

RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

ELLA Area: Governance

ELLA Theme: Domestic Violence



ELLA
Evidence and lessons
from **Latin America**

DESIGN AND METHODS PAPER

BEYOND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAWS: WHAT ELSE MAKES RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EFFECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The ELLA Research Design and Methods Papers are working documents produced by the Latin American-African research pairing, as the first stage in the conduct of their joint research. Production of the papers was aimed at fostering a shared framework and approach to the research, owned by both partners in the research pairing. As the centres proceed to the research itself, the design will inevitably evolve to address issues arising. As such these Design and Methods papers should be seen as an approximation towards the intended research direction.

1. TOPIC

In the last twenty-five years, there has been growing recognition both from the academic and activist communities that domestic violence is a public issue worthy of attention. The response has largely been the enactment of domestic violence laws across many different countries both in Africa and Latin America. While there are many studies from the NGO and academic communities documenting these efforts, there is little attention to the exact ways in which implementation of the Domestic Violence Acts makes a difference in terms of effective responses to domestic violence in these various countries. In recognition of this fact, the most recent report from the World Health Organisation on domestic violence states that, "laws relating to violence have been widely enacted but enforcement is inadequate" (WHO 2014: 38).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

What We Already Know

Statistics: In the most recent statistics on the subject published by the World Health Organisation (WHO), globally, over the course of a lifetime, one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner (WHO 2014: 10).

With specific reference to our countries of interest, both Mexico and Ghana have fairly high levels of domestic violence. According to the National Survey for Domestic Violence in Mexico 2011 (INEGI, 2013) more than 47% of women aged 15 and above have been victims of domestic violence perpetrated by their partners. Amongst this group, 43% of women have suffered from psychological violence; 24.5% from economic violence; 14% from physical violence and 7.3% from sexual violence.¹

In the Ghanaian context, at least one in three of the women and girls studied in the 1990s had suffered some form of physical, psychological or emotional abuse (Aniwa, 1999). Dennis-Antwi and Dapaah (2010) point out that Ghana recorded about 109,784 cases of violence against women and children between 1999 and May 2010. The Human Rights and Advocacy Center (HRAC, 2012) also indicates that between January 2010 and July 2012, there were 42 cases of wife-killing, five cases of husband-killing and six cases of rival murders reported in the media.

Legislation: We know that there are many countries with some type of domestic violence legislation. According to Giridhar (2012), there are 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have domestic violence legislation. However, not all of these countries, including Ghana, have legislative instruments backing these acts.

In Latin America, on the other hand, there are 32 countries that have adopted the Inter American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women

¹ Sistema de Indicadores de Género (Gender Indicators System). [Estadísticas de Violencia contra las Mujeres en México \(Statistics on Violence Against Women in Mexico\)](#). Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Institute of Women).

(Convention of Belem do Para). This instrument distinguishes the Latin American Region from others in the world since all countries accepted its binding force (ECLAC 2007, 2009). Almost every country has harmonised its domestic frameworks with Belem Do Para standards and 29 countries have passed bills, national plans or programmes to address domestic violence.

Based on model frameworks for the design, application and evaluation of domestic violence laws developed by the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the United Nations (UN), Ortiz-Barreda and Vives-Cases (2013) evaluated the content and application of the laws that have been enacted in 29 countries/territories from the Americas (including Mexico), 17 from Europe, 23 from Asia, 10 from Africa (including Ghana) and 1 from Oceania. They evaluated whether the components of the law are inspired by human rights standards such as: definitions of the main forms of violence against women, identification of women as beneficiaries, and promotion of the participation of multiple sectors in violence against women interventions.

Findings showed that the majority of legal texts do not incorporate these key components, which limit the scope to provide integrated treatment and protection to women. More than 60% of countries' legislation refers to the concept of domestic violence instead of focusing on different forms of violence and the main beneficiary of legal protection is the family instead of women, which affects the type of interventions designed. Finally, the findings showed that legislation does not promote a comprehensive approach, defined as the involvement of multiple sectors (education, health, judicial system, mass media, police and social services) working together to create an efficient social programme that prioritises the care and protection of women.

