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Víctimas y
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Nit: 901036460-9

**NETWORK OF FEMALE VICTIMS AND PROFESSIONALS
(ASOCIACION RED DE MUJERES VICTIMAS Y PROFESIONALES)**

REPORT ON STIGMA RELATED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE

**WORKSHOPS HELD IN THE CITY OF MEDELLÍN ON THE 24TH AND 25TH OF
JULY, 2017**



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Summary	3
Methodology	4
Discussion	6
1. The marks that sexual violence leaves on victims	6
1.1 Own marks and acquired marks.....	6
1.2 Visible and invisible marks of sexual violence.....	7
2. What do victims of sexual violence know about the word “stigma”?	8
2.1 The relationship between stigma related to sexual violence and the absence of reports made to the police about this crime.	8
2.2 The perceptions of victims of stigma	10
3. Stigma at the family level	11
3.1 Sexual violence and relationships in families	11
3.2 Self-stigmatization in the family.....	12
4. Stigma in the community	14
4.1 The problems that victims recognize in their communities.....	14
4. 2. Forms of stigmatization in the community.....	16
5. Stigma in institutions	17
5. 1. The problems that victims recognize in the institutions responsible for attending to and protecting them.....	18
6. Proposal by the victims	20
Findings	21
Recommendations:	23
Conclusions	27
Bibliography	27

Summary

The workshop was held on the 24th and 25th of August in the Gran Hotel in the city of Medellín, department of Antioquia. It was attended by twenty (20) women and two (2) members of the LGBTQI community, all who have been victims of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict. Of these 20 women, four (4) are indigenous Embera women from the Karra Indigenous Reserve in Llano Gordo. The persons responsible for the design, direction and coordination of the activities were Ángela María Escobar, Fulvia Chunganá and Blanca Lucía Muñoz, leaders of the National Network of Female Victims and Professionals, and Lucía Gallón Rueda, member of the Las Troyanas group.

To achieve the objectives of the workshop, the main themes that were covered were: stigma, what is it and how is it identified?; the relationship between stigma and discrimination; the relationship between stigma and sexual violence; how does stigma manifest itself in the different areas of victims' lives (family-community-institutions)?; and how can the stigma generated by sexual violence be prevented and dealt with?

Comparing this workshop with the one that was held previously in the city of Popayán on the 17th and 18th of July, the following general differences can be observed. Firstly, while in both workshops the women reported that they felt that their safety was at risk due to possible threats and persecution from their aggressors, in Antioquia this aspect was a lot stronger. Various women said that part of the reason for why they hadn't reported being a victim of sexual assault was their certainty that the aggressors could find out that they had made the report. This was due to their close relationships with civil servants. Second, in this workshop there was an emphasis on the visible and invisible marks and scars that occur from being



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

raped, which was used as an introduction to the topic of stigma. As a result, in Antioquia it was possible to more accurately identify the way in which female victims of sexual violence are stigmatized in the different spaces of daily life. Saying this, it is also important to highlight that in both workshops the women described in a very similar manner the ways in which they are stigmatized by the different government agencies that are responsible for providing them with assistance. This leads us to think that the stigma suffered by victims of sexual violence from government institutions can occur in a uniform manner across Colombia, but there is a need to hold a national workshop to confirm this suspicion. The following are the preliminary results from the workshop: stigma related to sexual violence occurs in the exclusion of victims from their spaces of daily life; guilt and shame are the most recurrent mechanisms that achieve this exclusion. This exclusion can manifest itself in different forms such as: the inability of women to engage in sexual relations following the victimizing event; the way in which they are blamed for “destroying” their family; filling victims with fear to such a point that it is easier to leave their place of origin than reporting the sexual assault.

Methodology

The design of the workshop was based on previous experiences that facilitated understanding of the stigma and stigmatization of victims of sexual violence and involved the Network's¹ coordinators as well as contributions from regional workshops with students and victims of sexual violence.² In addition, twenty-three (23) victims who have already made official

¹ Professor Andrea Lozano-Vasquez, current director of the Department of Literature at the University of the Andes, made a presentation on stigma at the National Network Meeting on June 5, 2017 in the city of Bogotá.

