has not fostered a drastic change in these trends.²⁴⁷

In 2022, young women under 30 had the highest rate of reported experiences of theft, sexual assault and human trafficking.²⁴⁸ In 2020, according to UNFPA, 55 percent of the victims of sexual violence were between 10 and 19 years old.²⁴⁹ In addition to physical insecurity, young women are also faced with economic insecurity; 63.8 percent of young people who work are men, while 36.2 percent are women. Of the young people who neither work nor study, 24.2 percent are men and 75.8 percent are women.²⁵⁰

Women and girls who are migrants in irregular status across Central America face challenges on their migration route, including gender-based violence, discrimination and vulnerability to trafficking, kidnapping and murder.²⁵¹ According to the World Bank, in 2020, almost 49 percent of the 16.2 million migrants from Central America and Mexico were women.²⁵² At the same time, in a context of poverty and structural violence, as well as direct violence in the family, community and in schools, migration is considered one of the limited alternatives for adolescents to opt for a better future.²⁵³ In fact, according to a 2023 CID Gallup opinion poll, in the last two years, the desire among the Honduran population to migrate has increased by 13 percent, particularly among younger people. The most cited reasons to migrate are to find work and better opportunities.²⁵⁴ Additionally, some studies show that young women, who suffer disproportionately from gender-related violence and victimization, and are generally less likely to seek state protection, are more likely to attempt to migrate than young men.²⁵⁵

This case study focuses on how young women in Honduras understand chronic violence and analyzes their experiences, challenges and visions for a peaceful existence in their context. Considering chronic violence in relation to young women specifically is important to protect their rights, promote gender equality and foster a safe and inclusive society for new generations. Addressing this issue is critical and requires comprehensive efforts, including policy changes, community engagement and support systems to ensure the wellbeing and empowerment of young women.

Methodology

This case study explores the perceptions of chronic violence among young women who are active in Honduran society, the challenges they face and the opportunities for tackling chronic violence and building social cohesion in their context. Specifically, the case study answers two interrelated questions:

- What is the understanding of chronic violence, peace and the relationship between the two among the new generations of young women?
- How have young women active in social movements, civil society organizations and governmental institutions tackled chronic violence and what ways have they found to work on peace in Honduras?

The case study used qualitative methods to answer the research questions. The instruments for data collection were 10 semi-structured interviews (40-45 minutes each) and one focus group with the participation of five young women leaders (22-32 years old) who work on issues of violence prevention and promotion of social cohesion (90 minutes). The participants were young women leaders and practitioners from different parts of the country who are involved in social cohesion processes, conflict prevention and prevention of violence in their communities. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with young women who have participated in social cohesion processes (2); young women working in international organizations (3); young women working in prevention of violence (2); young human rights defenders (2); and a national official (1). The focus group, on the other hand, included young women working in peacebuilding and prevention of violence at the local level, as well as young women part of the leadership of civil society organizations.

The interviews delved into the perceptions and experiences of young women working on preventing violence at national and local level, through civil society organizations, social movements and governmental institutions. The focus group was conducted with young women leaders from different sectors to understand their experiences and journeys as young women leading changes and their perceptions about their impact and participation opportunities. The focus group and interviews were conducted in Spanish.

When designing and carrying out the research, the privacy, emotional and psychological wellbeing, safety and rights of the young women participants were always prioritized. The participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits of the case study, and everyone's participation was voluntary. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the data within the publication have been anonymized, to ensure the safety of the participants.

Manifestations of chronic violence

Reflecting on the most pressing issues in the country, especially in relation to chronic violence, the interviewees consistently emphasized the presence of inequalities, high levels of violence and corruption, organized crime, as well as the lack of quality education for the population more broadly. Some of the other manifestations of chronic violence that stand out from the interviews are linked to physical violence, sexual violence, domestic violence and structural violence. These answers coincide with perception surveys carried out at the national level, where the general population indicates that the biggest problems in the country are lack of opportunities (unemployment, lack of quality education), corruption and issues of violence and insecurity.²⁵⁶ For the interviewees, these situations are an impediment to a full life, where one can enjoy wellbeing in personal and community life.

