

Elizabeth Villagómez, The cost of Domestic Violence: The case of Andalusia in Spain¹

In recent years, the term violence against women has been substituted by gender based violence considering the social and cultural factors as well as defining its existence, and refuse treating it as a natural or biological phenomenon in humans. This type of violence is suffered by women due to the gender differences which are social in nature and it is translated into physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

In 1979, one hundred and fifty countries ratified the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in which gender based violence was included in the concept of discrimination against women. A year later it was recognised that violence against women was the most frequently hidden or covered crime in the world and in 1996 the United Nations recognised that domestic violence is comparable to torture, and thus should be legally penalized.

In Spain there have been notable advances in the awareness among the institutions and, during the last decade, specific measures have been developed against gender based violence, initially in the framework of the Equal Opportunity Plans and more recently under the Organic Law on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence which takes a holistic view of the problem and includes measures in every aspect of the affected women's life as well as that of her children. Before this law each region had different and varying legislation, so the law has been a great step in bringing the same rights and services to women in the whole of the Spanish territory.

The dimension of domestic violence in Spain

The number of women over 18 who are victims of domestic violence in Spain is estimated between 800 thousand and 2 million women² (between 3.6% to 9.6% of the total population of adult women), according to the data in the year 2006 depending on the method of measurement. The survey from which these figures are taken calculates the number of women who are technically considered as suffering violence and those who classify themselves into this category. Thus, the number of women in the first category (3.6% of the population) would represent more than 800 thousand women while the second figure (9.6%) would be a figure of over 2 million, so together we are talking about 2.8 million women who suffer or may be suffering violence. As far as who the perpetrators of this violence are, in the overwhelming number of cases it is the partner or ex-partner.

¹ This speech is based on the publication the economic and social costs of domestic violence in Andalusia, (los costes sociales y económicos de la violencia contra las mujeres en andalucía), instituto andaluz de la mujer, Sevilla, 2004; I.S.B.N. 84-7921-112-1

² Estimations based on Instituto de la Mujer Resultados de la macroencuesta" (Violence Against Women. Results of the Macro Survey, 2006).

<http://www.tt.mtas.es/periodico/igualdad/200612/Macroencuesta.pdf>

The social and economic costs of domestic violence

From the different disciplines involved in the full comprehension of domestic violence, an important effort has been made in order to understand its causes and effects and to improve the efficacy of both assistance and prevention programmes.

The economic dimension of the problem has come to complement other perspectives, adding new arguments in favour of programmes aimed at prevention and victim support. The estimations of the economic cost of gender based violence, and more specifically domestic violence, referred to different countries have resulted in extremely high figures, even though these only contemplated part of the effects, those that are more easily quantifiable.

¿Why is it important to know the costs of gender based violence? Beyond the benefit of having a first and approximate calculation of the social costs involved, the effort made in the quantification exercise itself offers additional results: the final figure in itself is a powerful argument in favour of prevention programmes that cost much less in comparison to the social cost of violence; increases the knowledge about the effects and about all the different actors involved, and, therefore, favours the design of efficient assistance and prevention programmes, favours the dissemination about the phenomenon as a social problem and exposes the statistical gaps and the lack of information for adequate monitoring and evaluation exercises.

Methodological issues

Over the last fifteen years there have been over 20 studies that have approximated the socio-economic costs of violence against women over different geographical areas (neighbourhoods, regions and countries). There have also been advances in the estimation of partial costs, especially in the area of health, and some research into the economic costs of delinquency in the United States and in the United Kingdom have offered some of the first figures on intangible costs associated to the suffering of the victims and their families.

The methodology developed in the present study has been based on these studies and on the theoretical advances towards a comprehensive methodology of the phenomenon, particularly those carried out by the *Institute for Women's Policy Research* in Washington. However it does differ from these studies in that its starting point, similar to that of the Pan-American Health Organisation, is linked to the itinerary or critical path that the victims move through, in approximating the costs.

Limiting of the study to only include domestic violence against women by an intimate partner or ex-partner, and having obtained an approximation of the total population affected through the macro survey, the methodology has allowed for an exhaustive identification of the effects of violence on the life of the victims: women and their children (who many a time are also victims as they witness abuse or are also, in a high percentage, abused as well).

The complex process through which the effects of domestic violence deteriorate the life of the victims has been broken down into six theoretical itineraries (social, health, judicial, psychological, economic independence or employment, and educational) that allow a synthesis, from six different but complementary perspectives, of the paths that the victims take during their violent relationship, at the moment they decide to leave, and in the immediate phases. Each of these itineraries have been built in a homogeneous way, by a specialist in each of the fields that has identified with precision and detail the effects on the victims.