In their analysis, Mexico fares far better than Ghana in terms of the comprehensiveness of the approach utilised to deal with domestic violence. While Mexico has an approach that incorporates all six sectors identified, Ghana has only incorporated the justice sector and social services into its domestic violence prevention and protection framework.

Effects: One of the outcomes of passing legislation, according to Giridhar (2012), with specific reference to Malawi, is to change societal attitudes towards domestic violence. Legislation in and of itself signals a government's disapproval of what was once conceptualised as a private problem. That singular act changes societal attitudes for the better even if implementation is weak. Using a logistical regression, she shows that passing the law affects people's opinions. Once the law was passed, women were 30.77% less likely to be accepting of domestic violence and men were 6.7% less likely to approve of domestic violence (Giridhar 2012: 37). She does acknowledge, however, that she was unable to separate the possible impact of other factors such as women's empowerment campaigns on these figures.

Examples from Uganda do indeed indicate that community-based approaches that tackle the social norms accepting of violence and men's power over women are effective in addressing violence against women. Raising Voices, a local NGO, developed the *Sasa! Activist Kit for Preventing Violence against Women and HIV* to fill a gap in prevention approaches by addressing the root cause of the power imbalance between women and men. Sasa is a Kiswahili word that means, now emphasising the urgency required to prevent violence against women. At the same time, it is also an acronym for Start, Awareness, Support and Action, four phases that communities are taken through to ensure that attitudinal change occurs for community members. The evidence from Uganda shows that domestic violence laws are not the only means by which violence against women can be addressed.²

Another area in which the effect of domestic violence laws is evident is in the ways in which domestic violence is incorporated into the protocols and guides of the institutions tasked with dealing with domestic violence, such as health institutions. Many countries seek to improve the ways in which health officials can assist in the identification of violence and liaise with the appropriate authorities to protect the survivors while providing the necessary evidence to ensure that perpetrators receive appropriate sanctions through the judicial process.

Yet another logical and important effect of adopting a bill is the possibilities it opens up in the area of law enforcement. There are various models for this in different countries. In many cases, new police units are created to deal specifically with issues of domestic violence such as the Domestic Violence Victims' Support Unit (DOVVSU) in Ghana and the Special Police Unit for Women in Brazil (*Comisarías Especiales de Atención a la Mujer- Special Police Stations for Women Care and Services*). Other models to address domestic violence adopt a more comprehensive approach, such as the Women Centers in Chile, the national system for attention and prevention of domestic violence in Colombia, the comprehensive legal services in Bolivia, the local networks against violence in Costa Rica and the National Program for a life free from violence in Mexico (MESECVI, 2012, Beltrán-Martínez 2007, ECLAC 2007, 2009).

Evaluating the impact of these laws/policies in terms of the prevalence of violence against women is an important topic that has received special attention from the Statistics Commission of the UN. In 2009, this Commission developed a set of indicators – including frequency and gravity of violent acts – to assess the nature of violence against women globally (UN Statistics Commission 2009). Nevertheless, a 2010 study of data sources of Latin American countries showed that they did not have the necessary information to integrate and use these indicators (Fries and Hurtado, 2010).

² [RaisingVoices](#)

While a similar study is not available for the African context, it is quite unlikely that the appraisal would be different. The lack of these indicators is largely due to the fact that there is a lack of studies/ literature aiming to assess or analyse the impacts of domestic violence policies or support services for victims such as the shelters for battered women and the Centres for Women's Justice (*Centros de Justicia para la Mujer*) () in the case of Mexico or the Ark Foundation in the case of Ghana.

Factors that Affect Outcomes

Franceschet (2010) notes that a key factor that affects the outcome of domestic violence legislation is the political decisions made after a law is adopted. Drawing on the cases of Chile and Argentina, she argues that Chile had more substantial reform than Argentina because Chile made a political decision to create a centralised state agency that focused primarily on researching, designing, coordinating and evaluating the outcomes of programmes designed to tackle domestic violence in these countries.

