



Voices of Women: On guns, violence and activism



A paper by IM Swedish Development Partner



Preface

Agenda2030 is a commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030 world-wide, ensuring that no one is left behind. But there is a massive barrier to ensuring that: violence. Acknowledged in Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, it becomes clear that we need peaceful societies to thrive.

However, violence and specifically gun violence, is a challenge to a broad number of countries, many of them not being in a state of conflict¹. As rights-based organization that works for strong democracies and the inclusion of all globally, IM Swedish Development Partner has been witnessing how gun violence undermines the access of rights for many communities, such as in El Salvador. As feminist organization, IM has also seen that the gendered dimensions of gun violence are stark yet not documented or acted upon sufficiently.

It was against this background that IM has launched Humanium Metal. Humanium Metal turns weapons of destruction into commodities for peace. In cooperation with local governments illegal seized weapons, or voluntarily handed in weapons, are destroyed. IM converts that metal into high-quality stainless steel and then works with vetted companies to produce a wide range of commercial products from them. The profits are then reinvested into civil society interventions in the country of origin dealing with a wide range of causes and impacts of gun violence.

Humanium Metal serves as strong symbol towards overcoming gun violence and thus unites survivors, activist, the private sector and civil society into a joined quest for peaceful societies. IM aims to tap into this potential by inspiring a global movement on gun violence. Thanks to the support of the Folke Bernadotteakademin, we have launched a [global platform for activism](https://humanium-metal.com/activist/)² and are able to contribute to the discourse on gun violence by amplifying the voices of women affected by and fighting it.

In partnership with the organizations Cemujer, Data Cívica, Equis Justicia para las Mujeres, Gun Free South Africa, Intersecta, Centro de Estudios Ecuμένicos and the Women's Right to Education Programme, we have collected four case studies on El Salvador, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa respectively. They consist of women that are engaged in activism against violence and women that survived gender-based gun violence. Their testimonies tell us that guns are used to instill fear in many aspects of women's lives and that some

¹ <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us/highlights/2019/highlight-gvd-scenarios-bp.html>

² <https://humanium-metal.com/activist/>

women face an exacerbated risk of gun violence, because of their occupation or gender identity. It is the ambition of this paper to inform about the broad spectrum of violence against women and to show how powerful women around the globe aim to overcome it.

As Jeannette, an activist in El Salvador puts it: *“Violence affects society as a whole, though the impact on the most vulnerable groups are greater, and basically it is the poorest people, who already live in a situation of inequality and exclusion, who have historically been abandoned by the state. They are now facing this extreme and dramatic violence. **So, we have to name it, document it, testify to it [...].**”*

It is the ambition of this paper, to do exactly that. To name the issue of gender-based gun violence, to document the experiences of survivors and activists and to amplify their testimonies in a quest to raise awareness on the stark barrier gun violence poses to Agenda2030 and the wellbeing of us all.





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Introduction

More than eighty percent of global violent deaths victims are male and while global data on the gender of gun owners does not exist, numbers from countries in which data is available, such as South Africa, show that a huge majority of gun owners is male. So, why do we have to talk about women and gun violence?

Because gun violence does affect women massively. The use of guns is often closely tied up in cultures of toxic masculinity. Norms of what it means to be a man are linked to gun ownership and violent behavior, including towards women. These norms of masculinity feed general patterns of violence and those patterns are amplified by the presence of guns. Guns are used as tools for a broad variety of crimes, the lethality and wide range facilitating the exercise of power by the perpetrator in a way that would be impossible without a gun.

While the gendered dimension of gun violence have slowly received more attention in the relevant forums, there is a lack of understanding of the multifaceted impact gun violence has on women. This paper aims to address this gap by providing perspectives of women affected by gun violence. Instead of letting statistics speak, this paper lets women speak. The organizations Cemujer, Data Cívica, Equis Justicia para las Mujeres, Gun Free South Africa, Intersecta, Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos and the Women's Right to Education Programme spoke to women in El Salvador, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa respectively and collected their testimonies of survival and activism. This paper is a collection of their voices, giving you a taste of the rich analysis and powerful stories that are available in the country case studies.

The stories shared by women shows the broad spectrum of violence women face at home, in the public sphere, in conflict and at work. The testimonies exemplify how gender-based gun violence does limit women because it is threatening their security of person, hinders their personal development, forcing them into gender stereotypical roles and thus pose a significant barrier to the right of equality. They also show how women in El Salvador, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa reject to accept the status quo and engage in activism in many cases at great personal risks.

Case Study: South Africa

This case study has been conducted by Gun Free South Africa and is presented in a shortened and edited version here. Please find the full study [here](#)³.

Context

South Africa is one of a few non-conflict countries that suffers a great concentration of lethal violence resulting from a number of wide-ranging issues such as high socio-economic inequality, social norms that legitimise the use of violence, and weak law enforcement.⁴

The nature of gun ownership and use in South Africa differs across genders. Men make up around 81% of licensed gun owners, 64% of whom are over the age of 50. The majority of guns are licensed for self-defence purposes.⁵ While it is difficult to estimate the number of illegal guns in circulation, the main channel that supplies illegal guns is loss and theft of licensed guns, averaging 24 guns a day.⁶

Women and men are affected differently by gun violence. Men are the primary victims of lethal gun violence: Comprising 89% of fatalities, the majority are young black men; aged 15–29 years who live in urban areas and who are victimised by other young black men with illegal guns. Licensed guns play a large part in violence against women, particularly the killing of intimate female partners. Research into intimate-femicide-suicide shows that perpetrators are more likely to be white; to be employed in the police, army, or private security industry; and to own a legal gun.⁷ The patriarchal culture that both white and black South Africans share facilitates violence against women.⁸

Following several government interventions to address gun violence in the 1990s, the Firearms Control Act of 2000, which has a gender focus, was enacted. Stricter gun control associated with the promulgation and implementation of the Act saw firearm-related intimate femicide halving between 1999 and 2009, a trend

³ <https://humanium-metal.com/about/publications/>

⁴ Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2015. Chapter 3: Lethal Violence Against Women and Girls. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015: Every Body Counts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 87–120.

⁵ Wits School of Governance, Public Safety Programme. 2015. *Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014)*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

⁶ Taylor, Claire. 2018. *Gun Control and Violence: South Africa's Story*. Johannesburg: GFSA. (Online). Available at www.gfsa.org.za/component/jdownloads/send/13-research/114-gun-control-and-violence-south-africa-s-story (accessed 28 November 2020).

⁷ Mathews, Shanaaz, Nacemah Abrahams, Rachel Jewkes, Lorna Martin, Carl Lombard, and Lisa Vetten. 2008. Intimate Femicide–Suicide in South Africa: A Cross-sectional Study. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, Vol. 86, No. 7, pp. 552–58.

