



Critical Analysis of Gender-Based Violence in Latin America: Theoretical Perspectives and Challenges for Intervention

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Summary

In this sense, this article addresses the problem of gender violence in Latin America, taking the Colombian case as its main reference; This phenomenon will be analyzed from a critical perspective that allows theories such as feminism, social learning and structural violence to be related. Likewise, those elements that seek to perpetuate patriarchal domination and inequality are identified, showing how aggressive behaviors can be transmitted in a socialization environment configured by cultural structures. Therefore, this is a documentary review through which the main factors that influence the growth of cases of violence against women are identified and the gaps in the institutional response are evident. Thus, this paper highlights the importance of targeted public policies, early educational intervention programs in schools, and psychological support mechanisms, which must address both the cultural roots of violence and the particular needs of each victim in relation to their victimization. The findings point to overcoming this problem with intersectoral attention, education in gender equality and the approval of stricter regulations that allow effective access to justice and protection of women's human rights.

Keywords: gender-based violence, patriarchy, social learning, feminism, Latin America

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Introduction

Gender-based violence is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that, over the centuries, has been systematized and, therefore, naturalized in different contexts and sociocultural situations. Despite the legal and discursive advances that have been made around gender equality, the high rates of violence against women in Latin American countries do not seem to decrease, on the contrary, they register alarming rates.

The article by Medina González et al. indicates that during 2022, according to data from the Observatory of Gender Equality of Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 4000 femicides were committed, placing Latin America in one of the most dangerous places for women. In the case of Colombia, the most recent survey by the National Institute of Health indicates that so far in 2024, 66221 cases of gender-based violence have been reported, of which 75.6% were perpetrated against women, presenting it as an urgent problem. The justification for its analysis is its transversal nature, which is not only generated in the domestic sphere but is rooted in the community, work and educational spheres. Although the largest number of victims are women, it is no more or less true that gender violence damages society as a whole with emotional, economic and legal consequences. That is why, from a critical perspective, it is important to understand that these practices of power have been sustained in patriarchal structures that over the years have naturalized the domination of men over women and their functioning.

Among the many theories that contribute to the understanding of gender-based violence, the feminist perspective stands out, which examines violence as a means of control and suppression of women. Segato in Rita Segato, 2010 argues that patriarchy operates using cultural and symbolic devices that justify male supremacy and that lead to abusive practices and the reduction of female autonomy. Likewise, Millet in Cuesta, 2018 argues that violence is the most extreme form of oppression of women, derived from their constant disadvantage in the competition for power and resources. On the other hand, according to Pérez-Martínez and Rodríguez-Fernández in UNED, 2024, Bandura's 1973 theory of social learning states that violent behavior can be learned through the observation and imitation of aggressive models. Children living in abusive families may incorporate these attitudes into the repertoire of their interpersonal relationships and even reproduce them in their adult lives. In terms of gender-based violence, programs continue to observe and accept sexist and controlling attitudes. In addition, the theory of structural violence, based on Galtung's work in La Parra & Tortosa, 2003, highlights the social and institutional mechanisms that perpetuate exclusion and inequality. Violence in this sense goes beyond the physical, even expressing itself when the needs of a group of the population, in this case, women, are not met or are restricted. For lack of access to inferior jobs or wages, the structure is defined as if these and other elements could be made to subordinate women and create the illusion of male superior status Rhizome against Polarization, 2020.

On the other hand, the phenomenon of gender-based violence in Latin America is also affected by economic, ethnic and cultural factors. In several countries in the region, state institutions are weak, resulting in impunity and the reproduction of patriarchy in the justice system. As mentioned, "the lack of a gender perspective in the application of laws is reflected not only in the revictimization of women who denounce, often with little state support. This lack also translates into the scarce allocation of resources to prevention and care programs; in the lack of training in gender and sexual diversity of police and judicial officials and in the lack of adequate policies for institutional action." Similarly, in the field of education, gender-based violence requires approaches to promote awareness among the family, schools and the media. Various studies have shown that gender violence is carried over from childhood, penetrating quite deeply into adult attitudes. Therefore, it is essential to promote co-education, since "beyond the relevance of strengthening the legitimacy of the State, only if a process of awareness-raising, demystification and co-education is carried out can violence be eliminated." Despite the continued production of knowledge and evidence, gaps remain in how to understand and address institutional violence. This is because justice operators tend to reproduce the situation of patriarchal violence and act with a low degree of trust. Added to this is the lack of coordination between the various institutions for the protection of women's rights, which generates a duplication of functions and delays the treatment of cases of greater urgency.