In Ghana, since the introduction of the domestic violence legislation in 2007, there has been a "yawning gap" between legislation and practice, as there is frequent reference to policy implementation being blocked through government failure to introduce the necessary legislative instrument that will ensure the full implementation of the law (Mitchell, 2012: iv). Women's groups, activists and stakeholders have called on the government on several occasions to provide the needed legislative instrument to little effect. Indeed, Hodzic (2009) has documented the many ways by which the Ghanaian state opposed women's rights activists' demands by deploying the discourse of cultural sovereignty during a period when much activism was geared at positively influencing the passage of domestic violence legislation. The government cited marital rape as a foreign phenomenon that, if included in the bill and passed, would break up many Ghanaian marriages. This opposition in the beginning, as well as delays in providing a legislative instrument, point to the Government's poor understanding of domestic violence, as well as a lack of commitment to ensuring the full implementation of the domestic violence law.

Another factor that can affect outcomes is the extent to which government provides resources for implementing domestic violence legislation. The International Centre for Women (2003) for example has noted that domestic violence legislation requires sufficient budgetary allocations to make it possible to fund the various interventions so that they can be implemented. Vetten (2005) has underscored the need to cost the implementation of domestic violence laws, so that practitioners can advocate for an itemised budget, instead of demanding resources that could be

misunderstood as excessive because of a lack of clarity as to the purpose for which the resources would be utilised. She asserts that:

“the existence of a cost allows for comparison of budgets allocated to the implementation of other law and policy. Such comparisons could be a means of testing the state’s commitment and political will to implementing policies promoting women’s interests and rights, relative to other policy (Vetten 2005: 10)”.

Several scholars (Guerrero Caviedes, 2002; Provoste & Guerrero, 2004; Kislinger & Cedano, 2005; Jimenez, 2006; Sagot, 2008) also point to a range of issues that should be taken into account to explain the outcomes of domestic violence legislation. These include the living conditions in various countries; the absence of important and activist women’s organisations; the lack of commitment from police and judicial officers; poor coordination between public and private services and institutions; inadequate training on women’s human rights for officers charged with the duty of implementing the law; and insufficient service infrastructure.

How Explanatory Factors affect Outcomes:

Sonia Fries (2008) argues that the state plays a central role in determining the possibilities for changing cultural structures when addressing domestic violence. By combining feminist theories of the state and the theory of gendered organisations, she goes on to state that gender and the gender beliefs of individuals in different branches and agencies of the state matter because it might affect how the efforts in changing the social structure will take place. In the case of Mexico, the patriarchal structure of the state has produced a legislation that protects both the family and women’s rights. Yet, state institutions that are more masculinised, such as the judiciary or the police, are less sympathetic to victims’ claims that state institutions are responsible for providing assistance to abused women. In the cases of Argentina, Brazil and Colombia, for example, Gomez and Ricciardi (2010) showed that although these countries have enacted frameworks on domestic violence, the state has not gone a step further to adopt policies that ensure that a woman’s right to adequate housing is guaranteed even in the context of domestic violence.

Another important point to take into account is the inadequate training of the police and judicial officers. This limits the effectiveness of the response to domestic violence in the sense that these officials still consider domestic violence as a private/domestic matter that must be resolved without state intervention. This raises the question of the impact of the training vis-à-vis the patriarchal perspectives of individuals who work for the state.

Similarly, in the Ghanaian case, although a Domestic Violence Act has been in place since 2007, the legislative instrument that would enhance the comprehensiveness of the Domestic Violence Act is yet to be passed into law. As such, state and non-state actors working on domestic violence do so without a full complement of state measures to address victims' concerns as they go through the process of reporting and seeking redress.

Literature shows that in the Latin American region, the state has a central role in dealing with domestic violence, due to its obligations derived from its international and interregional commitments. (Almost every Latin American state signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW – and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women-Convention of Belem Do Para.) States' efforts have been focused on treatment measures such as creating and extending the provision of services and the criminalisation of aggressors mostly because it shows immediate effects rather than focusing on a long-term prevention strategy that might deal with the root causes.

In Mexico, the Violence Against Women Act is a general law, not a specific law, which means that the norms are not directly enforceable – and since Mexico is a federation then each province should adopt its own law and reforms its own legislation to put it in line with this general standard. At the same time, the scope of this general law is violence against women and not specifically domestic violence. It establishes a variety of mechanisms to prevent, address and sanction violence against women. It creates a (*Programa Integral para la Prevención, Atención, Sanción y Erradicación de la Violencia contra las Mujeres- Integral Programme for the Prevention, Attention, Sanction and Eradication of Violence Against Women*), which also includes multisectoral work among different public agencies with specific activities to deal with domestic violence. However, the Mexican Government has largely focused on providing treatment measures: restraint orders, shelters and the Centro de Justicia. The prevention aspect has not yet been included as a key strategy to address violence against women.