Some of the interviewees²⁵⁷ insisted that it is necessary to focus efforts on addressing chronic violence not only in the big cities, but also in rural areas where development is precarious and inequalities, including in the workforce, persist. In the context of limited access to education denying young women the opportunity to develop critical thinking, empathy and conflict resolution skills, some of the interviewees²⁵⁸ mentioned the importance of programs and projects also being accessible to women in rural areas. Otherwise, these women losing the opportunity to participate, learn and give their opinion on issues that concern them. One of the interviewees who works with training processes for women in rural areas emphasized that it is necessary for young women to know different perspectives to analyze and make decision in an informed manner.²⁵⁹ On the other hand, the interviewees²⁶⁰ felt there are very few spaces to receive training on dialogue, debate and conflict resolution, even though education plays a vital role in challenging cultural norms, breaking the cycle of violence and promoting alternative approaches to conflict resolution. As one of the young woman interviewees pointed out, "If we are not educated, we are vulnerable to any type of violence. Education is essential in a country; education changes our lives."²⁶¹



Some of the interviewees²⁶² emphasized that corruption and organized crime are serious problems in the country and are both manifestations of and contributing factors to chronic violence. When there is corruption in formal institutions,²⁶³ there are fewer financial resources to meet the country's priorities. For example, one young woman who was interviewed²⁶⁴ noted that if there are fewer resources to address the country's priorities, it fosters dissatisfaction, which could lead to protests or violence. Furthermore, three interviewees²⁶⁵ also noted the impact of impunity on the whole society and on the persistence of violence, as the lack of an effective justice system can contribute to the reproduction of violence. Relatedly, three of the interviewees²⁶⁶ stressed the need to strengthen governance and law enforcement in the country as a way of attending to the social demands and protecting the population, especially the most vulnerable populations.

Another manifestation of chronic violence is the high rates of femicides in the country. Some of the young women interviewed²⁶⁷ agree that the state of physical violence in the country is deeply concerning. From January to July 20, 2023, the Women's Rights Center registered 259 violent deaths of women, according to print and digital media.²⁶⁸ This is an alarming rate of femicides, regardless of the decrease in the overall homicide rate in recent years,²⁶⁹ Some young women interviewed for this study²⁷⁰ further acknowledged various forms of violence that impacted them, including economic violence, political violence and domestic violence. Some interviewees²⁷¹ note that marginalized populations, such as Indigenous peoples, rural women and youth, bear the brunt of the existing insecurity, often leading to instances of irregular migration or forced internal displacement.²⁷²

Chronic violence implications for young women

Reflecting on the implications of chronic violence in the lives of young women, even though not all the interviewees were familiar with the term, they agreed that Honduras is in a situation of chronic violence and that it manifests itself in different ways in their lives. Some of these implications include deep feelings of insecurity, pressure to follow cultural norms embedded in the society and limitations of professional growth and loss of leadership spaces.

When it comes to the deep feelings of insecurity, fear and helplessness that young women experience, five of the interviewees²⁷³ referred to street harassment as something that is normalized in society and that young women feel unsafe in the streets. In fact, one of the interviewees specifically talked about how street harassment leads to young women's limited participation in certain spaces.²⁷⁴ Women feel in danger in their communities, and because of that fear they do not participate or develop their potential, which is also normalized. Some interviewees²⁷⁵ stated that they have stopped doing activities because they do not want to expose themselves to uncomfortable situations where they cannot stop or prevent the harassment. Street harassment and feelings of insecurity have detrimental effects on the lives of young women as it creates a diminished sense of safety, restricts their freedom and causes them to alter their routines. Street harassment undermines self-esteem, generates panic, anxiety and frustration, and perpetuates gender-based violence and inequality. One of the young women interviewed stated that she lives in constant fear, always present and alert when in the streets: "I perceive it [the fear] very much alive on a day-to-day basis. We all have a fear of going out, of going to a certain neighborhood, of not leaving anything in the car [for fear of being robbed]."²⁷⁶

