Gender-based violence: prevalence, sexist imaginaries, and myths among university students[1]

MACARENA TRUJILLO CRISTOFFANINI
Universidad de Playa Ancha, Chile
macarena.trujillo@upla.cl

PAOLA CONTRERAS HERNÁNDEZ
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Grupo de Estudios de Inmigración y Minorías Étnicas (Gedime), España
paolacontrerashz@gmail.com

Abstract. The aim of this study is to identify aspects related to gender-based violence at Chilean universities, with a focus on three areas of analysis: the prevalence of violence against women in heterosexual relationships; the persistence of traditional gender constructs; and the reproduction of myths about this form of abuse, as well as the sexist imaginaries present in the student's experiences. Theoretical support is drawn from feminist analyses that have examined the power structures in which these aggressions survive and reproduce, as well as the social dynamics that naturalize them. Studies have found that higher education is neither a protective factor against violence nor a tool that dismantles the gender imaginary that supports it. At a methodological level, 1,120 surveys were administered at three Chilean universities, encompassing the three aforementioned areas of analysis. The results point to the continuing prevalence of violence against women, as well as the endurance of myths and sexist imaginary that invisibilize the reproduction of gender power relations. The discussion and conclusions highlight the role of education and higher education institutions in driving changes in this area.

Keywords: gender-based violence, higher education, sexism

Presentation and context

This article presents the results of a study carried out at Chilean universities with the aim of exploring gender-based violence. To this end, the study established three areas of analysis: the prevalence of gender-based violence in romantic relationships between university students; the persistence of traditional gender constructs and myths about this form of abuse; and sexist imaginaries of both male and female students. Thus, 1,120 surveys were administered at three universities during the final semester of 2018 and the first semester of 2019. The approach is framed by gender studies, which situate the naturalization and reproduction of male violence as a reflection of unequal power relations, and which stress the need to address this form of violence from an interdisciplinary perspective in order to tackle its cultural underpinnings (Osborne, 2009).

The decision to focus on male violence within university communities responds to the urgent need to explore its persistence of in this setting (González & Mora, 2014). Higher education institutions are critical spaces that provide tools that students can employ to question discourses and imaginaries about gender relations that, despite sociocultural transformations, continue to reproduce normative visions of femininity and masculinity (Barrera, Benalcázar, & Pilamunga, 2019).

Moreover, it is hoped that this study will serve to guide future prevention, awareness-raising, and eradication strategies (Ferrer & Bosch, 2000; Strauss, 2004; Sernameg, 2011; Díaz-Aguado, Martínez-Arias, & Babarro, 2013), to which universities, as agents of socialization and therefore social and cultural referents, are central (Lizama-Lefno & Hurtado Quiñones, 2019).

This article is structured as follows. First, the basis of the theoretical approach to analyzing gender-based violence is presented. Then, the methodology and fieldwork are described. The next section presents and discusses the results. Finally, the conclusion stresses the role of universities in working alongside community agents to devise specific plans aimed at tackling inequalities in the sex–gender system, as well as the violence symptomatic of a patriarchal system that continues to thrive.

1. Gender-based violence: a theoretical approach based on feminist discourses

Studies about gender-based violence have examined structural patriarchy and its complex web of meanings, values, and roles; this has aided the development of interpretive frameworks that visibilize how this type of violence is founded on the subordination—underlying and structural—of women

(Bosch et al., 2007). As Expósito (2011) observes, there is an international consensus around the definition of gender-based violence proposed by the United Nations General Assembly (1993), which is as follows:

> any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Art. 1)

This definition delimits three types of violence: physical, sexual, and psychological. The first is that which causes harm or injury (striking, shoving, mutilating, etc.); the second infringes on sexual freedom and physical or emotional integrity; and the third is primarily verbal and restricts well-being and self-esteem (Krantz & García-Moreno, 2005). Now, according to traditional analytical frameworks, the causes of violence against women are related to the aggressor's individual pathologies, personality disorders, or problematic experiences that have conditioned their aggression; but this simplifies and even naturalizes the structural and systemic factors that generate and sustain gender-based violence (Cabruja, 2004; Expósito, 2011). Therefore, feminist studies have noted that the patriarchy, as a social system, has institutionalized historic relations of domination, sexual inequality, and violence against women (Lerner, 1990). The incorporation in these studies of the category of gender has enabled an understanding of how socialization processes reinforce cultural representations that devalue the female and overvalue the male, thus facilitating an understanding of the specific and distinctive violences that men and women face as well as their cross-cutting character (Scott, 1996).

