

ARTICLE

Feminist reflections on social work intervention with women experiencing violence in Bogota

Reflexiones feministas sobre la intervención del trabajo social con mujeres que viven violencia en Bogotá

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Abstract

Social work intervention with women who have experienced gender violence is relatively recent. In Colombia, as well as in other Latin American countries, the issue has become visible thanks to citizen mobilizations that, on the one hand, repel and unmask patriarchy, and on the other, place on the public agenda the development of social policies aimed at addressing the problem. Even though the issue is visible, its analysis and approach must be carried out from a feminis-

Keywords:
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feminism

perspective that highlights the effects of patriarchy on feminized bodies, which continues to be an urgent issue in different social spheres as the figures of violence have not been reduced. On the other hand, the institutions do not have sufficient clarity regarding the requirements of this type of attention, given the limits imposed in each case. Based on the results of a qualitative study with a narrative approach, in which social workers who work with victims of gender-based violence in state institutions in Bogotá participated, this article offers a reflection from a feminist perspective on the complexities of this phenomenon and the characteristics of its intervention, as well as the challenges posed by its attention in this professional field. Part of the challenges we identify in this reflective process is that, as social work professionals, we have a determining political role in the transformation of the patriarchal codes of daily exchange, with which we seek to question machismo with the active participation of women, in order to advance in the conquest of spaces, dynamics and vindication of their rights.

Resumen

La intervención del trabajo social con mujeres que han vivido violencia de género en el continente es relativamente reciente. En Colombia, así como en otros países latinoamericanos, el tema se ha visibilizado gracias a las movilizaciones ciudadanas que, por un lado, repelen y desenmascaran el patriarcado, y por el otro, posicionan en la agenda pública el desarrollo de políticas sociales llamadas a atender el problema. Aun siendo el tema visible, se requiere que su análisis y abordaje se realice desde una perspectiva feminista que ponga en evidencia los efectos del patriarcado en los cuerpos feminizados, lo cual sigue siendo un tema urgente en las diferentes esferas sociales en la medida que no se logran disminuir las cifras de violencia. Por otro lado, las instituciones tampoco tienen suficiente claridad respecto a los requerimientos de este tipo de atención, dados los límites que se imponen en cada caso. A partir de los resultados de un estudio cualitativo con enfoque narrativo, en el que participaron trabajadoras sociales que atienden víctimas de violencia de género en instituciones del Estado en Bogotá, este artículo ofrece una reflexión desde una perspectiva feminista acerca de las complejidades de este fenómeno y las características de su intervención, así como de los desafíos que plantea su atención en este campo profesional. Parte de los desafíos que identificamos en este proceso reflexivo es que, como profesionales del trabajo social, tenemos un papel político determinante en la transformación de los códigos patriarcales de intercambio cotidiano, con lo cual se busca el cuestionamiento del machismo con la activa participación de las mujeres, para así avanzar en la conquista de espacios, dinámicas y reivindicación de sus derechos.

Palabras Clave:

Violencia contra las mujeres; intervención social; trabajo social; patriarcado; feminismo



Introduction

Social work is a profession and discipline dedicated to the defense of human rights, social justice, the improvement of living conditions, the search for equity, among others (International Federation of Social Workers, IFSW, 2014); in this framework, the field of attention to violence against women constitutes a scenario in which all these professional purposes are required and put into play. Considering that violence against women in Colombia has worsened in recent years (Pinzón, 2021), in this article we present some reflections arising from a qualitative study with a narrative approach that recovers experiences of professional intervention in the field of violence against women. Based on the analysis of the narratives of four professionals working in two public institutions in the city of Bogotá, we offer a reflection from a feminist perspective that considers as a starting point the trajectory of the authors in research and interventions on the subject, and identifies key elements for a problematization of the issue based on the testimonies of the participants in the study.

The article begins with a theoretical discussion of gender-based violence, highlighting the power relations inherent to the patriarchal and heteronormative order that underlie the phenomenon of violence against women. It is followed by a contextualization of violence against women as a current social problem as a focus of professional intervention, revealing the barriers and critical knots that arise in its approach. The study, its purposes and methodology are presented, followed by the main findings, where it is identified how social workers develop their interventions, recognizing key elements that allow for posing professional challenges from a feminist perspective. From these reflections, we discuss the lessons learned from the professional intervention, the contributions achieved, but also the difficulties we face as a profession in this field.

