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SERIE MUJER Y DESARROLLO

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN:
PROPOSALS FOR DISCUSSION**

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT**



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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This document was prepared by Ms. María Nieves Rico, a consultant to the Women and Development Unit of the ECLAC Social Development Division. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Organization.

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Introduction

The many different types of violence present in our societies are the result of a variety of factors which need to be analysed from a political, social, cultural, economic and psychological standpoint in order to arrive at a genuine understanding of the phenomenon. In the past few years, we have witnessed some progress in this regard, inasmuch as one of the most serious problems faced by women on a daily basis has been brought to the fore: violence against women. This term includes rape, sexual harassment in the work place, the treatment of women, sexual tourism, pornography, prostitution, the disparagement and deprecation of women by the media, and physical, sexual and psychological aggression against and abuse of women in the home —by their husbands or partners— along with the direct effects of such actions on their physical and mental health.

This study will refer in particular to domestic violence against women. This serious problem calls for a particular type of approach and concern on the part of the various social agents which can contribute to the development of concrete solutions that address the causes of the problem rather than just its consequences.

This report constitutes part of the effort to implement the resolution on women and violence adopted by the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean at its fifth session (ECLAC, 1991a) and United Nations General Assembly resolution 45/114, "Violence in the home" (1990a). Both of these resolutions voice concern about this pressing and critical problem, acknowledge the existence of a serious lack of information and research on the subject, assert that concerted measures need to be taken and state that, in order to accomplish this, multidisciplinary policies and strategies need to be examined, designed and implemented.

The goal of this study is to provide the reader with an analytical vantage point from which a holistic approach may be taken to the problem of domestic violence against women and a fuller understanding may be obtained of the roots of this phenomenon in our countries. Accordingly, the first step is to "deconstruct" the dominant sex/gender system in our societies, since it plays a crucial part in accounting for the persistence of this phenomenon and its reproduction from one generation to the next. In so doing, an effort will be made to place this system within its proper context as regards the traditional sociocultural model and the changes now taking place in public participation by women and the formation of families. This analysis will be supplemented by a characterization of domestic violence based on what applied psychology can tell us about the phenomenon.

During the past few years, the laws of the countries in the region have been amended so as to take into account the existence of discrimination against the female population and to acknowledge and deal with the problem of violence against women within the home. Within this context, some observations will be made with regard to legal procedures and the administration of justice as they relate to this problem, since both are essential considerations which must be addressed on a joint basis if a genuine effort is to be made to change the law and the way it is enforced so as to protect victims, penalize aggressors and provide effective deterrents.

The most significant advances and experiences with respect to ways of dealing with domestic violence in Latin America and the Caribbean will also be presented in order to show what types of specific approaches have thus far proven to be successful and should therefore be emulated by each of the countries. This review of initiatives also provides an idea of the real possibilities of helping abused women and of introducing types of social change that will work to their benefit.

International organizations have a very important role to play, through their resolutions and programmes, in raising the awareness and sensitizing the governments of the region to this problem. They begin to assume this role by characterizing domestic violence as a development issue that is closely linked to the achievement of peace and the consolidation of democracy. In so doing, they support the efforts made to incorporate the issue into the discussion of public policy and the concept of human rights, as they provide the States with tools for implementing measures aimed at eradicating, preventing and forestalling violence against women in both the public and private spheres.

Within this context, attention will be drawn to the need to incorporate considerations associated with characteristics specific to women and the gender-based stratification that exists in our societies into the Latin American and Caribbean countries' development programmes and policies, inasmuch as domestic violence constitutes a major obstacle to a harmonious form of development with social and gender equality. One of the important aspects of this concern refers to the prevention of situations that generate violence against women. The role of the State in this respect is fundamental in setting the scene for effective efforts to design and implement realistic solutions in such areas of endeavour as raising the population's consciousness of the fact that this is a problem which affects society as a whole.

Finally, the flaws or shortcomings observed in baseline assessments and action proposals will also be presented. This line of inquiry is another component of a comprehensive approach to the issue and brings out the need to make changes in all those areas which directly or indirectly affect the status of women in the region. In our view, each aspect should be considered not only as it relates to dealing with the problem of domestic violence against women, but also with a view to the construction of a social and cultural model in which no human being feel that he or she has the right to attack or abuse another, and where men and women would recover a range of experience and a form of understanding in which discrimination and inequality have no place.

I. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Day after day, our societies are confronted with a particular form of conflict —violence within the family— which calls into question the declared existence of equal rights for all humankind. Domestic violence is defined as any act committed within the family by one of its members which seriously impairs the life, body, psychological well-being or liberty of another family member (Antony and Miller, 1986). Such aggression is usually directed at children, the elderly and women, but research conducted in a number of different countries indicates that the main victims of violence in the home are women. This problem therefore has some unique characteristics.

Based on a deeper analysis of studies on domestic violence, some authors prefer to use the concept of "battered women" because this term identifies a particular phenomenon with discrete characteristics which set it apart from other sorts of conjugal violence and their possible manifestations (Ferreira, 1989). The term "battered woman" is applied to a woman who is the victim of physical, psychological or sexual abuse committed by her husband, boyfriend or life partner and who, by this means, is forced to commit acts she does not wish to commit or prevented from taking some action she desires to take (Serra, 1988). This term is therefore subsumed under family or domestic violence and conjugal violence against women.

Our understanding and delimitation of this phenomenon supports the assertion that domestic violence against women is a public, social and even political problem rather than an individual or private one, despite the fact that it relates to the household environment. This sort of violence —as all others— is a violation of human rights which does not occur in isolation but rather within the framework of a society that reinforces sexist concepts as a reflection of a social order that discriminates against women.

Women in the Latin American and Caribbean countries are in a vulnerable position, and even though the female population is heterogeneous and exhibits different features depending on its members' position within the social structure, all women are subject to one or more types of discrimination. One of the factors which unites women is the very real possibility of suffering some type of violent attack, since violence penetrates and cuts across all social classes and all cultures (United Nations, 1986). Violence against women, and specifically violence against women within the home, has been a taboo subject condemned to social invisibility, silence in the intimacy of the home and justification on grounds of custom and cultural tradition.

This phenomenon, which is part of women's daily lives, is not a recent one in Latin America. This is demonstrated by historical evidence of its presence in the past, when aggression was used to keep women in their socially-assigned place within the family hierarchy by limiting their physical mobility and sexuality (Lavrin, 1985; González and Iracheta, 1987). The way in which the issue is perceived has been changing, however. Violence against women in the "private" sphere of life has ceased to be regarded as consubstantial with intra-family relations, and there is a growing, if tacit, consensus among both men and women that these types of behaviour are regarded unfavourably and should be corrected and prevented.

Thus, the public visibility of this problem is indeed a new development. There is a greater sensitivity to the issue and a growing awareness of the need to de-mythologize the subject, to examine it in the light of day, to admit that a large percentage of women are the victims of violence, that such violence should be punished, both legally and socially, and that greater efforts must be made to prevent it.

Some studies have indicated that at least one out of every ten women in the world has suffered or is suffering some form of violence at the hands of her partner (United Nations, 1985a). Other studies cite even higher figures. For example, a survey in Quito, Ecuador, for the Social Planning and Study Centre (CEPLAES) found that 60% of the women surveyed had been physically mistreated by their partners, while a study of 500 women conducted by the Legal Office for Women in Nicaragua found that, regardless of their social class, 44% of these women were mistreated (Barricada, 1988).

The complexity and deep-seated nature of the problem make it difficult to arrive at a precise assessment of the baseline situation. The shortage of comprehensive statistics and official information, due to a lack of concern —until quite recently— on the part of the relevant agencies, make it impossible to measure the full scope and depth of the problem. Nonetheless, what data are available provide grounds for the inference that domestic violence against women in the countries of the region is of epidemic proportions.

Far from demonstrating that violence against women does not take place or is only a rare occurrence, the absence of more precise information on the subject brings out the fact that this problem has been swept under the rug and that its importance has been down played. It also indicates that society has failed to recognize the harmful effects of violence not only on the mental and physical health of the women concerned, but on the whole of society and on the countries' very development, although progress is being made in understanding and assessing the problem in this respect.

In order to arrive at an understanding of this issue and analyse it properly, the fact must be borne in mind that domestic violence against women is rooted in deeply entrenched family and social lifestyles arising out of a structural system of domination: the patriarchal system, in which men hold the power both within the family and in society and in which violence is one of the tools used to perpetuate male supremacy. Within this framework, aggression has been a mechanistic and de-humanizing form of "settling" —or denying the existence of— disputes which arise within the family or couple. In other words, men feel entitled to protect and maintain their position of power *vis-à-vis* women, who are relegated to a subordinate, dependent status, thereby replicating and conserving the hierarchy which has grown out of the androcentric social system.

Violence against women may therefore be analysed as the end result of a set of values which, at a symbolic level, are effective in both ideological and practical terms. Since women are regarded as inferior to men, discrimination is accepted as an organizational principle in the various spheres of social activity: employment, health, education, economics, the law and political representation. Hence, in considering this issue, these elements should not be regarded as isolated or partial indicators; inequality-discrimination-violence are part of a self-perpetuating circle which takes shape through the social production of means of legitimizing inequality as well as discriminatory practices and violence (Giberti and Fernández, 1989).

1. Sociocultural conditions for the generation of violence

The biological fact of being a man or a woman is determined by genetic factors, but one's identity as a male or female in social and psychological terms largely depends on environmental factors, experiences and learning processes. From this vantage point, gender as such is the construct that each culture and society create in order to specify which elements are female and which are male. Numerous anthropological studies and a vast amount of information amassed by the social sciences support the finding that behaviour patterns, interests and values are culturally determined and that individuals are "trained" to perform their sexual roles from birth onward. The differential socialization of men and women, whether through formal or informal systems of education, stimulates and reinforces certain roles and stereotypes for each sex.

Western society, and hence the colonized societies of Latin America (despite their cultural plurality and varied histories), maintain a series of stereotypes regarding "female nature" which conform to the patriarchal cultural model. Women are characterized as docile, submissive, dependent, insecure, irrational, passive weak, unstable and self-sacrificing, whereas men are seen as being independent, sure of themselves, dominant, rational, active, stable and strong. The relationship between the two is thus dichotomized and polarized (Gissi, 1978). These arbitrarily assigned traits limit the behavioural possibilities of each individual, whether man or woman, as well as the development of each person's human potential.

In Latin America, anthropological studies have pointed out the explanatory potential of the concepts of machismo and Marianism along with their ideological contents, which refer to male aggressiveness, arrogance and intransigence, as opposed to a model of spiritual perfection and superiority to which women are supposed to aspire by means of motherhood, self-sacrifice, submissiveness and obedience. Both make reference to cultural stereotypes that endow men and women with traits and forms of behaviour which play an effective role in giving shape to gender-based identities. These identities, which permeate and define ways of being and ways in which the two sexes relate to one another, are asymmetrical in terms of the value placed upon them, but they are complementary in terms of social praxis (Stevens, 1973; Melhus, 1990; Montecino, 1991).

