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Intimate Partner Violence and Femicide in Ecuador

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Abstract This article analyzes intimate partner violence and femicide in Ecuador from an ecological perspective. The qualitative study, involving the participation of 61 individuals, took place in the province of Imbabura and was based on eight interviews with qualified experts and seven focus groups made up of professionals from the field of social and public services. The study comprises: a) the characterization of the dynamic of violence and risk of femicide; b) the analysis of the microsystem in relation to the family, neighbors, and professionals; c) an examination of the institutional response; and d) the assessment of the patriarchal culture, the role of the church, and indigenism. The results point to the permanence of a naturalized, chauvinistic culture, the lack of an effective network of resources to support victims, and a rigid administrative structure. As a consequence, victims have little confidence in public institutions, rates of reporting and prosecuting cases of violence are very low, and there is a perception that the aggressors are able to act with impunity, increasing the risk of severe violence and femicide.

Keywords Intimate Partner Violence; Femicide; Public Policies; Ecuador; Ecological Model

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Gender-based, domestic, or intimate partner violence is a global public health problem and a violation of human rights (Ellsberg et al. 2008; WHO 2013). A wide range of international reports has drawn attention to the impact of this type of violence (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006; Devries et al. 2013). In Latin America, some of these works have been instrumental in assessing and evidencing the prevalence and significance of the phenomenon (e.g., Bott et al. 2012).

Focusing on femicide during the Symposium celebrated in November 2012 at the United Nations in Vienna, it was pointed out that the killing of women is a global reality. Femicide is thus defined as *the ultimate form of violence against women and girls*, which can present in many different ways. In order to examine the etiology of this complex phenomenon, it is necessary to consider its development in relation to the inequity between men and women. This inequity is based on systematic discrimination against females (Laurent, Platzer, and Idomir 2013). Related to this issue, it is important to study the research carried out on femicide in social studies, as well as other research that has addressed

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this problem (Corradi et al. 2016). Weil (2016) has offered some possible reasons as to why this problem has remained "hidden," highlighting the absence of data and hence preventing transnational comparison. According to the official data available on femicide by the Observatory of Gender Equity of Latin America and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 1,678 women lost their lives due to their sexual identity in sixteen Latin American countries and the Caribbean in 2014.

To understand the impact of this type of violence in Ecuador, we only need to consider data from the (now defunct) Commissariats of Women and the Family and social surveys undertaken in the country. In 2011, there were 83,115 incidents of domestic violence reported to the Commissariats of Women and the Family (Comisión de Transición para la Definición de la Institucionalidad Pública que Garantice la Igualdad entre Hombres y Mujeres 2014). Figures from the Demographic Maternal and Infant Health Survey (CEPAR 2005) indicate that 31% of Ecuadorian women of childbearing age had suffered physical, psychological, or sexual abuse. According

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to the National Survey on Family Relationships and Gender Violence against Women, 6 out of 10 women living in Ecuador have suffered some type of gender violence and, of these, 87.3% have suffered physical violence in an intimate relationship (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Ecuador 2011; Camacho 2014). Regarding femicide data provided by the Police and published by the Latin American Network on Security and Organized Delinquency, 69 women were murdered in Ecuador in 2013, and 97 in 2014.

Despite the importance of the statistics, a thorough analysis of intimate partner violence requires the contemplation of the many factors that can influence the problem. A number of studies have contextualized domestic violence in Ecuador in relation to the following factors: i) differences existing between rural and urban areas (Cuvi, Ferraro, and Martínez 2000; García and Astete 2012; Aguinaga and Carrión 2013; Boira, Carbajosa, and Méndez 2016); ii) women's sexual and reproductive rights (Friederic 2013; 2014); iii) the needs of women, the risk of adolescent pregnancy, and the attitudes of men towards gender-based violence (Goicolea 2001; Goicolea et al. 2009; Goicolea et al. 2012); iv) patrimonial violence (Deere, Contreras, and Twyman 2013); and: v) violence in relation to racial diversity, in the territories of the country in which *Mestiza*, Ecuadorian and African-descendent communities coexist (Prieto et al. 2005; Salgado 2009).