Gender violence and patriarchy

Gender violence is a relatively recent term in Colombia. Its use, from the legal protection of relationships, connotes the damage or affectations inflicted on women or bodies that become feminized, due to their condition as women or for subverting the hetero-norm as an organizing principle of social relations. In 2008, Law 1257 used the term “violence against women” and in 2012 the National Public Policy Guidelines on Gender Equity for Women incorporated the term “Gender-based violence” (High Presidential Counselor’s Office for Women’s Equity, 2012). It is important to clarify that in



the first case, the defense of a subject that, by biological sign, we identify with the female sex is assumed: feminine/woman/vagina. In the second case, we appeal to gender as a social construction of sex in some analyses (Delgado 2017), but also to the structure (héteronorma) that is a condition of possibility for the ordering and construction of gender identities, in which case - for example - a trans woman or a woman with a penis can be violated for not adhering to the héteronorma. Therefore, when we talk about gender, we are not necessarily talking about women, but about the framework or structure that organizes and reproduces matter in a gendered way. On one side or the other, beyond the essentialization of the female subject to which some theoretical perspectives adhere, gender violence alludes to the defense and reproduction of a hetero-normative regime that constitutes that which becomes feminized as banal and minor and that which becomes masculinized as superior and a guarantor of order. In other words, the concept of gender appears in the social and legal literature to account for the subordination of women or the feminine in a hetero-normative regime.

The understanding of the social that underlies this order understands that the world is made up of men and women who relate to each other unequally. The heterosexual matrix in which these relationships are inscribed is deeply hierarchical and violent to such an extent that it is possible to assault or kill someone for the mere fact of being a woman or for not behaving as the gender norm indicates. This understanding of the social has been investigated by many, but problematized - at least in gender terms - by few (Barbieri, 2004; Pateman, 1988). The discomfort and indignation that comes with feeling and knowing oneself to be a subsidiary of the masculine perse in a hetero-normed world and a second-class citizen in a time frame that salutes the discourse of rights, human freedoms and gender equity proposed by the modern state, has been a condition of possibility for some authors to deal with this problem.

Different theoretical perspectives attempt to explain gender violence in context - not only spatially but also temporally. We found at least three problematizing perspectives of the discussion that have focused on the Latin American context. One perspective argues that gender domination is a universal problem, thus enabling the possibility of transmitting to all women, including Latinas, racialized and indigenous women, the discourse of the rights of the modern white and liberal world. Another argues that there was no gender oppression in the pre-colonial period (Lugones, 2007) because gender oppression only comes with the race/gender system installed in the modern colonial world system. And a third explanation argues, as Segato (2016) says, that there were already in the precolonial period gender nomenclatures that are going to be dangerously modified with modernity.



Documentary, historical and ethnographic data from the tribal world, show the existence of recognizable structures of difference, similarities to what we call gender relations in modernity.

(Segato, 2016, p. 112)

But why is this discussion important? We are slowly approaching the use of a concept that has been of vital importance for the understanding of social relations from a critical perspective. In other words, a concept that serves to identify, enunciate and problematize gender violence, the concept of patriarchy². In principle, it should be noted that the emergence of this concept is one of the great contributions that feminism has made to critical theory. In political terms, adhering to this concept is problematic, since at its heart is the anthologized relationship of male supremacy over women. However, its analysis allows us to walk through a history that makes it possible to see the cracks through which it passes and the orders it proposes. Also, the exits or political alternatives that we can operate to dismantle it.

Let us return to the three perspectives. The first, which enunciates patriarchy as a universal problem and without major differences throughout the planet; the second, which suggests that gender oppression arrives with the conquest of the Americas; and the third, which announces that in the pre-colonial period there were gender nomenclatures that are dangerously modified with modernity. We will develop the third perspective precisely because we are interested in seeing the problematization in more detail in the modern precolonial/colonial framework, perhaps in order to understand what these dangerous modifications are that gender nomenclatures undergo. Segato speaks of a patriarchy that in the pre-colonial period can be called “low-intensity patriarchy”, and in the modern period, “high-intensity patriarchy”.

What happens then in that meeting of patriarchies, in the low and high intensity? Segato (2016) suggests that although in the village world there were hierarchical relations between men and women based on the differential status between them, the domestic sphere was exposed, that is, it was part of the community space. This will no longer be the case when the colonial/modernity project is articulated. There the domestic sphere will be deprived given the reconfiguration of social relations, that is the superinflation of the leading role of men in the organization of the community by acting as intermediaries now in front of the power of white administrators. This relegates women, together with domesticity, to the private sphere, annulling their participation in the community. As a result of all this, the family form, anchored to the heterosexual matrix that already

²The concept of patriarchy refers to the system that gives authority and predominance to men over women. It has been a controversial concept due to its general and totalizing nature.

existed in the pre-colonial period, is enclosed in privacy, so that violence against women will not be subject to surveillance by the community. A private conjugality allows and favors impunity for violence. According to Segato:

... the discourse of colonial/modernity, despite showing itself as egalitarian, hides within it an abysmal hierarchical hiatus, due to what we could here tentatively call progressive totalization of the public sphere or totalitarianism of the public sphere (...). (2016, p. 114)