⁸ Langa, Malose, Adele Kirsten, Brett Bowman, Gill Eagle, and Peace Kiguwa. 2018. Black Masculinities on Trial in Absentia: The Case of Oscar Pistorius in South Africa. *Men and Masculinities Journal*, pp. 1–17.

mirrored in overall gun-related deaths: While 34 people were shot and killed a day in 1998, in 2009 the rate had almost halved to 18.

However, gun-related homicides in South Africa have been on the rise since 2011. In 2019-2020, gun-related daily death rates average around 23.⁹ The reason for this upward trend can be explained by a general breakdown of the national firearms control regime, resulting from deliberate criminality involving corruption and fraud within the firearms management system, as well as poor implementation and compliance linked to a lack of capacity and resources. Consequently, the flow and availability of guns – both legal and illegal – ramped up and an increase in guns in death rates followed.

“Our problem is not that we don’t develop policies, our problem is implementing policies” – Sophie

There are several steps to be taken to address the epidemic of gun violence in South Africa, and policy making is only one. Political engagement is essential for the sustainable implementation of gun control laws, particularly to counter opposition from special interest groups. Moreover, even though more women have been involved in the policy and legislative arena, necessary efforts have not been made to protect women in their homes, with the explicit norm asserted that the private domain should not be legislated.

“I believe that we as young people play a role...because we are the future of tomorrow, so why not start now and advocate now?”- Abigail



Abigail, a South African Youth Activist

⁹ SAPS (South African Police Service). 2020. Crime situation in Republic of South Africa: Twelve (12) months (April to March 2019-20). Presentation to the Portfolio Committee of Police, 31 July. (Online). Available at www.saps.gov.za/services/april_to_march_2019_20_presentation.pdf (accessed 3 August 2020).

Voices of Women: Survivors

Ntomfunthi

Ntomfunthi is a mother and grandmother, she lives on a farm outside Waterval Boven in rural Mpumalanga where she works as a housekeeper. Her son, who is her only child, was shot and injured in an armed robbery. She describes what happened:

On a Friday in October 2019 my son was hitchhiking to Waterval Boven to come and visit me when two armed men attacked him at a hiking spot. They

stole everything he had and then shot him twice in the leg and left him lying on the side of the road. There are a lot of police patrolling the area, and the police found him lying there, they called the ambulance but it took a really long time to arrive, so another person with a car took him to hospital.

My son was shot at 6 o'clock on Friday evening and I got a phone call from the hospital on Saturday morning as I was on my way to work. When they told me my child was in hospital, that he had been shot, I thought I was going to collapse, I was so scared. My employer took me and his girlfriend to the hospital (about 100 km away). I felt traumatised when I saw him lying in the hospital bed, he was bleeding from the leg and his arm and hand were injured and he couldn't move. I tried to be strong for him and he tried to be strong for me and his girlfriend and son, but I kept thinking 'he may not make it.'

My son was operated on and stayed in hospital for two months, where I visited him three times. When he was discharged from hospital he came and stayed with me until the end of January this year. While he stayed with me I cleaned and cooked for him – I made him breakfast before I went to work, then came home to give him lunch because he couldn't carry anything, I brought water for him to wash and helped clean his wound. He was in a lot of pain and couldn't sleep, so I also bought medicine and bandages. It is over a year



Ntomfunthi, after sharing her powerful story



since my son was shot, he still has a bullet in his knee and he limps, but he doesn't need to use crutches anymore and he has started doing piece (part-time, informal) work again.

The police and the hospital staff treated my son well. The police have called him a few times, to see how he is and to keep his hope up. They also called twice to ask him to identify people they have arrested, but he can't recognise the men who shot him because they had their faces covered. The man who took my son to hospital in his car has also kept in touch with my son to see how he is doing.

I see my son; he is better now. He did struggle with depression, but he says, "I don't want to go back, I want to go forward."

I managed because of the support from my family and friends. When my son was in hospital I took my grandson (who is 4 years old) to stay with me because his mother was really struggling, she kept asking "what will I tell my son if his father dies?" I'm older, and more able to help my grandson, so he came and stayed with me in this time. We prayed a lot to God for strength to cope. We have given all to God, and we have forgiven the men who shot my son. If we kept the anger in our heart we wouldn't be able to heal and move on. My son has said, "what happened, happened, it's in the past, but I'm alive, and I can walk without crutches." He gives thanks to God for his life.

We haven't told my grandson what happened to his father; we told him his father was at school and that he fell down playing ball. My grandson is too young to know what happened, and I'm afraid to tell him his father was shot, that this will stay in his mind as he grows up and that he may think that shooting someone is okay, that crime is okay; or he may seek revenge. We will tell him when he is older and can understand.

When they told me my child was in hospital, that he had been shot, I thought I was going to collapse, I was so scared. - Ntomfunthi



Keletso, during her interview

Keletso

Keletso, a young woman who grew up in Alexandra township outside Johannesburg, survived living with an abusive step-father and being held hostage at gun point. Her step-father, a police officer, went on to shoot and kill four people before he was shot and killed by the police. This is her story (supplemented by media reports of the shooting incident, highlighted in italicised text):

I lost my biological father at a young age. In 2011, when I was 11 years old, my mother met Ronnie Masie, a constable at the local police station. Two years into the relationship, Ronnie moved in with us. We lived a happy life, and I even began to see Ronnie as a father. But things started to change in early 2015, that's when a woman called Sowela Nkuna, who was the mother of Ronnie's child, threatened to press charges against him for domestic violence.

On 15 March 2015, the first serious incident occurred. On this particular Sunday, my mother suddenly left the house in a rush, with no explanation. I was ironing clothes in the dining room with my cousin when Ronnie started yelling, and we had no idea what was happening. He then locked my cousin and I in the house, holding us hostage at gun point and telling us "you're going to die today." My mother returned with the police, an entire squad of policemen. Ronnie went outside, and the policemen spoke to him, and he was yelling "I'm going to kill them." Ronnie then called to me to fetch his bullet proof vest. I fetched the vest and gave it to him, I had to do it, he had a gun pointed at me and I knew that if he did shoot at me, he would not miss. As I gave him the bulletproof vest, I saw my mom standing on the street, I started screaming "Mama, mama, help us," but Ronnie pushed me back inside. Meanwhile the police just stood outside, not

doing anything, just listening to him. I knew I had to make a plan if I wanted to get out of this situation. While Ronnie was outside with the police, my cousin and I managed to sneak out the kitchen door because he had not taken the keys. We tried to jump over the wall into our neighbour's backyard. Suddenly Ronnie appeared and pointed the gun at us, he told me to get off the wall and go back in the house. Ronnie then locked me and my cousin in the house, taking away all the keys.

Outside, Ronnie's friend from the police station spoke to him, trying to convince him to let us go, and telling him that if anything happened to us, he would be arrested and he knew what life inside prison was like. Finally at 6pm that evening, Ronnie let me and my cousin free. When the policeman came to get us out the house, I ran to my mother and was so grateful to be alive, I cried so hard.