In recent years, Latin America has made significant national legislative advances (UNDP-UNO Women 2013), but there are still a number of meaningful policy issues that have to be tackled in order to

guarantee protection and support for the victims of gender violence and intervention treatments for the aggressors (PAHO-WHO 2015). As the United Nations have commented, it is time to move from words to deeds and for the nation states to face up to their responsibilities. It is time to close the gap between international directives and recommendations on the elimination of gender violence and national and local policies and practices (WHO 2006).

In view of the information previously discussed, this study aims to address intimate partner violence in Ecuador and to identify factors associated with the increased risk of femicide. The work comprises a qualitative study undertaken in the province of Imbabura, utilizing the opinions and experiences of relevant professionals and intervention agents.

Methods

Study Area and Participants

Imbabura is located in the Andean region of Zone 1, in the north of Ecuador. The province has a geographical area of 4,599 square kilometers and is divided into six districts (Antonio Ante, Cotacachi, Ibarra, Otavalo, San Miguel de Urquí, and Pimampiro). The population is 398,244, with an average age of 29 years. 65.7% of the inhabitants are *mestizos*, 25.8% indigenous, and 5.4% are African-descendent. The school enrollment rate for 5-14 year-olds is 94.5% and this falls to 75.2% in the 15-17 age groups. Illiteracy stands at 10.6% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Ecuador). The national income-based poverty rate is 24.55% with

8.97% of the population living in conditions of extreme poverty; in rural areas, these figures rise to 40.091% and 19.74%, respectively.

This study was based on seven focus groups and eight in-depth interviews, involving 61 participants who were either directly implicated in dealing with cases of intimate partner violence, or held positions of civil or public responsibility in the province.

The eight interviewees (six men and two women) were members of teams belonging to judicial units (a psychologist, a social worker, a judge, and a doctor), female community leaders, and members of the Council for Citizen Participation and Social Control and the UNHCR.

The socio-demographic distribution of the focus groups appears in Table 1.

Table 1. The focus groups.

Group number	Place	Number of participants	Sex	Average age	Ethnicity	Main roles
1	Peña Herrera	5	5 women	42.4	<i>Mestiza</i>	Members of mothers of school students association
2	Ambuquí	10	2 women 8 men	36.4	<i>Mestiza</i> indigenous Afro-Ecuadorian	Regional government, police, teacher, doctor
3	Peña Herrera	6	6 men	43.1	<i>Mestiza</i>	Doctor, teacher, regional government
4	García Moreno	10	6 women 4 men	36.7	<i>Mestiza</i>	Police, public administration, regional government, teacher
5	Ibarra	11	9 women 2 men	38.4	<i>Mestiza</i> , indigenous Afro-Ecuadorian	lawyer, university teacher, regional government, Prefecture, council of citizen participation, leaders of social organizations
6	Ibarra	6	3 women 3 men	41.5	<i>Mestiza</i>	University teachers
7	Ibarra	5	5 women	55.2	<i>Mestiza</i>	Representatives of women's associations

Source: self-elaboration.

The variables taken into account for the members of the focus groups were: sex, urban or rural origin, and employment in the public or private sector.

Techniques and Procedures

The study employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and focus groups. The fieldwork took place between September and November 2014. The focus groups were comprised of professionals linked to the Provincial Government of Imbabura, the Imbabureña Integrated Attention Center for Women and the Family (CAIMYFI), and the Technical University of North Ibarra.

Local community representatives were consulted to facilitate contact with the group participants. Group meetings took place in the parishes and rural communities in regional government offices and other buildings of the participating organizations. On average, the group sessions and interviews lasted 1 hour and fifteen minutes. At the beginning of each interview or group meeting, the general objective of the research was explained and participants were asked for their consent. All those invited to attend agreed to participate.

The first named author of this article undertook the in-depth interviews and was responsible for the coordination of the focus groups. Other members of the research team also took part in the focus groups as facilitators. Although there was flexibility with regards to the direction of the group discussions, five major themes were examined: a) intimate partner relationships; b) the causes and dynamic of violence and risk factors; c) access to resources; d) the

professional response; and e) prevention and action plans. The group meetings and interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Discourse Analysis

This article is based on an analysis that employs an ecological perspective: it incorporates the relationships between the different roles and factors implicated in each of the systems contemplated by the ecological model—ecosystem, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1986; Edleson and Tolman 1992; WHO 2002). Some of these factors are associated with the macrosystem (e.g., the patriarchal culture, religious values, or the influence of the indigenous culture) and the exosystem (e.g., public institutions and the Administration), whilst others concern the microsystem and involve an examination of family relations, the neighborhood, or the response of the professionals that intervene in cases of domestic violence.