² Workshops have been held in Antioquia, Bolívar, Cauca, Huila, Meta, Putumayo and Soacha since 2016, as actions that form part of plans for the prevention of sexual violence and in the training of female victims of sexual violence on laws, mechanisms to access the justice system and reparations.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

reports as victims of sexual violence, supported from the National Network of Female Victims and Professionals, were asked to participate. This was to ensure that they could openly talk about their condition as victims and thus promote discussions about the stigma related to sexual violence. The Network ensured the participation of women from different ethnic groups (mestizo, afro and indigenous) and of different ages in order to ensure a sufficient range of perspectives in the discussion.

The workshop used a mixed methodology and was designed with the purpose of guaranteeing individual participation through the use of explicit questions, the answers of which reflected perceptions rather than knowledge. Collective and individual work through creative activities such as painting, writing and theatrical performances generated concrete products that, in addition to being analysed, can be used in other training and advocacy activities. The purpose of these activities was to recognize the victims' common experiences with the goal of characterizing the stigmatization experienced by victims of sexual violence and in turn, identify strategies to prevent and deal with this stigma in both private and public areas of life. These activities were primarily led by Ángela María Escobar and Blanca Lucía Muñoz, who are victims of sexual violence. With their regional leadership, they used their personal experiences of stigmatization as an example for other women and in this way guided the discussions. The presence and leadership of the female victims of the Network has proven to be of fundamental importance in the workshops as they create a space of trust for the victims and also serve as a link between them and the professionals who also participate in the workshops delivering information sessions. Two information sessions were delivered by Lucía Gallón Rueda in order to outline and define the key concepts related to stigma and the different types of discrimination that people experience. The analysis presented in this report is the result of the systematization and analysis of the participating women's responses and proposals.

Discussion

1. The marks that sexual violence leaves on victims

1.1 Own marks and acquired marks

Sexual violence leaves marks on the bodies of the victims that end up affecting the way in which they relate to their bodies.

The workshop opened with a brief introduction by Lucía Gallón Rueda about the concepts of “own marks” and “acquired marks” as components of the physical identity of a person. She shared with the group that own marks are those marks that are the result of genetics and what we inherit from our parents and ancestors, which means a person’s own attributes with which they were born. On the other hand, the acquired marks are those that are not natural but were acquired by the body through either their own decision, the decision of another person or as the result of an accident.

Once this clarification was made, victims were asked to identify on their bodies the features that they considered naturally occurring and the features that were acquired, with both groups forming their physical identity. In order to do this, participants could draw as well as write. As might be expected, the victims identified the following as their own features: their hair colour, their body types, their skin colour and the colour of their eyes. When considering their acquired features, they identified the following attributes: permanent makeup, cultural makeup (in the case of the indigenous people), clothing, pierced ears, tattoos, being baptised and marks that have occurred as a result of war, domestic violence and sexual violence.

At the conclusion of this activity, the victims were asked to indicate how they felt about their own marks and the marks that they had acquired. In general, all the participants felt quite



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

good about their own marks, except for one who said she was not comfortable with having a vagina because it was the cause of all of the negative experiences that she has had to endure. This type of comment is important to keep in mind not just to understand the stigma suffered by victims of sexual violence, but the stigma experienced by Colombian women in general. Participants felt good about the acquired traits that had been the result of a decision they themselves made on their own. However, this was not the case with the marks that were the result of a decision made by others. This was particularly the case with the marks that reminded them of the victimization they had suffered.

At the conclusion of the socialization of participants' answers, Lucía Gallón Rueda gave a brief presentation on stigma, going over the etymological and historical origin of the word (the human branding that was used to mark slaves in the Greco-Roman world) and then moving on to the different types of stigma that exist in the modern age.

1.2 Visible and invisible marks of sexual violence

The extent of sexual violence goes beyond the visible marks left by the act of victimization.

After the presentation on stigma, the victims were asked: *What are the visible marks left by sexual violence?* Each victim was given a card to write down their response and in the socialization space each person who wanted to could share what she/he had written with the rest of the group. These were the most common responses:

1. Marks on the body: scars, scratches and bruises.
2. Behavioural marks: fear, sadness, resentment, not being able to be fully happy with their partner, feeling the presence of the perpetrator long after the victimization had taken place, feeling impure and dirty.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

At the conclusion of the socialization the victims were asked: *What are the invisible marks left by sexual violence?* This was a way of asking about the impact of sexual violence on their lives. Each victim was given a card to write down their response, and in the socialization of answers everyone who wanted to could share what she/he had written with the rest of the group.