Ronnie was charged with domestic violence that night, and his service firearm removed. However, he wasn't arrested, and no disciplinary inquiry was opened, nor was there an inquiry into whether he was fit to possess a firearm.¹⁰

When he came back to our house that night Ronnie apologised to my mother, she forgave him, and everything seemingly went back to normal, though I was still very angry about what Ronnie had put me through. Later that month, Ronnie and my mom had an argument and Ronnie beat her to a pulp. At this point I was not speaking to Ronnie, but my mother still stayed with him. Ronnie later apologised to me and my cousin for everything he had put us through. By June, the entire family had put everything behind us and things were finally back to normal.

But this seeming normalcy was shattered on Wednesday, 3 June when Ronnie shot and killed Sowela Nkuna, her uncle Mathews Mapaya, a neighbour, Stephina Semenya, and his colleague Major Thomas Moetlo. The shooting happened at the Alexandra police station where Sowela had gone to press charges of domestic violence against Ronnie after the couple had allegedly had an altercation earlier that day.¹¹ After killing Sowela, Mathews, Stephina and Thomas, Ronnie went back to Keletso's house.

I had just fallen asleep and my mom was in the TV room. Ronnie entered the house in a rush, and kept chanting "I did something wrong," but refused to explain what had happened. By this time I was awake and could hear he was gathering money together, then he told my mother, "tell the kids I love them, lock the door, I will call when I get to where I am going." We locked ourselves in the house and as Ronnie tried to leave, he was confronted by the police. There was a shootout, and Ronnie was killed. We stayed in the house because we had no idea what was going on.

¹⁰ Kuang, Jeanne. 2015. 3 suspended after Alex killer-cop rampage. The Star, 11 June. (Online). Available at www.iol.co.za/news/3-suspended-after-alex-killer-cop-rampage-1870327 (accessed 26 November 2020).

¹¹ Ibid.



We waited in fear until the police knocked on the door and told us what had happened. We went outside where my mother saw Ronnie lying near the gate, she rushed to him and saw that he was no longer alive.

We were then taken to the Alexandra police station, where we were told what Ronnie had done. We were shocked, especially when the police said they had shot Ronnie because he was a danger to us because when Ronnie came home after the shooting he wasn't violent but rather showed love and regret.

The police investigation into the shooting of Sowela, Mathews, Stephina and Thomas found that Ronnie had lied to get his service pistol back, telling his colleagues he was transporting prisoners, and that the warrant officer at the station at the time did not follow procedure in giving Ronnie a firearm. In addition the investigation revealed that Ronnie had a history of violence and anger management issues.

Voices of Women: Activists

Sophie

“Under democracy heterosexual men have considerable power, just as they had under apartheid” – Sophie

Sophie became a gender rights activist because of her experiences as a child raised by two women under apartheid: She is from a conservative, religious family and described the anxiety when her mother left her father for another woman, with the family living in fear that Sophie and her brother would be taken away from their mother. She notes that the need for secrecy and not telling anyone has “changed and shifted over time,” so that now a woman being with another woman is seen as normal in her community, though she recognises that this isn't the case for other races, religions and socio-economic groups. In addition to perceived and actual power, social identity also impacts on fear of and experiences of crime and violence. As a white middle class woman Sophie is very aware that she's much more cautious about what she feels safe to do than if she were a white, middle class man, but that her lived reality is very different from a woman of another race or socio-economic status.

Within accepted, albeit slowly changing, gender norms, women bear the brunt of inequality, poverty, discrimination and unemployment, which limits their choices. Sophie, who worked at a women's legal advice centre where she dealt with domestic violence cases, describes how the socio-economic dependence of women traps them into staying with an abusive partner, women say, 'I can't leave him, I don't have a job, how will I look after my children, how will I look after my parents?'

"A victim (of violence) is not just one person; a victim is the face of a ripple effect" – Sophie

The lack of transformation under democracy and continuing poverty and inequality were identified as a key obstacle to violence prevention. Sophie talks about the "transformation project" being "delayed" (to express optimism that real transformation will happen), but that this delay has meant that "a lot of people have been left behind." In her view government does not "give enough of a shit," and that particularly under Zuma¹² the "state was hollowed out, ransacked," which has taken away from job creation, housing, health care and education. Twenty five years into democracy many people still have no dignity, their human rights are trampled on daily, life is cheap "so we can't be surprised when people disregard life."

Moreover, she notes that South Africa's history of apartheid has meant that "gender inequality is seen as second to racial inequality, when the reality is that they are hand in hand."

Sophie also notes that language and policies perpetuates the belief that women are inferior, childlike and incapable of looking after themselves. For instance, wording used in government communication (as recently as September 2020) to act to "protect *our* women" (emphasis added, Government Communication and Information System, 2020), and proposed changes to the so-called Sexual Offences Act,¹³ which identifies "a female under the age of 25 years" along with children and people with disabilities as "a person who is vulnerable"¹⁴ and needing additional protection, takes away women's power and autonomy.

¹² Jacob Zuma, the president of South Africa from 9 May 2009 to 14 February 2018, which have been described as "nine wasted years", Source: Modjadji, Ngwako and Setumo Stone. 2019. ANC: 'Zuma's mess is our mess'. City Press, 4 February. (Online). Available at www.news24.com/citypress/News/anc-zumas-mess-is-our-mess-20190203 (accessed 27 February 2020).

¹³ Minister of Justice and Correctional Services. 2020. Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Bill, B16-2020. (Online). Available at www.parliament.gov.za/bill/2292300 (accessed 27 October 2020).

¹⁴ The purpose is to "expand the list of persons who are to be protected to include other vulnerable persons, namely young women, persons with physical, mental or intellectual disabilities and persons over 60 years of age who, for example, receive community-based care and support services," Source: Minister of Justice and Correctional Services. 2020. Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Bill, B16-2020. (Online). Available at www.parliament.gov.za/bill/2292300 (accessed 27 October 2020), p. 14.

Roegchanda

Roegchanda (who comes from Manenberg on the Cape Flats outside of Cape Town) became a gun violence prevention activist in 2011, after seeing a 6-year-old boy playing in front of his home got shot in the back in gang crossfire. She describes seeing his body falling over and his aunt coming downstairs screaming. Knowing that the boy is now confined to a wheelchair ‘grips’ (devastates) her as she herself is a mother, “My God, imagine my child...my children are growing up in Manenberg, their freedom to play is gone...from that day on, I never looked back.” In the following years, Roegchanda has become more committed to activism, even testifying against a gang leader accused of killing a member of a rival gang. Despite three attempted hits on her life, including gunmen opening fire on her house, she perseveres in her attempt to combat gun violence in South Africa.

“People have multiple layers of unhealed trauma” – Roegchanda

A history and culture of violence has meant that South Africa as a nation is deeply traumatised, with high levels of structural and interpersonal violence that cycle through generations. The result is deep trauma at an individual level. Roegchanda recounts working with about 30 police officers who chose to go to a trauma centre rather than to inhouse counselling for fear of the “labelling” given to them. She notes that everything these officers see at work gets taken home to their families, and that when a couple breaks up it is not because they don’t care for each other, it’s because “they do not know how to process the pain and the trauma they are seeing.”