In terms of the design, execution, and evaluation of public policies, an ecological approach allows for a more integrated analysis that favors the processes of planning and the identification of risk factors (personal, relational, communitarian, and socio-cultural) that can be incorporated into policies and strategic action programs (WHO 2002; Heise 2011).

The establishment of categories used in discourse analysis is a dynamic process. As Taylor and Bogdan (1987) have noted, the original set of analyzed categories evolves as new problems arise and the categories are grouped and separated in accordance with the logic of the discourse. In the first stage

of this process, the members of the research team read the transcriptions with the aim of identifying the explicit or implicit enunciations, organizing the information, and evaluating the key themes and discursive positions. The second stage involved the proposal of the main nodes for encoding the opinions of the groups. In the third stage, the material was encoded with the assistance of the Atlas.ti program. Finally, the resulting information was analyzed by the research team.

Results

The key themes were organized in accordance with the levels of analysis suggested by the ecological model.

The Characterization of Violence: Victims, Aggressors, and the Dynamic of Violence

Differences in Violence between Territories and Ethnicities

Although domestic violence is a feature of all the districts of the province, the number of official complaints to the police is higher in Ibarra, Otavalo, and Cotacachi. Violence is common to all ethnicities (*mestizos*, Afro-descendants, and the indigenous population); its expression and justification varies for religious, cultural, and economic reasons:

Participant 8, a woman from a social organization: The women in *Intag* [an Afro-descendent community] stay with their abusers for economic reasons, but not in the Andes region where marriage is forever. Here, the women are more pragmatic and if they had

economic independence, they wouldn't hesitate, they would leave...In the case of the indigenous population, religion is much more important: "I got married for life, so I have to put up with it."

Violence occurs in both rural and urban environments. In small communities, the expression "he's my husband" is common and implies the justification of the behavior of the men. Violence is naturalized and, in many cases, denied by the victims.

Participant 6, a man from the judicial team of a public institution: [In the rural areas] women say that although their husbands beats them, "He's my husband." He hits her and she says, "My husband has the right to hit me." I have worked with the indigenous population for many years and I know their customs; the wife stays at home with the animals and the kids, the husband dishes out the punishment and she respects this. He comes home like an ogre, "Get me my food!" and if it is not ready, he hits her and she says, "He's my husband, it's OK," they have this philosophy. A woman from the city would not tolerate this, she would fight back.

Sexual Violence

In isolated rural areas, domestic violence is endemic and involves all members of the family unit. Attitudes transmitted from generation to generation include intense violence against younger members of the family, sexual abuse, and incest.

Participant 8, a woman from a social organization: We realized that there was a common factor: violence was reproduced from generation to generation...

We worked with a group of 10 and 11-year-olds because of the number of young suicides that had taken place...The boys said that they didn't understand why life had to be like this, they had been mistreated since birth, all their lives with problems resolved by violence: they suffered abuse from their parents, who expected them to work three times more than anyone else, planting and harvesting, taking care of the animals, and those that had access, were expected to go to school, many had no access to education. Most women had no access to education and they saw how their daughters and older sisters were abused by their fathers, cousins, or uncles.

Female participant from focus group 4: Here in the parish, we have a social problem that is very difficult to deal with, and it is much more difficult in the rural areas...Inter-family violence is not only directed against the female parent, it is also directed against the children; it is not only physical violence and beatings, there are fathers that rape their daughters.

Another important characteristic of the areas close to the Columbian border is that a part of the population is made up of refugees and people displaced by war, many of whom are undocumented, illegal aliens. For women, the experience of war is often linked to situations of sexual violence.

Participant 2, a man from a social organization: Many of the people that have come here have experienced violence, and for many of the women this means gender violence...Women are used, young women, as tools of war to gain information for the soldiers or armed groups, they are seduced in order to get information. Sexual violence is a complex is-

sue. There are a high number of gang rapes by the armed groups on female survivors that are taken prisoner.