These were the most common responses: impotence, anger, hatred, resentment, pain, bitterness, sadness, fear, illness (both physical and mental) and feeling dirty. According to the responses of these women, both visible marks and invisible marks consist of fear, sadness and resentment. These emotions are important, bearing in mind that in Antioquia, women feel very unmotivated to report crimes of sexual violence due to the influence that the perpetrators have on government institutions, which will be discussed later in this report. As a result, it is normal for victims to feel a strong component of fear due to the possibility of the offender reappearing. In addition, because they cannot obtain justice, it is also natural for them to feel that their sadness and resentment are both visible and invisible marks. In addition, it is important to highlight the women's sensation of feeling dirty, which was mentioned by a number of victims. This feeling, combined with the physical scars on their bodies, results in a sense of dissatisfaction that victims feel towards their own bodies, which should also be taken into account when eradicating stigma related to sexual violence.

2. What do victims of sexual violence know about the word "stigma"?

2.1 The relationship between stigma related to sexual violence and the absence of reports made to the police about this crime.

Stigma is one of the first causes of why sexual violence victims do not report the crime they have suffered.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

Following the discussion on the marks left by sexual violence, Lucía Gallón Rueda made a presentation on the different stigmas that are created as a result of a violent event, using the example of the stigma that Syrian refugees have suffered, as well as those internally displaced by the Colombian armed conflict. At the end of the presentation the participating victims were asked: Why didn't you report your sexual assault earlier or straight after it happened? Each victim was given a card so that they could write down their answer, and in the socialization whoever wanted to read out their answer was invited to. These were the most common answers:

1. **Fear of discrimination and shame:** the victims did not want their family and community to know that they had been raped for fear of being singled out and discriminated against in their own social spaces.
2. **Fear of the aggressor:** the victims were threatened by their aggressor who told them insistently that if they reported the crime, they would return and kill the victim or members of the victim's family. This occurs mainly but not exclusively with victims who have suffered sexual assaults within the framework of the armed conflict.
3. **Lack of knowledge about assistance mechanisms and their rights as victims:** the victims did not have access to the knowledge required about which government agencies they could be referred to as victims of rape while some did not conceive rape as a crime but as normal behaviour within their community.
4. **Shame:** the victims felt that they could not report the crime because of the shame they felt about what had happened. This aspect is very important because it shows how victims self-stigmatize. These women feel guilty about what happened and it makes them too ashamed to talk about what happened with someone.

As has been mentioned previously, it is necessary to highlight that victims from the region of Antioquia have higher levels of fear than women in the department of Cauca, due to the fact that perpetrators have contacts within government institutions.

2.2 The perceptions of victims of stigma

Victims are aware of what stigma is, even though they can't define it conceptually.

The following activity consisted in asking victims, “how have you been stigmatized for being a victim of sexual violence?” Each victim was given a card to write down their response, and in the socialization of answers everyone who wanted to could share what she/he had written with the rest of the group. These were the most common answers:

1. **Criticism:** victims are criticised for what they were wearing or the time of day when they went out on to the street and were victims of sexual violence.
2. **Judgement:** victims are judged by their neighbours and considered personas non-grata in their communities.
3. **Discrimination:** victims are denied certain fundamental rights such as the possibility of working or having access to some form of government subsidies, specifically because they are seen as personas non-grata in their communities.
4. **Blame:** victims are seen as guilty and responsible for what happened to them.
5. **Rejection:** victims are expelled from their spaces where daily life occurs (families and communities) because their presence affects the other people who also form part of these spaces.

As described later on, blame is one of the forms of stigma that victims recognise. The need to lay blame is accentuated when the other forms of stigma are related to this feeling of guilt that they create for victims. Through criticism and judgement, victims are seen as responsible for what happened to them. As a result of this, the victims are discriminated against and rejected by other members of the community specifically because they are seen as being responsible for what happened to them.

3. Stigma at the family level

3.1 Sexual violence and relationships in families

Being a victim of sexual violence affects internal family relationships.

In order to characterize the perception of stigma by victims in their family environment, the following activity was divided into two parts. In the first part, the victims were asked what they represent to their family, and they either drew a picture or pasted together images from magazines and newspapers to express how their family sees them. The reason for this activity was to visualize and gather evidence of what victims' families consist of in the region of Cauca. This activity provided sufficient data to be able to characterize, at a future date, the type of families that exist in Colombia. The following conclusions are based on these drawings:

1. The immediate family of at least half of the workshop participants consists of themselves and their children. In all of these cases the victims still don't feel that they can safely engage in emotional relationships with other people following their sexual assault.
2. The other participants have a more extensive immediate family in that they have a spouse or a partner.
3. On a number of occasions women included family members who had passed away.
4. On occasion the families included the victims' ex-partners, even if they were the perpetrators of the violence that they had suffered.
5. The women that included extended family members stated that they are no longer close to them.

