



Women Caught in a Culture of Violence in Guatemala

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In 2009, Guatemalan women experienced the highest level of violence in Latin America and one of the highest levels in the world (Borzutzky & Ogradnik, 2011). According to the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (2011),

violence against women has increased more than 33 percent between 2008 and 2011. Guatemala is one of the most violent countries worldwide with a murder rate of 34.5 per 100,000 in 2012, which

Abstract Violence against women is prevalent around the world. In Guatemala it is pervasive. Living in a culture of violence oppresses women, children, the economy and society as a whole. It destroys families and can effect women emotionally and spiritually, as well as physically. Nurses have the power to intervene and influence change on a global level by taking action against abuse and oppression of women. By examining the pervasive nature of intimate partner violence and femicide in Guatemala, nurses can identify actions and interventions to combat violence on a global basis. DOI: 10.1111/1751-486X.12151

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Box 1.

Nursing Approaches

Nurses can provide the following:

- Safety, by offering a discreet environment for counseling and support
- Emotional support to victims and their families
- Education for women and girls on women's rights, self-protection and keeping girls in school
- Referral to available resources, such as safe havens, job training and health care
- Education for birth attendants in rural villages
- Involvement in outreach groups, such as medical/health care teams and faith-based groups

translated into an alarming 5,174 murders that year (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2013).

Compared to other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Paraguay and Mexico, with murder rates of 10 per 100,000, Guatemala has one of the highest violent crime rates in Central America (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2013; Valladares, 2011). For reference, the United States had a murder rate of 3.4 per 100,000 in 2012. In 2010, there were 46,000 complaints of violence against women filed in Guatemala, making Guatemala's record of family violence

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one of the worst in the western hemisphere (Thomson, 2012; Valladares, 2011). According to the Instituto Nacional Ciencias Forenses de Guatemala (INACIF) more than 600 women were murdered in 2012, an increase of almost 13 percent over 2010 (Borzutzky & Ogrodnik, 2011).

Roots of Violence in Guatemala

Understanding Guatemalan cultural views about women is necessary to understand the roots of the pervasive violence against them. Historically, Guatemala has had a patriarchal culture that devalues and subordinates women (Borzutzky & Ogrodnik, 2011). Violence against women has been legally and socially supported through a culture of unequal gender roles and the portrayal of women as minimally human since the early part of the 20th century (Carey & Torres, 2010). Thirty percent of women are poor

and only 71 percent are literate, which compounds their vulnerability (Borzutzky & Ogrodnik, 2011; Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). Poverty and extreme poverty (defined as an income between \$1.25 and \$4/day) affect almost 50 percent of the total Guatemalan population (The World Bank, 2014; Valladares, 2011). According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee's report on the violation of women's human rights in Guatemala, indigenous and incarcerated women are particularly vulnerable to gender-related violence (MADRE, 2012).

The Guatemalan judicial system has not been effective in addressing crimes against women. Femicide, defined as the gender-motivated killings of women done with extreme brutality, claimed the lives of 5,200 women between 2000 and 2010; 99 percent of the perpetrators of these crimes went unpunished by the Guatemalan judicial system (Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, 2012). With a femicide rate of 9.7 per 100,000 people, Guatemala is ranked third for these heinous crimes, only surpassed by El Salvador and Jamaica (del Frate, 2011). None of these countries has adopted effective measures to address this problem. Organized crime, widespread gender discrimination, unemployment and lack of education further contribute to the high violence rate in effected countries (Borzutzky & Ogrodnik, 2011).

Societal Effects of Violence Against Women

Violence against women has a cumulative negative effect on society. It deprives families of resources and income, it perpetuates poverty and unemployment, it puts children at high risk for health and emotional problems and it taxes the resources of health care systems. Violence

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