The Causes of Violence

Chauvinistic attitudes, especially among men, are regularly found in personal relationships.

Female participant in focus group 7: I want to make a point about the attitudes of men to football, while they are in the street with their friends, thinking they are the most handsome, the toughest, and the most attractive, the women are at home washing dishes and looking after the kids. In my work at the Ministry, I listen to my male colleagues and when they get home, they can watch a soap opera on the TV and later they talk about it at work, et cetera. When women get home, they are exhausted; they change their clothes and prepare the food or make the coffee while the men relax.

Jealousy and infidelity are also given as excuses for violent behavior, and, as in other situations, patriarchal attitudes are dominant and used by men to justify their actions. Women suffer the consequences; in their social lives and interpersonal relationships, jealousy, chauvinism, and violence are often interlinked.

Focus group facilitator: What would make you want a divorce?

Female participant in focus group 1: I'm not sure, perhaps if he was unfaithful or I was unfaithful...for lack of comprehension or vices or maybe jealousy...I don't know, there are many, many things...Most

men are jealous and I ask myself, "What can we, women, do?" Most men, what they do is beat us, that is how it is.

Female participant 2: Yes, that's what happens to most of us.

The excessive consumption of alcohol in the rural areas is also a common excuse for violence.

Focus group facilitator: Do people drink much here?

Participant: In festivals, the weekends, and...

Focus group facilitator: Do you think that drinking is related to the cases of violence?

Male participant in focus group 3: Obviously! It's clear that one of the causes is the *puntas* [a drink with a high alcohol content]. In these isolated areas, most men carry their little bottle like it was a bottle of water, like a friend.

Finally, there were causes linked to economic conditions: poverty, unemployment, and the lack of opportunities or conflicts about ownership and distribution of land. In many homes, economic issues are not only directly associated with violence but also with a permanently hostile relationship between the partners.

The Response of the Microsystem: The Family, Neighbors, and Professionals

The violent relationship between the victim and the aggressor is not produced in isolation—rather, it can be contextualized within a number of microsystems through which men and women interact with the family, the neighbors, and professionals that are called upon to intervene.

Family and Neighbors

The response of the families and neighbors is ambivalence, and, on occasion, they place the blame on the victim. In the case of the family, participants commented that relatives usually encouraged women to stay in the relationship (for religious reasons, to maintain the family unit, for the good of the children, etc.), arguing that the victim should change her attitudes towards her husband and accept her situation. "What will *they* say?" is a concern for many women and can discourage them from leaving their abusive spouse. Social pressure is very strong and more intense in the rural environment where most people know each other and have close contact; rumor and gossip is commonplace and the expression "there's no hell like a small town" is frequently heard.

Female participant in focus group 1: Many women like to chat with friends, but are much more reserved with their husbands...I tell them that women have the right to talk and to go out and enjoy themselves when there is a party; it's not just for the men...My husband doesn't like dancing and goes to bed when I go to a party with my kids. He tells me to go, he trusts me, but people criticize and they ask me why my husband goes to bed and I go to the party. The problem is what the people say.

Apart from gossip and rumor, neighbors do not usually intervene or get involved in what are viewed as other people's problems; in addition, they do not want to risk any reprisals from the aggressor or his family.

The Professionals' Response

The response of the professionals and their relationships with victims are crucial. Unfortunately, their attitude is, in many ways, also one of ambivalence. There does not seem to be a clear understanding as to how domestic violence manifests itself and how it evolves over time. Whilst there is agreement that in severe cases of physical abuse the priority is the protection of the victim, solutions are usually oriented towards mediation and negotiation, only using criminal charges as a warning to the abuser.

Another issue is that whilst the professional may be conscious of the difficulties that the victim has in reporting the abuse, they are not usually proactive, for example, they do not offer to accompany them to the police station.

Focus group facilitator: What can a person do when they suffer these kinds of problems?

Male participant in focus group 3: In the local health center, we have a protocol that they go directly to the national police; they fill in some forms and are sent directly to the national police...What usually happens is that the women arrive, they talk about the problem, they let off steam, but nobody takes the initiative to report the incident...The health center should get involved in domestic abuse, the problem is that before we get involved, we have to have authorization or, at least, evidence of the abuse, it is one thing for us to recognize abuse and another to report it. I have seen women deny everything: the beating, the bruises that they have, they say that they have fallen down, they totally deny it and it makes you

look bad. From a legal point of view, there is no point in reporting the incident.