On the other hand, the Ghanaian case shows that, according to its international obligations to address women's rights, the State adopted a Domestic Violence Act in 2007. Contrary to the Mexican case, this act is directly enforceable and it is specific to domestic violence. It establishes definitions of domestic violence, as well as creating facilities for the police and the judiciary to take actions against domestic violence prosecute the offenders and support victims. It also establishes a specific fund for victims of domestic violence and a Management Board comprised of different authorities and civil society organisations in charge of it.

Conditions under which Factors Operate

Although there is widespread awareness that domestic violence should be eschewed, there are some factors that hinder people from reporting domestic violence cases. These factors include poor knowledge of rights; inadequate services, especially for rural dwellers; poor documentation of cases; poor tracking of victims/survivors who are referred to other services; and a lack of privacy, counselling, shelter, legal advice and medical services (Adomako Ampofo, 2008; Mitchell, 2012). In addition to these, there are also reports of many instances where police officers use their discretionary powers to determine whether a domestic violence case warrants prosecution or not (Cantalupo et al, 2006).

In many cases, due to the general lack of resources at state facilities such as the Domestic Violence and Victims' Support Unit (DOVVSU) in the Ghanaian case, victims are asked to pay for medical services, a requirement that limits the opportunities for poorer women to seek redress from the courts. For many years, the Ark Foundation was the only NGO that provided shelter for abused women (Amoakohene, 2004). The shelter also provides counselling services, legal advice and refers victims to the appropriate state agencies for redress. The Ark Foundation operates a hotline for victims of abuse. Anecdotal data, however, suggests that many women are either not aware of this service, or are unable to afford the cost of calling the hotline. These factors, as well as the widespread perception/belief that "dirty linen should not be washed in public" often combine to prevent people from reporting and/or following through on domestic violence cases.

Language can be a serious barrier to the effective implementation of domestic violence law. In multilingual environments such as Ghana and Mexico where not all citizens are necessarily fluent in the official languages of English and Spanish respectively, inability to communicate freely might hinder access to justice in cases of domestic violence. Given the fact that non-English/non-Spanish speaking victims of domestic violence denounce their partners in civil courts where the language of communication is English or Spanish, Lemon (2013) has called for the need to provide free professional interpreters in these courts.

In the Mexican case, in addition to the language barrier for indigenous women, the high rate of general impunity (more than 97%), the general perception of the judicial system as inefficient, and the proven specific impunity for violence against women cases due to the persisting gender stereotypes amongst the police and judicial officers (ICHR, Campo Algodonero case, 2009) are serious obstacles for women to accessing justice and reporting their cases to the appropriate formal institutions.

Finally, some studies seem to show that economic and social empowerment for women is not having the expected effect on decreasing violence against women. Scholars such as Johnson & Kishor (2004), Garcia & Oliveira (2006) as well as Castro & Casique (2009) do not support the assumption that “a greater autonomy for women leads to lower violence against them”, and show that work outside the home and greater decision-making powers of women in most Latin American countries are actually associated with bigger risks for domestic violence. Outcomes in that direction might be less immediate than desired.

As evident from the discussion above, there is a large body of scholarly work that describes the prevalence of violence against women as well as the numerous cultural/social/political/economic factors that keep the rates of domestic violence high in various countries. In response to the pervasiveness of domestic violence, numerous mechanisms and institutions have been created around the world to address domestic violence, such as special units of the police force in Ghana, and justice centres for women in Mexico. However, there is little literature that explains why, in spite of the creation of institutional frameworks of varying complexity to address domestic violence, the rates remain stubbornly high in various parts of the world. In this project, we seek to investigate the policies and practices that are needed in addition to a Domestic Violence Act to make a difference in the response to domestic violence.