2. Sexism(s) and misogyny: basis and myths of violence against women

As noted, one of the components of violence against women is the set of beliefs that drives their devaluation, orchestrated on a social and ideological structure that legitimizes and reproduces the gender hierarchy (Lerner, 1990). This ideology serves to propagate behavior that justifies violence against women. Furthermore, these belief systems project practices with strong sexist components that are articulated on the basis of sexual difference. In this regard, Glick and Fiske (1996) argue that sexism is characterized by two poles: on the one hand, antipathy and intolerance toward women; and on the other, prosocial attitudes founded on stereotypes that define women as fragile and dependent. The first (hostile sexism) is readily detectable; the

second (benevolent sexism) is associated with actions that, on the face of it, appear positive, but which ultimately prove harmful, placing women in a traditional and romantic imaginary that limits their autonomy and segregates them in a domestic space linked primarily to their reproductive capacity (Expósito, Moya, & Glick, 1998). However, looking beyond the differences in how sexism operates and manifests itself, both forms coexist within an ideology that promotes subordination (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Along similar lines, Bosch and Ferrer (2012) stress that myths about gender-based violence are widely shared fallacies that are central to the social naturalization of such aggressions. The authors propose three categories of myths. The first are myths of marginalization, in which gender-based violence is not conceived as a structural problem but an exceptional one, associated with developing countries or individuals facing specific setbacks (unemployment, separation, etc.). The second are myths about the abusers, who are perceived as subjects who are affected by psychological pathologies or drug use, or who have themselves been abused. From this perspective, the aggressor's violence is understood as a product of given personal characteristics, leading to its individualization at the expense of examining the sociocultural structures that support sexist aggressions. The third type of myths center on the idea that abused women bear responsibility for the violence, either because they provoke the aggressor or because they have a self-flagellating temperament that prompts them to stay with their abuser.

Thus, myths about gender-based violence downplay the importance of this social problem, which has adverse effects; on the one hand, they hamper support for victims and absolve the aggressors of blame (Bosch & Ferrer, 2012; Ferrer & Bosch, 2013); and on the other, they become a breeding ground for the legitimization of these aggressions among different social collectives, university students included.

3. Gender-based violence and university students

Because of their social role, universities are a vitally important space in combating violence against women (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013). Examining the practices and experiences of gender-based violence in this sphere is important in order to visibilize it and remedy prevailing silences and omissions (González & Mora, 2014). International research on this subject points to a high level of violence in romantic relationships between university students. Straus (2004), in the most comprehensive study to date, used a sample of 8,666 students from 31 universities in 16 countries. One of the main findings was that between 10 and 29% of the interviewees had experienced

physical violence, including severe assault. It is interesting to compare these results with those of a study conducted by Universidad de Valencia, Spain; namely, that 36.5% of participants had suffered gender-based violence or knew someone in their social circle who had (González & Mora, 2014). Other studies have obtained higher figures; one found that approximately 50% of female students have experienced gender-based violence at the hands of their partner or another man (Vásquez, Torres, Otero, Blanco, & López, 2010). A higher level of education, then, does not protect against violence (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013; León, Grez, Prato, Torres, & Ruiz, 2014), and can only be considered a protective factor in conjunction with other dimensions, such as greater knowledge of gender constructs and equity (Ferrer & Bosch, 2000; Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013).

In the case of Chile, a pioneering study discovered that 47% of young people were fearful that their partner might react violently during a conflict (García & Aguirre, 1997). This has been borne out by other studies that have pointed to a high rate of violence in romantic relationships (Póo & Vizcarra, 2009).[2] In 2015, the National Institute of Youth (Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2015) presented the results of a study in which 38% of Chilean women aged between 15 and 29 stated they had experienced psychological or physical violence in a relationship.