As illustrated by the above example, this failure to act is justified by the refusal of the victim to admit to the abuse, this is often because she has to return immediately to living with the abuser, or because there is not enough evidence. In this regard, the professionals can become cold, cynical, and lacking in empathy.

Participant 3, a woman employed by a public institution: In the area of domestic violence, there should be trained specialists that do not have an uncaring attitude; the response should not be the same as when you go to pay the electricity bill.

Some of the professionals admitted that they were tired and frustrated by the lack of support and resources, one of them commented, "well, so here we are, what can we do?"

Male participant, focus group 2: I know the problems in each of the houses...If I'm honest, and direct and speak openly...Here we have all the authorities, what are we doing? It's not only a question of speaking the truth. Sometimes you can feel impotent as a teacher because you don't have the finance and support of other institutions, because, in reality, they say to us, "You have to do this, you have to fight against that, you have to end this." That's all very well, but I disagree because they are very nice words, and I say, "But how?"

Anxiety and fear are also present, as the professionals do not feel that they are supported by the ad-

ministration. They are worried about reprisals that may be taken by the family or the husbands, or, as the following example shows, in some cases, women have been killed by men involved in human trafficking or the drug trade.

Participant 2, a man from a social organization: Here there are a lot of organized criminal gangs; even the police limit their investigations into the crimes that take place in our area. There are a lot of death threats; all of us have received threats after attending certain incidents.

The Exosystem: The Performance of the Institutions, Direction, Care of Victims, and Monitoring the Aggressor

The components of the exosystem are relevant to understanding the dynamic of violence and how it can be stopped, or reinforced, by the actions of the administration and public institutions. In this section, we examine aspects related to administrative procedures, the process of reporting an incident, care of victims, the follow-up of the legal process, and monitoring the aggressor.

Bureaucracy and Administrative Procedures

The relationship between the administration and the citizen can have a direct influence on the incidence of gender violence. Despite the fact that there has been progress, there is much criticism of the difficulties faced by victims with regard to the bureaucratic and administrative procedures. For the victim, bureaucracy can discourage the reporting of violent incidents and situations.

There seems to be a lack of clarity with regard to the roles of the institution, the citizen, and the mechanisms of protection and restitution of rights. The approach of the administration is very personal and although the starting point is the law, the citizen does not appear to see the administrative system as a whole, conjoint body; rather, it is interpreted through its representatives who have the power: the councilor, the mayor, or the governor.

Beyond the courts, many citizens are not aware of the specific bodies charged with the protection of their rights (e.g., The Council for Citizen Participation and Social Control, the Ombudsman, etc.) or they do not believe that these organizations can offer a solution to their problems. Most people trust what they know, personal contact, or, as they say here, the *palanca* (the lever) that opens the door.

Reporting and Intervention

Although it was felt that violent incidents were decreasing and there was an increase in reporting incidents, there was a general agreement that the rate of reporting was still very low, especially in the rural areas. Here, it is important to differentiate between cases of violence that are reported to the institutions involved (local government offices, hospitals, health centers, the police, the courts, lawyers, etc.) and cases that result in criminal charges and prosecution.

When dealing with the victims, immediate attention is recommended and they should be supported in the decision-making process. The degree of assistance varies from area to area, so it is vital to identify available resources and organizations that

can offer specialist care and advice. It is also important to note that Ecuador's Gender Violence Judicial Units and other women's support centers are based in urban areas, so victims from rural environments have to travel to the city to make official complaints or receive specialist treatment.

The Gender Violence Judicial Units are dependent on the Judicial Council, which has a national structure and exemplifies the progress that has been made. However, the institution is not without its critics; it is argued that it is focused on the decisions of the judge, not on the needs of the women: it does not pay sufficient attention to the victims and does not contemplate their differing cultural sensibilities.

Participant 8, a woman from a social organization:

When you go to the judicial offices, you go alone, a single interview determines the psychological condition of the woman and the man...any woman can tell you that you don't get anywhere with an interview. To start with, the woman is in a state of crisis and she has to be supported.