Roegchanda, after her interview



Case Study: Nigeria

This case study has been conducted by Ms. Mimidoo Achakpa, Executive Director of the Women's Right to Education Programme and is presented in a shortened and edited version here.

Context

Nigeria faces multifaceted challenges regarding the efficient control of guns. The circulation of small arms is widespread, and the country has limited capacities to exercise control over the issue in the entirety of its territory.¹⁵ Firearms have become endemic in Nigeria and the rate of accumulation is increasing.¹⁶ They are used as instruments of power and control, and can, therefore, be used or perceived as a means of threat, but rarely end up in official statistics. The female population accounts for more than half of the Nigerian population and they experience gender-based social injustices that prevent the full exploration of their potential.¹⁷

The prevalence of small arms and related violence has led to human rights abuses and undermined the rule of law in the country. The damage to health, education, and other social infrastructures caused by armed violence can have disproportionate effects on women. As a result of armed violence, girls may be affected more than boys regarding access to education and healthcare. For example, girls are generally the first to be held back from school, whether it is due to the risk of violence or lack of resources or a combination of these two.

While the home is commonly regarded as a safe place, the presence of weapons in the house greatly threatens women's physical integrity. The key measures that were put in place by the Nigerian Federal Government to halt the spread of Coronavirus such as lockdown, restriction of movement, and social isolation have left many women more vulnerable to violence¹⁸, especially physical and sexual violence. Home is not havened from violence and abuse for most women and a threat that exacerbates the situation further, and which often goes overlooked is the presence of a firearm at home. While both men and women can, and do, use violence against each other, men's violence against women is far more common, and more destructive than

¹⁵ Baseline Study on Small Arms and Light Weapons for the Sahel and Neighboring States UNREC-UNDP; Federal Republic of Nigeria

¹⁶ Helen Chuma-Okoro (2014); *PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN NIGERIA: LEGAL IMPLICATIONS*

¹⁷ Domestic Violence and Nigeria Women - A Review of the Present State; *Nigerian Journal of Psychiatry Vol. 8, No. 2, April - June, 2010*



women's violence against men.¹⁸ The middle belt of Nigeria including the Plateau region are subject to conflicts between armed groups and/or individuals protecting their household and/or property and other forms of communal violence involving firearms.

Incidents of armed violence are also present in other parts of Nigeria. The existence of armed conflict within the country ranging from the terrorist activities by Boko Haram in the North East, spates of Herdsmen attack across the country, and other armed bandit attacks have been indicated by the high level of fragility with the use of guns in Nigeria. Boko Haram has managed to expand its network of supporters within the country over an undetermined area. The supporters of Boko Haram are considered to be heavily armed and therefore this conflict further intensifies the circulation and demand for illicit weapons. This has led to the use of guns in intentional killings particularly of women (femicide) in armed conflict.

The increase in the cases of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage, kidnap and rape of minors has been the norm since the spate of Boko Haram insurgency.¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted interviews of victims and witnesses of Boko Haram's abduction of women and girls. The report narrated the horrifying experiences of these women that have faced harrowing experiencesⁱⁱ and most times, these acts against humanity are carried out with small arms.

At the same time, many communities are still dealing with the consequences of prior violent conflict in their communities, such as human rights violations and ethnic cleansing in war-torn and occupied areas.ⁱⁱⁱ The entire community suffered the dire consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, but women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their gender. There is, for example, evidence of parties in conflict who raped women with impunity sometimes using systematic rape as a tactic of war and terrorism which has hurt the individual homes and communities in these areas.²⁰

¹⁸ https://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1199&context=fac_articles

¹⁹ Ngozi Catherine Okolo & Chukwuemeka Okolo: "Gender based violence in Nigeria: a study of makurdi metropolis in benue state, Nigeria" *Vol 24(2) 2018*

²⁰ Alawemo, O & Muterera, J. The Impact of Armed Conflict on Women: Perspectives From Nigerian Women: Institute of Peace and Conflict, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria: School of Business, Economics, and Entrepreneurship, American University, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria; Ontario International Development Agency. ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

Voices of Women: Survivors

Amina

Amina* is 45 years old and shared her experience from an official trip she took with a female colleague to North Eastern Nigeria. Along the way, they were apprehended by armed men. They thoroughly ransacked their car and searched every part of their bodies saying they had to determine if they had hidden any valuable. This was done repeatedly for a long period of time, during which the men pointed their guns at her and her colleague. Amina experienced a lot of fear during the assault. She recounted other incidences of robberies and rape at gun point that a colleague and other acquaintances of her survived. Amina had all her valuables stolen and the incident left her in a state of fear and shock. She was suffering from trauma induced symptoms for a period and had to take out time off work to recover. This led to her missing out on a number of activities on a project that she had worked hard to develop.

Abeke

Guns facilitate a variety of crimes, including sexual violence. The story of Abeke* exemplifies that. Abeke is 17 years old and is residing in a camp in Benue State, Nigeria. Abeke was following orders by a female security guard in the camp, to meet with one of the male security agents. She did not know why she was supposed to meet him but did not want to reject the request of security personnel. When she got to the location, the man dragged her into an empty house. Abeke resisted him at first but when she noticed he had raised his uniform to expose the gun he had tucked in by his side she did not dare to and she was raped by him. As a survivor of the farmer herder conflict Abeke already experienced traumatic events, as she had seen guns, heard them and seen people who have been killed by them.



Abeke, who preferred to remain anonymous

* names changed to protect identity

Abeke has received psychosocial support and has been in contact with other women and girls in the camp that experienced violence. She says that she is back at her feet and was brave enough to tell her experience to Mimidoo Achapka, Executive Director of Women's Rights to Education Program and IANSA Women's Network member.

Voices of Women: Activists

Women are heavily impacted by gun violence and they are at the forefront of fighting it. We spoke with four women activists in Nigeria. These women include Ms. Bridget Osakwe, the Network Coordinator and gender and peace building expert with WANEP Nigeria, Mrs Edwina Mang, who serves as the Director of Women and Children in Support of Community Initiative, Dr. Helen Teghtegh who serves as the Executive Director of Community Links and Human Empowerment Initiative and one participant who chose to remain anonymous.

The activist highlighted that they engage in gun related issues to amplify women's voices while advocating for their rights. They stressed that GBV by itself is traumatizing enough but often even worsened when the violent act is accompanied by an arm that threatens the person's life. They also emphasized that the presence of guns also limits women from reaching their full potential, because it instils fear and thus poses limits in the space's women can safely access.

In the course of their work, the activists named face various challenges they face. It was stated that its usually difficult getting vital information from survivors of gun related GBV who are still traumatised. This makes giving any form of assistance more difficult than it should be. More so, most people are afraid of pointing fingers or identifying those using arms and even to inform security agencies. This is because they are afraid, they might not be believed or attacked, as there have been stories of such occurrences from the media several times. In many cases impunity rules and justice is not given appropriately, which leads to a culture of silence and allowing perpetrators to continue to act violently.