The process of socialization which influences all the members of our societies thus encourages passive behaviour and responses on the part of women while fostering expectations of power on the part of men, who associate force or strength with their own identity, just as a need for protection and insecurity form part of the female identity. Each individual incorporates gender-based contents and adapts to cultural commands by internalizing virtually inviolable models of what is "feminine" and what is "masculine".

Along with these traits, there is a socially-defined and value-laden division of labour whereby women specialize in activities associated with human and social reproduction and perform a role which has its basis in the expression of love and support for family members, while men specialize in the production of goods and services, thereby performing a role of an instrumental nature. This is the foundation for the public/private, home/street dichotomy whereby women are restricted in spatial and value-based terms to a world of domesticity, which is nevertheless penetrated by the ongoing social and cultural discourse (Da Matta, 1987; Pizarro, 1989). Actually, both the family and the home in general are influenced by the public sphere of life through legislation, institutions, education, population policies, social control and ideologies. Thus, both play a role in shaping the social sphere (Jelín, 1984). An awareness of this fact paves the way for an understanding of the web of relationships which exist between domestic violence and our countries' social and cultural structures.

Owing to their role as reproducers of behaviour patterns and values, women have traditionally taken part in the institutionalization of the gender-based models which discriminate against them. This seeming contradiction becomes understandable when we remember that women internalize and share the predominant cultural paradigm. In fact, they actively go along with it, based on the historical evidence which indicates that "it has always been this way" and their acceptance of the view that it is "natural" for it to be so, at the same time that they devise compensatory mechanisms and adaptive/resistance strategies as part of their daily behavioural repertoire, along with the exercise of an "underground" type of power in certain areas. Men, however, share the view that these female and male realities are "natural" and thus mutually supportive, while failing to realize that these forms of behaviour and these attitudes are learned and, as such, are cultural constructs that can be changed.

The asymmetry of men's and women's roles and the value placed upon them, despite their differences and contradictions, is reflected in the tools that are used to control and reproduce a social order which is founded upon male authority and buttressed by the restriction of women's access to social, political and economic power structures or by the limitation of their participation in public affairs by channeling them into traditionally "feminine" careers, professions and jobs which do not question the status quo. The definition of female and male contents and directions give expression to this asymmetry, fomenting and concealing violence against women in both the public and private spheres.

The roles that are culturally assigned to women on the basis of "naturalistic" and "essentialist" concepts which mask the origin of gender-based identities as social constructs reinforce the fact that traits and functions are attributed to women solely by reason of their sex, thereby narrowing their freedom of choice as individuals and implying the presence of what has come to be called "invisible violence". This type of repressive, symbolic violence, which is manifested in an unequal distribution of money, power, domestic duties and opportunities for self-realization, surfaces in day-to-day affairs in the form of the ideological underpinnings for visible violence, be it physical, sexual or psychological in nature (Giberti and Fernández, op. cit.).

These persistent sociocultural factors, which block or devalue women's participation in society and which are buttressed by an entire array of beliefs, norms and habits that have been built up over time, constitute the backdrop and the referents that legitimize and reproduce discrimination and violence as an effective tool of domination in family and societal life.

The family replicates the sexist ideology of society and is organized on the basis of hierarchical relations according to which the man is regarded as superior to the woman, who is both economically and emotionally dependent upon him. Power is not distributed democratically within the family but rather as a function of the gender and age of its members. This power structure and the idea that the man is entitled to dominate and control the woman are in keeping with the belief that the man has the right to use aggression and physical force to maintain his privileges; this leads to a "naturalization" of violence, whose practice is tolerated despite all the statements which are made condemning it.

Society and its laws place great importance on the privacy and autonomy of the family and idealize it as a sphere of affection, communication and protection. This is one of the reasons why the community, institutions and governmental authorities have failed to deal effectively with domestic violence, since it is considered to be a private, personal problem over which they have no authority. Furthermore, the existence of violence runs counter to the rationality of the family as an institution and may therefore call into question certain aspects of the family unit's structure and its forms of regulation.

However, a number of studies and personal accounts indicate that, far from being a place of safety, the family may be a place where violence is directed towards the woman who plays the role of wife or companion to the aggressor and towards children and the elderly, who are also the object of discrimination. Aggression against children is carried out by both men and women, who also feel they have power over the children and associate this power with the right to abuse them. Studies show that families in which women are the victims of violence exhibit hierarchical forms of organization together with strictly delimited roles and are characterized by their rigidity and resistance to change. Violence—in this context—is both a condition and a result of the persistence of these types of relationships and this type of structure of domination (Larraín and Rodríguez, 1992). Society's permissive attitude towards domestic violence grants impunity to those who commit criminal acts within the home and makes it difficult to confront them.

The complexity and heterogeneity of the gender-based subordination and exercise of coercive power practised by men are expressed most directly and brutally in the form of violence; this fact is an essential consideration and must be incorporated into our analysis if we are ever to eliminate the inequalities and discrimination—in the broadest senses of the terms—which currently exist in our societies.

2. New changes, old violence

In recent decades women have come to play an increasingly important role in the public affairs of the Latin American countries in the fields of economics, labour, politics, social issues, cultural matters and community activities (ECLAC, 1990/1991b). Women, and especially more highly educated middle- and upper-class women, have achieved a certain degree of freedom and independence along with their increased role in society. At the same time, thorough-going changes have taken place in the organization and configuration of the home.

These changes have led to modifications in women's traditional role, but this role cannot be separated from the role which the dominant culture assigns to men. The two roles (female and male) are related to one another and a change in one inevitably leads to a change in the other; thus, the changes that have occurred in women's lives are societal changes that affect all. This has given rise to a redefinition of sexual roles and has prompted society to take another look at the very categories of "female" and "male", or "feminine" and "masculine". These changes have not been synchronized, however. Although women are playing a more forceful role in public affairs, men have yet to move so forthrightly into the domestic sphere.

Many men see themselves as being displaced and feel that they are losing the referents which had served as the underpinnings for part of their identity—primarily the moral sway of their authority. Thus, when their ideological means of control are weakened, they resort to violence—the old standby—as a device for upholding their now questioned supremacy, which is based on their alleged superiority to women, on the strength of traditional values and on the fulfilment of the roles mandated by those values. Furthermore, the culture itself does not yet offer men alternative behaviour patterns or value systems that would allow them to form their identity and legitimize it without resorting to the use of power, or by using a form of power that is shared with women, and this places them at a disadvantage in dealing with the changes that are taking place.

This transition from the predominance of a traditional, domestic role for women to the emergence of other, different roles faces many women with a dilemma which generates internal tension and external conflict. Within the family, the woman/wife

demands a different distribution of power and system of decision-making, thereby calling the traditional family model into question. A majority of men, for their part, are not prepared to meet these demands owing to their socialization within the patriarchal cultural model and the persistence of this model in the mainstream symbolic constructs.

Transitional gender roles in the family, which imply new definitions of functions and duties to be performed, are subjected to institutional pressures that tend to slow the pace of change as men and women find themselves doubting whether these changes are right; such doubts generate anxiety in both genders. Within this context, domestic violence is an extreme expression of the tension inherent in the conflict between men and women.

However, the new feeling of independence and self-confidence achieved by women in the middle and upper classes —chiefly those of them who are professionals and are gainfully employed— clashes with the deeply ingrained values and stereotypes associated with the cognitive systems they have internalized in the course of their socialization, and this stops them from denouncing the acts of violence committed against them. Women often keep the problem a secret out of a sense of shame, fear or, paradoxically, guilt. Frequently they even conceal it in order to protect the man, their children and/or the marriage or because they feel the legal system, which they do not regard as offering effective solutions, will not back them up.

These women, who have relatively more economic resources, turn to private medical centres, psychological counsellors and legal services which maintain no record of the reason why their services were sought. This makes it difficult to quantify the problem and renders the domestic violence that occurs in these strata invisible, thereby reinforcing the myth that it is primarily a phenomenon of the lower, uneducated classes. This is yet another way to avoid assessing the true scope of this problem or addressing its actual origins.

In all the Latin American and Caribbean countries, lower-income women are the most intensively and widely studied sector of the female population. Domestic violence is more the rule than the exception and a demonstrably greater amount of information and data relating to the problem have been compiled in this socioeconomic stratum.

In Latin America, a number of events that took place in the 1980s —such as the its severe economic recession, the advent of authoritarian governments and the implementation of neoliberal policies that affected wages and employment— had the effect of making lower-income women the organizational linchpin of their respective families, since it was they who implemented survival strategies that enabled many families to extricate themselves from poverty or at least subsist within it (Jelín and Feijóo, 1988; Raczynski and Serrano, 1985; Valdés, 1988). It would also appear that the number of households headed —at least in economic terms— by women has increased (Buvinic, 1991), even though single mothers and women who are their families' sole means of support have long been a very real part of the region's societies.

Thus, one of the effects which recent macro-social changes have had on poor urban households is that men have lost their position as the sole or principal breadwinner and this, in turn, has weakened their identity and their authority. At the same time, in seeking to meet their families' basic needs, women have come to play an active role in grassroots subsistence-economy organizations and, as a result of their participation, have been gaining greater self-confidence and becoming more autonomous from their partners.

Men resist this new situation because of the great weight they place on economic dependency as a guarantee of fidelity and as a means of upholding their position of superiority to their spouses (ECLAC, 1991d). Emotional insecurity and the undermining of their authority as father and husband prompt them to try to impose their will upon the

rest of the family by violent and authoritarian means (Oliveira and García, 1991). It is important to note that when a man takes out his frustrations in a violent way, it is the woman who is usually the target, rather than other adults with whom he has dealings, because he feels he has a right to treat his wife or partner in such a way and can do so with impunity.

When women assume the responsibility of supporting their families because the man does not have a steady job, is unemployed altogether or fails to assume the responsibility of contributing to the household on a regular basis, tension and hostility arise, and the woman's job becomes a major point of conflict within the family. Men who feel they have failed in their role as providers find no alternative role, and when they see their wives functioning in areas outside the home, they seek to reaffirm their authority by using mistreatment as a means of upholding the marital hierarchy.

The fact that a woman is supporting her family does not, however, necessarily give her greater autonomy from her husband. According to a study conducted in Mexico, such women did not consider themselves to be the heads of their households and accepted the maintenance of their husbands' position of authority in the family (Oliveira, *op. cit.*). On the other hand, anthropological studies of intra-family dynamics have found less violence in households headed by women than in those having a male head of household (Chant, 1988; González de la Rocha, 1988); if this finding proves to be generally valid, then it would certainly be of interest to attempt to determine the reason for such a difference.

