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**Social Surveys on Domestic Violence  
against Women in Spain**

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### **The Social and Political Background of the Emergence of Major National Surveys**

The increasing social and political sensitivity regarding gender violence has come about in Spain together with the profound social, political and legal transformation implemented through the political transition towards democracy at the end of the 1970s. This shift is also rooted in increasing international sensitivity on this issue, all as a result of the action of feminist movements. However, it was not until the 1990s that the social rejection of this form of violence became visualized, and it was not until then that domestic violence became an issue of public interest.

Thus, the first statistics on cases of maltreatment of women began to be published by the Home Ministry as of 1983, and a major step forward in social policy was taken in 1984 with the first shelters for battered women (Villavicencio and Sebastián, 1999). In 1986 a task force for investigating maltreatment of women was instituted in the Senate Committee on Human Rights, which issued its corresponding report and recommendations in 1989. The creation of the *Instituto de la Mujer* (Women's Institute) in 1985 must also be cited as an important step forward: over the 1990s, the Institute began to finance research on the scope, characteristics, causes and consequences of gender violence, in addition to articulating demands for a comprehensive policy to tackle the problem. The work led by the *Instituto de la Mujer* gelled in the elaboration, for the first time, of a Comprehensive Plan to combat Domestic Violence in 1997, which was in force from 1998 to 2001. When this plan ended, a second plan running up to 2004 was implemented in 2002. Both of these plans were designed and implemented by the government of the Popular Party. A major landmark in this process came in December 2004 when the Socialist Party got the unanimous approval in the Parliament of the Act for Comprehensive Protection against Gender Violence.

The general objectives expressed by both plans can be summed up as follows:

1. To foster education based on dialogue, respect and tolerance in order to prevent future generations from reproducing patterns of violent behaviour stemming from gender stereotypes, and to raise awareness in society in order to generate an attitude of rejection as well as behaviour that will eradicate this practice.
2. To improve legislation and legal procedures in order to achieve greater efficiency in court cases, thereby bringing about greater protection of victims and heavier penalizations for the behaviour of the aggressors.

3. To complete the map of social resources nationwide in order to provide care for all women who are victims, regardless of where they are from.

4. To foster coordination of the actions carried out by various bodies and social organizations that work to prevent and/or eliminate domestic violence, as well as to assist victims.

The measures developed in the context of this plans can be grouped into four major areas of intervention:

1. Preventive and awareness raising measures. These measures are targeted at the public at large, and also specifically at professionals in the media. A second line of intervention in this area is targeted at specific groups and particularly educational centres (teachers and students) and to those teaching Law Enforcement Forces, and judicial, health and other bodies.

2. Legislative and procedural measures: The introduction of measures that perfect legal coverage in the entire area specific to domestic violence, such as preventive measures to protect potential victims, sanctioning measures against aggressors, procedural measures aimed fundamentally at streamlining court cases, and measures to palliate the effects of violence suffered by victims.

3. Assistance and social intervention measures: Increased resources to respond to the needs of victims, such as facilitating the filing of complaints or court cases, providing of health care, economic, job or psychological assistance.

4. Measures to foster research: The measures in this area are aimed at obtaining complete and reliable data on domestic violence, improving and enriching the statistical information available, and promoting research on the host of aspects concurring in the complex phenomenon of gender violence.

It is in the context of this growing awareness that research has proliferated and the first surveys of a rather limited nature, either owing to the type of measurement instruments used, the target population chosen, or the geographical area covered, have arisen (Medina, 2002). The first major national survey aimed at measuring the scope of the phenomenon and its associated factors is the macro-survey on gender violence (*Macroencuesta sobre violencia de género*) carried out by the *Instituto de la Mujer* in 1999 within the framework of the first comprehensive plan. This survey was replicated in 2002 in the framework of the second comprehensive plan, and a further replication is scheduled for 2005. These replications are conceived as a tool for ascertaining how the phenomenon is developing and the impact of the measures introduced through the successive plans.

In addition to these surveys, in 1999 another survey was also carried out applying Straus' Conflict Tactics Scale II. It included a sample of 2,000 women residing in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants in the framework of a research programme financed by the *Instituto de la Mujer*. However, this study has barely been made use of or disseminated (Medina, 2002). The *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (Centre for Sociological Research) has also examined the attitudes and opinions of the population on domestic maltreatment and violence against women since the beginning of the

1990s, although the impact indicators used were insufficient to ascertain the scope of the phenomenon. The objective of these public opinion polls is to ascertain not so much the impact of the phenomenon as its social image and the scope of its rejection.