In order to measure the prevalence, or generalization, of the effects identified by each of the specialists (and taking into account possible overlaps among the different areas), a survey³ was carried out where 300 women victims of violence by their partner or ex-partner participated. This field work has been decisive in allowing the measurement part of the methodology as it has furnished basic information given by the victims themselves.

Finally, once the information from the survey was gathered as basic data, and through the use of secondary sources, the estimation of the costs was carried out associated to the different effects that violence has on the life of the victims, and, through aggregation, of those associated to the different itineraries in which, theoretically or artificially, their reality has been deconstructed.

The results obtained with this methodology have also allowed to develop a system of indicators on domestic violence. This system covers over 100 indicators, structured around six blocks: severity and prevalence, impact on victims, risk factors, institutional and social response, access and use of victim oriented services, and perception and social attitudes.

In addition to allowing for a consistent estimation of the costs, this methodology has contributed, and this is probably its highest value added, to the detailed identification of the effects of violence on the victims, the interrelations among the different dimensions that the effects are grouped under and the agents that carry the costs. The integrated vision that the methodology is based on uncovers the social exclusion process in which victims are submerged through violence and the very high degree of reproduction that the phenomenon has horizontally (to third parties in the economic and social sphere) as well as across time, through the numerous effects and intergenerational transmission of the problem.

Results from the study on costs in Andalusia

The number of women over 18 who are victims of domestic violence in Andalusia exceeds 400,000 women⁴ (13.6% of the total population of adult

³ The sample has been selected among the women who use public assistance and information centres for women and among those who are living in Safe Houses (safe houses, emergency centres and tutored apartments). The field work was carried out by the social workers of the Andalusian Woman's Institute.

⁴ Estimations based on Instituto de la Mujer (2002): "La violencia contra las mujeres. Resultados de la macroencuesta" (Violence Against Women. Results of the Macro Survey).

women), according to the data in the year 2002. Of these, more than 300,000 ((10.1% of the total) were victims of violence by their intimate partner or ex-partner, although only 75,000 (2.5%) classified themselves as abused women.

In Andalusia, only 6,578 women denounced their partners or ex-partners in 2002 for abuse, 80% were processed as misdemeanours and the rest as crimes. Drawing from the figures given above, this means that only around 2.2% of victims come forward to take legal action against the situations of violence. Although this is a very low rate there is a slight increase with respect to the two previous years and it is larger than the national figure for Spain.

Over the period 1998-2002, 43 women have been murdered by their partners or ex-partners in Andalusia. Every year three to four women per 100.000 who are victims of domestic violence die every year.

Domestic violence against women by partners or ex-partners has an annual cost for Andalusian society of 2.356,8 million Euro (Table 1). This figure reflects direct costs (resources used by victims) as well as part of the indirect costs (the value of goods and services that are foregone due to violence, the loss of well-being by the victim and society as a whole). This represented at the time almost 2% of the regional GDP.

The annual costs associated to the labour market represents 30% of the total cost (707 million Euro), followed by the social itinerary that reached 628 million Euro (27% of total costs) and the itinerary followed by sons and daughters of the victim (590 million Euro, 25% of the total cost). The costs associated to physical and mental health of women are valued at 371 million Euro every year (16% of the total) and the judicial costs are the smallest at 60.7 million Euro (3% of the total costs).

The distribution of cost by supporting agent show that the victims themselves support the major part of the costs (1,000 million Euro, 43% of the cost). The most important part of this is the value of suffering. The costs associated to their employment, physical and mental health as well as the effects on their sons and daughters are also quite high: respectively 196, 98 and 92 million Euro annually. The judicial costs paid by the victims reach 16.3 million Euro annually.

Family and friends support an estimated cost of 18.4 million Euro (1% of the total cost) that proceeds from the social itinerary of the victims. However, for these agents most of the identified costs have not been quantified due to lack of information and adequate methodologies for measurement.

The costs supported by firms and employers is estimated at 385.3 Euro annually (16% of the total cost). This cost is derived from the repercussion that the rest of the itineraries have on the employment situation of the victim.

The public sector (central and regional administration) is the second most important agent in the distribution of total costs. The estimated cost to the public accounts is approximately 947 million Euros annually (40% of the total cost). The effects on the sons and daughters of the victims and the effects on women's health take the lion's share of this cost.

Finally, the costs carried by the third sector (NGOs) is estimated at 0.6 million Euro (0.02% of the total cost).