6. Indigenous women represented nature as an integrated part of their families.

These results are similar to those of the victims from Cauca, in that the women maintain close relationships following their sexual assault, mainly with their children. However, they are different in that the victims of Antioquia are women who no longer live with their families or former partners. This can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, it could be a rejection of the traditional culture that prevails in Antioquia, which places great importance on the family; on the other hand, it could show the difficulty that the victims have in leaving the traumatizing events of their past behind. It should be highlighted that the armed conflict was responsible for the deaths of relatives of the victims. As mentioned earlier, several of the victims were abused by their former partners. To address this issue, an important action that needs to be carried out in the region is to strengthen psychosocial care.

3.2 Self-stigmatization in the family

Victims of sexual violence do not feel stigmatized because of their families but because they feel too self-conscious to tell them about what happened. This is self-stigmatization.

Once this activity was concluded, the victims were asked the following question: *With who in your family is it, or was it, more difficult to talk to about the sexual violence that you suffered?* Each victim was given a card to respond and in the socialization of answers, anyone who wanted to could share what she/he had written with the rest of the group. These were the most recurrent responses: common

1. Children: the children of several of the victims are the product of rape. In these cases, the victims do not know how to talk about what happened. In cases where the children are not the result of a rape, possible rejection from their children was the reason that victims felt it was extremely difficult to talk about the sexual violence that they suffered with them.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

2. Partner: the victims' partners blamed them for having suffered sexual violence, as well as for having destroyed their family. The partners saw the victims as someone to be ashamed of.
3. Parents: the victims did not know how their parents would react if they learned about what happened to them, but they suspected that it would not be a positive reaction. In addition, there were victims who told their parents and they weren't believed.

Something common in all three of the responses is the fear that the victims have regarding the possible reactions by their family members. This fear lies in the preconception that they will be rejected, which often does happen. This shows how the victims have internalized the stigma previously mentioned, in particular the feeling that they will be rejected. This internalization turns into self-stigmatization by the victims towards themselves. This is important to take into account, precisely because it will be shown to be relevant in the following point.

The victims were then asked the following question: *Have you been or do you think you would be stigmatized by your family for being a victim of sexual violence?* Each victim was given a card to respond and in the space for sharing answers, every participant who wanted to could share what she/he had written with the rest of the group. The most common response: *No, because I have not told them and I don't want them to know that I have been a victim of this crime.* This demonstrates that their stigma has been internalized to such an extent that victims do not talk to their families about what happened precisely because they are, to a certain extent, aware of the rejection they are going to suffer if they knew that they had been victims of sexual assaults. This was also highlighted by victims in the workshops in Cauca. Self-stigmatization plays an even stronger role than the stigmatization suffered by the victims from society as it is configured as a repressive mechanism that prevents them from engaging in open and honest relationships with their family and their community.

4. Stigma in the community

4.1 The problems that victims recognize in their communities

Victims in Antioquia, particularly women have to endure sexual violence because of their lack of empowerment in their own communities.

After talking about stigma in the family, victims were asked the following question: *What are the main problems in your community?* Each victim was given a card to respond and during the socialization of answers, each participant who wanted to could share what she/he had written with the rest of the group. These were the most common responses:

1. Drug addiction: victims recognize the issue of addiction as one of the main problems in their community because it creates an insecure environment and because it has negative effects on young people, including criminal behaviour and dropping out from school.
2. Gossip: victims recognize that gossip is a problem in their communities because it prevents open relationships between different community members.
3. Hypocrisy: related to the relationship between the perpetrators and public officials that work at government institutions; victims do not feel that their communities are safe spaces because they don't know if they can or can't trust others. It may be the case that they open up to a neighbour or a friend and these people turn out to be an acquaintance or friend of the perpetrator.
4. Criticism: victims feel that their communities are not supportive spaces, but on the contrary, they are spaces where people are judged harshly and no help is given.
5. Envy: victims feel that in their communities it isn't possible to develop projects or make changes in their lifestyles because that would generate envy among other members of that



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

community. As a result of that envy, they could be rejected and even be attacked by other members of the community.

These same problems were also reported by participants in the workshop in Soacha, but in this workshop they acknowledged sexual violence as one of the most common problems in their communities.