Thus, the social organization that is being constituted and that privileges the public sphere over the private sphere is a problem. Not only because women have been marginalized from the community scenario, but also because some forms of organization, such as the family, will henceforth empower, reproduce and sustain gender violence. Some analyses adhere to this thesis, arguing that violence is consubstantial to the 'family' form, partly because its structure is hierarchical and unequal (Gil, 2009). We also find analyses that, reviewing domestic violence, warn how the 'modern family' form can become a scene of torture (Copelon, 1997), precisely because it is kept hidden and considered a personal, private and domestic matter. The need to maintain a patriarchal order, for some the natural order of things, leads to the reproduction of practices of violence within the family that are analogous to those of official torture, that is, the intentional infliction of physical or psychological pain for specific purposes (sustaining hierarchies), with some form of active or passive official participation. In the case of the family, given its legal protection to such a degree that it is considered the nucleus of society, it is complex to advocate its de-romanticization. The family is a sacred entity that must prevail over any other form of social organization. And although it must be admitted that the figure of "intra-family violence" is used to suggest the regulatory nature of the violent relations that occur within the family, the fact that this category is privileged to the detriment of gender violence - of course in cases in which what becomes feminine is violated - hides and prevents us from seeing what is in itself a condition of possibility for the exercise of violence: the regime that authorizes inequality between the genders.

The hierarchical order on which the 'family' form is built and reproduced is in fact patriarchal. In Colombia, we observe that throughout the 19th century, the enunciations about the family are relatively few in contrast to the enunciations referring to the pater familias. It is the father, the man or the pater familias who has rights, ownership and power over his subjects, including the wife. History has changed, it is true. Throughout

the twentieth and twenty-first century we have witnessed the bet of making family under the seal of love, but unfortunately leaving its structure untouched, that is, the reproduction of the family form with the respective socialization of gender role patterns and their reigning hierarchies. This approach may be objected, but a society that understands that domestic care work is a women's issue, as shown by the multipurpose survey conducted in Bogota in 2014³, does not speak in the long run of great transformations.

At this point we have to warn that within the same processes of social organization that we have celebrated and legally protected, we knot and second gender violence⁴. This criticism of the family form is important, but it is not the only scenario for the reproduction of gender violence. If we adopt patriarchy as an explanatory category of gender violence, taking into account the framework of power relations that has been constituted in Latin American societies, it is because it allows us to question experiences that, like the family, have contributed to the maintenance and reproduction of hierarchies between the feminine and the masculine. It is useful to review what other structures or institutions favor gender violence.

Violence against women in Colombia and its intervention as a problematic issue

Violence against women, as we have pointed out in the previous section, operates as a power device of male domination in a patriarchal order (Muñoz, 2019). According to Law 1257 of Colombia, violence against women is defined as any action or omission that causes death, harm or physical, sexual, psychological, economic or patrimonial suffering to a person because of her condition as a woman, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or deprivation of liberty whether this occurs in public or private settings (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, 2008); according to Muñoz (2018), violence against women is generally held by men and the State through legislation, policies and interventions. Colombia has faced this phenomenon directly since 2008, in which the State committed to raise awareness, prevent and punish forms of violence and discrimination against women, materializing its adherence to the Convention of Belém Do Pará given in 1994 (National Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Despite the enactment of various laws to address the issue, violence against women in Colombia continues to be a matter of priority given its aggravation in recent years,

³ 80% of women carry out unpaid care work in contrast to 52% of men. Results of the 2014 Multipurpose Survey, Secretaría Distrital de Planeación.

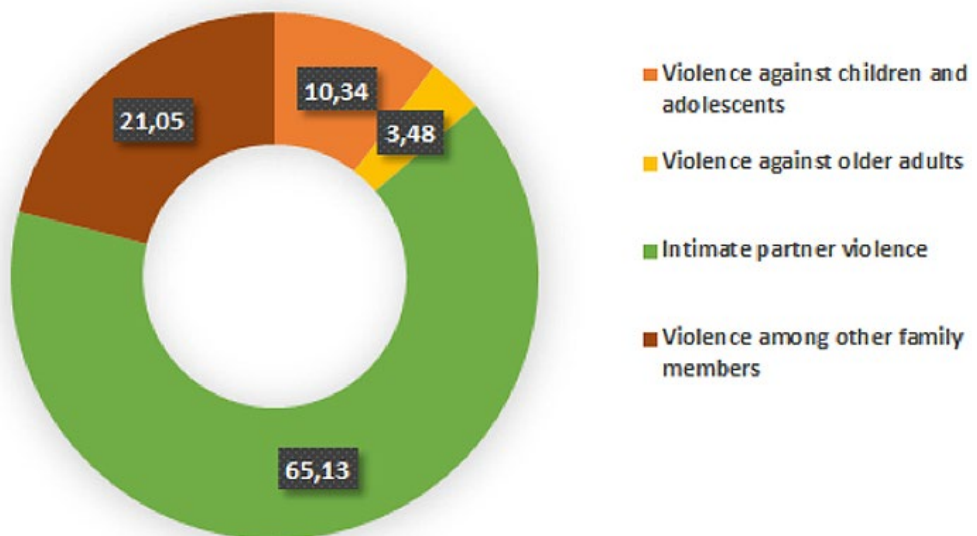
⁴ According to Segato "the first lesson of power and subordination is the familiar theater of gender relations, but, as a structure, the relationship between its positions is replicated ad infinitum, and is revisited and rehearsed in the most diverse scenes in which a differential of power and value are present" (2016, p. 92).



especially in the last year, in which the pandemic caused by COVID 19 forced confinement and thus forced women to stay with their aggressors, which further exacerbated the conditions of violence in the country. In 2020, according to Sisma Mujer, more than 90% of reports of domestic violence were made by women. It also warns of figures between 79% and 90%, depending on the source determined, of cases of sexual violence against women in the context of armed conflict.