Poverty-related factors such as overcrowding, a lack of privacy and inequality of opportunity in education and employment make it more likely that lower-income women will be exposed to violence, since a larger number of risk factors are present. One study done in Chile found that 80.2% of the 222 women surveyed admitted to having been the victim of violence in the home. The true figure may be even higher, since 9.4% of the women declined to answer even though they could have chosen the response "I have not been a victim of violence". This provides us with yet another indication of the inhibitions and fears surrounding the subject and the difficulty of acknowledging such a situation because of its social significance. The study also found that in 52.8% of these cases, the aggressor was the woman's current partner, 16.3% of the time it was a former partner and in the rest of the cases it was another male family member (fathers, brothers, sons or stepsons, etc.) (Molledo, 1988).

Moreover, when poor women are the object of violent attacks, they usually do not seek help, unless the situation is so extreme that they feel that either their life or their children's physical well-being is in danger. In fact, when women are asked why they have sought help, the majority cite their children as the reason. This tells us something about their low self-esteem and their internalization of the "live for others" precept (Molledo, personal interviews, 1992).

In Chile, doctors who work at the country's "postas" (centres which provide emergency medical care free of charge) estimate that they receive the victims of approximately 20% of the cases of domestic violence which occur, while the remaining 80% stay locked up in their houses waiting for the physical evidence of the attack to disappear so that they can resume their normal activities. Furthermore, police reports are made in only 15% of the cases for which medical care is provided (Guerra, 1991). In the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the statistics show that 22 out of every 100 battered women initiate legal action; this somewhat higher figure may well be due to the existence in Argentina of what are known as Women's Commissariats and Provincial Centres for the Prevention of Family Violence, which offer social welfare services, psychological counseling and legal advice free of charge.

The Women's Rights Information Network in Santiago, Chile, has noted that relatively few of the requests for information that it receives have to do with violence; it attributes this phenomenon to the fact that domestic or family violence has not yet been incorporated into the popular culture, and women allude to the presence of violence in terms which mask and minimize it (Muldmann and Sandoval, 1991).

The patriarchal cultural model and its Latin American form of expression (*machismo*) have a direct impact on women's daily lives at all social levels. The only statistical survey which has thus far been done on this subject in Colombia was conducted by PROFAMILIA in 1991. This study, which used a sample of 10,000 women between the ages of 15 and 49 drawn from different urban and rural zones, educational levels, socioeconomic strata, and situations in terms of marital status, concluded that one out of every five women is beaten or hit by her husband or partner and one out of every ten is forced to have sexual relations (Giraldo, 1991). One Mexican non-governmental organization has calculated that conjugal violence exists in at least 70% of Mexican households, while in Nicaragua 44% of the men admit that they regularly beat or hit their wives or girlfriends (Carrillo, 1991).

Although, according to what can be surmised from experiences in working with abused women, each social group or class exhibits its own particular forms of violence (types of blows, parts of the body attacked most frequently, greater prevalence of psychological or sexual violence than of physical violence, etc.), these differences are not significant in terms of the impact of violence, since all women, regardless of their place within the social structure, share the experience of being victims of the "invisible violence" that is used as a tool of subordination. This phenomenon cuts across all areas of social activity (Dorola, 1989). In the past few decades progress has been made in terms of the status of women in many fields, and although there have also been changes with respect to forms of subordination —which have become more subtle— this does not mean that inequality and violence have been eliminated.

At the same time, more and more women, especially those in middle- and lower-income sectors, are finding ways of standing up to the societal system of discrimination based on "natural" differences and a sexual hierarchy, either by using strategies for augmenting their individual autonomy or by participating in organized women's groups or movements, promoting new forms of dialogue and new gender definitions.

The patriarchal social and cultural model, as well as the violence which it engenders, is beginning to be called into question, however, on the grounds that it constitutes an assault on human dignity and because of the far-reaching implications it has for society and for a development process based on peace, democracy and social equity. The multiplicity of forms assumed by the family of today makes it possible to turn to established procedures for settling the conflicts that will inevitably arise and to seek alternatives to violence in any of its forms.

There is no reason to believe that domestic violence has increased in recent years as a consequence of the more prominent role now being played by women in society, however, particularly since —because this problem has only recently become the focus of widespread concern— data on the level of violence in the past are unavailable. It is, however, useful to bear in mind the changes that have taken place in women's role in society in order to place this problem within its true context and to arrive at a better understanding of what violence against women in the family is expressing and legitimizing in contemporary society.

Abuse and aggression directed against women in the home by their partners is part of a larger picture of social and political violence, discrimination and the marginalization of broad sectors of society in Latin America. Although it would be beyond the bounds

of this study to undertake an analysis of the relationships that may be found to exist between domestic and public violence or a consideration of family violence as a reproductive source of social violence, these subjects need to be explored in future studies in order to determine the causes of violence (of all types) in our societies and to provide a basis upon which to seek solutions and implement preventive policies.

II. THE NATURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence against women has certain aspects which set it apart from other types of aggression or repression; these characteristics have to do with the setting in which it occurs, the actors involved and the range of psychological factors that are at work —all of which gives rise to a complex and not always clear significance and perception of the problem.

Violence against women in the home takes many different forms. Violent acts are not isolated occurrences but rather are intertwined events which in combination with one another do physical, psychological and moral injury to the victims. This fact notwithstanding, experts on the subject generally distinguish among three chief forms of abuse and oppression:

a) *Physical violence* includes blows, shoves, slaps, punches, kicks, burns, the breaking of bones and, in some cases, death. This type of violence is the most visible form because of its symptoms and the external evidence it leaves. It is the type of violence which is most widely recognized by society and, due to its brutality, the type which is most vehemently repudiated by the populace in general.

b) *Psychological violence* takes the form of insults, disparagement, threats, constant recrimination, baseless accusations, mockery, humiliation and all sorts of verbal aggression. This form of violence is the least visible because it leaves no external traces, which is not to say that it does not leave its mark on the victim. Although it is more subtle, it also has a longer-lasting impact on the victim owing to its destructive effect on the personality. According to a study conducted in Argentina, some women who have left violent relationships say that the emotional abuse or psychological violence was what had the most debilitating effects on them in the long run, even though women who remain in violent relationships have a hard time identifying or putting a name to this type of violence (Vila de Gerlic, 1987).

c) *Sexual violence* includes forcing a woman to have sexual relations against her will, marital rape, forced prostitution, pressuring or demanding that a woman have an abortion, and mockery of a woman's body or sexuality. These types of abuse and aggression are a difficult issue to address because of the private, intimate nature of sexuality and because these are the types that are the least mentioned and least perceived by women themselves.

Another type of violence is indirect violence, which takes such forms as prohibiting a woman to work or study, isolating her or closing her up in the house, blocking social contact, excessive control over her activities and friendships —all of which limit a woman's freedom and her ability to make choices on the basis of her own criteria and desires. Economic blackmail, constant complaints regarding a woman's performance as a mother and housewife, deprecation of her ideas and feelings, and the destruction of objects in the home or a woman's personal possessions or objects having a sentimental value for her are also forms of violence.

Regardless of the system of classification used, however, violence is experienced as a mixed assortment of aggressive acts and disparagement. Most violent relationships

unfold in a repetitive cyclical, however; a violent relationship involving a battered woman is said to exist when the couple has moved through the cycle of violence at least twice (Serra, op. cit.).

According to a psychological study carried out by Leonore Walker (1979), this cycle has three phases: phase one is marked by mounting tension and hostility; phase two is the acute or crisis stage; and phase three is characterized by repentance on the part of the aggressor, promises that it will not happen again, and the hope on the part of the woman that the relationship will change. This last phase is known as the "honeymoon" stage. The cycle is not broken here, however. Sooner or later —depending on the degree to which the couple's relationship has deteriorated— phase one begins again, and the cycle is reproduced over and over until it is broken by some qualitative change in the man, in the woman or in their relationship, generally as a result of outside help.

The psychology of women victims of violence is quite complex; they have contradictory thoughts, fears and doubts and from one moment to the next experience conflicting feelings and very strong emotions. The expectation of violence generates tension, fear and even terror; the most frequent symptoms are constant tiredness, insomnia, heart palpitations, skin rashes, loss of appetite, or extreme sleepiness and hunger. After being the victim of a violent outburst, women under an emotional breakdown and exhibit symptoms of indifference, isolation, depression and feelings of helplessness (Walter, op. cit.). Other psychological effects include a drop in performance, reduced cognitive and intellectual capacity, constant fear, a rejection of sexual relations, low self-esteem, frustration and emotional fragility.

Women's reactions to aggression range from astonishment, confusion, bewilderment and a feeling of helplessness to anger, rage and an urge to escape. These emotions are coupled, however, with a desire to stay with their aggressor out of love, fear, insecurity and/or concern for the children, as well as the perennial hope that things will change so that they can realize their dream of having a happy marriage and life.

As part of their socialization, women are inculcated with a belief in and the experience of male superiority and women's consequent subordination. Acceptance of violence directed at them begins in infancy, since during childhood many women have lived in a hostile, violent environment or have been subjected to excessive control of their ideas and behaviour. The socialization of women within the framework of their traditional role also sets them up to be "possible victims" (Serra, op. cit.), since they learn to be passive, dependent, submissive and prone to guilt feelings; if they refuse to adopt these attitudes, they must assume the identity of transgressors, which also makes them the focus of controls and punishment. Being the object of aggression, deprecation and abuse is thus not something that seems odd or strange to women; on the contrary, it is a so deeply ingrained part of their daily lives that they find it difficult even to recognize such situations for what they are.

Women tolerate such disadvantageous relationships and, in many cases, are unable to imagine any other form of interaction due to a number of factors: a) the internalization of social values which entail the assumption that the subordination of women is something "natural"; b) cultural norms which regulate the life of a couple and define the role of wife and mother; c) the idealization of the family and marriage; and d) social pressure to fulfil cultural commands. All these elements must be taken into consideration in order to understand why women accept these types of situations.

It is a verifiable fact that the majority of women in our countries do not report the violent acts committed against them to the police or the justice system. In fact, they do not even tell other women who are close to them. In order for such silence to be possible, women have to have incorporated discrimination against them so completely that they

have lost their voice (Chejter, 1988); when this happens, they experience these kinds of behaviours in the midst of a deep sense of loneliness which is only heightened by the fact that society and the authorities do not want to "know" about acts of violence in the home.

Statistics for the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, indicate that 37 out of every 100 women who report abuse have been battered for 20 years or more. This figure attests not only to how hard it is for a woman to break the cycle of violence and take the decision to report her husband or partner, but also to the population's growing awareness of the fact that domestic violence is a crime that should not go unpunished and to the creation of a place in society for these women where none previously existed.

Various studies have indicated that the main reasons given by some women for not reporting crimes committed against them are fear of reprisal, shame or embarrassment about having the aggression made public, a desire to maintain family ties that takes precedence over their physical safety, and feelings of insecurity in relation to the economic and emotional dependence which binds her to the aggressor. These reasons are combined with the fear of reproach by the children or other family members, the belief that the police and the legal system are not effective in dealing with domestic problems and, at the most basic level, with the hope and desire that the man will change and everything will be as the woman had dreamed it would be.