Specialist psychological treatment for victims and minors is not generalized, and in some areas, it is either not available or a long way from home. Nor is there any systematic treatment aimed at the aggressors, this type of rehabilitation therapy is in its infancy and rarely sentenced. Judges will often recommend therapy for the victim, in some cases, for the aggressor, but there is not usually any type of systematic follow-up or monitoring.

Participant 5, a female member of a judicial team of a public institution: We need to understand that

psychological treatments are important and that they can really help us minimize the risks of femicide.

Facilitator: Do you deal with as many victims as aggressors?

Participant: The judge works with judicial orders, but we try to make them conscious, so they don't just see it as a legal requirement, but as a human and family need.

Facilitator: Is it usual for the judge to suggest this type of follow-up and monitoring?

Participant: Very occasionally, just in some specific cases.

Having someone to accompany and support the victim is vital, and this is a role often played by non-governmental organizations, especially women's associations.

Participant 7, a female member of a judicial team of a public institution: This is very important; we are always in contact with women's movements that visit the rural areas and report the incidents.

The Process

It is necessary for both victims and professionals to understand the mechanisms of reporting an incident, the basic procedures of a judicial procedure, and the resources available to the victim. It is also essential to know how these resources respond to the needs of the victim: if a crime is reported, whether it will result in a judicial procedure and trial, with the conviction of the aggressor.

In the province in which this study is based, a number of attempts have been made to develop a support

system common to all the districts through the creation of networks such as the Imbabura Network for Integral Protection in Cases of Intra-Family, Gender, and Sexual Violence. However, a provincial model, which identifies the specific function of each institution and coordinates the administration of cases, has not been established.

Facilitator: Who is the current leader of the Integral Protection Network in Cases of Violence?

Participant 1, a woman working for a social organization: This is not really clear, it's complicated and quite sad because it is an issue that was being pushed by the women's organizations, but it is an issue that involves great responsibility and it needs time...In the beginning, it was driven by women's organizations and later, the judicial powers, then the Provincial Government through the Social Action Board, but the attitude and agenda of some people has made it difficult to make much progress.

Facilitator: Their agenda, their objectives, and their political affiliations?

Participant: Absolutely, in the end, you don't get an answer, despite what they say, in reality, nothing. That is when we say, "So, what now?"

The Trial and Conviction of Aggressors

Another important aspect is the evaluation of the possibility that the reporting of a violent incident will result in the prosecution and conviction of the aggressor. As already noted, the perception of the professionals is that the number of reported incidents is low; many cases do not reach trial and if they do, the sentences rarely exceed three months in prison. Furthermore, many of the aggressors do

not turn up for the trial and with the passing of time, the case is filed.

Facilitator: Who calls the aggressors to trial?

Participant 7, a female member of a judicial team of a public institution: A court official goes to the houses and workplaces to deliver the summons to be at the court at a specific day and time. Some appear and others, rebels, never come and they abscond... It is difficult for the police to find them; they go to Columbia or to other provinces...There is a time limit to present the reports and it goes to the tribunal and if there is no evidence, there is nothing, there is no case, there is a detention order, but there is nothing.

Facilitator: So what happens with the case? Is it filed?

Participant: Exactly, it is filed until they can catch him and they can start the case again.

Microsystem: Culture, Values, the Church, and Indigenism

Patriarchal Culture, Values, and Confrontation between the New and the Old

The patriarchal culture is undoubtedly one of the underlying causes of gender violence. However, the evaluation of cases of violence only really considers the victims or aggressors, but not the culture that dominates the institutions and represents the structure that models the interpersonal relationships at all levels of society. The patriarchal discourse defines the sex roles of men and women, their behavior, and social rules. Apart from a politically correct form of discourse, there were

very few comments (especially from men) that contemplated new models of masculinity which question sexist roles in relationships or that incorporate non-heterosexual paradigms of interpersonal relationships.

Some of the participants linked the problem of violence with the loss of traditional values and the confrontation between the old and the new. The loss of family and community values and the individualism inherent in globalization and neoliberalism are considered the origin of family dysfunction and violence. Nevertheless, this perspective can be concealed behind the patriarchal tradition that always supports the permanence and asymmetry in gender relations. This confrontation, between the old and the new, also incorporates other influences such as the indigenous culture, ancestral wisdom, the role of the Church, or the part played by the new state and the “citizens’ revolution” of Rafael Correa’s government.