3. JUSTIFICATION

Justification for Mexico

In Mexico, violence against women has gained prominence as an issue since the 1990s, due to the increasing rate of femicides in the Juarez region, which shares a border with the United States. This has helped to raise the awareness of the international community on the scope and magnitude of different forms of violence against women in Mexico and its effects on the fulfilment of their rights. International and regional reports have shown that domestic violence represents the most common form of violence that women face. At the hands of intimate partners, Mexican women experience physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. According to the National Survey for

Domestic Violence in Mexico 2011 (INGEGI, 2013=), more than 47% of women aged 15 and above have been victims of domestic violence perpetrated by their partners.

In recognition of these high rates, the Mexican government pledged to eliminate violence against women in all forms and fields, and to promote concrete actions, such as reforming domestic laws to match international standards. This led to the passage in 2007 of the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence, which aims to prevent, address and eradicate domestic violence (Law against Violence) and mandates the creation of different mechanisms such as special institutions, programmes and public policies to comply with the State's obligation to address domestic violence. Besides, feminist and human rights organisations have been working with survivors by offering different types of services to women victims of violence and have run care centres, shelters providing protection and a taken a multi-institutional approach to domestic violence. The Government recently enacted a programme to prevent, address, sanction and eradicate violence against women (2014-2018) that establishes the main objectives and potential areas of public intervention. This study represents a great opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the State's responses and identify good practices as well as obstacles to addressing domestic violence.

Justification for Ghana:

With support from the international donor community, the Ghanaian Government, in an effort to combat domestic violence and violence against women, established the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) within the Ghana Police Service. Previously called the Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU), the unit is mandated to handle all domestic violence cases. In 2001, the government subsequently established the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, now known as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in an effort to bring the abuse of women under control and to promote the Ghanaian woman as an integral part of society (Amoakohene, 2004:2379). In addition to this, domestic violence courts were set up "to resolve domestic violence cases in a speedy manner" (*Daily Graphic*, 18 September 2012). The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice has also been operating since 1993 to safeguard and protect the human rights of all Ghanaians.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) also exist to provide basic and allied services to victims and survivors of domestic violence. These include the Ark Foundation, the Centre for Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation, the International Federation of Women Lawyers and the Domestic Violence Coalition Secretariat.

The Committee set up to develop a legislative instrument that will enhance the implementation of the domestic violence law has also submitted a draft LI to the Attorney General's office for consideration and comments. The passage of the legislative instrument ought to ensure a policy environment that is supportive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable persons in the Ghanaian society, especially women and children. Investigating the potential benefits that a legislative instrument can bring to issues of domestic violence will provide crucial information for the Ministry at this point in time.

Given that both Mexico and Ghana enacted domestic violence laws in 2007 but after eight years of implementation have seen no major change in the prevalence of domestic violence, this study affords us the opportunity to undertake a comparative investigation of how the different conditions in which the acts are implemented make a difference in the effectiveness of the response to domestic violence.

4. CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent do factors beyond the passage of a law determine effective responses to domestic violence?

This research question will help to show how the presence of a domestic violence law in itself does not necessarily affect prevalence of the problem. It is rather the nature of institutions, programmes and budgets that the state develops as well as the space created for civil society participation that will constitute an effective response to domestic violence.

Considering that the state is responsible for protecting and guaranteeing women's rights to live a life free from violence, we will look at the responses that are being implemented to comply with these obligations and look at the conditions under which these responses are taking place in order to observe if there is any impact on their effectiveness. Our measure of effective responses

to domestic violence is based on two criteria: the strengthening of women's human rights and the transformation of the unequal and violent conditions in which women are living. We will also consider civil society organisations to examine the role they are playing in each country since in Ghana and Mexico they have been active in providing shelter for survivors of domestic violence and monitoring the State's actions. In Mexico specifically, this initiative from civil society has been incorporated as part of a larger public policy.

5. HYPOTHESIS

The conditions in which domestic violence laws are implemented determine the effectiveness of the responses to domestic violence.

We define "conditions" as a variety of circumstances:

- Political: In this case, we refer to the political will of governments to defend women's rights that can be observed through the creation and role of different mechanisms such as the Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection, the role of Gender Committees in the Legislative and Executive Power as well as in the Judiciary.
- Institutional: This is defined as the existence of specialised institutions (special attention for victims), their coordination and specific activities.
- Economic: This means sufficient allocated budgets to address domestic violence as well as adequate personnel in every service that attends to domestic violence survivors.
- Training: This means adequate professional training for public officers (police officers, judiciary, health care personnel, Public Ministries), referring to the number of courses, job positions and the content of courses on human rights, gender perspectives or the contents of the law. In particular, we are interested in the extent to which training undermines societal understandings of domestic violence as a private matter.
- Social conditions: The existence and the role of civil society organisations to monitor and evaluate public policies and to provide services to survivors of violence.