In order for women to overcome the fear that immobilizes them and to diminish, neutralize or forestall violent situations, they must make a determined effort, they must summon sufficient energy, they must have support, and they must subvert certain "feminine" values and contents which are deeply ingrained in both the society and its individual members, as well as learning about and identifying their rights. The psychological and legal assistance offered by women's organizations, non-governmental organizations and the government play a vital role in enabling each woman to overcome the violent relationship in which she is involved and to confront the need to make personal changes in herself and in the way she relates to others.

Research done in a number of different countries demonstrates that the explanation of why a man is a chronic emotional, physical or sexual abuser of his partner transcends the individual traits of the man, the woman and the family. The individual psychopathological traits detected by such studies have been minimal; instead, domestic violence against women has to do with a socially mandated "right" to maintain a male identity based on domination.

It is true, however, that certain risk factors or situations have been identified which trigger —but do not in themselves cause— violence, such as alcohol, drugs, weekends, unemployment, conflict between the members of a couple, pregnancy, parties, a woman's refusal to have sexual relations, overcrowding and holidays. The range of factors to consider is so broad that it once again brings us back to the need to seek the structural causes which underlie and reproduce such violence, rather than any particular psycho-social factors, if we are really to prevent and eliminate this problem.

Conjugal violence has adverse consequences for the woman both immediately after its occurrence and later on (e.g., injuries and their physical and mental aftermaths) as well as having negative implications for the emotional balance and physical well-being of children whose socialization takes place within a framework of violent behaviour patterns. One element cited as contributing to the perpetuation of violence from one generation to the next is that children who are abused or who witness violence against their mothers grow up to be wife-beaters, if they are boys, or tolerant of violence on the part of their husbands, if they are girls, as well as having, in both

cases, a more permissive attitude towards social and political violence (United Nations, 1991a).

Domestic violence also, however has social, economic and political implications for society as a whole which are embodied in such phenomena as the reproduction and perpetuation of a discriminatory system that subordinates one half of all humanity, human rights violations and the lack of a sociopolitical structure consisting of more symmetrical social relations that would lend substance to a democratic way of life; such violence, moreover, directly or indirectly hinders the countries efforts to attain a harmonious form of development.

III. LEGAL ASPECTS AND JUDICIAL TREATMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Latin American and Caribbean women have been legally subordinated to men ever since the civil and criminal codes of each country were drawn up. The path to achieving equal rights with men has been long and rife with obstacles and pockets of resistance, but has gradually opened up as a result of the drive, mobilization and pressure exerted by women themselves, as exemplified in their fight for women's suffrage.

The successive steps taken towards equality have been approximately the same throughout the region, i.e.:

- 1) Recognition of women's legal status;
- 2) The right of access to higher education;
- 3) The right to hold public office;
- 4) The right to vote;
- 5) Equality of rights and obligations within marriage and the family (Vain, 1989a; Bonilla, 1991).

Nevertheless, some national legislation still contains discriminatory provisions which have yet to be rectified: some very obvious, such as marital authority provisions—still in force in some countries—and others more subtle, but no less harmful. Furthermore, the specific, inherent features of the female population and of the gender-based social construct of reality are not traditionally considered in law or in the administration of justice in the region.

Since legal standards are a reflection of dominant social values, the law plays the role of regulating interpersonal and inter-group relations, thus legitimizing the ideological assumptions—for instance, those underpinning the patriarchal system—that symbolically uphold social life by classifying and passing judgement on actions and conduct in general.

Latin American legislation, inspired by the Roman and Napoleonic codes which ratify and promote violence against women by their spouses as a mechanism of punishment and control, supports the idea of masculine ownership and authority. The laws back up and legitimize those who exercise power (in this case, men) over those who occupy an inferior position (i.e., women), thus comprising a regulatory and judicial system which sustains and is strengthened by traditional cultural values to the point of becoming a primary obstacle to overcoming the problem of violence against women, and specifically violence directed against women within the family.

The daily reality of domestic violence against women exposes the deficiencies and omissions of judicial systems which do not legally define such offences or penalize their perpetrators, nor do they protect victims from aggression or abuse. The absence of specific legislation can be considered an omission, but also an adaptation of the law to existing social reality so that it reflects the differentiation between the public and private spheres: while the law governs and regulates actions and conduct in the former, it leaves all personal relations in the latter to the forces of morality and individual will (González, 1990), granting impunity to offences committed in the home.

However, legislation does regulate many aspects of individual and family life, such as the institution of marriage and the legal status of children. Thus, the point is to analyse which types of private acts are or are not protected by the right to privacy and/or by the principle of family autonomy, and how family violence (against women, children, the elderly) fits into the matrix of individual rights and responsibilities, with serious social implications. The difficulty stems from the fact that the structural and cultural components of legal systems see domestic violence not as a real social problem but as a private matter that concerns only the parties involved, thus contributing to its social invisibility.

Since most Latin American countries traditionally do not have legislation that considers domestic violence an offence, intra-family aggression is not considered a crime or a punishable act except in extreme cases, such as death or serious injury. It is therefore difficult to obtain quantitative measurements of the phenomenon in these countries, since statistics do not differentiate by sex, making it easier and less contentious to assume that cases of family violence are gender-neutral and to ignore the fact that nine out of every ten victims of domestic violence are women (United Nations, 1991b).

The social changes of recent decades, together with the constant protests, awareness campaigns and pressure brought to bear by women's organizations, led to the emergence in the late 1980s in a number of Latin American and Caribbean countries of a series of legal initiatives aimed at preventing, punishing and eradicating violence against women, with special emphasis on domestic violence and with a vigour and specificity that allow for the implementation of concrete measures in this area.

Almost all of the countries of the region have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and some have already adopted internal measures in the legal sphere to implement and build on the Convention. They have also established State agencies specializing in women's concerns to formulate a realistic diagnosis of their situation, to help enhance the legal status of women and to adopt policies and plans aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity, along with the conduct of awareness campaigns on the problems of women in the societies of the region.

The fact that the problem of domestic violence is beginning to elicit recognition and concern represents progress towards achieving respect for the rights of women and dealing with one of the most serious and dramatic problems affecting them. Notable in this regard are Costa Rica's law on promoting the social equality of women (1990), Puerto Rico's law on preventing and intervening in domestic violence (1989), Argentina's law on domestic violence (1988), preliminary draft laws in Chile and Guatemala and reforms of civil and criminal codes to reflect the reality of abuse within the family in Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela.

However, the difficulties that remain are formidable and of various types. Even in countries which recognize domestic violence as an offence, criminal codes appear to be ineffective because penal procedures are designed to deal with acts committed in public places between individuals unrelated by affective ties. Since conjugal violence occurs in the privacy of the home and the victim is economically and emotionally dependent on the aggressor, lacking in alternative support structures and usually failing to report the incident, the situation requires not only new laws but also judicial procedures which can effectively address the problem and take account of its unique characteristics.

Even when women do decide to report the aggression or abuse they suffer, their reports do not bring results for various reasons:

a) Officials pay no attention to them and try to persuade women to drop such complaints by arguing in favour of family stability, to which concept women themselves are subordinate;

b) Even when accusations are taken seriously, women lack sufficient "hard evidence" to initiate legal proceedings;

c) There are no "objective" eyewitnesses, since children are not considered valid witnesses and have great difficulty speaking against their fathers, for whom they feel affection, on whom they depend economically and from whom they fear reprisals;

d) Procedures are slow and judicial processes are rigid and complex, discouraging victims from pressing charges or leading them to drop accusations while they are still in the "honeymoon" stage of the cycle of violence and believe that the situation will change.

The Expert Group Meeting on Violence against Women, organized by the United Nations, defines these situations as an additional violence or injury against the victim, which is compounded by the insensitive attitude and time-consuming formalities of agents of the judicial system, by sensationalist publicity and by police negligence, hostility or indifference (United Nations, 1991c).

Various factors inhibit a rapprochement between the police and abused women, including inaccessibility—for reasons of privacy—to the inner life of the family, the discriminatory treatment of women when they report such incidents and the idea that cases of conjugal violence are not within the competence of the police, who have "more important" duties, and that couples should settle conflicts on their own. Since most police officers are males who have not been sensitized to gender issues and do not know how to approach the problem, there is a need, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, to provide them with special training programmes, to utilize specifically trained female personnel to intervene in situations of domestic violence and to establish police stations staffed by women to address the particular problem of offences committed against women.

A number of Latin American countries have taken up the challenge of redefining the role of the police in preventing and controlling violence against women within the family by introducing awareness, education and training programmes for police officers and by opening special police stations and government offices for women victims of any form of violence. Under these measures and programmes, the police must inform victims of their legal rights and provide them with appropriate services, take due account of all reports of violence and encourage victims to make such reports, facilitate investigations and prepare evidence; and they must be supported in their work by interdisciplinary teams (physicians, psychologists, social workers, lawyers) and remain in close contact with centres for battered women, both private and public, and with other social services such as hospitals, emergency first-aid stations, police courts, etc.

Another difficulty in many countries of the region is the lack of a special court to handle all cases of domestic violence, of all types and characteristics, in line with the specific nature of this phenomenon. The United Nations recommends the establishment of family courts or tribunals or other judicial mechanisms to deal with cases of domestic violence, including all aspects of civil, criminal and family law which are thereby violated, and to impose appropriate penalties. Within these authorities, situations of family violence should be evaluated by judges who are sensitized and trained in such problems. Draft laws in Argentina and Guatemala endorse this recommendation, stipulating that all family problems arising from situations of violence shall be handled by a single tribunal staffed by a team of experts who take a therapeutic, integrated approach to such situations.

The lack of a legal framework capable of addressing the circumstances which characterize domestic violence points to the need to identify less serious acts of violence which are not considered criminal but which are the most common and which initiate the cycle of violence and subsequently worsen, possibly to the point of causing the victim's death. Such acts include verbal, emotional and psychological abuse, coercive acts or restriction of freedom, physical aggression that does not cause serious injury and sexual abuses that do not constitute rape or defloration.

In view of the foregoing, the Expert Group on Violence against Women considers the concept of "victimization" a key premise for inclusion in legislation, since violence involves extreme cases of victimization (serious injury or murder), which are the only acts which States recognize as punishable or for which reparation can be sought. Using the term "victimization" instead of "violence" yields a clearer picture of actual needs in terms of protecting victims, and takes into account the cases of women who are doubly victimized, such as young women, disabled women, ethnic minorities and poor women (United Nations, 1991c).

According to the Seventh United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, victims are understood to be "persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws operative within Member States, including those laws proscribing criminal abuse of power" (United Nations, 1985b). In light of the foregoing considerations, all of the terms of this definition apply to women who suffer domestic violence. Legal standards must therefore be broadened to take account of this disturbing fact, considering that an offence involving a victimizer and a victim, regardless of the persons concerned or the relations uniting them, is not a private act but a problem which involves the entire community and affects the whole social fabric (Ferreira, 1989).