In general terms, violence against women in Colombia is systematically presented in figures that reveal the lack of institutional efficiency. According to the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INMLCF) between January and July 2021 there were 20,859 women injured by domestic violence compared to 5,961 men. Of these, 15,239 are immersed in contexts of intimate partner violence, thus being the scenario with the highest number of complaints reported in this period, as shown in Graph 1:

Graph 1: Percentage of domestic violence by context (Colombia, January-July 2021)



Source: Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses-INMLCF/ Grupo Centro de Referencia Nacional sobre Violencia-GCRNV (2021).

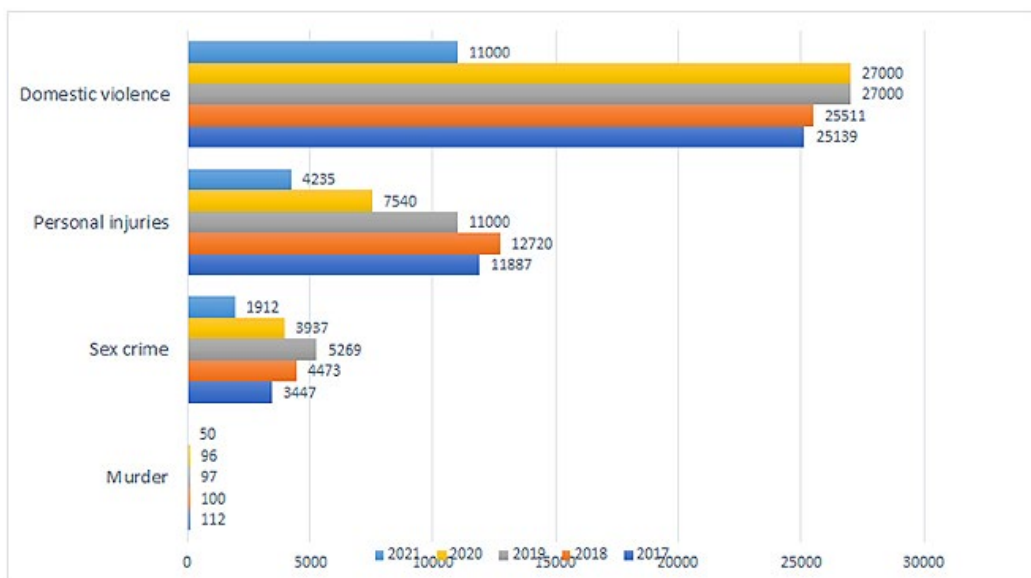
According to the Statistical, Criminal, Contraventional and Operational Information System of the National Police in Colombia (2021), 12,055 cases of sexual violence against women were registered between January and July 31, 2021. From the statistics reported by the Observatorio Femicidios en Colombia coordinated by the Red Feminista Antimilitarista (2021), so far this year up to June there have been 320 femicides, a situation that has worsened in recent months.

When analyzing the situation in Bogota, the above is ratified, despite the fact that it is the territory with the greatest institutional offer of attention to cases of violence against women. The phenomenon is still present, even with the efforts of institutions to address the issue, including the District Secretariat for Women (SDM)⁵, which has presented worrying data corresponding to the first year of the pandemic, among which is that quarantines were not a protective factor for the murder of women, that domestic violence could increase with confinement and not be reported, although it is also suggested that for sexual crimes, isolation did seem to be a protective measure.

This is shown in the following image, which reflects figures for different types of violence and their visibility in terms of complaints filed. (See Graph 2).

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Graph 1: Percentage of domestic violence by context (Colombia, January-July 2021)



Source: Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses-INMLCF/ Grupo Centro de Referencia Nacional sobre Violencia-GCRNV (2021).

⁵ The SDM is responsible for leading, guiding and coordinating the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Public Policy on Women and Gender Equity, as well as the mainstreaming of women's rights, gender and differential approaches in plans, programs, projects and district public policies, for the protection, guarantee and realization of the human rights of women in the differences and diversities that constitute them, promoting their autonomy and the full exercise of their citizenship in the Capital District.

One of the most common phenomena as a result of violence against women in the world are femicides, and Bogota is no exception since between 2019 and 2020 192 murders of women were committed, with 15 of those committed in 2019 classed as femicide (Secretaría de la Mujer, 2021).

