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2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: STUDY ON THE PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR DEPENDENCE ON THE SALVADORAN JUSTICE SYSTEM

Executive Summary

The 2022 study, "The Prevalence of Violence Against Women and Adolescents and Their Reliance on the Salvadoran Justice System," prepared by International Justice Mission (IJM), examines the rates of physical and sexual violence against women and adolescents in El Salvador. It also explores how these populations depend on the justice system for protection and justice.

The Northern Triangle of Central America, which includes El Salvador, is one of the most violent regions in the world, with violence against women and adolescents being a structural issue. In El Salvador, physical and sexual violence profoundly impacts these groups, leading to a significant demand for intervention from the justice system. To assess this problem, the study presents key indicators—derived from surveys of 2,700 households across 15 municipalities in the three regions of the country—that provide an overview of violence prevalence, associated factors, and opportunities for the justice system to better serve these populations. This analysis can inform decision-making to strengthen the justice system's response capacity and enhance public policies aimed at eradicating violence.

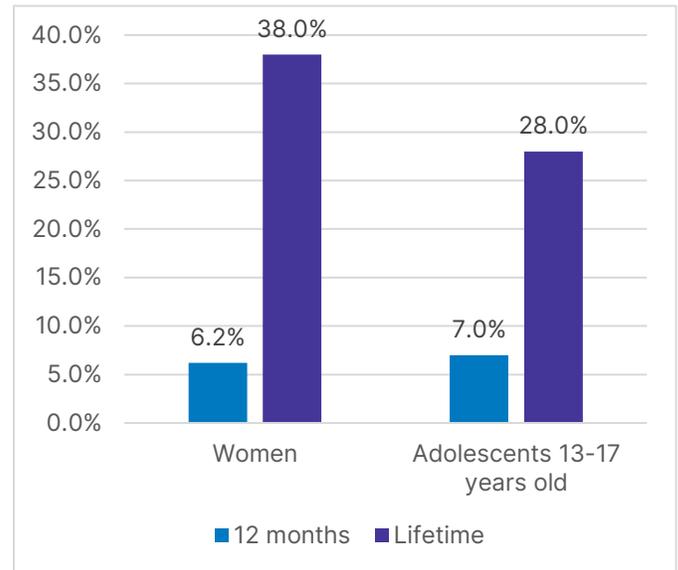
The study's findings indicate a disparity between the prevalence of violence and the actual reliance of women and adolescents on the justice system, highlighting the need to develop and implement strategies for improvement.

1. Prevalence of Violence

In El Salvador, 4 out of 10 adult women (38%) and 3 out of 10 adolescents aged 13 to 17 (28%) have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Additionally, in the 12 months prior to the study, the prevalence of physical or sexual violence against these groups is comparable, with adolescents experiencing a

slightly higher rate (almost 7%) compared to adult women (6.2%).

PREVALENCE OF PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN WOMEN AND ADOLESCENTS BETWEEN 13-17 YEARS OLD



2. Types of Violence

Physical Violence: Over 33% of adult women and 25% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 have experienced physical violence at some point in their lives, particularly in the form of slapping, pushing, and being struck with objects. Moreover, 56% of women who have faced physical violence report having experienced it on multiple occasions.

Sexual Violence: 16.3% of women have experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives, primarily involving attempts at unwanted sex. Additionally, nearly half of the women who have been victims of sexual violence (49.5%) report having faced it on multiple occasion

For the adolescent population, 6.6% have experienced sexual violence, with unwanted touching being the most common form of abuse.

Overlapping Violence: More than 11% of adult women and nearly 4% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 have experienced both physical and sexual violence

3. Age and Context of Violence

Four out of 10 female victims of sexual violence encountered it for the first time before the age of 13 (43%), while nearly 3 out of 10 experienced it between the ages of 14 and 17 (28.2%). For physical violence, adult women typically face it for the first time between the ages of 18 and 30 (almost 48%), whereas 60% of adolescents experienced physical violence before the age of 13.

Physical violence against women predominantly occurs in private spaces (61%), while sexual violence is experienced in both private and public settings. In contrast, two-thirds of physical violence against adolescents takes place in public areas, such as playgrounds or recreational spaces, and sexual violence in this population occurs equally in both private and public spheres.