Amina, who choice to remain anonymous

Case Study: Mexico

This case study was conducted by Intersecta, A.C., Data Cívica, A.C., Equis Justicia para las Mujeres, A.C., Centro de Estudios Ecueménicos, A.C. The following content is a translated excerpt. The full study is available in English and Spanish [here](#)²².

Context

Mexico is the sixth country with the most weapons in the world. Small Arms Survey estimated that 15 million guns are in circulation in Mexico and another study suggests that there could be up to 24 million guns during the period of 1990-2013.²³ The violence caused with firearms in the country has generated great human losses and suffering in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Mexican men and women. The data presented below highlights the central role that firearms have acquired in homicides in the country, not only in those of men, but in those of women as well.

From 2000 to 2007 homicides had been showing a stable and even downward trend. However, after the implementation of the security strategies of former President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa—including the militarization of the streets, the murder rate increased almost three times from 2007 to 2011, from 8.1 to 23.6 people per 100,000 inhabitants.²⁴ It is important to mention that the effects of mentioned public security strategies, especially militarization, have contributed to reaching historic levels in terms of violence and human rights violations in Mexico, including those of women. Subsequently, the rate decreased from this year until 2014, when it culminated again in 2018, with 27.3 people killed per 100,000. This rate was the highest recorded during the last four decades.²⁵

In the case of men, the trend seen in the general population is preserved; from 2007 to 2011 the murder rate increased 2.9 times. For women, the jump from 2007 to 2011 meant an increase of 2.3 times the initial rate.²⁶

One of the most notorious changes occurs in the way in which people have died during this time. In the case of men, in 2000, the proportion of homicides due to firearms was 53.6%; in 2010 this percentage increased to 72.2%. For the last year of registration, this trend has been preserved.¹

²² <https://humanium-metal.com/about/publications/>

²³ Pérez Esparza 2020

²⁴ *Las dos guerras* (2020). Disponible en: <https://www.intersecta.org/lasdosguerras/>

²⁵ David Pérez Esparza (2020), El tráfico ilícito de armas de fuego hacia México: una perspectiva desde las confiscaciones, Revista digital Relaciones Exteriores de México <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/index.php/ultimo-numero>

²⁶ Registros de Mortalidad del INEGI 2000-2019

Women, meanwhile, in the early 2000s, only three out of ten were murdered by firearms. By 2010 it was five out of ten. The trend indicates that murders perpetrated by firearms have been increasing gradually since 2014. By 2019, almost six out of ten women were murdered by firearms. It should be noted that these patterns also follow the general trend of increasing and decreasing homicide incidence over the years.²⁷

Women also experience the cumbersome offshoots of gun violence in their daily environments, in addition to those experienced within couple relationships. The survey shows that, during the last year of the survey (2015), among women who have suffered domestic violence, 124,656 of them had been threatened by their partners with a weapon - either knives or firearms - while 24,469 of them reported having been injured with a firearm.

Gun violence takes toll on the lives of LGBTQ+ as well. If we compare with what kind of weapon people were killed in hate crimes, according to their identity, we will see that while 56.6% of trans people were killed with firearms, only 23.4% of homosexual people were killed in the same way (most of the people that Letra S records here as trans people are trans women, there is only one record at the base of a murdered trans man).²⁸ The case of trans people is an example of how armed violence can affect certain profiles within the community in a different way. Widespread violence puts us all in a more vulnerable situation, however, it puts the most vulnerable members of this community, who work on the streets and at night, in an even more dangerous situation.



Activists protesting on Women's Day in Mexico

²⁷ Registros de Mortalidad del INEGI 2000-2019

²⁸ Registros de Mortalidad del INEGI 2000-2019

Voices of Women: Survivors and Activists

Claudia González

A survivor of sexual violence, who works with migrant women in refugee situations and collaborates with Voces de Mujeres en Acción. This is her story:

I am from Monterrey, from a small, semi-rural municipality, and I came to Monterrey at the age of 18 to study. I work on a project with migrant women in refugee situations, or applying for refugee status, here in Monterrey. The women come from Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador or are internal migrants from Tabasco, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Puebla. Besides, I work in the Ministry of Culture as a State Liaison Officer here in the state of Nuevo León. I started working on gender-based violence issues when I recognized that I was as a survivor of sexual violence and needed someone to support me in moments of crisis. Then, sadly, I realized that this was too common, that I was not alone. Then I got a lot more insight, from collaborating with Voces de Mujeres en Acción.



Claudia González

Among migrant women the issue of sexual violence is very present, rapes by military personnel, rapes by gangs, are always a part of their stories, and harassment, out of nowhere, they came to the houses in the middle of the night, to loot them, armed.

I was working in some areas called La Campana and Altamira, which were extremely impacted by violence throughout this time of the war. The gangs entered, organized crime entered, and grabbed, as their social base, all the young people out there. Then they came, they settled down, there were territory fights and so on. It was

a highly violated area, still very vulnerable and it continues to be violated, organized crime is still there and undermines any kind of progress. Many people left these places, fled completely from there, many families, so it has changed a bit. But still, things happen there. I visited these places for almost a year, because I was working on a women's book, a book with stories about the women, about how they tried to sustain and transform life during this violent period. These women were part of, what they call, neighbourhood committees. They are mixed committees on the paper, but, when you are there, you notice that the committees only depend on women who are really doing the job, those who attend the board meetings, those who are making decisions about the water basin, the water pump, dealing with the issue of garbage, which is a very common topic there because there is no constant garbage collection.

On the issue of drug outlets, on the safety of girls and boys, this is a very complex and violent area. I was joining them to listen to their stories, how they organized themselves, why they are still there, why they have this desire to be organizing, themselves, to be trying to do something else, because years can go by and they will continue to live in a situation of violence. The same thing happens to them, that happens with the migrants. No one speaks about the cartels, that is, and if someone occurs to say something, they say it very quietly, but they don't actually name them. You recognize them because they are part of your territory and because you know which war occurred at that point, which cartels entered, but really, these are things that you definitely do not name. The women can tell you about boys having weapons and drugs, but they will not mention from which cartel. We had to make these recognitions ourselves, of how we set up networks, support networks and begin to recognize them and see how to strengthen them.

Because here I see these children completely alone and abandoned, they are children from the community and of course we have to attend to them because they are cannon fodder for organized crime. Children that are left abandoned with traumas, with psychological situations, in precariousness and abandonment, will eventually be targets for organized crime if these causes are not addressed. Right now, those who are armed are the boys and girls too, in these cases, in these situations where they cannot find other solutions. In Monterrey we have many gangs, the western area is a high-risk area. These gaps have turned into time bombs, and they are exploding. Gangs, which may have always existed, are now armed gangs. According to the latest data, it is assumed that 20% of the gangs, around 2000 gangs, are part of organized crime, of some cartel. Something new is that, of that 20%, about 1% are gangs exclusively of women, who are armed and are part of organized crime.