Similar to the results of the workshop held in Popayán, in Medellín the victims recognized drug addiction as one of the main problems in their community. However, unlike Popayán, where participants stated that their communities were spaces that offered little safety or solidarity, in Medellín this situation was even worse. This could be due to the infiltration of the perpetrators of sexual violence, usually members of an illegal armed group, in these communities. This infiltration can occur either because the perpetrator is an active member of the community, or has an indirect influence on the community. In addition to the above-mentioned problems, indigenous victims also highlighted the following problems in their communities: sexual violence, family mistreatment, abandonment by parents, psychological problems, illegal armed groups, alcoholism and a lack of employment. This highlights a difference between urban areas and indigenous reserves that must be taken into account if stigma related to sexual violence is to be eradicated.

With the exception of indigenous women, no other victims mentioned sexual violence as one of the most important problems in their community. For this reason, the victims were asked the following question: *Why is sexual violence not a problem in your community?* Each victim was given a card to write down their response and in the socialization of the answers, each participant who wanted to could share what they had written with the rest of the group. These were the most common responses:

1. **Normalization of sexual violence:** victims perceive sexual violence as a common practice within their communities, as it ensures that women have a partner and the means to survive.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

In other words, in their communities, committing sexual violence against a person, who usually holds an inferior level of power to the perpetrator, is considered the price that they have to pay in order to survive or have a partner and thus be considered a respectable person within their community.

2. **Security problems:** victims of sexual violence avoid talking about what happened to them in their communities because of the security problems mentioned above, and specifically because of the possible retaliation they might suffer at hand of their perpetrators.
3. **Respect for the privacy of others:** victims do not talk about the issue of sexual violence in their communities because they consider that it is a private matter that is not subject to public debate or discussion.
4. **Normalization of sexual violence:** similar to their family environments, sexual violence is perceived as a common practice in participants' communities, which is why any comments that victims make regarding their victimization will be downplayed and their emotional suffering will be seen as a character defect.

In the workshop that was held in Popayán, the normalization of sexual violence was also noted. However, the lack of females' empowerment was very evident in Medellín. While in Cauca several victims found the means to work and even set up their own companies, in Antioquia, the role of women in society is much more limited and consequently they have to endure sexual abuse if they wish to survive. Furthermore, there is a strong social obligation for women to have a partner or otherwise they will be labelled "old maids" or whores and rejected by other members of their communities. This was reported as being significantly stronger in Antioquia than in Cauca.

4. 2. Forms of stigmatization in the community.

Stigma in the community can be seen in different forms in which victims are excluded from their communities, among which, blaming and shaming are the most common.

The victims were asked the following question, "How are victims of sexual violence stigmatized in your community?" Cards were provided to each victim for their response, and in the socialization of their answers, each participant who wanted to share what they wrote with the rest of the group was given time to read out their response.. These were the most common answers:

1. **Being singled out:** Victims of sexual violence are singled out and insulted by community members (being called prostitutes, for example). Likewise, they are seen as bad examples or persona non-grata within their community.
2. **They are told not to get involved in other people's business:** when victims of sexual violence try to defend another victim, or notify the community about a case of possible sexual abuse they are told off for getting involved in the private issues of other people.
3. **Blame:** the victims of sexual violence are blamed for what happened. Specifically, in this region they are called "whores".
4. **Rejection:** the community rejects victims of sexual violence and isolates them.
5. **Ignored:** victims of sexual violence don't feel any type of support from their communities and are ignored by them, with nobody paying attention to victims' needs or advice on how to prevent further cases of sexual violence.

These results are similar to what was identified during the workshop in Popayán, specifically in terms of victims being singled out and blamed. In addition, the participants in Medellín highlighted the strong respect for other people's privacy in terms of talking about personal issues and open rejection from members of the community.

5. Stigma in institutions

5. 1. The problems that victims recognize in the institutions responsible for attending to and protecting them.

The stigma that victims of sexual violence suffer in government institutions have several, if not all, of the same characteristics of the stigma mentioned above that occurs in family environments and communities.

To recognize the problems that victims face in institutions and how these are related to stigma, a role-playing activity was carried out in which victims acted out how they are treated when they go to these institutions. Five (5) government institutions were chosen to be represented by the five (5) groups that were present; a hospital, the Ombudsman's Office, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, and the Victims Unit.