We shall focus our attention on the two macro-surveys on domestic violence done by *Instituto de la Mujer*. In 2002 only a replication of the 1999 survey was carried out.

## **Methodology**

The previously mentioned macro-survey was done on a sample of 20,000 women aged 18 or more living in Spain and irrespective of whether they lived with their husbands or partners. The sample distribution is semi-proportional, with a fixed amount of 300 units per Region (*Comunidad Autónoma*) and the remainder proportional to the population. The questionnaire was done through telephone interview (CATI system), and the interviewer was also female, which leads one to assume there will be less inhibition in acknowledging situations of maltreatment and, as a result, a more accurate measurement of the scope of the phenomenon. The greatest drawback of this methodology however, is that it does not record situations where there is no telephone, which is especially the case among the immigrant population.

For measuring what is understood to be domestic violence, the Conflict Tactic Scale, notoriously widely criticised by the feminist movement, was not used. In order to measure the scope of maltreatment against women, those surveyed were asked first of all if they had been subject to this treatment during the year prior to the interview and how often (i.e. often, sometimes, rarely, never) out of a series of 26 types of behaviour that could be considered indicators of maltreatment against women, 13 of which could be considered, as Alberdi and Matas (2002:130) do, *weak* indicators of violence (and that particularly reflect the woman's feelings), while the other 13 indicators could be considered as *strong* indicators of violence. In this article, we will only focus on the latter 13, which can be grouped together, as the authors do, into four categories: physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence in the forms of control and berating. In addition, analogously to the consideration of the *Instituto de la Mujer* when it published the data, we consider there to be maltreatment when one or more of these types of behaviour is found often or sometimes. The behaviour associated with these dimensions, as well as the impact of this behaviour, can be found in table 1.

Insofar as the limitations of these indicators, particularly as compared with Straus and Gelles' Conflict Tactic Scale, it can be indicated that physical violence is included in a highly unspecific way, and what are known as grave physical aggression (kicks, punches, hits against the wall, the use of arms, among others) cannot be isolated out, nor can information about the dimension of this type of aggression, be it grave (such as unconsciousness, fractures, injuries requiring medical treatment, among others) or minor (bruises, pains, etc.). In this regard it must be noted that there are important differences in the impact of physical violence depending on how it is defined and the aspects that may be considered (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000; Straus, 1999). Insofar as sexual violence is concerned, the indicator used is equally generic, and whether or not the use of physical force or intimidation was used in this dimension cannot be ascertained.

Table 1

Percentage of maltreated women with a partner who have been subjected to the following behaviour by their spouse or partner in the year before the interview

	1999			2002		
	Cohabiting couples (married or not)	Dating couples / LAT	All women with partner	Cohabiting couples (married or not)	Dating couples / LAT	All women with partner
<b>Physical violence</b>						
Threatens or insults you	1.7	0.3	1.5	1.6	0.5	1.4
Sometimes you become afraid	1.3	0.5	1.2	1.1	0.4	1.0
When he gets angry, he pushes or hits	0.8	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.2	0.7
<b>Sexual violence</b>						
Insists on having sexual intercourse even if you don't want to	5.3	1.5	4.6	4.3	1.5	3.9
<b>Psychological violence: control</b>						
He hinders you from visiting your family or keep in touch with friends, neighbours, etc.	1.4	0.8	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.3
He takes the money you earn or doesn't give you what you need	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.4
He decides what you can do or not do	2.2	0.5	2.0	2.2	0.6	2.0
<b>Psychological violence: berating</b>						
He doesn't care about your needs (you have the worst place at home, the worst of the meals, etc.).	2.1	0.7	1.9	2.1	0.4	1.9
He says that what you do is always wrong	2.3	0.5	2.0	2.0	0.5	1.7
He ridicules or doesn't value your beliefs (church-going, voting a certain party, belonging to an organization, etc.)	1.8	0.8	1.6	1.4	0.3	1.2
He doesn't value your work	5.5	0.7	4.7	5.5	0.6	4.8
He blames you in front of your children	2.8	0.1	2.4	2.7	0.2	2.3

Source: Author's own elaboration of the microdata provided by the *Instituto de la Mujer*; Survey of Domestic Violence against Women, Madrid, 1999 and 2001

In addition to these indicators of domestic violence against women which can be qualified as "objective", that is, defined based on recorded behaviour, those interviewed were also later asked whether, from their point of view, they had been subjected to maltreatment over the last year or at any time over their lives by any member of their close family and, if so, for how long they had been suffering from this treatment. They were also asked in the survey whether they knew of the maltreatment of a woman in their family and, if so, who it was and how long they believed she had been suffering from that treatment.