The armed issue diminished the youth, the young men, and leaves the young mothers alone and therefore we have to look for him. It is very notorious, all the mothers who are left without a partner, and on that, the issue of disappearances.

The other is clearly the issue that men now are armed. The number of feminicides has increased a lot due to the same issue of gender violence, machismo, and now with armed men. It has had a great impact because those fights that could previously ended up in blows, now, they end up in gunshots. The news is full of women who wake up with gunshots all the time, the woman, the ex-wife, who was the couple who no longer wanted to be, and even the mother, the mother-in-law. Men go home and finish them off, they kill them, because now they are armed. That is why there is a great issue with childhoods because eventually the mother is also murdered. So, the issue of femicides with weapons has increased a lot.

About murders on public roads, the exhibition of the body, the way it is displayed and the place where the body is left, is very noticeable when it comes the gender difference. It is even notorious that it is due to organized crime and because even they are involved, who then kill them. Those who are men disappear, but those who are women are always exhibited and shown. That is a very notorious issue. Here we also had a case of a partner who was murdered. She was a lesbian and she was also like super exposed and the case was very violent. Maybe these cases became visible when the issue of war began, maybe about the year 2000, but in these areas, it increased a lot from 2010 and on. Before you did not see those bodies of women with messages displayed on the street, tortured, because it is very well known that they are tortured, as the bodies have been punished for something.

Perhaps the trans community is the most violated within the LGBT community, which you can tell. If violence exists in all groups, I could say that here is where it is more obvious, in these highly marginalized groups, also differentiated by gender and of their trans identity. Here is where you find the transfemicides.

When you see a femicide, of a partner, ex-partner or others, it is committed with a small weapon. These weapons you can find in the gangs, in the colonies. The truth is that also girls and boys who are around, loose their lives, when these armed fights take place. But we cannot deny that there are certain areas where it is inevitable to see the long weapons, of those who guard a house of someone who has to do with organized crime.

We need public policies, to address the armed issue, at least this issue that is in these communities, which are young men and women who are carrying these weapons or who are suffering the consequences of their existence, because it does have a lot to do with the attention to childhood and the focus of the youth, definitely with a differentiated gender theme. Mental health seems to be very important, not only that they exist, but that there is a correct availability. Because even on this issue of mental health you can see that what impacts is masculinity. The issue of masculinity is what is sustaining this criminal life.

The other is clearly the issue that men now are armed. It has had a great impact because those fights that could previously ended up in blows, now, they end up in gunshots - Claudia

Natalia Lane

Natalia is a trans woman, sex worker and activist for the human rights of the LGBTI + population and street sex workers. Consultative Assembly member for COPRED, CDMX, survivor of coerced sexual violence with a firearm. This is her story:

I have been an independent sex worker for a little more than 10 years, and I am a trans woman. I started my transition when I was about 18 years old, about 12 years ago. I am part of a civil society organization called Centro de Apoyo a las Identidades Trans (CAIT), which works to defend and promote the human rights of trans women, especially sex workers. We mainstream this work in the area of health, security and access to justice.

2016 was an emblematic year in the struggle of trans activism in Mexico, because they murdered two compañeras: Paola Ledesma and Alessa Flores in one week between each femicide. This generated a series of mobilizations by colleagues such as Kenya Cuevas, such as young trans women, queers (that is how they identify themselves), gender dissidents, and let's say they sought to make the issue of transfemicides or murders of trans women visible in Mexico City particularly.

Trans women are challenged not only by a gender identity issue, but also by issues of precariousness, ethnicity, migration, health, and not only sexual and reproductive health, but also comprehensive health. (We are trying to) help mitigate the differentiated impacts that the pandemic had on groups of sex workers, especially elderly women, migrant women, women living with HIV.



Nathalia speaks at a panel



As the hotels were closed, the companions – and I include myself there - had to carry out the service on public roads, in clients' cars and in parks. And that - although sex work is not considered a crime or an administrative offense in Mexico City - generates practices of criminalization and extortion by the police against my compañeras or the clients. They tell them that they are going to take them to the MP (Public Ministry). And the police will never change, they have no idea, they don't even know their internal regulations. [...]

Once I decided to file a complaint, it took hours and hours, not only did I have to repeat everything that happened in detail, but there is also a very strong cis sexist bias that is “you are not a woman”, so they don't treat you like one. It would even be ridiculous to treat a CIS woman that way, if she was a victim of sexual abuse. But they treat a trans woman in an even more ridiculous way, more biased, more prejudiced. I did not have my identity change recognized, I did not have my legal name or my documents. Then, all the time, they spoke to me under my previous name. The coroner who treated me was a doctor, but the treatment was extremely cold, impersonal, inhuman, not very empathetic or sensitive. Even in the psychological area, they want you to be the “good victim”, to cry, to cry, to show yourself weak, to show your vulnerability.

On the issue of femicide, sometimes support networks exists, that is, family - mothers of victims of CIS-gender women who seek justice - but in the case of trans women, those family networks disappear. Why? Because they do not want to be involved in issues of violence, even out of shame of having an openly trans daughter - they do not see them as women and they do not respect their gender identity, only when we arrive with money - that means that, in access to justice. Family members do not want to get involved, file a complaint, open an investigation folder, do not want the murderers or transfemicides of their daughters to be solved. Unfortunately, the blood family is the one that has the legal decisions, unless they deliver a power of attorney to an organization. That is exactly what we have done at CAIT. Civil society organizations seek solutions to involve family members in justice processes.

In the case of transfemicides of sex workers, one of the causes of death is due to a firearm. In other words, because they are shot in areas of sex work and then they die, either on the street or waiting for emergency services. This is an indication of how violence against trans women also has a component of hatred, apart from misogyny - due to gender issues - perhaps a motivation of transphobia and homophobia (homophobia because the perpetrators read trans people, especially trans women, as gay men). That happens in places such as Tamaulipas, Sonora, Chihuahua, Veracruz, Guerrero, which are the ones that register the highest number of murders. There is no coincidence that these entities also register a large amount of violence and crimes related to organized crime or groups.



Criminals and trans women sex workers are also the most exposed to such violence. The issue of the use of weapons and sexual abuse is also a problem. A partner of mine was sexually abused recently, and there are three more compañeras who faced sexual abuse and have been threatened with a weapon. Even when they had already agreed to serve. The issue of sexual abuse is very strong.

I think perhaps trans women, with self-defence, are sometimes more fanatical - not me, really - but other partners do fight with the customers. Generally, in the case of trans women murdered in public space, the aggressors are clients who return as a revenge, let's say for what they consider a bad service, because they were not satisfied with the service or because the partner stole from them, a cell phone or a wallet - which is something that does happen.