Considering the situation of victims and the way in which gender-specific violence is constructed socially, it is understandable that the number of cases reported to the police is minimal compared to the magnitude of the phenomenon, and that so few cases are brought to criminal court. However, it must also be emphasized that what women seek, more than a penalty curtailing the freedom of the spouse or companion, is protection, support and shelter to escape from situations of violence. They want the aggressive man to change his attitude and violent behaviour, not to lose his freedom. Moreover, modern criminologists recommend that alternative penalties to prison be sought, since jails are not so much centres for rehabilitating antisocial behaviour as they are schools of violence. In response to this idea, there have been some cases in Argentina and Chile where judges have obligated offenders to attend psychotherapy sessions or therapy groups for men who batter women, but to date these have been personal initiatives, not general policies for rehabilitation and prevention of recidivism.

The effectiveness of criminal charges and trials and of legal intervention to halt acts of aggression has been significant. A study evaluating the work of the legal team of the Centre for the Treatment of Domestic Violence of the Municipality of Santiago, Chile, showed positive results in 72.5% of all cases, where aggressors, shaken by being summoned and investigated by police and judicial authorities, stopped their aggressive behaviour with the realization that it would no longer go unpunished. Some 5% of the cases had negative results, including even increased violence, and the results of about 22.5% of the cases are unknown because the women dropped legal proceedings or because the cases were initiated recently (Ulloa and Vargas, 1991). All of these data demonstrate the importance of legal intervention in preventing abuse and aggression in

addition to penalizing them, as well as the fact that when women feel protected and supported, they feel more confident and more ready to break the cycle of violence.

Also noteworthy is the effective pressure being exerted by the women's movement to broaden and reinterpret the concept of human rights to specifically include women's rights. The consideration of domestic violence against women as a violation of the basic rights of humanity implies that international human rights legislation should be applied in such cases, along with the nascent body of law on women's rights and the principles of equity. Given the reciprocal relationship between violence, social status and the distribution of power, efforts to enhance the status of women in all areas and to eradicate violence against them are a prerequisite for the achievement of equality and social equity. However, what is needed is not merely a call for legal reforms, but a process of questioning and analysis of what laws are essential to bring about and protect true equality between men and women, thus reflecting the evolution of societies in the region in recent decades with respect to the recognition of women's dignity and rights.

The advances made in the legal area in Latin America and the Caribbean are significant, and greater changes in judicial procedures are undoubtedly needed, but the experience of more economically developed countries shows that legal reforms are insufficient to reduce domestic violence. Legislative solutions in themselves do not have the required effectiveness, since the active participation of the community is necessary to implement preventive solutions, and the prevailing cultural model must be altered through changes in educational programmes and in the image presented of women and of human relations in the mass communications media. The ultimate goal is to eradicate all actions or omissions which amount to instances of aggression or discrimination against women and to rectify the paradoxical reality of the *de jure* equality of rights between men and women and the *de facto* inequality evident in daily life.

Lastly, it is important to consider women's need for information on laws which affect them directly and which recognize their rights, so that they can feel protected and sheltered by a legal framework that does not allow crimes of domestic violence to remain unpunished and socially invisible.

IV. ADVANCES AND EXPERIMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

Almost all Latin American and Caribbean countries have carried out experiments of various types aimed at dealing with violence against women, specifically violence within the family, to supplement the efforts already made in the legal area, which are insufficient in themselves.

Most of these experiments were carried out in response to initiatives and actions originated and developed by women's groups and non-governmental organizations, which have made an important contribution by denouncing, before public opinion and governments, the violence suffered by women, as well as by operating support and assistance programmes for victims of aggression and abuse within the family. Concern for the problem subsequently spread, and these efforts were bolstered by those of grass-roots organizations, church organizations, associations of professional women and government agencies.

Within the region, urban women belonging to the lower and middle classes are the main beneficiaries of the various programmes and actions, though the latter are gradually being extended to rural sectors and to upper-class women, who —for different reasons— are often overlooked in efforts to combat the problem of domestic violence.

The final report on the research carried out by Isis International, with the support of UNIFEM, on violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean contains a presentation of existing programmes in 22 countries of the region, describing and classifying them according to the relative proportion of government, non-governmental and academic programmes; the presence or absence of coordination and linkage among such programmes; and the establishment of State mechanisms to handle the problem (Isis, 1990)* and formulating a diagnostic assessment of the situation in the region, providing a map of the actions undertaken to combat domestic violence.

The intervention models of the various programmes differ both in theory and in method; however, this document will simply describe those measures which have had some degree of success, so as to indicate the advances made in the region in recent years and the spheres of work and action which could be developed, taking a few examples as references.

i) *Centres to care for battered women*: These initiatives follow up partial experiments initially carried out by women's organizations and later resumed and conducted either by governments —through government offices concerned with women's issues and providing free, centralized services in the areas of psychological support, social work and legal assistance— or by non-governmental organizations. Approaching the problem from a multidisciplinary perspective, these centres seek to redress the fragmentation of different specialties, which puts various barriers in the way of mutual consultation and the harmonization of criteria, thereby constituting another type of violence: institutional violence.

One such experiment has been carried out since 1989 by the Centre for the Treatment of Family Violence (CAVF) of the Ecumenical Human Rights Movement of the city of Resistencia in the province of Chaco, Argentina. The objective of this project is to

find solutions generated from within the family itself, deactivating guilt mechanisms and interpreting violence as a treatable phenomenon of family interaction and communication. In addition to caring for women victims of violence and their families, the centre carries out a dual strategy: interaction with local institutions that take a particular approach to given aspects of the problem (police, courts, the public health service, the Women's Unit), and community outreach, by encouraging self-help groups and basically trying to strengthen community solidarity mechanisms and women's social support networks which offer contextualized alternatives and approaches in each individual case. Another pilot project is the "Affection Without Aggression" Treatment Centre of the "Being and Becoming" Foundation of San José, Costa Rica, which mainly serves women victims of incest and sexual abuse. Since March 1990, this centre has cared for over 200 women; its therapeutic approach is to conduct self-help groups.

In the government sphere, the Centre for the Treatment of Domestic Violence has been operating in Chile since September 1990 by agreement between the National Women's Service (SERNAM) and the Municipality of Santiago, Chile, and is staffed by a multidisciplinary team working in four areas: 1) comprehensive care for abused women through psychological, legal, family and social services assistance; 2) information campaigns on the problem of domestic violence and its unique character through presentations in the mass communications media and discussions in schools, trade unions, neighbourhood associations and women's organizations, for the prevention and early detection of cases of violence; 3) training of health professionals, police officers and judicial personnel in the problems underlying domestic violence and the situation of women; and 4) quantitative and qualitative research with a view to formulating a more reliable assessment of the reality of abuse in Chile. Since April 1991, the programme has employed a police officer to receive reports by women who come to the centre for help; since July 1991, successful programmes have been carried out for the treatment of male aggressors, since real social change cannot occur without the active participation of men: change can then take place in both members of the couple, thus laying the foundation for true equality.

ii) *Self-help or support groups*: These groups provide an environment in which women experiencing guilt, low self-esteem, shame and fear as a result of family violence can meet and identify with each other. The basic goal is for the participants to offer each other emotional and psychological support so that they can gain greater assertiveness and break out of the isolation they generally suffer. At the same time, the formation of such groups taps women's organizational potential, thus promoting their more active social and political participation. Such experiments, which are usually launched under the auspices of non-governmental organizations concerned with women's issues, have been reproduced in some government-sponsored treatment centres.

The self-help groups for battered women of Woman Space in Buenos Aires have one of the longest histories in the region, with positive results for the hundreds of women who have gone through them and have found an environment in which to share their life stories and experiences. The goals and objectives to be met by participants, both personally and as a group, include the following: becoming aware that they can grow, nourish themselves and formulate their own agendas; understanding that they have rights which must be respected but which they must take responsibility for protecting; and basically developing a sense of their own worth as people, since the more capable, secure and vital they feel, the more successful their relations with those around them will be, so that they can break the destructive circle of violence (Oller, 1987).

Another way of handling the problem of domestic violence, more recent in Latin America, is through *safe houses or shelters*, whose purpose is to provide a temporary

home for women victims of aggression and abuse. The oldest experiment in this area is the Julia Burgos Safe House in Puerto Rico, which gives support, protection and counseling to abused women and their children; one of the newest is the Shelter for Women Victims of Violence, attached to the Ministry of Public Health of the province of Chaco, Argentina. Shelters for abused women have given rise to discussion and skepticism because they are considered only a partial response to women's problems, since their role of providing assistance may even increase women's economic dependence on "others". Various women's organizations maintain that a more positive approach would be to reinforce social assistance, support and solidarity networks and to believe in the power and strength of women, though such organizations do not deny the value of shelters in emergency situations.

Legal offices and assistance bureaus play the dual role of informing women of their rights and encouraging them to report cases of abuse, and also receiving reports of battered women, instituting proceedings and providing legal advice and assistance throughout the procedure. In general, these organizations also furnish women with legal primers or notes which explain the laws in simple language, such as those published by CENSEL (the Women's Legal Services Centre) in the Dominican Republic, and by the Women's Legal Office in Cochabamba, Bolivia. There have also been experimental education and training programmes for legal outreach workers or advisers who, while they are not lawyers, have a basic knowledge of the law and of procedural norms and who work among the population; examples of these are the courses for monitors conducted by Peru's Manuela Ramos movement and Brazil's Women's Network. These pilot programmes reflect the importance attached to legal assistance as a basic means of supporting victims, in view of the scant contact between women and the law, and the fact that legislation and legal systems in general are unfavourable to the female population.

The work carried out by non-governmental organizations in the legal and judicial fields has been vitally important, not only for women victims of domestic violence but also for the contribution of knowledge and concrete suggestions—based on experience—to the elaboration of draft legislation on domestic violence in the various countries, and to the incorporation of amendments to eliminate discrimination in national legislation and in law enforcement.

Women lawyers organized through professional schools or autonomous groups also contribute to this process by reviewing national legislation for instances of discrimination against women and discussing the development of a body of case law relating to women, as well as by establishing free legal aid offices, as in the case of the Venezuelan Federation of Women Lawyers.

In 1987 the Latin American Committee in Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM) based in Lima, was founded, as a regional forum to deal with the problem of violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean. This organization has helped considerably to promote women's rights in the region through meetings and seminars and a series of publications relating to family legislation, constitutional and labour law and human rights. It has also developed an alternative understanding of law which takes into account the specific situation and needs of women, and acts as a mechanism for coordination, liaison and collaboration with organizations concerned with the topic in the various countries.