Participant 8, a woman from a social organization:

At the end of the day, as much for the priest as for the psychologist, the focus is to say, “Stay [together], say that marriage is forever, if you don’t go back to your husband, your child’s schoolwork will suffer, he is cutting himself, he wants to commit suicide, make a healthy family environment.” This is what make the women put up with it all.

Blaming the Victim

Not surprisingly, with these attitudes and values, the discourses of both the men and the women participants included many comments that blamed

the women for their situation and the violence that they suffered.

Participant 4, a female member of a judicial team of a public institution:

We are very clear; we look for what happened in reality and who is really the victim. At the beginning, many women came to report incidents just to get protection orders and to separate, but sometimes this measure was not used correctly because the next day they were fine.

This point of view is very clearly reflected in the following comment:

Participant 6, a male member of a judicial team of a public institution:

Nowadays...women know that men cannot insult them at home, raise their hand or hit them or, whatever happens, the men end up losing... Now you hear of cases in which they are washing the clothes, looking after the kids, and if he says something, “I’ll report you,” or they have a protection order, so they say, “If you say anything, you’ll go to prison.” They have their husbands like slaves, and all their friends think they are right. Many men have come to me, crying, “Doctor, my wife mistreats me, she hits me and humiliates me, she has a protection order so if I do anything, I’ll go to jail.” When they investigate cases, they find that the man is not always guilty; I would say for every ten cases in which a woman says she has been beaten by her man, then maybe one of them will be the truth.

There is also a feeling, among many men, that legislation favors the women:

Male participant, focus group 3: The new laws protect them...according to the new reforms...the law is always on the side of the woman and we have no way out.

In the same way, some people accuse women of looking for relationships with men in important positions with the idea of getting pregnant in order to claim a paternity case and obtain economic support. In these situations, a claim for maintenance payments is sometimes viewed as a substitute for reporting a violent incident. A number of participants in this study suggested that this could be a method for taking “revenge” after a separation, or to “provide for the future.” They even speak of women who use this tactic as a “business strategy”: having a baby with a man in an important social position (teachers, police officers, military personnel, etc.), thereby ensuring financial stability.

Male participant, focus group 2: And I wonder, “What do single women want today?” Have a baby, without caring about their development...The cases that are most resolved in our area, in our police activity, are the famous maintenance payment orders.

Facilitator: Do you know many women that have one or two maintenance payment orders?

Participant: Oh yes. Although it is not generalized among all women, but it does happen here...there are women that live off the maintenance payments and have practically stopped working.

Conclusions

This study has identified some influences and relationships between factors of the different anal-

ysis levels (onto-, micro-, exo-, and macrosystems) regarding the comprehension of intimate partner violence in Ecuador. The interrelation between the systems highlights the essential aspects such as the rural setting, patriarchal values, the family, social control, and the fragility of state intervention, which is predisposed to increased risk of femicide. We found a scenario of complex relationships between the victim and the aggressor, all of which can help design public policies in terms of prevention of violence and femicide.

The first noteworthy factor is the permanence of an interiorized patriarchal culture that naturalizes violent attitudes and behavior and occasionally blames the victim for the abuse that she has suffered. The patriarchal culture is present at all levels of society, including formal and informal educational models. As Camacho (2010) concluded, gender roles that emphasize the idea of “women-mother-wife” and “man-provider-leader” are reinforced by the system of education.

Ecuador has undertaken legislative reform that incorporates progressive action plans and strategies: the National Plan for the Eradication of Violence against Children, Adolescents, and Women; the National Agenda of Women and Gender Equality; the National Plan for Well-being (2013-2017); and the Integral Organic Penal Code that categorizes gender violence infractions and establishes, for the first time, femicide and psychological violence as criminal acts (Boira 2014).