When I started to do sex work, it was like in 2014, a client hired me, took me to the hotel, and in the room alone, he took out a black gun - I don't know about guns. Well, it was "normal", neither too big nor too small, and he put it on my head, in my mouth and abused me. When we left the hotel, he threatened me with the gun, got me into the car and left me at the place where he had picked me up. When I got out, I was very upset, crying when I went home. He did not intend to kill me, but he did intend to sexually abuse me. That is something that happens a lot with rapists, it is not only the act of abusing or penetrating someone, but everything around it, such as power, knowing that they are in control of the situation. I think they detect the girls who seem more innocent, and from there they select the girl, they can take several turns. We had a case like this just a few weeks ago, now in 2020, the modus operandi has not changed.

We do not have confidence in the institutions for the administration of justice, in the Public Ministries, in the public prosecutor's offices and that is why we prefer to put it aside. It is not that we "normalize" it, it is just that we do not have confidence in these processes and we prefer to turn the page, without treating our feelings, but then it has repercussions on our mental health. Any visible or invisible sex worker will continue to be the object of violence, whether by a client or a pimp, what we do is make the problem visible and open spaces that can help the Government to have a reconciliation with the population, but that does not lead to any security for us, because at the end of the day, those who continue to expose themselves daily are us in the streets.

There is something that women have to deal with, it is to live permanently in a world that is not designed for us and, much less, for trans women. So, today more than ever, I know that I am a woman, despite everything other people say, and I try to fight for the rights of the sex worker sisters.



Case Study: El Salvador

This case study was conducted by Cemujer in Spanish. The following content is a translated excerpt. The full study is available in English and Spanish [here](#).²⁹

Context

Firearms are among the materialized symbols of the patriarchal society with the most impact and lethality. Patriarchal structures within the El Salvadorian society facilitates the use of guns and sometimes even legitimizes it. With their high destructive power of short and long range, with their high threatening power, firearms have been representing a serious menace to El Salvador.

El Salvador registered the highest accumulated mortality rate related to firearms in the world, with 39.2 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants during 2016, indicated a US study by the Institute for Health Measurement and Evaluation (IHME).³⁰

According to data from the Attorney General's Office, in 2019, 98% of homicides in El Salvador were committed with mostly illegal firearms. The National Civil Police reported that between 1999 and 2009, 76% of violent deaths had been committed with firearms.³¹ In 2018, it was reported that 78% of violent deaths were committed with firearms.³² Firearms are also playing a big part in femicides. According to the Institute of Legal Medicine, 72.7% of violent deaths of women were committed with firearms, between January 2014 and July 2018.³³

Moreover, firearms are incessantly being used against LGBTQI community. From 1992 to 2020, in El Salvador, 600 murders have been committed against trans women, mostly with firearms, only three of which have been prosecuted: Camila Díaz, Anahy Miranda and Tita Andrade.³⁴ According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in El Salvador, the life expectancy of a trans woman is only 33 years, less than half of life expectancy of the general population.³⁵

²⁹ <https://humanium-metal.com/about/publications/>

³⁰ El Diario de Hoy, 2018

³¹ Duhalde, 2011

³² Radio Deutsche Welle, 2019

³³ Montti-Bolaños-Cerén, 2018

³⁴ ASPIDH and REDLACTRANS, 2020

³⁵ Amnesty International, 2020

Voices of Women: Survivors

Amalia

The use of Firearms constitutes an abuse of power, it constitutes intimidation and limitation of territories. Remember that weapons have historically been one of the main pillars that have generated conflicts, wars, divisions, death, disappearances and, of course, the perpetration, abuse and violation of people's fundamental human rights.

As a woman, I have felt the negative impact and it has also left me with not only emotional and psychological but also physical consequences due to the misuse of weapons, due to the abuse of power that weapons generate in the wrong hands; although it should be noted



Amalia, during her interview

that I really believe that, regardless of the hands in which a weapon falls, they will never be a good thing ... especially because I come from a family that has suffered severely due to the internal armed conflict, a family that still deals with the aftermath of a war: a mother of only 9 years old, fled Suchitoto because of this conflict. Aunts, cousins, sisters, my grandparents, all abandoned their home to flee from this conflict ... So, I think that being the ancestors of the women of my family, we have felt the negative impact that weapons have on the life and social contexts of women. I do know, from my own experience and from the voices of the women in my family, that the ones who have been most impacted by all this have been the women themselves.... So, I think that to this day every death of a partner, a trans woman, every disappearance, every permanent injury that a woman has due to weapons, continues to have severe consequences, and that is something that the Salvadoran State does not care about. On the contrary, it promotes it, as part of the individual protection of a person. I believe that the only thing I can learn from this is: weapons constitute an abuse of power.

I remember all the times that police patrols visited us just to tell us to leave and that we had to follow them to a dark place and give them pleasure, otherwise they would pull the trigger.



They had soldiers behind them, and we had to do it... I will never forget this and that is why I reject the military forces. I believe that using a position of power to disrespect the dignity of others might be the most cowardly act and I remember that day those two soldiers arrived with huge machine guns and were carrying an instrument to give electric shocks and I remember well that they made us walk into an alley, that we performed oral sex on them, and then they took off our wigs, they took them away and they laughed at us ... and I remember well that the guy who was with me obviously threatened me, he put the shotgun aside and showed me the electric shock instrument and said "here I have it and if you don't obey me I'll give you electric shocks with this" and...

I think it is one of the most disgusting sensations that I have had as a woman, the fact of thinking that if it had not been for the weapon, I might not have stayed to fight with him but at least I could have run away. But now there was nothing else but to give in and listen to his words. "Do not make a face because you guys like this". There is a collective imagination in the macho society, that trans women are semen deposits, that you will always be there when they want, how they want, in the place they want and it is incredible how a firearm can transform you from person to object, how you lose dignity and how you lose your status as human person before someone who has a weapon and you can become a target... then, perhaps from that point on I always said that I dream of the day when my country abolishes the army once and for all.

So, I think that being the ancestors of the women of my family, we have felt the negative impact that weapons have on the life and social contexts of women. - Amalia

Ceci*

I was part of a self-help group, and in these groups, women can talk about everything and some dare to tell their experiences of violence. Actually, the idea with these groups is to work with crafts, make earrings, piñatas, bracelets, and to find a way out of poverty. This is not really a way out of poverty, but allows women to get together, that is the strength of these groups. A woman can leave her house for a moment and say to their husband that she will learn how to make a blouse or to embroider. And he will let her go. In fact, she goes to the self-help group to listen to the testimonies of other women. In one of these meetings, a young woman told us, that one day her husband was very angry with her, took the gun, went to the patio and killed the dog, he shot him twice. All the women in the group got scared and upset, and we told her to prepare her suitcase, that she had to leave the house, because this was a strong indication, a terrible sign. She listened to us, and the next day she left the house, she took her girl and left. Today she lives and works abroad, she writes to me from time to time, she is living a quiet life. She is very thankful to us, and writes that, now when she knows more, she understands that, if it was not for the self-help group, she would not have left the house and her husband.