Structural conditions: This refers to the domination of gender stereotypes, and inequality, as well as impunity. Mexican society is multicultural but also patriarchal and moreover

particularly onerous for indigenous women who often face poor living conditions that limit the enjoyment of their rights. In the case of Ghana, there are some regions where matrilineal communities might have more gender equal societies than the patrilineal communities.

Our dependent variable, effectiveness of responses, is defined as: all violence reports are accompanied by a restraining order; all reports of violence end in a sentence strengthening women's rights; all cases resolved either through sentencing of perpetrators or all cases resolved through mediation that actually ends the violent situation; time between when case is reported and resolved is not more than six months; survivors' satisfaction with process; and survivors' satisfaction with outcome.

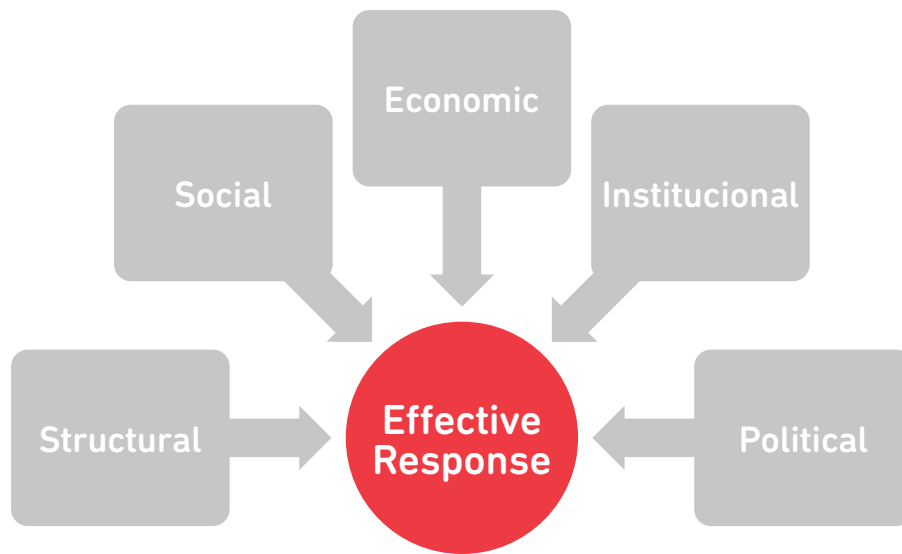
The key variables of the hypothesis represent the parameters that will be used in explaining the outcomes. From the literature review, we identify a range of policies and activities that have been implemented in Ghana and Mexico to curb domestic violence, but there is a gap showing which of these responses have been effective. Thus, the analysis of the conditions in which these responses are implemented and their effectiveness in addressing domestic violence could provide useful findings for decision-makers, practitioners, academics and others.

6. RESEARCH DESIGN

To enable us to answer our central research question as unambiguously as possible, it is important to sketch out a clear research design that outlines the type of evidence we need to collect so that we can answer our research question in a convincing manner. We will draw on a mix of different sources of evidence to answer our central research question. Our research can be described as an analytical study that seeks to explore the relationship between a set of conditions (political, institutional, economic, social, and structural) and what we describe as effective responses to domestic violence, by which we mean responses that lead to all violence reports being accompanied by a restraining order; all reports of violence ending in a sentence strengthening women's rights; all cases resolved through sentencing of perpetrators; all cases resolved through mediation genuinely ending the violent situation; time between when case is

reported and resolved not being more than six months; and the increased satisfaction of survivors with the court procedures and court outcomes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research Design Frame.