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ANDALUSIA

ANNUAL TOTALS

	Social itinerary	Physical and mental health itinerary	Judicial itinerary	Employment itinerary	Children's itinerary	TOTAL	%
VICTIMS	602.944.911	98.173.149	16.299.845	195.876.678	92.089.947	1.005.384.529	43
FAMILY AND FRIENDS	18.463.850	n.d	n.d	n.d	n.d	18.463.850	1
EMPLOYERS	n.d	n.d	n.d	385.302.088	n.d	385.302.088	16
PUBLIC SECTOR	6.173.897	272.784.914	44.363.664	125.950.234	497.765.676	947.038.384	40
THIRD SECTOR	315.996	131.718	67.662	3.369	66.129	584.874	0,02
TOTALS	627.898.654	371.089.780	60.731.170	707.132.369	589.921.751	2.356.773.724	100
Percentage over the total	27	16	3	30	25	100	

Source: Based on the survey and secondary sources

The distribution between direct and indirect costs reveals that the losses of goods and services due to violence and the loss of well-being by the victims (indirect costs), are much higher⁵ than the general or specific resources used by the victims as a consequence of violence (direct costs, Table 2). The direct costs, which reflect mainly the costs of services in mental and physical health used by victims (women and their children), the costs of the judicial itinerary and specific services by the public administration of the third sector dedicated to domestic violence are estimated at 834 million Euro (35% of the total). The indirect costs, that basically include costs of pain and suffering, the employment itinerary and the losses in education, are estimated as 1,521.9 million Euro (65% of the total costs).

Some ratios can help in understanding the relative size of these costs. The direct costs estimated here represent 0.9% of the GNP for Andalusia at market prices⁶, which is 113 Euro per capita per year. The direct costs per victim (Women and their children) per year is estimated at 835 Euro. And the direct cost per household is 2,764 Euro per year.

⁵ This result is similar to those obtained in all of the studies in which indirect costs have been quantified.

⁶ Reference to 2002.

Table 2. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ANDALUSIA			
ANNUAL TOTALS			
	Total direct costs	Total indirect costs	Total costs
VICTIMS			
Absolute Value (Euro)	177.054.127	828.330.401	1.005.384.529
Percentage over the total	18	82	100
FAMILY AND FRIENDS			
Absolute Value (Euro)	6.432.600	12.031.250	18.463.850
Percentage over the total	35	65	100
EMPLOYERS			
Absolute Value (Euro)		385.302.088	385.302.088
Percentage over the total		100	100
PUBLIC SECTOR			
Absolute Value (Euro)	650.791.144	296.247.240	947.038.384
Percentage over the total	69	31	100
THIRD SECTOR			
Absolute Value (Euro)	584.874		584.874
Percentage over the total	100		100
TOTALS			
Absolute Value (Euro)	834.862.745	1.521.914.349	2.356.773.724
Percentage over the total	35	65	100
Source: Based on the survey and secondary sources			

Conclusions

The results obtained in this study reveal, from a new perspective, the social dimension of domestic violence against women. The effects transcend the household and family level and extend, like a shadow, over society at large. This phenomenon depletes an important amount of public and private resources that could have alternative uses, provokes material losses to victims, to their most immediate social circle and to firms and the public sector, and deteriorates individual and social well-being. The road taken by Andalusian society towards increased levels of human development and towards a society in which its members can count on increased opportunities to develop their human and productive potential is being diminished by the serious barriers to access those opportunities faced by a significant number of their citizens: women victims of violence and their children.

The results of this study show other aspects that should be considered in the design of policies to combat domestic violence. In the first place, the policies specifically aimed to prevention and assistance of victims are a very small part of the costs of violence. As an example, the Action Plan of the Andalusian Government to combat Violence Against Women represents 1.1% of the total direct costs that Andalusian society carry according to the results of this study. Given that the policies to combat the prevalence of this phenomenon and contribute to diminish its effects, the resources assigned should be increased substantially. In addition to the arguments solely in benefit of attention to victims, this is also justified in terms of economic efficiency, as a strategy to reduce the costs caused by domestic violence.

In second place, the methodology applied in this study has made possible an increased knowledge about the impact of domestic violence in economic and social terms. The sheer magnitude of the costs obtained through the different itineraries, which are based on the extent of the effects, point to possible new policy measures in the combat against domestic violence that can increase efficacy. There are at least two main messages to reflect upon: 1) the extension of the actual scope of policies and 2) the diversification of measures. The actual scope should include hidden victims, who are the great majority. It is not an easy task, but it is necessary to create specific measures to those women who have not taken legal actions nor have broken their relation with the abuser. With regard to the diversification of policies, the results point to the need of addressing the effects on the labour market, which is an aspect that is now being addressed in Spain by the new law, but which needs further attention and can be inspired by good examples in other countries, and is also now intensifying the measures in the areas of health (mainly through the introduction of a basic protocol fro the whole of Spain) and those aimed at the children of victims, especially in education.

Finally, the choice of policies should involve the most recent efforts to quantify the "intangible" costs of the phenomenon, which are much higher than the direct costs. If ignored, the phenomenon is undervalued and there is a risk to opt for certain policies based on partial information.