INTRODUCTION

This exploratory study is designed to better understand the history and development of gender-based violence (i.e., violence against women) in Guatemala and to explore the relationship between the current rise in violence and the past civil war, in addition to investigating what factors are impeding women’s access to services. Guatemala is a beautiful place, filled with a vibrant culture and a deep cultural heritage. The country’s current sociopolitical climate reflects a long history plagued by poverty and violence, wrought by colonial intervention, ongoing foreign political interference, and organized crime.

• Guatemala has one of the highest rates of homicide in Latin America; in 2013 alone, 5,253 murders were reported by the Guatemalan National Police.

• The National Institute of Forensic Sciences of Guatemala reported an astounding average of 16 murders per day in 2014.

The violence in Guatemala pervades every sector of society, producing a shared experience of victimization and fear. Although both men and women are victims of the violence, evidence from reported data and statistical analysis indicate that women are being targeted solely on the basis of their gender.

BACKGROUND: A CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

A Vortex of Fear

More than 3,800 women in Guatemala were deliberately targeted and murdered between 2001 and 2009. In 2005, there were 305 reported cases of tortured female homicide victims. Among these cases, 401 different torture marks were reported by Human Rights Observers. La Violencia

In December of 1996, the Guatemalan Army and URNG guerrillas (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) formally signed peace accords ending Guatemala’s devastating 36-year civil war.

• 626 villages massacred
• 1.5 million people displaced
• More than 200,000 people found dead or disappeared

The disparity between victims of violence is evident: 83 percent of victims were identified as Maya and 17 percent were identified as Ladino. Up to 99 percent of all sexual violent crimes committed against women were carried out by army soldiers and other security officers, including government officials.

Engrained Impunity

In 2008, the Ley contra el Femicidio y otras Formas de Violencia Contra la Mujer was passed, aiming to ensure rights to women such as “life, liberty, dignity, protection, and equality.”

In 2011, CENADH (National Center for Judicial Analysis and Documentation) reported 20,398 complaints of violence against women under the 2008 law; less than 30 percent of these cases presented to the court reached a judgment.

Factors in this include:
• Poor investigative methodology
• Inadequate evidence collection and preservation
• Systematized organized violence
• Victim blaming

LOCATION: SANTA CLARA LA LAGUNA, SOLOLA:

La Violencia

In this exploratory study, I will be approaching GBV from a feminist perspective, viewing the increase in violent acts against women as a product of an entrenched structural power imbalance, emphasizing the need for women’s agency.

I anticipate actively engaging the public in discussions about topics encompassing gender inequality, to inform community members of the resources open to them. I hope to encourage community members to further pursue the channels of education open to them, which are vital to socio-economic advancement. Ultimately, I seek to contribute suggestions for future research, in hopes of dismantling the structural fastenings supporting systemic violence against women.

EXPECTED CONCLUSIONS

I expect there will be many cultural fastenings that perpetuate systemic violence against women in Guatemalan communities and that are particularly entrenched within indigenous communities. It seems as though indigenous Maya are treated as the degenerate “race” and that barriers to public services as basic as education and health care have been effectively erected despite infrastructure-driven development.

• I believe that an inadequate access to education and financial independence, by both men and women, plays a key role in the perpetuation of GBV.

• Pervasive judicial impunity, insufficient legislature, and a complete lack of motivation to solve cases of GBV by law enforcement reinforce violent acts.

• Local cultural beliefs and practices grounded in machismo may be preventing women from seeking services provided by local NGOs. Many people today are still deeply impacted by the civil war; mistrust of the Guatemalan government and NGOs is not uncommon among indigenous communities.

• Long-established practices, such as blood feuds, may also be contributing factors that prevent women from accessing state-based and private resources. Only time and an in-depth study can reveal all of the fastenings holding together this current misogynistic patriarchy.

REFERENCES


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