Our research will rely on both secondary and primary data collection. The former will include an extensive literature review of the material on domestic violence in the 19 African and 29 Latin American countries that have domestic violence legislation. Our primary data collection will be information gathered through key informant interviews as well as interviews with survivors. Our first group of respondents will comprise officials working in key state and non-state institutions that work on domestic violence. This group of respondents will provide us with insight into their understandings of their roles; their perceptions about the appropriateness of the services they provide to survivors; the extent to which they will describe their responses as effective and the basis for these assertions. Our second group of respondents will be women that report their cases at the police special unit in Ghana or the Public Ministry (*Ministerio Publico*) in Mexico when they can obtain a restraining order as a precautionary measure. We will conduct face-to-face and semi-structured interviews with these women in order to get information on the path they went through, the kind of attention and information they received from the authorities, the solutions they were offered to deal with their violent predicament and finally their feelings about their new situation. We believe that making the link between women's needs and the responses provided allows us to assess the effectiveness of the responses to domestic violence.

The evidence we gather will be generated largely from a qualitative perspective. This is due to the fact that this project is shaped in part by the advocacy/participatory worldview, as well as the social constructionist perspective. Our starting point for this project is both the idea that research should incorporate an explicit goal of improving the circumstances of the marginalised or under-privileged members of society as well as a belief that individuals make sense of their experiences in a subjective manner. While survivors of domestic violence will not participate in the project as project designers or implementers, their perspectives on the issue of domestic violence will be sought and their voices amplified in the report that will be written. In documenting the perspectives of the survivors of domestic violence, we will work from the assumption that multiple meanings can be assigned to state/non-state actors, each of which is as equally valid as the other and all of which provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which survivors of domestic violence view state and non-state institutions that provide them with services.

7. RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods we will employ are mostly qualitative. Different research methods (content analysis, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews) will be used to enable us to answer our hypothesis.

Hypothesis: The conditions in which domestic violence laws are implemented determine the effectiveness of the responses to domestic violence.

On the basis of the domestic violence Acts that were passed in both Ghana and Mexico in 2007, we will conduct a content analysis of the annual reports, institutional memories and public material available to ascertain the extent to which these countries and their institutions have implemented any programme, policy or action to address domestic violence according to the stipulations in the respective laws. We will supplement possible information gaps with key informant interviews.

We will focus on some services of each country, some provided by the legal framework such as restraining orders, specialised police services, and specific funds for domestic violence victims, as well

as shelter services, provided in Mexico by a collaborative effort between civil society and the State, and exclusively provided by civil society in Ghana, in order to analyse how they are implemented in each country. We will look at how these possible responses to domestic violence are conceptualised (by the law or outside of the law) and operationalised through programmes, policies, budget allocations, training programmes, selection of adequate professional service providers, and number of public officers available, for instance. We will try to see how the different conditions in which these services or measures are implemented are a key factor to explain effective responses to domestic violence.

An important part of the research will consist in looking for official or public documents on the programmes, budgets and activities of the public institutions in charge of some services provided to the domestic violence victims, analysing them and comparing them between Mexico and Ghana. We will fill gaps in information with key informant interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in the provision of domestic violence services such as lawyers, judges, police officers and the NGO community to ascertain their perspectives on the process of reporting and resolving a domestic violence issue in the two countries.

A second part of the research will focus on establishing standards or indicators of what we understand by “effective responses” to domestic violence. As laid out earlier, we will focus on the extent to which these responses are built on a human rights framework and ensure the transformation of the violent situations that the victims have faced as well as seeking the empowerment of these women. Interviews with women that survived domestic violence will be a key means to measure the effectiveness of responses to domestic violence. But we will also interview specialists from both academia and the NGO community who work with survivors in order to have more profound information and a critical perspective on these responses to domestic violence.

We will interview between 40 and 50 survivors of violence, in both Ghana and Mexico, so that we can undertake a comparative assessment of the satisfaction of the women who have received support in these two countries. In both cases, we will seek ethical clearance from the appropriate quarters (the Ethics Committee for the Humanities at the University of Ghana and its equivalent in Mexico). We plan to interview approximately 20-25 women each at the two sites. The authorities at both sites will inform potential participants about the project and the details of those who are willing to participate will be passed on to us. Some of the questions we seek to explore include: the nature of the abuse experienced; coping mechanisms prior to reporting; factors that led to reporting; sources of information about services; survivors’ sense of safety and isolation; their awareness of various service points; perceptions of the process and satisfaction with outcomes; and finally a sense of the ways in which coming to either site has been helpful to them.

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