In addition to the information about the scope of the maltreatment and its duration, information was also gathered about the perpetrator, his/her tie to the victim (measured in a relatively detailed way), the basic social and demographical characteristics of the husband or partner, regardless of whether he resided with the woman in question, some basic data about the woman's background in her relationships, the situation in her household, and certain basic indicators of her health.

## Principal results

According to the "subjective" definition of maltreatment, in 1999 4.2 % of respondents affirmed they had been maltreated by a member of their family during the year prior to the interview. This proportion dropped to 4.0 % in 2002, as can be observed in table 2. An almost identical proportion appears when the question is whether the person knows of any maltreated woman in the family. No more than 14 % of the women surveyed both stated that they feel maltreated and that they also know someone maltreated in their family. This indicator also registered a slight decline in 2002 as compared to 1999. Irrespectively of whether there was actually a downward trend, this proportion is considerable and would lead to a total number of 640,000 maltreated adult women.

The main perpetrator of the maltreatment is, notoriously, the husband or partner, although among younger women who still live in their parents' home, the parents, and in particular the fathers, are the main perpetrators. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the table, there are all different types of situations. The maltreatment is more evident when the question refers not to the year prior to the interview but rather over the course of one's lifetime, as can be observed in table 4.

Table 2

Have you at any time suffered from any situation due to which you have considered yourself to be maltreated by any family member? Percentage responding affirmatively to **Over the last year** broken down by the tie with the maltreater

	<b>1999</b>	<b>2001</b>
My husband/partner	1.9	1.8
Sons/daughters fathered by husband/partner	0.5	0.5
Own sons/daughters fathered by non-current husband/partner	0.1	0.1
Sons/Daughters of current husband/partner (not one's own)	0	0
My father or my husband/partner's father	0.5	0.3
My mother my husband/partner's mother	0.5	0.3
My brothers/sisters or brothers/sisters-in-law	0.8	0.7
Other family members	0.6	0.3
Ex husband or ex-partner		0.5
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>4.0</b>

- 0.5 % of women in 2001 by more than one family member

Source: Author's own elaboration of the microdata provided by the *Instituto de la Mujer*; Survey of Domestic Violence against Women, Madrid, 1999 and 2001

Table 3  
Awareness of maltreatment of a woman in the close family

	1999	2001
Yes	4.3	4.1
No	95.3	95.1
Does not know/no response	0.4	0.7
Total	100	100

Source: Author's own elaboration of the microdata provided by the *Instituto de la Mujer*; Survey of Domestic Violence against Women, Madrid, 1999 and 2001

Table 4  
Have you at any time suffered from any situation due to which you have considered yourself to be maltreated by any family member? Percentage responding **At some time in my life**

	1999	2001
My husband/boyfriend	3.8	3.4
Sons/Daughters fathered by current husband/boyfriend	0.4	0.5
Sons/Daughters fathered by non-current husband/boyfriend	0	0
Sons/Daughters of current husband/boyfriend (not one's own)	0	0
My father or my husband/boyfriend's father	1.6	1.5
My mother or my husband/boyfriend's mother	1.2	0.9
My brothers/sisters or brothers/sisters-in-law	1.2	1.1
Other family members	1.2	0.7
Ex husband or ex partner		2.4
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>10.2</b>

- 1.2 % of women in 2001 by more than one family member

Source: Author's own elaboration of the microdata provided by the *Instituto de la Mujer*; Survey of Domestic Violence against Women, Madrid, 1999 and 2001

The proportion of maltreated women is much greater according to the "objective" definition of maltreatment. The figures indicate 12.4 % of the total number of women in 1999. This percentage dropped to 11.1 % in 2002. If we consider only maltreatment by the husband or partner, this proportion increases, and even more so if we focus on cases in which there is cohabitation, as can be seen in table 5. In these cases as well as in those of couples who do not live together, the same decreasing trend can be perceived. For the ensemble, all of the indicators seem to point to a trend towards a gradual reduction of maltreatment, except in the cases of psychological maltreatment, both for couples living together and those who do not, or those who have long distance relationships. What has yet to be seen is whether these results truly reflect social trends or merely variations in the samples. Statistics of deaths and complaints, as is well known, represent another partially different dimension of the problem, although the trend seen there is the opposite.