Therefore, in this context, the purpose of this article is to critically reflect on gender-based violence in Latin America, with special emphasis on Colombia, in order to identify its structural and interpersonal dimensions. To this end, the theoretical contributions of feminism and theories of social learning and structural violence will be examined, with the aim of showing how the logics of domination are reproduced and why it is so difficult to eliminate this scourge. Likewise, the actions and omissions of current public policies will be discussed, as well as the importance of interdisciplinary strategies that strengthen social awareness, citizen education and legal protection for victims. In short, in Segato's words: gender violence

is not an issue of private or family spheres, but one of the symptoms of deep imbalances in the social and symbolic structure. Therefore, eradicating them will require a cultural change in which rights and opportunities between men and women are curtailed, and comprehensive interventions are generated in which different actors intervene, from community-based movements and organizations to the State itself. In this sense, this article seeks to promote new reflections and evidence that can strengthen academic and professional debate, to guide decision-making towards more proactive interventions adapted to local contexts.

Methodology

Under this framework, it is worth mentioning that this study was prepared under a qualitative approach that allowed us to delve into the phenomenon of gender violence in Latin America, based on secondary sources that included academic articles, official reports and documents prepared by international organizations. Initially, an exhaustive and systematic compilation of literature was issued from well-known databases such as Scopus, Redalyc and SciELO, as well as institutional portals in order to ensure the inclusion of broad-spectrum references. The keywords used in the search included concepts such as "gender-based violence"; "patriarchy"; "feminist theory"; "social learning"; "Latin America". This massive search allowed the location of a corpus of information in accordance with the objectives of the research. The respective selection of works included sources that were in accordance with the Latin American context, in addition to being subject to being published within ten years of the time, because they had an updated approach to the problem. However, classic contributions were allowed from authors who are fundamental in the literature on the problem, such as Kate Millet and Albert Bandura, because they have essential conceptual bases to understand gender violence. The analysis strategy went through a critical reading of the compiled materials that allowed the identification of content patterns through the thematic coding suggested by Braun and Clarke. This codification made it possible to group the findings into categories such as: "patriarchy and domination", "transmission of violent behaviors", "institutional violence" and "prevention strategies". Subsequently, this process went through an enrichment through triangulation processes, comparing not only scientific information, but also statistics and reports from official biases such as the National Institute of Health and the Observatory of Gender Equality of Latin America and the Caribbean. This process and phase made it possible to reinforce the credibility and coherence of findings, by fitting together various sources and theoretical approaches. Likewise, special attention was paid to the multiplicity of conceptual perspectives around gender-based violence, including feminist, social learning and structural violence visions, so that the analysis reflected the multidimensional nature of the problem. In this way, through critique, it was not only possible to specify the magnitude of violence in the region, but also the forms of cultural and institutional patterns that perpetuate it, allowing a more nuanced and reliable interpretation of the phenomenon. In this way, the methodology presented results in an excellent foundation for the validation of results and to facilitate the depth of the theoretical debate about the continuation and replication of gender-based violence in Latin America.

Results

The extensive review of the literature and specialized reports on gender-based violence in Latin America has made it possible to identify a series of interrelated factors that explain its rooting and perpetuation in the region. In the first place, the hard data reflect alarming figures in relation to femicides and the number of physical and psychological aggressions culminating in victims of this type in various countries of the region. However, these numbers, far from being isolated events, are related to the cultural scaffolding in which patriarchal practices have been naturalized, giving legitimacy to attitudes that reproduce female subordination. As authors such as Kate Millet and Rita Segato point out, patriarchy does not operate only in the domestic sphere, but also in the public sphere and even in the legal architecture itself, thus generating a constant reproduction of violence. This cultural mechanism, according to the findings, has found a channel of transmission in the family institution, in which the positions and patterns of sexual violence are taught from an early age consciously and unconsciously, since these children of today will become the adults of tomorrow. This coincides with Albert Bandura's theory of social learning, expounded in several of the texts analyzed. This author proposes that, through the observation and imitation of violent behaviors, the

internalization of these schemas is facilitated, since they are associated with the idea that violence is a reasonable response in a given sociocultural context.