4. Aggressors

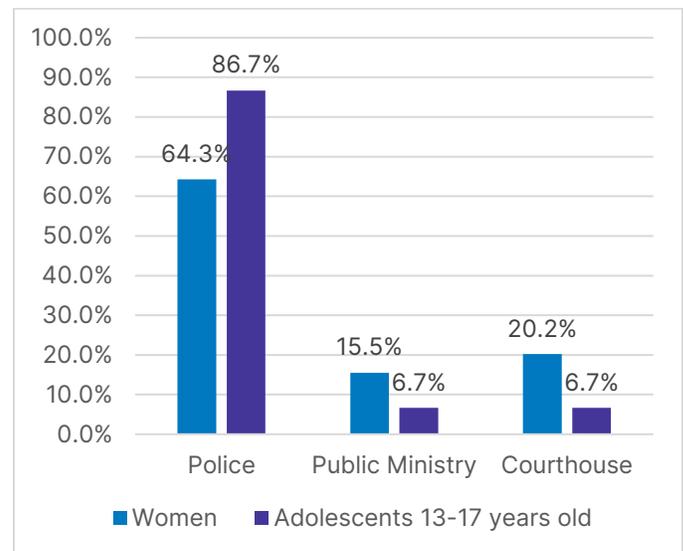
Violence is primarily perpetrated by individuals close to the victim. In the case of physical violence, nearly 60% of women knew their aggressor, with partners or ex-partners accounting for 32% of these cases. Similarly, almost half of the reported cases of sexual violence (49%) were committed by people known to the victim. This trend is also evident among adolescents aged 13 to 17, where over 77% of physical violence perpetrators and 49% of sexual violence perpetrators are known to the victim and belong to their close circle.

5. Whistleblowing, Access to Justice, and Dependence on Justice System Institutions

Despite the high prevalence of violence, reporting rates remain very low. Only 27% of adult women and less than 15% of adolescents who experienced violence reported the incident to a justice system institution in the 12 months preceding the study.

Among those who do report, the National Civil Police (NCP) is the primary institution victims turn to, particularly in cases of sexual violence. This is followed by the Attorney General's Office (AGO) for women. For adolescents aged 13 to 17, the courts are the second most frequently contacted institution.

CHART 2. INSTITUTIONS OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM TO WHICH WOMEN AND ADOLESCENTS AGED 13-17 YEARS OLD WENT TO REPORT VIOLENCE



On the other hand, the level of satisfaction among those who report is low. Half of the women expressed dissatisfaction with the care, support, or protection they received in response to physical or sexual violence. Similarly, 62.5% of adolescents were dissatisfied with the response to physical violence, while 33.3% felt the same regarding sexual violence.

Additionally, the study reveals that many victims drop out of the judicial process after filing a complaint, reflecting distrust, fatigue, and frustration with the system. In fact, only 39% of women and 53.6% of adolescents continued to participate in justice processes after making a formal complaint.

6. Reasons for Underreporting

Victims often choose not to report the violence they have suffered due to fear, pressure, and threats, as well as a normalization of the violence. Over 23% of

adult women and 45% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 do not perceive physical violence as a problem. This normalization of physical and sexual violence is concerning, as it discourages victims from seeking help or justice.

7. Dependence on the Community

Communities play a crucial role in guiding and supporting cases to the justice system. Nine out of ten individuals who reported experiencing violence also shared their situation with someone in their community, particularly family members. Consequently, community support can significantly enhance the likelihood that victims will formalize their complaints.

8. Services for Victims and Survivors

The study highlights the lack of care services for victims and survivors as a significant issue. Only 3 out of 10 survivors who experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the survey received care or restorative services, such as psychological support, protection, or health services, which could help reduce their vulnerability to re-victimization. This deficit is even more pronounced for adult women who have experienced sexual violence, with only 1 in 10 accessing any type of service.

Challenges and Recommendations

The study outlines several challenges to the protection offered by the Salvadoran justice system for women and adolescents. These include the high prevalence of physical and sexual violence against these groups, the low levels of reporting to justice institutions, and the abandonment of processes once initiated. Additionally, the normalization of violence reduces the likelihood that victims will seek justice and support, while a general dissatisfaction with the justice system further complicates reporting efforts.

In light of these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the protection processes provided by the justice system.

- Enhance reporting mechanisms to ensure that the population is informed about available channels, how to access them, and how to use them safely. Increasing the accessibility of these channels and ensuring their interconnection would streamline processes and improve the experience for victims and survivors.
- Expand access to care services to ensure that the justice system guarantees protection, psychological support, and legal assistance for more victims and survivors, as these are essential for reducing the risk of revictimization. This recommendation is closely tied to the need to establish and strengthen effective referral and coordination networks between communities and justice system institutions.
- Focus on changing cultural narratives through awareness-raising and educational efforts in communities and society to alter perceptions of violence and encourage reporting.
- Utilize technology to enhance the responsiveness of justice system institutions. Implement strategic information systems to manage cases more efficiently and reduce response times.

In conclusion, the study highlights not only the severity of physical and sexual violence against women and adolescents in El Salvador but also the disconnect between the prevalence of violence and the justice system's capacity to respond effectively. Despite the significant number of women and adolescents experiencing such violence, most do not engage with the justice system due to fear, the normalization of violence, or a lack of knowledge. To address this issue, it is essential to strengthen reporting mechanisms, expand the availability of care and support services, and promote cultural changes that denormalize violence. Additionally, improving coordination between justice institutions and communities is crucial to ensure that victims and survivors receive the necessary support for effective access to justice, as well as for their recovery and long-term protection.