Professional intervention with a gender perspective for the attention to violence against women is fundamental (Organization of American States, OAS, 2020), but some shortcomings can be identified that need to be highlighted, such as the lack of institutional response based on the regulations and their barriers, and the lack of training and awareness on the part of professionals who can respond to the requests and requirements that the victims have when attending the government entities that are supposed to have the legal tools for the attention and response to the violence that they seek to denounce and therefore resolve. Among the institutions that can be identified for the attention to violence against women are: the Attorney General's Office, the Ombudsman's Office, the District Secretariat of Social Integration, the Secretariat of Health, the General Secretariat of the Mayor's Office of Bogotá, the District Secretariat of Security, Coexistence and Justice, the District Secretariat of Women and the National Police (See Table No. 1).



Table N° 1. Institutions that deal with the phenomenon of violence against women

Institutions	Units	Service
Attorney General's Office	Center for integral criminal attention to victims, pre-procedural attention units, etc.	Receipt of reports of acts of violence
	Immediate reaction units	Receipt of reports of acts of violence
	Center for Comprehensive Care for Victims of Sexual Violence (Caivas)	Reception of reports of crimes of sexual violence.
Ombudsman's Office	Gender Program of the National Public Defender's Office National System	Orientation Legal Advice Legal technical assistance
District Secretariat of Social Integration	Family Police Stations	Attention to Domestic Violence Attention to sexual crimes in the family environment Ordering of life protection measures
Secretariat of Health	Bogotá emergency hotline 123	Coordinates emergency situations and emergencies of the various entities included in the system for the prevention, attention and dispatch of physical resources.
General Secretariat of the Mayor's Office of Bogota	Local Centers for Attention to Victims (CLAV)	Guidance, assistance and counseling based on the principles of coordination and concurrence to victims within the framework of the armed conflict.
District Secretariat of Security, Coexistence and Justice	Houses of Justice	Psychological counseling and legal advice
District Secretariat for Women	Houses of Equality	Psycho-social counseling and socio-legal advice
	House of All	Psycho-social and psycho-legal counseling for people who engage in paid sexual activities.
	Shelter Houses	Protection of the right to life Psycho-social and psycho-legal care. Housing, food, clothing and transportation for women and their children facing cycles of violence.
	Purple Line	Counseling and psychosocial care
	Line 155	Information on access to your legal, psychological and medical rights at the national level.
National Police	Immediate Attention Centers (CAI inmediato)	Reception of information on cases of violence

Source: Own elaboration with information from the *Ruta única de atención para mujeres víctimas de violencias y en riesgo de feminicidio* (2017).

It is observed that the institutional offer in Bogotá is significant and most of the services provided are focused on reporting, information and psychosocial and socio-legal counseling. This as an initial process of attention is not empty. The problem arises when it comes to eradication and prevention processes of violence. This situation, according to what one of the authors of this article has identified in her intervention experience, occurs when women require effective responses to their violent experiences but do not meet the institutional requirements for the situation to be attended to, such as that the violence has been perpetrated by a permanent partner (cohabitation), or that the woman has gone through the complete route⁶. This impedes the resolution of the difficulties presented by the women, due to the lack of knowledge or experience in the approach of the professionals to the responses required by the concerns expressed by the women.

Despite the accumulation of legal norms that support the care and prevention of violence against women, at the time of their application, obstacles are identified that have to do with institutional barriers, professional actions based on patriarchal reproduction, limits in the protocols of care and questioning among peers that prioritize the time of care over the accompaniment that can be provided to women. In this regard, Segovia (2016) states that in the consideration of the difficulties of gender mainstreaming in Latin America, there are, among others, institutional barriers, which are understood as those related to the lack of articulation with other entities and actors for the implementation of the equality mandate, the insufficiency of accountability mechanisms, and evaluations that guarantee the commitments related to gender equality.

Part of the professional actions has to do with the bets on the family: there is evidence of biases that romanticize it and propose it as the only possible scenario for the development of human beings, clarifying that such bias is not exclusive to social work. One of the barriers identified corresponds to the imposition of the family ideal, which in the context of violence against women fractures their dignity, reflected in the actions of the institutional apparatus, in which the rights of children and adolescents are privileged, motivated by the union of the nuclear family; even when this implies putting women at risk in contexts of violence, reaffirming their role as women mothers sacrificed for the “well-being” of their children, although, paradoxically, the family, as a scenario of violence against women, considerably affects children (Dominelli, 2019).

On the other hand, institutional barriers are reflected in the border lines of each entity that deal with violence against women following the care route (Secretaría de la Mujer,

⁶ In the experience of one of the authors, a case of femicide risk was identified in which a referral for high-risk care could not be made because of two fundamental issues: first, the aggressor was the boyfriend and they did not live together; and second, the corresponding complaint had to be filed with the prosecutor's office and a series of requirements had to be fulfilled.

2017). This situation means that in some cases women must go to different scenarios and wait for attention, follow-ups and referrals from one institution to another without having a timely response that guarantees the redress of the specific situation. In this order, the protocols of attention of the institutions become a barrier to justice for women, discouraging them from continuing with the complaint process, which culminates in institutional distrust (Birgin and Gherardi, 2012). This situation has been identified by the authors in the framework of research and implementation of standards and protocols for the care of women who report gender-based violence, but they are not taken into account because it is assumed that the facts presented (undervaluation of functions, leering, insinuations, among others) are not behaviors that constitute violence, and such considerations occur precisely because of the normalization of such behaviors in the framework of patriarchy or the lack of knowledge to address such situations from a gender perspective; on the other hand, because there is inequity in access to justice, which has required some governments to issue documents that favor the inclusion of the gender perspective as a guarantee of access and administration of justice in the countries (Birgin and Gherardi, 2012).

