



D38 Women: Invisible Territory of Violence in Colombia

*Olga L. Barragán**, National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, Carrera 28 #8-83 piso 3, Calle 7a #12-61, Bogotá DC, COLOMBIA

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the reality of female victims of violence, specifically of domestic violence and spousal abuse in Colombia. The figures according to the 2010 report published by the Reference and Forensic Information Division of the National Institute of Legal Medicine, are a matter of concern. Two cases of female victims of domestic violence and spousal abuse will be presented.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing figures that prove how violence against women is a serious problem in Colombia. Two cases of female victims of spousal abuse who arrived at the coroner's office will be presented. Attendees will conclude that action is required to address these cases in an integral manner. The problem requires involvement from both criminal justice officials and health care professionals, who must create awareness and educate judicial officials who deal with domestic violence victims.

When there is spousal abuse, aggressions against women are seldom isolated cases. On the contrary, these actions are systematic attacks that escalate over time in terms of frequency and intensity and may cause serious injuries to the victims. The likelihood of the victim's death as a result of these systematic aggressions is high.

The first case involves a young woman who was frequently battered by her partner. According to her account, after her spouse choked her mechanically, she lost consciousness and sphincter control; forensic examinations revealed that she had dysphonia, multiple small petechial hemorrhages, bilateral punctiform retinal lesions in both eyes, and several bite marks, among others. The patient was medically diagnosed unable to work for ten days. The forensic examiner's report

warned the authorities about the victim's high risk of death. In Colombia, cases where the patient is medically diagnosed as unable to work for less than 30 days are considered misdemeanors and must be settled by the parties. However, the importance of this type of report is that it should be covered by domestic violence laws. In theory, domestic violence laws have different connotations from the legal standpoint. When this woman submitted the medical examiner's report to law enforcement, she was informed that the claim could not be taken and that she could not file a complaint against her abuser because, based on the time of medical disability, it should be settled by the parties, despite the offender's repeated death threats against the woman and her child.

Case two involves a young woman whose fragmented body was found inside several garbage bags in a neighborhood in Bogotá. Seventeen fragments were found. The chest fragment became relevant because it had evidence of a tattoo and multiple sharp force wounds. The body was identified a few days later on the basis of the signs that matched those of a mother of two daughters who had been reported missing by her husband. According to the husband's account, the missing woman had left home after a domestic fight. Investigators suspected that the woman was a victim of spousal abuse and domestic violence by her husband, who was jealous because "his" woman was working. The offender dismembered the victim's body after physically attacking her, which caused her death.

Although significant efforts have been made in Colombia to give women a dignified position in society, legal statutes are still unable to prevent violence against women and establish integral intervention programs aimed at breaking the psychological, emotional, and financial chains that keep women tied to their abusers. Therefore, women are highly vulnerable. Their private spaces, i.e., their homes, can become terrifying places for them and for their children.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Violence, Female Victims