Recent years have witnessed the establishment in Latin America of so-called *women's police stations* in countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, staffed by female police officers who are specially trained to receive and register reports of battered women, on the assumption that violence against

women is a specific problem requiring special treatment. These initiatives represent an important advance, since a specialized police presence affords women better services, more encouragement to report incidents and a sense that they are not defenseless, while aggressors are discouraged from abusive behaviour by the fact that measures are being taken. The presence of these police stations demonstrates a recognition on the part of the State and society that violence against women exists and is a preventable and punishable offence. In addition, special police units in various countries focus on victims of sexual abuse and rape, both within and outside the family; one example is the recently established women's unit of the National Police of the Dominican Republic, staffed by specially trained female personnel.

The most extensive experiment in this regard is taking place in Brazil, where pressure by the women's movement and the political will of state governments have resulted in the establishment, beginning in 1985, of Women's Defence Offices in the capital and major cities of each state. The police force in these stations consists entirely of women at all levels of the hierarchy, along with social workers and psychologists. In the city of São Paulo, a single police station registered 7,000 reported incidents in 1988 (IWRAW, 1991), which indicates the magnitude of the problem and the need for this type of solution. The success of these police posts consists not only in their full coverage of reports by abused women, but also in the systematization of the statistics compiled, which has made it possible to pinpoint the groups most affected and specific forms of violence, and in their role as a consciousness-raising vehicle for the rest of the population on the extent and nature of the problem.

In some countries, officers in regular police stations have been trained by means of awareness and education days for police personnel, with significant success. For example, as a result of the training given in Argentina's Federal Police Academy, officers say they now recognize the urgent need to change the laws so that police and judges may take preventive measures to restrain aggressors and keep them outside the home, thus preventing the offence from recurring by protecting the victim (IWRAW, 1991).

One innovative experiment of demonstrated effectiveness at the local level is the *telephone service* of the Municipality of Buenos Aires, attached to the Women's Unit, which takes calls 24 hours a day to provide access to a support service consisting of various professionals. This service went into operation in February 1990 and, up to December 1991, has taken 12,000 calls at the rate of 600 per month. Ten per cent of these are emergency calls in answer to which, depending on the seriousness of the situation, either a police patrol or an ambulance is sent to the victim's home. The number of requests for help doubles on Mondays and Fridays because weekends are when men spend the most time at home, so that the violence intensifies (Bendersky, 1991). Similar projects are found in the Bahamas, where the Programme for Battered Women of the Women's Crisis Centre has a telephone line for women in crisis situations, and in Costa Rica, where the Support Group for Battered Women received nearly 1,000 telephone calls in 1988 (Isis, op. cit.). The effectiveness of such a service lies in the immediacy of the response and in the fact that the women do not have to leave home and can call for help at any hour of the day or night.

Another significant step taken throughout the region has been the establishment of *government offices for women*, attached to ministries and secretariats, which, despite their chronic shortage of funds, have launched actions and programmes to cope with the problem of violence against women at the national level. While facilitating the elaboration of more coherent plans and programmes for women, these agencies, by coordinating their activities and concluding agreements with other government authorities, can carry out preventive actions at the inter-sectoral level and press for legislative measures. Moreover,

State access to the communications media has been used to conduct public awareness campaigns over television and radio to show every woman affected by violence that she is not alone and that others share her situation. In this context, the evaluation of the public information campaign undertaken in 1989 by Ecuador's National Women's Department, together with other activities, led to the preparation of a project for approaching the problem of domestic violence in that country.

It should be noted here that non-governmental organizations with feminist concerns have made systematic and highly creative efforts to denounce and confront the problem of domestic violence. One example is La Morada of Santiago, Chile, which operates through the Health and Sanitation Programme to provide individual support to abused women through legal counseling and gender-sensitive psychotherapy, giving women the tools with which to escape from crisis situations. It also trains monitors on the topic of domestic violence in individual and group methodologies for helping battered women, seeing the problem in the context of feminist theory, and acts as a service for other social organizations and grass-roots women's groups, with a multiplier effect. Likewise, the Information and Action Centre for Women (CEFEMINA), one of Costa Rica's most important women's groups, carries out the "You are Not Alone" project and operates the "Spider-web" network of groups working on the problem of family violence against women, in terms of either treatment or prevention.

With the growing recognition of *women's studies programmes* and the increased visibility of the problem of domestic violence, the need has arisen to consider the latter in the academic world to ensure that professionals in various disciplines acquire the knowledge they need to approach the problem effectively, taking into account the uniqueness of women as social actors and developing appropriate and innovative theoretical perspectives. Notable in this regard was the introduction in 1989 of the programme of study in family violence at the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Buenos Aires, and the conduct of specialized seminars in a number of universities in Chile, Costa Rica and Puerto Rico. The topic of domestic violence is also being studied at private research centres and institutes in countries such as Colombia, Mexico and Panama. It is important to mention the solitary but none the less significant work done by professional women throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, who, through their teaching and research in universities, have established the subject of violence against women as a topic of study, and inspire their students to approach it seriously.

Lastly, it is important to note the role played by the feminist encounters held in the region. At the First Feminist Encounter in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Bogotá in 1981, the date 25 November was established as an international day to end all forms of violence against women. The idea has spread to a number of countries, including some in Europe, which commemorate this date by holding public events, awareness campaigns, seminars and other activities; these have multiplied over the past ten years through the coordinated efforts of women's organizations and have been supplemented by activities in a wide range of sectors in each country. The observance of this day is receiving increasing coverage in the mass communications media and has helped to raise the general public's level of consciousness, while also acting as a call to action addressed to governments.

At the Fifth Feminist Encounter in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in San Bernardo, Argentina, in November 1990, the Latin American and Caribbean Network against Sexual and Domestic Violence was founded. The Network's objectives are: a) to exchange information on labour experiences in this field, b) to develop and interconnect the work of institutions, organizations and women's groups to create national networks, c) to make contacts with public and private institutions to ensure that violence is

addressed in their programmes of work and d) to develop the power of negotiation from a position of autonomy. The collective strength and efforts of women have already been manifested through the formation of national networks in some countries of the region, such as Chile and Mexico, where women themselves join forces and devise answers to the problem of violence.

The research conducted by Isis in 1990 was carried out with the participation of 109 programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean; others have been added as the problem has gained recognition and become a subject of public debate. It is time to begin to systematize initiatives, moving beyond the necessary stage of denouncing the problem to that of confronting it more squarely by reproducing actions and measures that have proven successful. Likewise, programmes and actions must be integrated into the sectoral and general policies being implemented in each country, with a view to achieving development in which the specific features of the female population are considered and violence against women is recognized as the most prevalent covert crime in the world (United Nations, 1980).

V. INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TAKEN BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Since the early 1970s, with the revival of women's rights movements, one focus of international attention has been the problem and phenomenology of women as social beings and actors.

The declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976-1985) made an impact on governments and on international public opinion, which began to recognize the importance of women in all aspects of social life and to include that subject area in debating and designing policies for implementation.

Consideration was given not only to equality of opportunity and participation by women in employment, education and politics, but also to topics which had traditionally been assigned exclusively to the private sphere, such as household work and the family role of child care, which over the past decade have become objects of public discussion and concern. The 1990s are beginning with a growing willingness to deal with the problem of violence against women in all its forms, especially domestic or intra-family violence, considering it a social problem intimately related to human rights.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force as a legally binding international treaty in 1981, addressed the deep-rooted discrimination and exclusion which women have suffered solely by reason of their sex, and constituted the first great stride towards ensuring equal rights for men and women and promoting and facilitating women's participation in all countries and regions of the world.

To date, the Convention has been ratified by 112 countries, including many Latin American countries, which have undertaken to implement policies in accordance with its recommendations and to report on their compliance with the Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

This instrument sets forth the premise of equality of rights for all women without exception, regardless of their marital status, in all areas: political, civic, economic, social and cultural. It calls upon countries to enact anti-discrimination laws and to take special measures to change cultural models that accentuate differences and perpetuate inequalities, particularly in its article 5, which calls for the modification of social and cultural models of sexual roles and stereotypes based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either sex (United Nations, 1979).

Although the Convention covers a number of areas relating to sexual discrimination, one of its omissions is the absence of any direct approach to or specific definition of violence against women, which hinders the effective application of human rights standards in controlling this problem (Bunch, 1991) and the formal definition of the offence in national legislation. Among its limitations, which it shares with other international treaties, is the difficulty of requiring governments to implement its provisions, as illustrated by the problems CEDAW has experienced in successfully urging countries to report on their compliance with the Convention. For example, of the 74 States which reported in September 1991, 40 mentioned some form of domestic violence; only 11 of

these were countries of Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Barbados, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (United Nations, 1992).

The Convention, together with the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, promulgated in 1985, played a catalytic role in improving the situation of women with respect to closing the gap between the sexes. The Strategies constitute a basis and a support for political and legal changes to benefit women, thus promoting the design of more coherent plans and programmes in this field. Paragraph 288 sets forth specific considerations relating to violence against women. However, while this document provides a regulatory framework, its recommendations are not mandatory for States, and very few countries have reported taking concrete measures to eradicate violence against women, one of the subjects which have met with the most resistance on the part of governments.

The Expert Group Meeting on Violence in the Family with Special Emphasis on its Effects on Women, sponsored by the Vienna-based United Nations Office for the Advancement of Women, further developed the diagnosis of the problem by determining that violence within the family is a global problem, not only because of its scope but also because of its magnitude and harmful effects. The experts also recognized that although such violence is rooted in the existing inequality between men and women, which calls for changes to bring about full equality, States must provide immediate protection and legal and psychological assistance to victims of abuse (United Nations, 1986).

Likewise, the publication "Violence against Women in the Family" (United Nations, 1989) offers a general overview of this problem throughout the world based on case studies, analysing the legal solutions and methods used to cope with it and examining the short- and long-term effects of violence against women, as well as the psycho-social and structural explanations for the situation.

At its eighth session, held in 1989, CEDAW adopted a resolution which called upon Member States to include in their periodic reports background material on statistics, legislation and support services relating to violence against women, and urged them to measure the quantitative extent of the phenomenon and to adopt legislation commensurate with the real needs of women and the magnitude of the problem, without overlooking the importance of qualitative data for implementing preventive policies.

In its resolution 1990/15, the Economic and Social Council recognized that violence against women in the family and society is pervasive and cuts across lines of income, class and culture. Moreover, in its resolution 1991/18, entitled "Violence against women in all its forms", the Council urged governments to adopt, strengthen and enforce legislation prohibiting violence against women and to take administrative, social and educational measures to protect women from all forms of violence. The conclusions of the subsequent Expert Group Meeting on Violence against Women, held in November 1991, constituted the most significant step forward in this area.

At this meeting, the experts concurred on the need for a comprehensive definition of violence against women that clarified the measures to be taken to eradicate the phenomenon, describing it as any act, omission, restriction of behaviour or treatment in any area whose physical, sexual or psychological results are harmful to women, and incorporating violence within the family into this definition.