Another problematic issue is the professional interventions where social workers lack training with a gender perspective. They fail to identify key elements in these types of cases of care for women, especially if they are experiencing violence, and may end up reinforcing patriarchal values in the care, thus generating actions with damage that emotionally affect women causing feelings of guilt or undervaluation about the violence they have received. Faced with this, Chacón (2019) states that very few social work professionals work with a gender perspective, and those who approach it do so from a rights approach, which has a more “familiarist” orientation in training. Then, the gender perspective is articulated in the professional practice as these tools are required.

Considering these elements of the current context in which interventions aimed at addressing situations of violence against women in the city of Bogota are developed, questions emerged regarding the perspectives that social work professionals have built around the approach to this problem and their reflections on the successes, difficulties and challenges of their professional intervention, in a scenario of worsening violence resulting from the prevailing patriarchal order that is exacerbated in times of pandemic. With the realization of this study we proposed to problematize the professional intervention in this field and to contribute a critical look at the challenges from a feminist perspective.



Methodology

The study was based on a qualitative methodology with a narrative approach. According to Puyana (2012), narratives refer to accounts of experiences of social interactions, giving sense and meaning to the way in which the so-called 'reality' is lived and interpreted by the subjects who narrate. To learn about the experiences and reflections that arise in professional intervention in the field of violence against women, four professionals from two emblematic public institutions working in this field were selected. All the participants are social workers, residents of the city of Bogota. The age range of the participants is between 28 - 30 years, with more than 2 years of experience in working with women. Three of them have postgraduate training in studies related to the gender perspective, and the other has extensive professional experience in the field. The four participants work with cases of violence against women, two of them work in the technical and university educational field and the other two participants work in an institution whose mission is to guarantee women's rights.

Through stories, the professionals narrated their experiences about the ways of approaching the processes of attention to cases of violence against women, which shows a reflection of situated practices, insofar as they are social, historical, located in a specific space and time with specific conditions of the groups with whom they work (Ortiz, 2020). In order to construct the narratives, in-depth interviews were conducted guided by key questions that allowed the professionals to reflect on their intervention with women who experience violence from their partners. The chosen approach is based on the recovery of intervention experiences through the reflexivity of the professionals (Puyana, 2012). For their participation, the professionals signed an informed consent form.

Due to the confinement and physical distancing measures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via the Microsoft Teams platform and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Thus, they became transcripts for the analysis process, which was developed from the guidelines proposed by Bolívar (2020), who states that texts and contexts are interdependent in intertextual networks that are moved by social actors. In this case, we account for a problem given in specific contextual frameworks that, when reflected upon by professionals who deal with the phenomenon, give meaning and significance to their professional practice with a gender perspective. In the analysis of the testimonies of the interviewees, what they interpreted as successes of the intervention, difficulties of the process and challenges in this field of professional action were recognized.



Strategies for professional intervention in institutions that deal with violence against women

Gender violence as a field of integral professional intervention raises contributions that focus on the prevention, reduction and eradication of aggressions that affect women. The psychosocial teams that attend to women immersed in these contexts of violence are made up of disciplines such as psychology, law, medicine, nursing, nutrition and social work.

In a literature review on the contribution of social work to the understanding of this social phenomenon, advances in the problematization of cycles of violence, theoretical developments of the different typologies, analysis of resistance and coping strategies of women in violent contexts, family studies on the analysis of inequality in the roles and distribution of care are generally identified (Romero, 2016). It is precisely in these fields of action that the legal, health, educational and public institutions whose purposes are focused on the attention to violence are identified.

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Although there is a common orientation in the two fields in which the interviewees work -educational institution and center for guaranteeing women's rights-, the actions of the professionals differ when considering the institutional purposes: while in the educational field the accompaniment of students is promoted by attending to the difficulties that affect them in the permanence of the academic program (difficulties, such as, for example, being affected by gender violence); in the public field the guarantee of women's rights and their translation in plans, programs and projects specialized in that field are projected. The above has some difficulties that depend, on the one hand, on the women themselves who request support, who come from diverse socio-cultural conditions and therefore give different meanings to this type of attention; and on the other hand, on the professional or institutional limitations.