However, some of our findings, based on the interviews and group sessions, indicate that there

remains much work to be done in the campaign to end intimate partner violence in Ecuador. Some of the problems were highlighted by Maira (1999) who wrote of the administrative obstacles and difficulties faced by women in their efforts to react to the violence. Moreover, the response of the state institutions is insufficient and can reinforce traditional gender roles and attitudes that place the blame on the women. In a study on violence in a rural area of Ecuador, Friederic (2013) reported that violence against women and children was widespread and legitimized by both men and women. Also, Caivano and Marcus-Delgado (2013) found that it was very difficult for women to escape the violence, not only intimate partner violence but other forms of cruelty related to wars, displacement, race, and socio-economic conditions.

The relationship between the state and its citizens plays a fundamental role; many of the participants in this study criticized the lack of training of public servants, the lack of empathy, and the proactive behavior towards the victims and their families. Many comments were also offered about the inadequacy of the information made available for women, the limited access to justice, and problems of bureaucracy.

Although there are national and local action plans, they must be improved and evaluated in order to develop public policies that integrate all state organizations; they must be well-funded and sustainable (Essayag 2013). Resources dedicated to combating this problem are not sufficient and many of our participants questioned their distri-

bution, pointing to the paucity of support and attention for victims and their children. There is no public network that offers systematic assistance and protection (legal, psychological, social, educational, etc.).

In rural societies, there is also tension between the sense of community (with its collaborative activities such as *la minga*) and an individualist attitude with regard to supporting others. This is especially serious in relation to domestic violence, as it is often perceived as a private, personal problem. In addition, there are issues of social pressure, the importance of "What will they say?" and gossip which hinders any response. Many victims, their families, and friends are loath to intervene, as they are afraid of possible reprisals by the aggressors (Boira et al. 2016). As García and Astete (2012) pointed out, in Ecuador and Latin-America in general, ethnic and cultural realities offer a very different perspective to Western European cultures. At the same time, the administrative structure and rural and urban differences in access to public services constitute another significant factor.

A consequence of the above-mentioned circumstances is the low level of reporting violent incidents to the authorities; in Ecuador, they are similar to those published by Sagot (2000) for Latin America as a whole, which implies a clear risk to the life of the victim. Silence and inaction are motivated partly by the sense of impunity, the belief that criminal charges will not be effective and the aggressor will be free to return home.

From an ecological viewpoint, and in consideration of the ontosystem, the causes of violence, with regards to the characteristics of the victims and the aggressors, are similar to those identified by studies in other parts of the world: dysfunctional gender structures, alcohol and/or substance abuse, jealousy or infidelity (Boira 2010; Abramsky et al. 2011). At the level of the microsystem, there are some specific aspects such as the ambivalence of the families, neighbors, and professionals, which imply a limited awareness of the impact of intimate partner violence. Analysis of the exosystem reveals severe difficulties for women who have been abused: precarious economic conditions; a fragile state structure in rural areas; limited resources for assistance and support; and excessive bureaucracy in administrative and judicial processes. It is clear that tackling these problems requires structural changes that go beyond specific policies on gender and violence. Finally, the perspective of the macrosystem emphasizes the enormous influence of the patriarchal culture that impacts all the other systems. Reference should also be included on the role of the Catholic Church and the indigenous culture in many rural areas.

In short, the campaign against gender violence and the prevention of femicide in Ecuador is limited by naturalized, chauvinistic structures, the absence of local resources for supporting victims, deficiencies of inter-institutional coordination, and the response of the professionals and the bureaucratization of the administrative processes. These circumstances result in the silence of the victims, difficulties in access to justice, the distrust of the

administration, low rates of reporting incidents, and a feeling that the aggressors are not answerable for their actions.

The conclusions drawn from this study can be extended to other areas of Latin America. In an analysis of gender parity, Archenti and Albaine (2013) looked at the complex social and political dynamic in Bolivia and Ecuador where, despite progressive gender equality legislation, change has proved to be very difficult and has been curtailed by institutional political barriers and the dominant influence of a patriarchal culture.

Whilst recognizing legislative progress and the commitment of a number of states to end gender violence, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2014), in line with what has been presented in this study, identified a number of issues that need to be addressed, namely: a) irregularities and legal pitfalls in investigations into violence against women; b) deficiencies in trials and sanctions in cases of violence against women; c) the lack of effective measures of protection and prevention of violence against women; d) barriers faced by victims attempting to access legal authorities for protection; e) structural problems in justice systems that affect the processing of cases of violence against women.

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