

# ▶ Fighting Violence against Women in Latin America



**Step by step against violence.**

**A participatory “path” to prevent gender-based violence**

## ▶ Background

For decades, intimate partner violence against women has been considered a private matter which had to be resolved within the family. Today, however, the issue is being judged differently, namely as a problem which requires public intervention. This change of perception is based on recognizing gender-based violence for what it is: a violation of human rights that also impedes a country’s social and economic development.

Consequently, politics and society have responded. To prevent and punish gender-based violence different policy approaches have been developed and campaigns have been launched – along with programs to assist victims.

Evidence suggests that breaking the vicious cycle of gender-based violence requires effective prevention programs starting at an early age. Infants are still in the process of incorporating social and cultural patterns and understanding gender norms, such as behavior typically associated with each gender and an awareness of an alleged superiority of everything “Masculine”. Because these beliefs are not yet fully internalized, they are accordingly more malleable.

rapidly. A British study from 2009 shows that 21 % have experienced violence by their boyfriends by the age of 13. Among 16-year-olds, this number rises up to 26 %.

Other studies have shown that violent experiences during childhood can lead to the internalization of violence as an accepted behavior for conflict resolution. Children from violent homes tend to repeat the violent behavior they have experienced, both within and outside the family.

In the United States, men who have witnessed violence at home are three times more likely to become abusers themselves – and men who come from extremely violent households are one thousand times more likely!

Similarly, it is also more likely that girls who have witnessed the abuse of their mothers accept violence directed at themselves as a “normal” behavior within couples. A study from the Basque Country indicated that, out of 3,000 women who were victims of violence at an adult age, one out of six had experienced domestic violence during her childhood.

## ▶ The Product

In response to the stark reality described above, the regional program ComVoMujer has developed a participatory program (or participatory “path”) “Step by step against violence”. This project not only promotes the rejection of gender-based violence, but also encourages reflecting on everyday discrimination and violent behavior between boys and girls and men and women.

The “path” approaches the subject of gender-based violence and its severe consequences gradually and in an easily understandable way.

Moreover, the age at which women first experience violence is decreasing





The procedure is as follows: The children form groups and go to five stations. At each of these they are exposed to a series of stimuli which encourage them to take part in adventurous, flexible, playful and creative activities on the topic. This means that at each station, the participants are not only being motivated to participate, but also become encouraged to act as protagonists themselves.

The children thus gain critical insights on the stereotypes, myths and popular “Macho” beliefs in which gender-based violence is rooted. Moreover, they also observe the damage violence causes to all affected persons. The activity also aims to increase the children’s self-esteem as a preventive strategy and to teach them self-protection strategies to deal with violence.

The probability that there are children in the group who already have experienced violence at home is high, especially in regions with significant rates of violence. While mothers usually prefer to remain silent, children normally feel the need to talk about their experiences. They often want to help but do not know how, and are afraid of the consequences. The participatory path shows them potential options to act which offer help directly, not to mention the (desired) long-term effects that focus on the children’s consciousness and their future behavior.

In Peru the participatory program has been tested during a pilot phase in collaboration with the regional governments of Ica and Apurimac (with the participation of Caritas). These counterparts

were responsible for the coordination, tendering and selection of appropriate schools. The selected schools were: I.E. Sagrado Corazón de Jesús 54006 in Abancay and I.E. Ezequiel Sanchez Guerrero – 23008 in Ica.

## ► Potential

One of the biggest advantages of the participatory path is its capacity. It is designed for large groups of participants and only needs to be adapted to the specific socio-cultural context. In fact, 80 to 100 children can be reached within a single day. Moreover, it is based on understandable and simple concepts and requires no special material. All this makes the circuit an easily transferable, highly recommendable and sustainable measure.

A manual containing all the necessary information has been developed to implement the participatory path. In addition, 60 special instructors were trained to implement the program at schools with a total of 278 children aged six to nine.

As soon as it was announced, the participatory path elicited strong interest because of its innovative nature and the high chances of its effectiveness. In fact, even before the project’s validation phase was over, counterparts in Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay, along with some firms had already expressed interest in implementing the measure.



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