"It is hard not having free access to enjoy the things I like; I can't walk because it means death for me. I have felt the little space to participate to raise my voice on issues that I consider to be wrong." - Young woman working in social cohesion processes

Not only do young women feel unsafe in their environment, but they also say they do not have confidence in the institutions that should protect them from violence. One of the young women interviewed expressed that “who should take care of us is who harasses us, scares us.”²⁷⁷ The political and public domain implications go even further, as according to a young woman interviewed, “a woman does not participate freely in politics for fear that someone will reveal her personal life.”²⁷⁸ She said, “since I was young, I had political aspirations, I wanted to be president of the law school. I was very young, they made a web page to talk about me, this intimidated me and made me give up participating... I don’t want to imagine what happens at the highest level.”²⁷⁹

In terms of the pressure to follow cultural norms embedded in the society, machismo has perpetuated gender inequalities that contribute to systemic violence against young women. This has contributed to gender-based violence, including the normalization of domestic violence, sexual harassment and femicide.²⁸⁰ These norms not only undermine the safety and wellbeing of young women but also hinder their access to justice and support systems, reinforcing a cycle of violence. One of the interviewees stated that it is necessary to make changes in traditional attitudes against women, otherwise “there is not much that can be done in a macho society, it is something normalized.”²⁸¹

Chronic violence can limit professional growth and close leadership opportunities. One of the interviewees noted, “there is a form of violence that extends beyond physical harm. Specifically, individuals have the capacity to undermine your confidence and make you doubt your abilities solely based on your gender, especially as a young woman.”²⁸² The interviewees stated that sometimes in their first workplaces, for instance, they were minimized due to their age and/or for being a woman.²⁸³ They do not receive the same salaries as their male colleagues with similar responsibilities or are not considered to be leaders because they are young women. Ageism may lead to the marginalization and devaluation of individuals. When young women are perceived as weak, dependent or insignificant, they may become more vulnerable to various forms of violence, including physical, emotional and financial abuse. The denial of opportunities for professional growth can also have psychological and emotional impacts on young women. Young women can come to believe that their talents, skills and ambitions are undervalued and unimportant, which can lead to feelings of frustration, self-doubt and diminished self-worth. Instead, some of the young women interviewed²⁸⁴ for this case study work to create a culture of respect and inclusion, which can contribute to reducing chronic violence and creating a safer and more equitable environment. Some of the interviewees²⁸⁵ indicated that much of the work to address chronic violence is led by social and feminist organizations, as well as international organizations. The government addresses the issue to a lesser extent. During the interviews, three of the ten young women interviewed²⁸⁶ expressed that they had decided to work on prevention of violence against women and particularly young women because they themselves were victims of violence (work-related violence, economic violence or domestic violence) and wanted to help other young women to stop cycles of violence. Overcoming these manifestations not only benefits individual young women but also contributes to building a more just, united and equitable society for all.

Gendered responses to chronic violence

When asked how to address chronic violence in Honduras, interviewees reported that approaches need to address youth and the issues they face. Some interviewees²⁸⁷ believe that the current approach is adult- and urban-centered, ruling out the possibility that young rural women have a leading role in their future. This vision limits the empowerment of youth leadership, which is critical for addressing the priorities of young women²⁸⁸.

Two of the interviewees²⁸⁹ recognized that there has been progress in the country in terms of legislation and prevention of violence against women and girls; however, there is still much to do. According to two of the interviewees,²⁹⁰ the institutions responsible for providing services for women victims of violence need to strengthen their capacities and make these services accessible to women in rural areas as well. From the national institutional framework, it is necessary to strengthen efforts to create a comprehensive approach to chronic violence and to promote coordinated work between government institutions.