Table 5

Partner violence against women according to different definitions derived from behavioural actions (“objective violence”), partnership type in 1999 and 2002

	1999			2002		
	Cohabiting couples (married or not)	Dating couples / LAT	All women with partner	Cohabiting couples (married or not)	Dating couples / LAT	All women with partners
TOTAL	14.8	11.8	14.3	13.6	10.4	13.1
Physical violence	2.5	0.6	2.2	2.3	0.7	2.0
Sexual violence	5.3	1.5	4.6	4.3	1.5	3.9
Psychological violence: control	3.4	1.2	3.0	3.2	1.7	3.0
Psychological violence: berating	8.6	2.0	7.5	8.7	1.5	7.6

Source: Author’s own elaboration of the microdata provided by the *Instituto de la Mujer*; Survey of Domestic Violence against Women, Madrid, 1999 and 2001

As can be seen in table 6, the following are the main risk factors for maltreatment by a spouse:

- Unemployed women are those who most clearly present the greatest risk of being maltreated. It is not clear that those women who are not active in the job market have a greater risk of being maltreated since the results are not as patent.
- The questioning of the traditional family model involving marriage until death do you part and the clear division of roles does not appear to be an evident indicator of a lower risk of maltreatment. Nor does the woman having a job outside the household or earning more than her spouse clearly translate into a lower risk of maltreatment, nor does cohabitation without marriage. Second unions indeed seem to entail a greater risk of maltreatment than first marriages or unions (Meil, 2003).
- Family overload, a greater number of children, is systematically associated with a greater risk of spouse maltreatment.
- Hypogamia, the woman having a higher educational level than her husband or partner, does not translate into a lower risk of maltreatment. However, it is associated with a greater risk of “objective” maltreatment, although the terms of the relationship may not be understood subjectively as maltreatment.
- Women belonging to higher social classes, measured both by the educational level of the spouse, the woman’s own, or by income (not included in the table), show a lower risk of being “objectively” and also, to a certain extent, “subjectively” maltreated.
- The phenomenon of marital violence is found more frequently in urban areas than in rural areas, with other pertinent factors controlled. This would indicate that anonymity, privatisation, and individualisation inherent to the urban world do not protect women from maltreatment. Instead, the lesser degree of social control over individual behaviour, and the greater “social isolation” of the privatised world of urban societies seem to facilitate marital maltreatment.

Table 6

Relative Risks of wife maltreatment by the (male) spouse or partner in cohabitation relationships

	Objective Definition		Subjective perception	
	1999	2002	1999	2002
<b>Woman's labour force status:</b>				
Employed	1	1	1	1
Unemployed	1.3*	1.3*	1.7*	1.1
Not working	1.2+	1.2**	1.1	0.8
<b>Type of partnership:</b>				
Marriage	1	1	1	1
Cohabitation	1.3	0.9	2.9***	1.1
<b>Number of partnerships during the 10 last years:</b>				
One	1	1	1	1
More than one	1.4+	2.0***	1.3	3.4***
<b>Number of children</b>				
Without children	1	1	1	1
One child	1.4*	1.2	4.2***	1.2
Two children	1.6***	1.5***	4.3***	1.8*
Three children	2.1***	1.8***	7.6***	2.0**
Four or more children	2.2***	1.8***	7.3***	2.4***
<b>Educational difference between spouses</b>				
Same level	1	1	1	1
Man higher level	1.1	1.1+	2.0***	1.2
Woman higher level	1.2*	1.2*	1.2	1.2
<b>Educational level of the man:</b>				
Primary	1	1	1	1
Secondary	0.7***	0.8**	1.0	0.8
University degree	0.6***	0.5***	0.7	0.6**
<b>¿Who earns more money?</b>				
Man (spouse/partner)	1	1	1	1
Woman or other person	0.9	0.9*	1.0	1.3+
<b>Labour force situation of the man:</b>				
Full-time employed	1	1	1	1
Part-time employed	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.7*
Not working	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0
<b>Rural / urban setting</b>	1.04	1.05*	1.1*	1.2***
<b>Age</b>	0.996	1.01	1	1.01
Sensitivity: % prediction y=1	0	0	0	0
Specificity: % total right	87	88	98	98

Source: *Instituto de la Mujer*, Violence against women survey, Madrid, 1999 Analysed in Meil, G, (2003), *Maltrato conyugal hacia la mujer y cambio familiar*, in *Revista Internacional de Sociología*

### Impact of the survey results and policy measures implemented afterwards

The results of the macro-survey basically served as awareness-raising mechanisms and also as additional legitimization of the interventions undertaken. The basic data has gone on to be included as part of the statistical information provided by the *Instituto de la Mujer* regarding the scope of violence against women, and the declining trend reflected in the data has been adduced as an indicator of the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

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