



Sociological Briefing

The need to tackle Isolating Gender Violence to properly address and overcome Gender-Based Violence

Gender violence is a reality very well known by science and by society. While this problem is highly recognized, more evidence is needed to better understand the reasons why, despite the efforts implemented to address and overcome gender-based violence, many victims remain isolated, without support to face and complaint such situation.

The team of researchers who carried out the first study worldwide about Isolating Gender Violence¹, shows that for 26 years there were no impacts of the concept of second-order of sexual harassment. As of 2016, this concept was recovered, and began to be analyzed from a scientific point of view, but it was also put into practice in concrete situations, as well as in the political sphere until it reached its legislation.

What is Isolating Gender Violence?

The authors define Isolating Gender Violence (IGV) as any kind of violence against those who advocate for gender violence victims. The objective of such violence is to isolate gender violence victims and discourage reporting or receiving support, in order to maintain the impunity of gender violence. The IGV concept is linked to what science and legislations establish as gender violence. To elaborate the name and concept, the authors followed this process: a) Dialogic process (scientists, policy mak-

ers, governments, parliaments, victims, social organizations, citizens); b) Impact objective: scientific, political and social to overcome gender-based violence (GBV); c) Prioritization of social impact; d) Co-creation of knowledge; e) Sustainability.

Political impact

As research shows, the first reason not to support survivors of GBV is fear of retaliation, thus support need to be addressed, researched and legislated. The authors include participants in the deliberation process who wanted, from the very beginning, not to reduce the legislation to sexual harassment but to include all types of violence against women in a single law. Thus, the first legislation in the world of what IGV implies has been achieved. As a result, the Catalan Legislation² of Law 17/2020, of December 22, modification of Law 5/2008, of the women right to eradicate violence against women, includes the following types of violence (in addition to the types of violence already included in the Istanbul convention): obstetric violence and violation of sexual and reproductive rights; digital violence; second-order violence; and vicarious violence. The second-order violence, the way under which IGV has been included into the law, has been defined as: physical or psychological violence, retaliation, humiliation and persecution against people who

support victims of gender-based violence. It includes acts that impede the prevention, detection, care and recovery of women in a situation of gender-based violence.

Overcoming limitations

The authors describe that until the moment, Second Order of Sexual Harassment (SOSH), named by Billie Dziech and Linda Weiner in 1990, was used to describe the reality created by that kind of violence conducted to those who support survivors. In this research, the authors pretend to build upon this initial work and so opened a wide process of dialogue, including the plurality of voices in order to define the best term, which has finally been IGV. The main limitations were the following: 1) the lack of scientific, political and social impacts of this concept and this name for 26 years; 2) the need to have a concept for all types of gender-based violence and not only sexual harassment; 3) the fact that “second order” does not reflect what is happening; it is violence both towards those who help the victims and the direct victims in order to isolate them and ensure impunity.

Dialogues towards the need to broaden the name of the concept

The authors describe that during the first group of discussion of the study, four participants shared their concerns regarding the creation of the name: Participant 1 stated that international reports, as well as, national and regional legislations contemplate the diversity of forms of gender-based violence and not only sexual harassment. Thus, the concept of protecting those who protect direct victims should refer to all these types of violence. Participant 2 stated then, that in the new concept should be clarified the list of types of gender-based violence related to the concept. On the other hand, Participant 3 stated that GBV refers to the types of gender-based violence listed by international agencies and those of each country. Then, the definition of GBV should not include this list, which is con-

textual and historical. The concept of GBV is for types of gender-based violence related to gender-based violence legislation. Perhaps a similar concept should be created for other types of violence or for all of them, but this is another topic that should be developed with other types of research.

Isolating direct victims. Main objective of the IGV

During the first group of discussion developed by the authors, seven participants were discussing about the main objective of the IGV. Participant 1 stated that the objections made to the words “second order” by recent researchers and jurists are very conclusive, they introduce confusion with other concepts already present in several international and national legislations. Participant 2 claimed that second order does not mean anything related to the concept, we need to clarify in the name what are the targets of this violence and who are the victims, perhaps something like Victims of Violence Against Defenders Assisting Victims of Gender-Based Violence. To respond to this proposal, Participant 3 said this is not a name, but an encyclopedia. We need only one word to add to Gender Violence, simply Isolate Gender Violence, this word clarifies that the goal is to isolate the victim to maintain impunity. Participant 4 considered that Isolate Gender Violence does not clarify that those who suffer from it are also victims, only those we want to be recognized as such by this kind of new legislation. In this line, Participant 5 said in linguistics we are very clear about the contributions of the social psychologist Herbert Mead to interaction: language needs the interactive attribution of meanings to words. Ten years ago, the words “me too” had a different meaning than today after the fantastic “Me Too” movement has attributed a new meaning to them. Other people intervene in the debate and participant 6 asked: do you mean that any word is indifferent to the interactive attribution of the intended meaning? Participant 5 said: Almost so, do you know the origin of “Okay”? In 1839, the Boston Morning Post made a joke by writing “all

right” like this: “Oll Korrect.” Since then, the use of O.K. to say “all correct” spread and now it has this meaning. Participant 3 answered: OK, OK, but Isolate is not just a word, it is the best word for the meaning of the concept. It is used with more meanings in literature, feminism or mental health, for example. For example, in her speech at the UN, Emma Watson said, “Apparently, I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too loud, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and unattractive.” There are studies, for example, on the mental health problems of so-called “isolated students.” Participant 7: Isolate reminds me of electrical isolation, not human relations. I don’t see what the translation into other languages will be for example, in Spanish “aisladora” is used for electricity “cinta aislante”.

The authors highlight that after all these dialogues, this option was discussed with many different researchers, politicians, citizens and nobody has found a better word for this concept. In a very short time, IGV will have the very strong and transformative meaning that we have developed over the years for this research program and its policy and social impact.

Notes

¹ Vidu, A., Puigvert, L., Flecha, R.. & López de Aguilera, G. (2021). The Concept and the Name of Isolating Gender Violence. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 10(2), 176-200. <http://doi:10.17583/generos.2021.8622>

² For more information, see:

https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2021-464