In the first case, the professionals working in the educational field state that topics such as gender violence are considered taboo, making open dialogue on situations of violence difficult or favoring women's evasion in the follow-up. It is precisely because violence against women has been associated as a problem of the private sphere that reporting it means breaking into privacy, as it has been culturally constructed: "dirty linen is washed at home". This expression reproduces the silencing of women, and at the same time blames them by making it visible in external scenarios. However, in the sphere of public institutions whose purpose is to defend women's rights, there is a hi-



gher rate of women seeking support; however, this does not exempt them from being silenced and blames them for expressing violence in other scenarios, as identified in the following account of a professional:

She (woman assisted) told me that she felt ashamed to be there (public institution). She had suffered from violence all her life, and if it had not been for the economic factor, she probably would never have gone, since she considered it shameful to see people telling their problems to the institutions. (Interview 2, 2021)

However, in this same field, cases were identified of women who questioned themselves for not having asked for help in time, which reveals a connotation of personal reflexivity that unravels this concealment in the search for support and change in their situation.

In reference to the professional and institutional difficulties, it is identified that in the care of women, the intervention has an emphasis on orientation. Through it, the women's situation is accompanied and monitored, which is seen as a limitation to the possibilities of intervention of social workers. In general, the professionals focus their intervention on the identification of the different forms of violence that may affect women in relation to physical, psychological, sexual, patrimonial and economic aggressions, among others. In this order, the aim is to identify the level of risk in which women find themselves, since in some cases the aggressor shares daily spaces occupying the position of partner, father, brother, boss, co-worker, among others, putting at risk the guarantee of women's rights. As mentioned in the section on gender violence and patriarchy, it should be remembered that the first lessons of power and subordination take place in the family setting and are extended to other scenarios such as school, religious and work settings.

Institutional limitations are related to the disarticulation between officials, who from the interpretation of the norms sometimes fail to agree to provide answers according to the needs of women who require support; or the same lack of inter-institutional coordination, which is due to the non-existence of standardized databases or clear protocols regarding care, and even the discontinuity of the processes of hiring professionals, which contributes to the knowledge and trajectories in the issues and cases being lost and the need to start over again. In addition, there are parameters of attention that restrict time and resources, which affects the possibilities of approaching cases.



Despite the above, there have been significant successes in the positioning and value implied by the intervention in the accompaniment of women, the strategies employed by the professionals as a result of the specificity of the discipline⁷, such as the search for the defense of human rights, the recognition of women with the capacity of agency that overcome the manifestations of violence, the promotion of the change of stereotypes that favor a life free of violence and the mobilization of women's resources towards the transformation of the situation.

In this sense, the diagnosis becomes interesting in the identification of sensitive readings that problematize the object of intervention, since the codification of the analysis of the risk factors to which women are exposed is achieved. This issue is favorable in recognizing that in some cases social workers provide the first attention, allowing them to contribute to the orientation and accompaniment of other disciplines such as psychology, law and health. Likewise, this accompaniment from social work promotes the identification of the violence that women have experienced in their daily contexts, favoring the recognition of the single care route for women victims of violence and at risk of femicide (Secretaría de la Mujer Distrital, 2017), thus contributing to the prevention of the phenomenon.

When thinking about the intervention strategies implemented by the professionals, both individual and group actions are recognized, the latter are understood from the interdisciplinary articulation in the psychosocial teams. Individual practices are subordinated to the approach that the professionals give to the intervention, which are related to the understanding of the expressions and origins of gender violence; in other words, the recognition of the issues or causes that are at the root of gender-based violence, the place that women occupy in power relations within the manifestations of violence, the conditions that limit women from leaving violent spaces, among other questions that allow us to put into tension gender stereotypes that re-victimize women, judging their narratives. The naturalization of gender violence, it must be said, also affects professionals. The sacralization of the family and of the rights of children and adolescents has done its part by upholding the patriarchal family as the nucleus and reducing the capacity for agency in children and women.

These understandings in the professional area have an impact on the intervention model, based on the recognition of gender violence as a social and cultural problem that is subordinated to an order that hierarchizes and legitimizes the power of the patriarch over the subordinate position of women. This recognition of power relations makes it

⁷ The Code of Ethics of Colombian social workers raises a series of values, principles and purposes that determine the professional intervention, which is relevant at the time of the implementation of care strategies with populations. (National Council of Social Work, 2019)

possible to problematize women's aggressions, in addition to identifying that culturally violent control over their bodies is approved, thus naturalizing their affectations, which occur mostly in the scenario of couple relationships (Tepichin, 2020).

Individual and subjective strategies on care are identified in the narratives of some professionals, as they are not translated into guidelines for the comprehensive interventions of the psychosocial teams of the affected population. As well as the naturalization of some gender violence reproduced by the professionals, it is important to point out that the discussion of the nuclear family as a reproducer of patriarchy has been a success, even when this implies opposing the protectionist discourse of the family promulgated by the judicial apparatus (Barraza, Benjumea and Chaparro, 2020). Defamiliarizing their analysis has contributed to the professionals developing particular strategies that show their sensitivity and empathy with the gender issue, as identified in the following account:

We establish a space for dialogue to talk about what happened and evaluate strategies that will somehow alleviate the tension. In terms of emotional health and mental health, it will depend a lot on the situation, but I speak in my case; I think my colleagues will do the same, because fortunately, the professionals we are working with are very sensitive to the gender issue. (Interview 1, 2021)

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In this particular case, sensitization with a gender perspective becomes an intervention referent based on the professional's criteria. This can be a controversial issue because it is subject to the criteria of those who are or are not sensitized to the issue, thus circumventing the effective commitment of the professionals to guarantee appropriate and comprehensive care for women. If the orientation lacks a gender focus, it may possibly affirm gender stereotypes, generating the revictimization of the affected population.