Moreover, convinced that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace and a manifestation of the historically unequal balance of power in which women have suffered discrimination, the experts state that

violence against women is a violation of human rights, such as the right to life, liberty, physical and mental integrity, personal safety, non-discrimination, effective protection under the law, health, protection against torture or degrading treatment and the right to work (United Nations, 1991a).

However, the breadth of this definition makes it difficult to circumscribe the problem and to determine the responsibilities of various social sectors. It is important to look beyond the physical aspects of violence and to take into account the ethno-cultural factors used to justify it in various countries and regions, as well as the criminal aspects of physical, sexual or psychological violence.

The most important recommendation concerns the elaboration of a separate convention on violence against women to promote the adoption of appropriate, effective measures to prevent, punish and eliminate such violence, thus assuring women of protection against discrimination and any act of violence.

Taking up this idea, the Organization of American States, through the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW), has included on its agenda a plan to elaborate an inter-American convention on violence and women, with a view to providing model legislation on guaranteeing women reparation and protection against violence and containing general definitions of types of gender-based violence.

The recommended preliminary draft of the inter-American convention on the prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women contains the reaffirmation that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights, and recognizes the systematic, persistent and egregious nature of this type of violence in the Americas, which acts as a barrier to development, democracy and peace in the countries of the region.

The draft establishes that violence shall be understood as any action, omission or conduct, direct or indirect, through which physical, sexual or mental suffering is inflicted by means of deceit, seduction, threats (harassment), or any action or other measure against women, with the intention or effect of intimidating, punishing or humiliating them or of confining them to a sexual stereotype or denying them their human dignity, sexual self-determination or physical, mental or moral integrity or of undermining their personal safety, self-esteem, personality or physical or mental capacity; and that violence shall also be understood as any action, omission or conduct marked by the aforementioned intentions or effects, even if it does not cause physical or psychological pain or suffering, i.e., violence perpetrated in public or private by individuals, institutions or States. However, it also specifically addresses violence in the home, defining domestic or family violence as situations in which the perpetrator is the spouse or a person with whom the woman maintains or has maintained stable marital or intimate relations, or any other person related to the woman as a parent, relative, forebear or descendant, brother or other relation, regardless of the legal designation established by national legislation (OAS/IACW, 1991).

Among the responsibilities which States are expected to assume are the enactment of national legislation that includes civil and criminal penalties, the provision of resources for legal, therapeutic and economic assistance for all women subjected or vulnerable to violence and, basically, the adoption of appropriate measures to change sociocultural standards of conduct for men and women, including the development of educational programmes to combat prevailing prejudices and practices based on the concept of the inferiority or superiority of either sex or on stereotyped roles for men and women, recognizing the complicity of the patriarchal cultural model in promoting, justifying and legitimizing gender-based violence in the home. For its part, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), joining the OAS initiative, considers

domestic violence and abuse directed against women as one of its priority areas of work and programme execution for the period 1991-1994.

Lastly, the United Nations Group of Experts enunciated the urgent need for States to provide immediate protection and assistance to women who are physically, sexually or emotionally abused, victimized or exploited, emphasizing that such aid and protection must be coordinated and multifaceted, comprising legal, judicial, psychological, medical, social and community support services. It also called for the application of international human rights legislation in controlling violence against women and for the inclusion of the problem of domestic violence as an integral part of activities to promote human rights in each of the countries (United Nations, 1992).

This summary illustrates the heightened concern about violence against women among international organizations, but also highlights the resistance encountered, as manifested by the countries' disappointing response to the resolutions and the difficulty of translating them into concrete preventive policies that effectively address this phenomenon.

VI. VIOLENCE: AN OBSTACLE TO DEVELOPMENT WITH SOCIAL EQUITY

The United Nations Decade for Women helped draw attention to the position of women in the development of Latin American and Caribbean countries and to their significant contribution to society, now recognized in numerous studies and clearly visible in reality. It also helped to reformulate the concept of development, taking a holistic, integrated approach to the economic, political, cultural and ethical factors thereof, in which women should participate through the establishment of new, egalitarian social structures. These principles lead to the premise that the analysis of development should not be divorced from specific considerations of gender and that the gender factor must be taken into account and incorporated in social and macroeconomic policies (Moghadam, 1990).

The persistence of situations of discrimination in the region is preventing women from fully realizing their potentialities, exercising all of their capabilities and participating as equals in society. This phenomenon stems from a historical process exacerbated in various ways by recent political and economic trends and by the development models implemented to date.

An analysis of the topic of economic development and the participation of women therein involves, on the one hand, recognizing the subordination and discrimination which affect women in the region and, on the other, acknowledging the need to confront the problem, for reasons not only of economics but also of equity and respect for human rights. It is an undeniable fact that women constitute half the world's population, work two thirds of its working hours while recording only one third of them, receive only 10% of its income, hold only 1% of its property in their own name and represent 100% of its mothers (Arizpe, 1989). These data eloquently express the urgency of taking the situation they delineate into account in assessing needs, evaluating situations and planning programmes of intervention.

Establishing the goal of social equity, understood as the elimination of factors which generate unequal conditions among human beings, entails the inclusion among these conditions of those which produce inequalities between men and women and which originate in the social and cultural structures of countries, bearing in mind that gender, like social class and ethnic origin, has become a basis for inequalities and must therefore be addressed systematically (Moghadam, op. cit.).

The failure to consider the cultural factors and specific problems affecting women in formulating most of the economic and social policies implemented to date is tantamount to a failure to truly address the disadvantageous situation suffered by the region's female population. As an illustration, it is notable that despite the significant growth of women's economic participation in Latin America over the past decade, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has reported that women's work has not been recognized socially or in government advancement and development policies, nor have women benefited directly from their own contributions (IDB, 1989, 1990). In recent years, the growing interest in women's place in development has spawned numerous specific projects aimed at the female population, particularly that of the poorest sectors (e.g., support for female heads of household, production and

microenterprise projects, etc.), whose purpose has been to help mitigate some forms of inequality and discrimination affecting women in the context of the social and economic changes under way in the region. However, current figures for the health, employment, education and political sectors show that women do not enjoy the same standards as men. The female population in general still benefits only marginally from development programmes and measures, and continues to occupy a disadvantageous position before the law, although the severity of the situation varies by country.

Great difficulties and resistance stand in the way of efforts to incorporate into development projects factors which concern the gender stratification existing in the region's societies, affecting all women indiscriminately, and to understand that the gender hierarchy is intimately related to economic and political factors in each country. In general, women are not heeded and do not participate in the formulation of development programmes; as agents of social policies, they are considered mere observers whose vision is principally based on the mother-child duality, while actions for the integration of women focus on low-income sectors, ignoring the discrimination which affects women belonging to the middle and upper socio-economic strata, who, although they do not suffer economic difficulties, experience inequalities in relation to the men of their own social class.

The specific features of the female population—which, although a focal group, is not a minority—derive from women's various social roles as domestic workers, a growing labour force, consumers of goods and services, socializers of new generations and social actors who demand specific actions (Carrillo, *op. cit.*). The characteristics engendered by this status and by the multiplicity of roles, in conjunction with discriminatory values and stereotypes, shape and determine a profile which varies according to the culture to which women belong and their place in the social hierarchy.

It is becoming increasingly evident that development must be redefined and given a broader meaning. Economic indicators such as growth, income and employment do not appear to suffice as adequate measurements of development, in view of the need to consider other aspects such as the level of protection against violence, guarantees of respect for human rights, opportunities for both education and recreation and freedom of choice in any situation in life. Such a conception of development entails a process of multiplying individuals' capacity to choose (UNDP, 1990).

The goal of equity in development at all levels of society necessitates the contemplation of the real situation of all women, without distinctions, given their vulnerability to persistent sex-based legal and social discrimination and to continued inequality. Thus, the issue of women must be reintroduced into the agenda of the main themes of development and considered a legitimate subject of debate, so that obstacles to women's participation as active agents of development can be identified and women can be enabled to share the fruits of that process under conditions of equality with men.

Including and specifying the concept of gender equity within that of social equity as a prerequisite for achieving genuine development means that the cultural must be incorporated as a variable in the symbolic construction of reality and in the production and reproduction of social life. It also involves aspects of daily and family life as basic components of overall social reality, and thus helps to narrow the gap between the traditionally separate topics of economic development and social development.

Taking social equity as an objective that is inseparable from the goal of development requires consideration of gender equity, which is related to women's integration in development through more equal participation in work, education and socio-political

activity, but also to the cultural transformations needed to enable women to truly enter the third millennium under conditions of effective parity with the men of their generation (ECLAC, 1991b). The concept of gender equity, in turn, must be developed, broadened and circumscribed until it becomes useful and workable while at the same time enriching the social and cultural dimension of economic policies by incorporating variables and elements not traditionally contemplated in development models.

Considering the "gender" analytical category as a relational category highlights aspects of development which are not apparent from other perspectives, such as the effect of health and population policies on the reproductive behaviour of women and on perceptions of the processes associated with maternity. The fact that gender issues cut across all dimensions means that accepting the equality of rights between men and women is not only a response to an ethical principle of equity, but also a necessary condition for the development of society (Parada, 1991). Women's equality with men is not an abstract concept divorced from social reality, and the efforts and actions aimed at putting this principle into practice must be considered part of the inalienable rights of human beings and indispensable components of development models.

One factor in the situation of inequity and inequality affecting women is the problem of violence directed against them, particularly abuse and aggression within the family. This topic, which is usually ignored and hidden, must be openly discussed with a view to proposing solutions to be included in policies to benefit the female population which are integrated into comprehensive policies. General policies, in turn, must be reformulated on the basis of the specific features of women's situations and of the premise that domestic violence is a social and political problem. If equality is to be achieved, real changes must be made in the cultural sphere, in which education plays a vital role, since it is here that the factors which create and re-create women's subordinate role in society and the discrimination they face are most deeply rooted and persist with most obstinacy, and where most of the underlying causes of violent situations are found.

In the context of the Nairobi Strategies, which recognize violence as a basic obstacle to development, and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, ECLAC is also attempting to incorporate the issue of gender into its proposal on changing production patterns with social equity. The participants at the Fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Curaçao in September 1991, addressed the problem specifically, recognizing its magnitude and extent in the countries of the region and the urgency of dealing with it, and proposing the adoption of effective measures to help prevent and eliminate the phenomenon, emphasizing the need to foster heightened awareness and sensitivity to the situations of violence in which women live on a daily basis (ECLAC, 1991a). A number of Latin American and Caribbean countries have taken steps in this direction (as described previously) and are adopting measures to combat the problem in various areas. However, they have yet to manifest an awareness that domestic violence is directly or indirectly linked —according to circumstances— to the targeted development of the region.

Violence against women in the home is not only a problem which directly concerns women and their families, as a means of control and a restriction of options, but also a problem of development in that it affects the quality of life and conditions of integration into production of over 50% of the population. Although statistics and research correlating violence with development in the region are unavailable, it is evident that violence restricts and curtails not only women's participation but also their opportunities to derive benefits from successful programmes and actions.