“The fact that the adult believes that we cannot do anything and tells us that because we are young, they tell us that we do not have the experience to make changes.”
- Young woman national official

In terms of young women’s inclusion in these efforts, most of the interviewees expressed that young women are not listened to or respected as they should be.²⁹¹ At the national level it is more difficult, but at the local level and with civil society organizations there is space to be heard in their work,²⁹² as there are organized spaces that promote the participation of young women. The cultural issue in some sectors is more notable since, as stated by one of the interviewees, “when a woman is in traditional male spaces, she is inhibited, but when only women are present in some places, then they [women] participate and give their opinion.”²⁹³

Civil society organization and international organizations work to respond to chronic violence by offering training programs, which were viewed positively by respondents.²⁹⁴ They perceived that these programs provided young women with necessary information and tools to prevent domestic violence, create spaces for protection and avoid femicides. Some felt that local women’s organizations are the most important organizations for promoting safe spaces for victims of violence. However, one of the interviewees²⁹⁵ stated that even human rights defenders face threats and are victims, even while they are trying to defend someone else. According to these respondents, education and inclusion of young women are key factors to promote safe spaces and encourage citizens to participate in positive change in their communities. The young women interviewees said that more and more women are participating in local spaces and, as one of them stated, “when a woman is educated, she is empowered, changes are generated in society.”²⁹⁶

“When a woman wakes up, she is unstoppable, she generates a social impact.” - Young women’s rights defender

Creating social cohesion and building peace in Honduras

In interviews and exchanges with the young women who participated in this case study, it was clear that they understand the manifestation of chronic violence and the importance of their role in building social cohesion. Honduras is a small and diverse country, and the young women interviewed – even among those of different ages and ethnic origins – agreed that they are working for positive change, promoting inclusive participation and influencing decision-makers to prevent violence.

What is peace?

Responses of interview participants when asked to define peace

“Peace is that our rights are guaranteed.”

“Peace is well-being.”

“For me, it means an environment where anyone feels safe and that their basic needs are met.”

“Peace is that we are all equal, that women go down the street, without fear. Where girls can go and not be harassed and not get pregnant.”

Some of the young women are working to promote social cohesion and build peace in Honduras by providing training and education on human rights issues for the reduction of inequities. Many of the interviewees are focused on training young women about their rights and on new masculinities.²⁹⁷ One of the interviewees emphasized, “we must all be educated on these issues, and men must respect women. When this happens, this will be an ideal place for young women.”²⁹⁸ These trainings also include addressing issues of leadership and empowerment for young women. Two young women interviewed²⁹⁹ highlighted that the support they need is related to mentorship, to be heard and to access more spaces for participation. The young women emphasized the important of mentorship because they felt a need for accompaniment by more experienced women in order to advance their goals.

The interviewees also discussed young women’s political participation. Some interviewees expressed the need for the state to promote opportunities for all people, including those who live in rural areas. They cited the need for decent employment, particularly since many young women migrate out of Honduras because of a lack of economic opportunities. There is a need for more open and accessible ways to be heard and influence public policy. In addition, one of the interviewees mentioned the need for opportunities to access financial resources to implement projects for young women.³⁰⁰

Interview participants also identified the need to create spaces for dialogue and protect victims of violence. Interviewees emphasized that dialogue to facilitate and center the participation of young women is essential. One of the interviewed mentioned that change “starts with something simple, spaces for dialogue, with spaces like these, it is how peace is built, it is not just thinking that there is no war, peace is built day by day... Sitting down, talking, building, instilling the culture of debate... that there is no polarization that restricts us from achieving these objectives.”³⁰¹ It is necessary to continue to open spaces for dialogue between national authorities and communities to reach agreements and collaborate to address the causes of chronic violence.