1. Hospitals

The victims that presented their experiences in hospitals showed that they aren't given priority treatment when they arrive to these institutions. In addition, the victims are criticised and judged by different employees at the hospital such as the security guards or doctors. When they are examined and diagnosed as having suffered from a sexual assault, the doctors ask them for information that is not relevant to the case, such as what clothes they were wearing that day, which re-victimizes them. Finally, the victims are required to present physical proof (such as traces or evidence of semen) in order to be able to continue with the procedure that has been designed for victims of sexual violence.

2. Ombudsman's Office:

The victims that presented their experiences with the Ombudsman's Office showed that, as was the case with hospitals, sexual violence is not considered a serious crime and therefore does not deserve priority assistance. In addition, the bureaucratic procedures necessary to file a report as victims of sexual violence are very complex and intricate and require too much time. Finally, the victims highlighted that the seriousness of being a victim of rape was even further reduced if the woman did not get pregnant as a result.

3. Public Prosecutor's Office:

The victims that presented their experiences in the Public Prosecutor's Office highlighted the limited presence and credibility of the civil servants who work in this institution. Using role plays, the women were able to demonstrate the difficulty that victims face in receiving assistance from this institution. This difficulty is the result of an extensive procedure they have to follow to file a report of sexual violence with this institution, yet this procedure does not guarantee that the victim will receive assistance from a professional.

4. Family Commission:

The victims that presented their experiences with the Family Commission demonstrated that the officials that work in this institution are not aware of the regulations that exist to protect victims of sexual violence. Additionally, the officials tend to blame the victim for what happened and lack empathy for their suffering. The women who participated in the workshop stated that these civil servants are more interested in answering calls on their cell phones than providing them with assistance.

5. Victims Unit:



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

The victims that presented their experiences in the Victims Unit highlighted the ineffectiveness of this institution. Firstly, the Unit does not have the capacity to assist all of the cases of victims and as a result they normally can't attend to all of the people who request assistance, which means that there are victims that don't receive the necessary support from this institution. In the event of being assisted, which generally takes a long time after requesting an appointment, the victims are re-victimized by the civil servants that work in the Unit or scolded for not having come to an appointment previously. However, this is not the victims' fault but a fault in the way that victims are assigned appointments.

6. Proposal by the victims

Once all of the presentations had finished, the victims were asked to create a series of proposals that they considered suitable for preventing and combatting stigma related to sexual violence. The proposals have been gathered here in three large groups: pedagogical and policy proposals; proposals for the government; and ethical proposals.

1. **Pedagogical and policy proposals:** these are proposals that aim to raise awareness about the issue of sexual violence in order to generate greater understanding and empathy from different members of the community, public institutions and families. Additionally, these proposals aim to make victims more visible as political actors so that their proposals for the government (detailed in the following point) have more power and support. These proposals include: engage in dialogue with different sectors of Colombian society; carry out different types of activities (theatre plays, public events, private meetings, movie projection) that help raise awareness about the issue of sexual violence; provide training on how to avoid re-victimization; disseminate information on the issue of sexual violence; conduct awareness raising campaigns; develop links with educational institutions; share the knowledge acquired in the workshops with different rural areas and municipalities in the region; conduct publicity campaigns that provide information on the issue of sexual violence; and openly support the LGBTI community.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

2. **Proposals for the government:** these are proposals that aim to achieve specific changes from the government and the civil servants that occupy positions in government institutions. These proposals include: provide appropriate psychological assistance; within their families, guarantee that victims are treated fairly and without stigmatization by other family members; reduce corruption; and increase the sense of responsibility that the government has to the community and ensure that they fulfil this responsibility.
3. **Ethical proposals:** these proposals cover behavioural changes that the victims consider necessary to prevent them from being stigmatized. These proposals include: give victims the possibility of building new narratives that don't just revolve around having suffered sexual violence; encourage respect for victims; and generate more commitment from members of the community to support victims of sexual violence.

This part of the workshop was not held in Popayán and therefore there is no point of comparison that can be made between the results.

Findings

During the workshop carried out in Medellín the strong presence that members of the armed groups have in the communities where victims of sexual violence live was a constant feature of the discussion. As stated previously, this influence ends up discouraging women to report crimes of sexual violence as it is possible they will suffer from retaliation and feel insecure in their own communities. The infiltration of members of armed groups in the community results in weakening the social fabric as it generates an atmosphere of distrust. The infiltration of members of armed groups in civil spaces has marked the armed conflict in Colombia. This has been stronger in the Department of Antioquia (Medellín) than in the Department of Cauca (Popayán). These results indicate that only by stopping the infiltration into communities by members of armed groups and restoring the social fabric can victims of sexual violence hope



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

to access justice and establish open relationships with the different members of their community. Rebuilding the social fabric and the fight against stigmatization are two components of the same process.