For example, if women are discouraged, threatened or expressly prohibited by their spouse from studying or attending training courses, their integration into the labour market and the requirements of technological transformation are prejudiced, or, if they have been educated but are denied or deterred from the chance to work, educated and trained human resources are wasted. Likewise, if their male counterparts oppose or discount their political, social and community participation, their access to power and to decision-making roles is limited, so that the development of democracy is impeded. If their physical and mental health is undermined by the violence directed against them, they cannot participate actively and creatively in development processes. Moreover, the medical, psychological and legal services provided to victims are very costly and use up resources that should be allocated to meet other needs, such as the introduction of educational programmes to eliminate sexual stereotypes. Lastly, when their human rights are violated or, in extreme cases, when physical violence results in death, it is abundantly clear that such problems affect entire communities. Unquestionably, domestic violence is a problem of inequity that reflects the existing asymmetry between men and women, which cuts across the entire social structure of each country and stifles women's human development and freedom of choice.

Often, violence against women within the family is also an obstacle to women's participation in concrete development projects. In one programme carried out by a non-governmental organization in Mexico under the auspices of UNIFEM, cases of battered women increased, among the women included in the initiative, as their capacity to take life decisions was enhanced through their participation. It was discovered that men saw the women's growing capacity for self-determination as a threat to the control they exercised, and that the increased beatings and aggression were intended to reverse the process and make the women abandon the project (Carrillo, op. cit.).

Equality and development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing objectives. Economic development is a necessary but insufficient condition for eliminating gender discrimination in the region, while real development is not possible unless all members of society participate in it under similar conditions. It should also be borne in mind that the integration of women into development, the formal labour market and public life is a necessary but insufficient condition for achieving equality between the sexes. The sexual division of labour must be reconsidered and, at the same time, social awareness of the responsibility of all members of society for household work and child care—traditionally the province of women—must be enhanced, since the current situation encourages discrimination by reason of the social and economic devaluation of household work, which is unremunerated, and perpetuates an inequitable distribution of power within the family, where violence is used as an instrument of control and domination.

It is important to stress that although education is a basic means of achieving development with social equity through human resources training, such training and transmission of knowledge alone are insufficient unless educational programmes comprise non-sexist cultural models that link national growth to equality and equity between men and women.

For women, equality means enjoying the rights which have been denied them as a result of the historical and culturally sustained discrimination they have suffered at all levels, but also the broadening of their options and freedom from all forms of violence. Human development (economic and social) is diametrically opposed to the persistence of violence against women, either in public or in private. Policies which take bolder strides towards gender equality are needed, considering that an effective strategy must comprise cultural, economic, political and legal aspects at the national and regional levels, and must include concrete measures to foresee, prevent and eradicate domestic violence.

Eliminating the violence which is depriving society of the full participation of women would mean progress towards the realization of true social and gender equity, and would allow women to be permanently integrated into development as secure, independent, creative individuals.

VII. NEEDS AND PROPOSALS

The seriousness of the problem of domestic violence, by reason of its magnitude, extent and grave individual and social consequences, urgently requires specific actions and preventive strategies. Since the roots of violence against women within the family are structural, it is essential to implement policies which modify those structures that engender and perpetuate violence, and which create a favourable environment for equality between the sexes, respect for human dignity and development with social equity.

According to the foregoing analysis, the measures to be taken cannot be confined to any single area, but must involve various social actors from an integrated perspective. Such actions, whether they have short- or long-term effects, must be carried out simultaneously so that all factors contributing to the problem are addressed.

The needs and therefore the proposals in this area are numerous, given the complexity of the phenomenon. However, this section will describe only those which appear most significant and essential, in light of the points discussed, for finding solutions to situations of domestic violence in the region.

First, a national and regional debate must be generated on the effects of discrimination against women in all areas of society, and especially the adverse effects of domestic violence on their physical and mental health. Sensitization and consciousness-raising about the problem must be accompanied by a search for appropriate mechanisms to enable various government sectors and representatives of society to participate in this debate, giving women's organizations a major role to play in formulating opinions and proposals.

Governments and development planners must give the problem of domestic violence the necessary priority, identifying the relations between violence and other concomitant variables. Aggression and abuse directed against women within the family must not be considered isolated phenomena which are self-generating and whose causes and consequences do not go beyond the confines of the home.

The positive mobilization of society against domestic violence requires the encouragement of solidarity with the victims and the promotion of collective condemnation of such acts. Furthermore, government initiatives and policies cannot be consolidated without the commitment and cooperation of citizens.

Governments, in turn, must acknowledge their responsibility *vis-à-vis* the problem of domestic violence, and must therefore allocate resources and financing to carry out concrete actions to eradicate and prevent it, in addition to providing services to victims. Since the problem carries over into all spheres, interventions should be designed to involve various ministries and other government authorities, which should coordinate their efforts and learn from the initiatives and experiences already carried out in the social sector, especially by women's organizations.

In view of existing realities, it is urgent and essential to provide immediate protection and assistance to women affected by physical, emotional or sexual violence or by any other form of abuse. Such assistance should be multifaceted and coordinated,

comprising legal, psychological and medical services, and facilities and help for meeting employment, economic and housing needs.

Women victims of violence in their homes need psychological help and support to extirpate the guilt and fear they usually suffer in such cases and to enhance their self-esteem and sense of security so that they can break the cycle of violence. Women in crisis situations who have nowhere to go and no economic resources of their own must be provided with shelters where they can stay without risking their physical integrity or that of their children. However, as such refuges are only temporary solutions, women must be given practical help, such as training and integration into the labour market, to promote their economic self-sufficiency and autonomy and thus assist them to escape from violent surroundings.

Another important step is the development of policies to strengthen social networks, mainly those of women's organizations, and to give them opportunities for participation. Such support and solidarity networks seem to be the best means of helping victims to escape from their social isolation and to move beyond situations of violence, since the socialization of the problem allows the community to take charge of addressing it and ensures that solutions are consistent with the reality experienced by women.

Both the victims of domestic violence and the victimizers—inseparable components of the same social problem—require comprehensive care with a therapeutic vision, and hence methods of education and rehabilitation must be devised for male aggressors. There is also a need to promote self-help groups for women, where victims of violence can express themselves and share their experiences with other women who have suffered in the same situations, thereby recovering their "voice" and their self-confidence, and initiating a process of joint recuperation and development, fortifying their own resources to overcome violence.

In the regulatory sphere, there is an urgent need for countries to eliminate all forms of legislative discrimination in civil, criminal and labour law and in judicial practices and procedures. Women need legal aid, laws that protect and defend them against acts of violence, and comprehensive judicial services. Also needed, however, is a legal system which formally defines and penalizes acts of violence against women within the family, be they physical, psychological or sexual, and punishes those responsible to put an end to their state of impunity and ensure justice for the victims. It is important that the right to privacy traditionally ascribed to the home and family not be used to deny women the protection they need or to refuse to acknowledge their rights before the law. It would therefore be advisable to establish family courts or other judicial mechanisms to handle all of the problems associated with intra-family violence and its specific characteristics.

Conversely, since women must know and work to enforce their rights, more information should be produced and disseminated through the publication of educational and informational materials (primers, posters, pamphlets) on women's rights under international conventions and national legislation. The establishment of more legal offices and judicial assistance services from which the female population could obtain information and assistance would also help women to exercise the basic human right of finally being able to say no to violence.

To ensure the effectiveness of laws in fulfilling their role of defending women's rights, it is essential to create mechanisms for monitoring compliance with legislation and to generate an awareness of gender-based problems in public institutions. Thus, training must be provided for judges, lawyers, police officers and public employees in general, both male and female, to enable them to recognize sexism in professional practices and thus to avoid and eradicate discriminatory conduct and procedures while facilitating and expediting lawsuits and trials. The police should play a major role in preventing the crime

of domestic violence by receiving reports and providing protection to victims. Women's police stations should be staffed by interdisciplinary teams consisting of medical, social and legal personnel, and should work closely with centres for battered women, shelters and other social services concerned with the victims of conjugal violence.

The characteristics and consequences of domestic violence demand that it be considered a problem of public health, both physical and mental, requiring appropriate sectoral policies and attention in the context of primary health care. Therefore, hospital and emergency services personnel, and physicians in general, must also be made sensitive to the problem so that they can identify it, provide the necessary care and follow up on individual cases, working in close contact with institutions offering services to women victims of abuse within the family.

Preventive policies should be aimed at society as a whole, since all women are potential victims of aggression and abuse as long as social sanctions are lacking and the social structure continues to act as an incubator for violence. It is necessary to design comprehensive social policies and to include within them more specific, woman-oriented policies which seek to change traditional roles and to enhance women's power and capacity to take initiatives in society.

Since education plays a fundamental role in the propagation of values and attitudes, major efforts are needed to institute the egalitarian socialization of boys and girls by altering those aspects of educational programmes which reinforce sexual stereotypes, discriminate against women and justify their subordination. One initial task is to reformulate textbooks and their sexist content to include the contributions of women to history, culture and civilization. Also incorporated should be material relating to human rights which broadens this concept and specifically mentions the rights of women, as well as techniques of education for peace that teach methods of personal and group conflict resolution through negotiation and mediation instead of aggression and violence.

Effective prevention will entail the introduction of extensive, long-term programmes of cultural change which, while requiring little in the way of financial resources, can have a significant impact.

Cultural policies should broaden the spectrum of accepted behaviour for both men and women and should revise the norms of daily conduct, *inter alia* through the public dissemination of values which reclaim the domestic world as the source of a more egalitarian distribution of power, aimed at the whole society without gender-based discrimination. In addition, public policies should be implemented to provide incentives for the socialization, validation and equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities between men and women, to ensure equality within the family and to safeguard the rights of the female population.

The communications media are another important instrument for changing the value system to improve the situation and quality of life of women. Media collaboration is essential in information campaigns on the problem of domestic violence and women's rights which seek to modify the stereotyped media image of women and of male-female relations to reflect women's real roles in society and to promote more equitable interaction between the sexes. To be truly effective in this role, however, the media must respond to government communications policies aimed at developing a collective awareness of the types of discrimination suffered by women in the societies of the region.

The design of suitable and effective initiatives to combat domestic violence requires the promotion of research on the problems of women, with emphasis on their specific character. For reasons mentioned previously, the problem and its effects on women, the family and society as a whole must be objectified, and appropriate mechanisms must be created to obtain quantitative and qualitative information in each country

and to exchange these data and statistics to gain a more exact idea of the phenomenon's prevalence in the region.

Preventive measures, to halt the perpetuation of violence from generation to generation, and eradication of the problem in the region call for the political will of governments and the support and commitment of all men and women in each of the countries so that women can participate in national development under better conditions, paving the way for a more just and equitable society.

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