The literature review also showed that violence is not limited to physical or psychological violence against women, but takes more subtle and complex forms, in fact, Galtung calls it structural violence. In this sense, the results found allow us to affirm that the wage gap between men and women, female job insecurity, lack of access to education and lack of decent health resources are expressions of deeper inequality. By weakening women's economic and social autonomy, these conditions act as catalysts for the process of dependency and reinforce the idea that men are in a superior position. At the same time, it was identified that the legal regulations of most Latin American countries have not managed to end impunity, either due to a lack of political will, the limited allocation of resources provided for or the shortage of officials trained in gender. The lack of focus not only discourages women from reporting these crimes, but also leads to revictimization, since in many cases these women go through lengthy or expensive trials, without comprehensive follow-up.

Another of the edges that clearly defines the analysis of the results is the situation of the cultural dimension and the institutional dimension. On the one hand, families and society in general reproduce myths and patriarchal statements that legitimize violence, on the other hand, such violence is little stopped or correctly sanctioned by the bearers of the safeguard. The fracture, determined by repetition and recognition in the totality of past investigations, is a breeding ground for "more of the same", as victims are considered helpless, while perpetrators are considered exempt from consequences. Added to this are fragmented public policies, which, in many cases, are impervious to intersectoral integration and function as independent islands: a judicial authority, a police authority and a social development authority. The lack of mechanisms for dialogue causes the woman not to attend once her situation is communicated, which enhances the helplessness and hopelessness of her rape.

Additionally, throughout the review, it was found that the intergenerational transmission of violence not only has an impact on the direct victims, but also, to a large extent, their children, who adopt patterns of behavior based on aggression or submission. In this sense, social learning theory is relevant because of the way it describes the internalization of violent attitudes: if the child sees the father organize power over the mother and there are no sanctions or psychosocial support interventions, the child will grow up with the belief that violence is a legitimate way to get his way. Many studies agree that the lack of preventive programs in childhood facilitates the perpetuation of these behavioral models as they are not altered, which maintains the violent mechanism and increases the incidence of cases in adolescence and adulthood. At the same time, the panorama is even more complicated if we consider institutional violence, in terms of indirect application when the State has not designed routes of attention to women or disqualifies the complaints themselves. According to several studies consulted, there is a pattern of revictimization that includes failures in the collection of evidence and abuse by some public servants by minimizing the facts and even exposing a universal value judgment, which decreases the victim's confidence in the judicial system and in the probability of reporting future aggressions. In the same sense, the cycle of impunity continues and the State continues to remain silent. Finally, the lack of resources and the lack of training in gender perspective prevent the design of solid policies that respond to the complexity of the phenomenon.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis offer a multifactorial view of gender-based violence in Latin America, where cultural factors, such as sexist roles and gender stereotypes and the normalization of sexual violence, social factors, including imitation learning and widespread acceptance of domination, economic factors, such as financial dependence and wage disparities, and institutional institutions, including weak legal regulations, lack of coordination, and insufficient staff training, all interact to maintain abusive violence and impunity. Law enforcement alone cannot break the cycle, because the root of the problem is not only violence, but the very organization of our social relations. The results therefore underscore the need for a systemic response, in which culture and education, including the demystification of culturally induced sex stereotypes from an early age, are combined with stronger protection policies and stricter judicial sanctions. Only in this way will we be able to change the factors that make violence against women continue to be a structural and urgent problem in our region.

Discussion

The results allow us to affirm that gender-based violence in Latin America is a complex phenomenon that is characterized by its multi-causal nature to the extent that cultural, social and economic factors converge. They are intertwined in a network of power relations that is articulated on the basis of patriarchal structures and places women in a position of subordination. In this way, they cannot consider the patterns of intergenerational transmission of aggressive practices and the legitimization of sexist behaviors as isolated, but as manifestations of a system of norms that grant men a position of superiority and women a subordinate place. Finally, the early socialization of violence and the lack of effective action by institutions deepens what has been called the unequal gap and complicates the breaking of the vicious circle of abuse. The second fact corroborated by studies based on social learning theory is how violent attitudes and behaviors are naturalized. In other words, family patterns exert a decisive influence on the price breakdown of behaviors. If men learn how to behave violently at home and no one intervenes to express and/or dismantle these behaviors, it is logical to assume that the following generations will produce a similar or even stronger structure, perpetuating the process of control and submission of women. In this sense, the results of the study, therefore, allow us to affirm that gender inequalities remain in no measure of what extent they are. (Certe labor, salary and educational mines silently maintains the strength) while women to lamas, to the reinforcement of the trust or organizational care.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting the central role played by institutions. Despite the fact that most Latin American countries have enacted laws and ratified international agreements to combat gender-based violence, the gap between regulations on paper and their effective application in women's daily reality is evident. They, mostly women with limited resources and reduced support networks, are faced with the dilemma that reporting often entails exposing themselves without guaranteeing their protection and even less punishment for the aggressor. This kind of vicious circle has direct and adverse effects: the lack of credibility in the system discourages reporting, fosters mutual distrust and perpetuates impunity. From this perspective, the studies analyzed point to the need for greater training in gender perspective for those who embody justice, and for inter-institutional public policies that are transversal to the management of cases, where the protection of women and their integral family nucleus is guaranteed. Likewise, the sustained difficulties in accessing justice highlight the urgent need for understanding and awareness among the authorities and frontline personnel about the seriousness of the situation, and how dignified and friendly treatment can be a way out for women in search of help.