Additionally, there was a lower level of empowerment of women in Antioquia compared to Cauca. As a result, various victims have to put up with sexual violence and see it as the price they have to pay in order to survive and have a stable partner. If the stigmatization of female victims of sexual violence is to stop, an empowerment process has to be generated that helps them to access the required economic autonomy so that they don't have an economic dependence on their partners, who are also the perpetrators of the sexual violence that they have suffered. In addition, sexism in Antioquia needs to be combatted so that when a woman decides to leave her partner because she is suffering sexual violence, she is not discriminated against for not fulfilling the traditional role for women in the region as wife and mother.

In Cauca, the most common form of stigmatizing victims of sexual violence is blaming them for what happened. However, this workshop in Medellín strongly demonstrated the way guilt is assimilated by victims: the stigma against them is so strong that don't end up saying anything. This means that the victims are self-stigmatizing. Staying quiet shows how deeply rooted this stigma is against victims of sexual violence in the Department of Antioquia.

Finally, it was observed that sexual violence in the communities is treated as a private issue. As a result, victims of sexual violence do not feel capable of speaking about what happened to them and are much less able to generate specific changes to prevent sexual violence from spreading in their communities. In this case, the stigma against victims is the result of how sexuality is treated in current society.

Recommendations:

Taking into account the information presented in this report and the proposals prepared by participating victims, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Different government institutions fully train their officials so that they have the necessary skills to provide assistance to victims of sexual violence. This training must not only address the guidelines and regulations that protect victims, it also has to include an emotional component that helps government staff to adopt more empathetic attitudes towards victims. This is directly related to what is established in the Principles for Global Action (p. 60).
2. Limit the use of mobile phones by staff in public institutions that are responsible for providing assistance to victims of sexual violence. This has the goal of government workers achieving more empathetic relationships with victims so that these women don't feel re-victimised or stigmatized by staff. This action is too specific to be included in the Principles for Global Action.
3. Implement workshops focused on the victims so that they can become aware of the laws and guidelines that protect them in the different institutions. This will allow the victims to have the necessary knowledge to identify when a public official is not properly doing their job and they can report it, as demonstrated in the role-playing activity carried out by the women. This is also included within the Principles for Global Action (p. 58).
4. Establish control mechanisms for public officials in the institutions that provide assistance to victims of sexual violence. This is in the interest of adopting a zero-tolerance policy towards stigma being expressed by staff in these institutions in order



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

- to guarantee the quality of assistance and so that the process becomes faster. This is also considered within the Principles for Global Action (p. 57).
5. Generate activities that empower female victims of sexual violence. These activities can be cultural / artistic, as is the case with the Female Drummers of Popayán who, in addition to expressing the pain caused by sexual violence through dance and song, have become a visible group in the Popayán region that have a strong political presence. In addition, programs can focus on physical activities. In July, various women from the National Network of Female Victims and Professionals ran the Bogotá Half-Marathon. None of the women had participated in such a prestigious sporting event before and completing this race gave them the encouragement and inspiration they needed to feel capable of facing new obstacles and challenges. Both types of these activities can help rebuild the relationship between victims and their bodies. These aspects are not considered in the Principles for Global Action.
 6. Based on the previous objective, generate spaces in the different communities to discuss sexual violence. A large part of the biases that different members of the communities have towards victims of sexual violence are a result of the issue not being discussed in schools and families. A result of generating these spaces can be seen in the Colegio Miguel de Cervantes in the Locality of Soacha, where more and more students have the courage to talk about sexual violence and little by little prejudice against victims is being reduced, with less victim blaming occurring. Therefore, the issue needs to be discussed with guidance from trained professionals who can lead the discussion and dispel myths and erroneous conceptions that stigmatize the victims, as proposed by the Principles for Global Action (p. 60).
 7. There needs to be a strong presence of representatives of religious authorities in these spaces who are willing to dispel these biases and erroneous conceptions in their communities. As demonstrated by the “No” victory in the plebiscite last year³,

³ <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/economia/colombia-se-crea-promedio-una-iglesia-diaria-y-ninguna-articulo-660708>.