One of the most emphatic responses focused on the importance of organizing, networking and joining groups that are interested in transforming communities. These spaces must be open to facilitate learning and participation and to allow gender roles to be questioned. As emphasized by one of the interviewees, “Young women must learn to question that bullying, adult-centrism, is not normal. It is necessary to educate with social awareness.”³⁰²



The young women interviewed for this study identified spaces for dialogue, training, and work for social cohesion as critical; it is also important to recognize that many young women are already contributing to reducing inequities and preventing violence. However, this can be a heavy burden to bear. One of the interviewees stressed the importance of not putting too much weight on young women: “it is not our job to save the world.”³⁰³ One of the interviewees mentioned that it is important to “empower oneself, I cannot help others if I do not feel well. We must continue fighting for our dreams so that other women know that it is possible. I wanted to help others when I did not feel good, but it is better to work for one first to inspire.”³⁰⁴ Self-care is essential to be better equipped to support others and contribute meaningfully to the prevention of violence.

Young women are asking to be heard, and to have the freedom to shape the development agenda. One of the interviewees expressed, “I have hope because I see the young people who participate with me, I see how women lead community processes.”³⁰⁵

Conclusion and recommendations

Chronic violence is intertwined with social factors like poverty, inequality, fragile institutions and high levels of violence. Addressing chronic violence requires a comprehensive approach involving prevention, intervention, provisions of support services, education, policy change and a commitment to creating safe and inclusive environments for all, particularly for young women.

By promoting gender equality and fostering a culture of non-violence, Honduras can reshape the structures that uphold chronic violence and work to create safer and more peaceful communities. In order to do so, it is necessary to promote social cohesion, a culture of peace and inclusion. The young women who were involved in this research exhibit tremendous potential to lead these efforts, as they are actively striving to contribute for a more just, equitable and peaceful society in Honduras.

The following recommendations originate from study participants and reflect their insights and experiences.

Recommendations for the government

- Develop comprehensive approaches that include policies and programs that promote equal opportunities and social inclusion, along with the eradication and prevention of violence in all its forms.
- Protect young women’s rights and promote gender equality to ensure the inclusion of young women in spaces where they feel represented.
- Strengthen systems to ensure the wellbeing and empowerment of young women.
- Focus efforts on addressing chronic violence not only in the big cities, but also in rural areas where inequality gaps are greatest.
- Increase funding for prevention and support, to ensure sufficient resources for implementing development projects for young women.
- Strengthen response capabilities among different government institutions, including law enforcement, healthcare, social services and education, to share information, coordinate efforts and implement effective interventions that address the needs of young women.
- Develop educational programs targeting schools, communities and the public, raising awareness about the consequences of chronic violence, promoting social cohesion and conflict resolution skills such as respect, empathy and new, alternative masculinities.
- Create more safe spaces for dialogue with authorities to share the priorities of young women and to empower young women.
- Promote legislation against harassment as one of the steps in creating an environment where young women feel safe, supported and free to live their lives without the constant burden of street harassment and insecurity.
- Promote more communication campaigns against street harassment.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

- Collaborate and establish networks among civil society organizations working on chronic violence issues to share resources, expertise and best practices.
- Support the creation and funding of young women's organizations.
- Provide training programs for community members and volunteers, including men of all ages, on recognizing, responding to and preventing chronic violence, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the issue effectively.
- Foster community involvement in addressing chronic violence by supporting community-led initiatives, empowering local young women leaders and engaging locals in prevention activities.
- Champion victims of violence by providing them with opportunities to share their experiences, access support services and contribute to policy discussions and program development.
- Develop and implement mentoring programs within civil organizations that promote leadership, non-violent behavior, conflict resolution skills, empathy and respect,
- Create safe spaces for dialogue and reconciliation, bringing together individuals, families and communities affected by violence to foster understanding, healing and the building of stronger social bonds.
- Create alliances between organizations and initiatives that promote the participation of men in combatting violence against women in all its forms.





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- 301 Interview with a young woman working in social cohesion processes, conducted on May 15, 2023.
- 302 Interview with a young woman working in international organization, conducted on May 11, 2023.
- 303 Interview with a young woman working in international organization, conducted on May 11, 2023.
- 304 Interview with a young woman working in social cohesion processes, conducted on May 13, 2023.
- 305 Interview with a young woman working in violence prevention, conducted on May 13, 2023.

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