Weapons are secured for destruction in El Salvador

*Name changed to protect identity

Voices of Women: Activists

Odalys Araujo

Odalys is an independent Activist and Human Rights Defender, a trans woman and member of the organization Communicating and Training Trans Women with HIV in El Salvador - COMCAVIS TRANS.



Figure 1: Odalys Araujo

Unfortunately, there is no education on non-violence and there is no law on sexual and reproductive education in this country. These are issues that we are promoting. The patriarchy is instilled in all of us, in the country and in society, and it gives men the right to be violent and as a woman you have to endure all the mistreatment in your home, in the street. It is a normalized behaviour. In other words, it is a lack of education, a true lack of respect towards diversity, towards diverse women. They are killing us, they are beating us, there is a terrible violation of human rights in our country. In every sense of violence.

There is a hatred towards women, towards diverse women; because it is not only CIS gender women who are suffering these murders, we as trans women are the most vulnerable. We are discriminated against, stigmatized and violated in this country. I have had to recognize the bodies of murdered compañeras and bury them, we have had to live through all that. The truth is that the hatred is machismo, that arrogance of man that the patriarchy has instilled in them; that they are the strong ones in society and that women are like slaves.

With the Peace Accords that took place years ago, it is true that we started a process of a demobilization of weapons in the country. And there has been destruction of weapons, they burned them.



Of course, there was a whole show where they even have been giving food and money in exchange to collect all the weapons from the civil war. But the police are in charge of the process and they have left it roughly as a business. Everything is business. And we were like asleep, all of this patriarchy with violence kept us asleep. Only they know what they really did. But today we have risen as a civil society. We must remember the details of the Peace Accords as we do not know what have happened with weapons that were in good condition, if the good ones were left aside. At that time a lot of weapons were on sale.

The truth is that there are laws, there are protocols, there is a whole set of things that regulate weapons but in practice they are not fulfilled. The police are supposed to leave their firearms deposited in the office after work, but, due to the security plans implemented by the different governments, transitory laws give them the power to carry weapons even when they are not in uniform. So, we know that there are laws but some are not put into practice and others, even if they have been implemented immediately, still don't have the effect. I believe that there has not been a psychological study that can verify that people are capable of carrying weapons 24 hours a day, every day of the week. Due to the levels of violence that exist in our country, it can easily trigger situations with civilians and even within families.

There are policies on these issues, because we have created protocols for the care of the LGBTBI population, especially in the Prosecutor's Office, in the Ministry of Justice and in other entities, but they are not taken into account. Perhaps no one download the information. Not long ago I was driving a vehicle when the police stopped me and harassed me. I told him that I was part of a human rights NGO, that we had created an action protocol about these situations that is available online. He responded that he had treated me like a woman, but it was not true. He had treated me badly, and this was on a public road. I can only imagine what could have happened if I had been stopped in another place.

Today you cannot know if the uniformed bodies are there to help you or to violate you. They are the greatest violators of human rights in this country; and some act with arbitrariness especially towards young people. We have cases of trans women, who are doing sex work in the streets, and when the police arrive, they tell them to have a sexual act with them, oral or penetrative, and if not, they will place a drug bag with them, or blame them for something, and take them away. Others just ask them for money. There are good policemen, also in the PNC, but there are several who are violating the rights of the population.

Recently there was a case, in Santa Ana, where policemen were convicted of beaten and mistreated two lesbian women, close to their home. Neighbours could register this lesbophobic act.



Regarding the implementation, the truth is that there should be more training and education about the protocols, those that are already created. Training for the people who work in the different judicial instances, and the prosecutors who carry these cases, about how to download the information, how to use an inclusive language and how treat a trans person. A trans person is not a man or a boy dressed as a woman, it is a transgender woman, so there must be constant training about the protocols, that are already created, and an inclusive language as well and how to treat diversity.

Firearms are also used to threaten trans persons, to intimidate them, put drugs on them or force them to carry out actions of a sexual nature or, on occasions, take money from their incomes.

As in the case of Camila who was murdered, something that has recently come out, it was the police who took her away, beat her, left her lying down, then took her to the hospital and three days later Camila died. That was a hate crime but it was classified as a normal homicide and the policemen were sentenced to 25 years, but they should have been sentenced to 50 years, as it was a hate crime.

The cause of all this is the patriarchy, that has been instilled in grownups and children about who is the weak one, who is the strong one, who is the one who is going to take, and who, the woman, is going to give. People are taught that a woman has to obey the man, otherwise the man will punish her. All that are stereotypes of patriarchy, that is violence against women, against girls. Men want to show that they have power, that they have control over women, that they can decide on women, that they want to impose to women, what they have to do and to follow their rules. This is normalized in this society, something in history has gone wrong and this has been promoting this violence, up to the point of hate crimes towards transgender women and femicides, and in this case we can include transfemicides. The powerful roles that men have, which patriarchy has encouraged, should not be the case, because here we are fighting for a society that is the same for all without all this competition. One of the biggest problems here is the competition between people, but that shouldn't happen.

The patriarchy is instilled in all of us, in the country and in society, and it gives men the right to be violent and as a woman you have to endure all the mistreatment in your home, in the street. - Odahys



Outlook

“How did hearing my story make you feel, is hearing it just part of your job, or could you feel, as a woman, what I went through?” This is what Ntomfunthi, whose story you can read on page 8, asked after speaking with Gun Free South Africa. While it might be impossible to feel the pain Ntomfunthi has experienced, we share her story with you to exemplify the broad range of impacts of gun violence on women. Ntomfunthi has nearly lost her son to gun violence. Apart from this traumatic experience, it fell on her to take care of her wounded son and his child. Ntomfunthi is one of many women worldwide, who step-up as caretakers for a family member.

Amalia from El Salvador, whose story you can read on page 28, shares with us the impact gun violence has in conflict, the facilitation of sexual violence and the vulnerability she experiences everyday as a trans woman. She clearly highlights how the weapon exacerbates power dynamics that put women at risk in the patriarchal societies we live in, when she says *‘I think it is one of the most disgusting sensations that I have had as a woman, the fact of thinking that if it had not been for the weapon, I might not have stayed to fight with him but at least I could have run away’*. Amalia is one of many women worldwide, who experienced sexual violence facilitated by a gun.

Reading about Ntomfunthi, Amalia and the other survivors instils a sense of urgency to tackle the issue of gender-based gun violence. Reading about the activism women engage in, often facing serious backlash, is inspiring. As Michelle, one of the activists in South Africa said: *“Many would just talk about doing things in the community but would never do it, and I wanted to be that person that actually acted out on my promises, not for myself but for my three boys and the generations to come”*.

Let us all be that person that engages in ending gun violence- for generations to come. As Jeannette from El Salvador says: *“My country faces a violence that has occurred culturally, a cultural construction in which there is a co-participation of the entire population. It is important to assume this challenge from a perspective of co-responsibility. We are contributing, and we have contributed, to this violence. But in the same way as we have contributed to this culture of violence, we can deconstruct it.”*

Let us deconstruct the culture of violence- one destroyed gun at a time.



ACTIVIST