Another of the strategies used by professionals is active listening⁸, whereby the conversation becomes a space for exchange between the experiences of the protagonists of the stories and the professional who attends to their situation. This active listening is characterized by empathy reflected in the possibility of encountering the situation of those affected; the identification of their emotional affectations and the factors that influence their permanence in violent contexts. From there, the professionals assess the scope of the response according to the care route, and the potential and resources that can be strengthened to overcome the barriers that the women are experiencing. In the words of a professional interviewed: "the case of a woman who arrived crying, conti-

⁸ Following Belziti (2016), the exercise of listening is an intervention strategy in social work in which the professional's own subjectivity comes into play, reflects our experiences and becomes: "a key to rethink issues linked both to the intervention and to the profession itself and its implications" (p. 6).



nued for almost an hour; she needed to talk, she had been keeping silent for 50 years”. (Interview 3, 2021)

In that order, women’s reflexivity about their own situation is a permanent strategy used by some of the professionals; precisely the recognition of women’s meanings and meanings about their experiences allows them to value the internalization of self-love and the self-recognition of their capacity for agency in violent contexts. The danger of assuming the term patriarchy as a category of analysis of gender violence was mentioned, precisely because of the tendency it has to anthologize the supremacy of men over women; however, facts such as those observed in relation to the reflexivity of the women who have suffered violence, open the opportunity to think that although patriarchy is a long-lasting structure, it is not immovable.

The group strategies are guided by the interdisciplinary and inter-institutional dialogue of the psychosocial teams, in some cases allowing reflection on their own professional actions, avoiding discourses that replicate machismo, promoting non-sexist language in the orientations, especially when male professionals refer to the population with expressions such as: “my love”, promoting the naturalization of power relations that subordinate women.

In general, the challenges of the profession are focused on the legitimization and positioning that we can achieve from interdisciplinary teams and institutions in general, which can place social work as a fundamental profession-discipline in the care of women immersed in contexts of violence, valuing its contribution in the defense of rights, the approach to cases from a gender and feminist perspective, and training in awareness processes that reinforce an equitable culture for women without any type of discrimination. To the extent that the profession is welcomed and valued as a discipline that contributes to the processes of intervention and research, the contributions to the social sciences in the field of gender violence will be increasingly visible, and therefore, it remains a challenge for the gender perspective to be taken into account in training as a central tool for social interventions.

Conclusions

Thinking about the intervention of social work with women who experience violence implies recognizing the training biases based on patriarchy, inherited from the subjuga-



tion and subordination as a feminized profession. But we also think about the possibilities of overcoming violence against women from the positioning of social work as a discipline that generates knowledge that can contribute to the reduction of such a phenomenon. This makes sense in the legitimization of our profession within psychosocial teams, institutional apparatuses, and with service users, recognizing in social work the possibility of promoting proposals that aim at the transformation of power relations that arise between genders, and to contribute to overcoming subordination underpinning violent relationships.

Although the actions of social work promote the reflexivity of women immersed in contexts of violence, their autonomy prevails in these processes of accompaniment. However, it is important to recognize that we are located in a patriarchal cultural system sponsored by socialization scenarios such as family, school, church, among others, which make it difficult to permanently transform the submission of women, who have historically been located in violent contexts since power relations are the support of the interactions in which women are involved. Therefore, from our ethical-political stance, we seek not only the transformation of patriarchal codes but also the reflexivity of women on their own experiences to enhance their autonomy and agency.

Active and empathic listening is a fundamental strategy in social work as a space for exchange and dialogue of knowledge, in which the field of action is achieved from the recapitulation of women's narratives and the return of questions to themselves; it becomes an opportunity for materialization and work with words to redefine their place in social relations and thus build strategies for the mobilization of actions and resources for the dismantling of sexist practices in their daily lives.

Despite legislative advances and greater institutional operability in addressing gender-based violence, those affected are still afraid and ashamed to talk about the issue, which makes it difficult to make it visible and problematize in everyday scenarios and reinforces the concealment of the manifestations of violence. This requires the social work profession to promote processes of accompaniment for women that focus not only on overcoming the situation of violence itself, but also on the recovery of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-recognition. That is to say, to promote the overcoming of re-victimizing judgments regarding her condition as a woman who has suffered violence.

Finally, the approach to gender violence in social work with a feminist perspective makes sense to the extent that power relations are problematized, denaturalizing the



exercises of violence against women in everyday contexts. In other words, it puts in tension and challenges the reproduction of the patriarchal system in social relations, which has been interposed as a continuum that has historically affected women. This recognition contributes to the defense of women's rights but also contributes to the problematization of this increasingly visible phenomenon.

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