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

- religious communities in Colombia have a high level of influence on their members. In addition, several of the biases in the communities against victims of sexual violence have a moral basis and religious communities play a strong role in the moral education of individuals. This issue has to be addressed. In addition, part of the stigma in the region of Antioquia reduces sexuality to a private and taboo issue. Achieving that members of religious communities openly talk about this topic can help it move from the private sphere of life to the public. This is already included in the Principles for Global Action (p. 59), but it becomes even more urgent in the case of Colombia due to the strong influence that religious groups have on individuals.
8. Generate the necessary tools so that victims of sexual violence who still don't feel comfortable talking about what happened to them with family members can discuss sexual violence, especially if their children are the result of a rape. In the workshops implemented by the Network in Soacha with young people, as well as with participants in the workshop in Popayán, the *Stories of Antioquia* publication that was written by women from the Las Troyanas Group has proven to be a useful tool for opening up communication channels in families about sexual violence and generating discussions on the issue between different family members. In addition, in Popayán one of the women reported that through the stories written by Las Troyanas her daughter could recognise a case of sexual violence in her community and report it. Tools like the stories written by Las Troyanas aren't just an example of the different activities that could be generated to introduce the topic of sexual violence and articulate a reflection on this. This publication can act as one of the tools to include in or serve as an experience for the practical toolkit described in the Principles for Global Action (p. 53).
 9. Promote activities that can restore the social fabric affected by the infiltration of members of armed groups. In order to do this, a clear public policy has to be generated to identify these individuals so that they are brought to trial and sanctioning accordingly. Following this, another public policy has to be generated in order to



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

- instil values among community members so that they can coexist peacefully and in solidarity with one another. This is not included in the Principles for Global Action.
10. Conduct public and visible campaigns that help raise awareness about sexual violence. This occurred in Colombia with the adaptation of a Chilean soap opera called “Alicia’s Labyrinth” in 2014. During commercials for the soap opera, which also covered sexual violence in the family setting, public information commercials were broadcasted that warned viewers about domestic sexual violence. However, the soap opera was not broadcast during prime time and therefore the messages were not properly received by the public. This is stipulated in the Principles for Global Action (page 57).
 11. Create incentives so that the Colombian government finances and promotes cultural products that discuss the issue of sexual violence. In 2016, the Colombian Director Victor Gaviria released a film called “The Animal’s Wife”. Due to its stark nature, in which the director examines the issue of sexual violence in the film, it generated a lot of controversy and for that reason its ratings are very polarized. Additionally, due to a lack of support for Colombian cinema, the film had a short run in theatres and did not make a large profit. However, this did not prevent it from winning two film awards, one in the Havana Film Festival and the other in the Málaga Film Festival. Additionally, thanks to this movie, two columns were written in *Arcadia Magazine* that addressed the issue of sexual violence. Movies like “The Animal’s Wife” demonstrate that when movies are well made they can generate discussion about sexual violence. However, not all of these movies will be successful unless they have a certain level of financing and support from the government. This is considered in the Principles for Global Action (pages 57-58).
 12. Strengthen the legitimacy and transparency of the state. As the results of the workshop in Antioquia demonstrate, if government institutions are infiltrated by members of armed groups, who are also the perpetrators of sexual violence crimes committed against several victims who visit an institution seeking assistance, the access mechanisms for the justice system are corrupted. Additionally, victims do not



Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

feel motivated to report the crimes of sexual violence because they do not feel that process will have clear results. It also takes up a lot of their time, which they could better use to look for work. This is in accordance with what is established in the Principles for Global Action (page 61).

13. Provide the necessary psychosocial assistance to victims so that they can come to terms with their own body and be able to build a life story that transcends the victimizing event they suffered. All of this has the aim of the victims being able to leave behind, or carry on with their lives with greater ease, the marks they feel they are going to carry for life after being raped. This is considered in the Principles for Global Action (page 62), but it is worth stressing that the psychiatric procedure has to include a holistic approach involving the body, which was already mentioned.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is worth highlighting that several elements reappeared in the workshop in Medellín that were already evident in the workshop carried out in Popayán. These elements include: guilt; normalization of sexual violence; and the lack of training and effectiveness of civil servants. These three elements are the ones that have the biggest impact on the configuration of stigma in Colombia at a national level and have to be prioritized if this stigma is to be tackled. However, an aspect of vital importance came to light in Medellín: the infiltration of members of different armed groups in communities and government institutions. This aspect has to also be taken into account if the victims are expected to feel safe accessing justice and wish to establish more supportive and open relationships with members of their communities.

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Red de Mujeres
Víctimas y
Profesionales
Nit: 901036460-9

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