Thus, the structural violence theorized by Galtung, i.e., systematic discrimination and the inability to meet basic needs, aggravates the effects of gender-based violence. When women are given insufficient jobs compared to men, their wages are lower, and access to resources is inadequately granted, the possibility of leaving the cycle of violence is degraded. Without economic and institutional opportunities, the choice to report or leave their battering partner is literally in volume: between the insecurity of an environment that does not really protect and the insecurity of not having a livelihood to guarantee independence. Consequently, violence is not the exclusive product of intimate space. Women do not choose to reproduce structural failures in social organization, but they face their consequences on a daily basis.

From the perspective of how to face these problems, then, the findings urge the articulation of multiple efforts. Gender-based violence is neither purely familial nor merely institutional: it is the intersection of entrenched customs, rigid social expectations and the inadequacy of the State. That is why, in cultural terms, it is necessary to dismantle patriarchal stereotypes and make visible the multiple forms of aggression that remain naturalized or invisible in terms of aggressors or victims. This requires not only an active intervention of the educational systems and the media, but also that they constitute themselves as truly influential actors in the construction of values and social representations. It should also be noted that in the search for stronger penalization measures, their complementarity must always be guaranteed by guaranteeing support mechanisms. Shelters and work alternatives, legal advice and psychological accompaniment are absolutely necessary to stop the impulse of violence, in the desire to grant real alternatives to victims who wish to report. Without an intervention at this level, ranging from the family

and school education to the public and institutional levels, the problem will continue to manifest itself and be renewed, as the new generations will not be exempt from continuing to learn from these guidelines.

Therefore, the results also invite reflection on the need to become aware of the magnitude of gender violence as a matter of public health, emotional well-being, social justice and community development. Awareness implies the need to create actions, namely the training of teachers and health personnel, and to transfer adequate resources for the implementation of prevention policies and programs. Similarly, it is imperative to promote the generation of reliable databases, since underreporting and anecdotal treatment of complaints hinder the extent to which the crime is carried out and its characteristics. Finally, but of primary importance, intervention cannot be restricted to the modification of legal frameworks, but also requires progressive work that, in some way, questions the way in which relationships are constructed between men and women. to completely break the heritage of our patriarchal society that has justified male supremacy and violence in all its forms. Only an effort by all sectors, families, schools, judicial institutions and civil society, will be able to generate a change in the way culture is felt and respected on an equal footing.

Conclusions

In this way, the above findings confirm that gender-based violence in Latin America is not simply an intra-family problem, but rather a structural one. Indeed, the condition for this disastrous social development is the convergence of cultural factors, the persistence of economic inequality and the lack of adequate institutional responses. Together, literary studies provide a picture in which learning gender stereotypes in vulnerable circumstances leads to the reproduction of macho attitudes and the naturalization of patriarchy. Inevitably, this logic implies fostering radical cultural change through education and working with a gender perspective. Since women and other vulnerable groups are often vulnerable to revictimization, judicial, rehabilitation and protection services require a gender-sensitive perspective in all aspects. Only monitoring, funding and permanent institutional pressure can lead to a true rupture of the patriarchal structure. Finally, gender-based violence is a sociocultural disaster, where women are physically, emotionally, and economically vulnerable in a number of barriers. Therefore, not only formal equality is required, but the creation of equitable opportunities, because it allows vulnerable generations to access levels of real social autonomy. Together, social change, education-based values, and a sober structure can pave the way for breaking historically patriarchal sociological patterns. Taken together, the above results support the need for an intersectoral and comprehensive perspective to promote long-term positions towards cultural and social direction to avoid problems of inequality in persistent functionalism. The society with equal rights and dignity, community cats unafraid to incite gender-based violence.

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