In the framework of sexual violence, the first study to address the victimization of female students in Chile is that of Lehrer, Lehrer, and Oyarzún (2007), in which 36% of the women interviewed reported rape, attempted rape, or unwanted sexual contact at some point in their lives. The study found that acceptance of myths is related to the low incidence of reporting, which is especially pronounced in the conservative sociocultural context of Chile (Lehrer et al., 2007).

4. Method and results

The study population consisted of undergraduate students from three regional universities[3] pertaining to the Consortium of State Universities of Chile (Consorcio de Universidades Estatales de Chile, CUECH).[4] The sample was random (probabilistic) and stratified by cohort and faculty. The fieldwork was carried out during the second semester of 2018 and the first

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2   Although these two studies approached intimate partner violence as a relational and two-directional situation between women and men, both noted that it was experienced more acutely by the former.
3   This study was carried out at Universidad de Playa Ancha, Universidad del Bío, and Universidad de la Frontera.
4   Founded in 1992, CUECH represents Chile's 18 public universities.

semester of 2019. The size of the sample was 1,120 units (in accordance with the formula of Namakforoosh, 2014), with a confidence level of 95% and an estimation error of 5%.

The survey was based on informed consent; the data were handled confidentially and aggregated across the three universities at which the fieldwork was completed. In this context, the ad hoc survey addressed women's experiences of psychological, physical, or sexual violence in their romantic relationships (present or past). For this part of the survey, only women were consulted. This was a theoretical as well as a methodological decision, since the research framework focuses on gender violence in heterosexual relationships in which men are the primary aggressors. This is borne out by various legal texts[5] and studies. As Reed, Raj, Miller, and Silverman (2010) note, if violence in romantic relationships is analyzed from a gender-neutral perspective, its causes and repercussions might be construed as behavior that is not linked to the gender of the abuser.

Thus, such approaches overlook gender as a determining factor (Ferrer & Bosch, 2019). The elimination of a gender perspective from the theoretical frameworks that guide studies can have serious consequences for the development of prevention and intervention programs, and for laws related to this sphere (Reed et al., 2010; Ferrer & Bosch, 2019).

In the following parts of the survey, all respondents (that is, those of both sexes) were asked about the continuity of traditional gender constructs and the myths related to abuse, as well as the sexist imaginaries present among students (men and women alike).

To analyze these aspects, the Inventory of Distorted Thoughts about Women and the Use of Violence (Inventario de Pensamientos Distorsionados sobre la Mujer y el Uso de la Violencia, IPDMUV) and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) were used. Both instruments present a high level of reliability and validity, and have been administered variously to university students in Chile, Spain, and Argentina, among other countries (Echeburúa, Amor, Sarasua, Zubizarreta, & Holgado-Tello, 2016; León & Aizpurúa, 2020, and others).

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5   See, for example, Spain's Organic Law No. 1/2004 on Comprehensive Protective Measures against Gender Violence , which states that gender-based violence is "the most brutal symbol of the inequality existing in our society. This is violence that is directed against women for the mere fact of being so, for being considered, by their aggressors, as lacking the minimal rights to liberty, respect, and decision-making capacity" (Ley Organica de Medidas de Protección Integral Contra la Violencia de Género, 2004; translation by *Apuntes*). This is particularly relevant to the Chilean context, in which, according to the Public Ministry, 75.9% of the victims who reported cases of domestic violence were women. See (http://www.fiscaliadechile.cl/Fiscalia/estadisticas/index.do).

Of the total sample (1,120 students), 31.6% were men (349 students) and 68.5%, women (771 students). Ninety percent of the sample were within the range of 18 to 25 years of age.

The results were as follows. They are grouped into the aforementioned areas of analysis. In the first area, around 30% of the sample was found to have experienced physical, psychological, and/or sexual violence (though this varied depending on the type of violence), which is consistent with national and international figures. This result confirms one of the study's underlying assumptions: violence against women is not confined to the most vulnerable sectors, but cuts across different collectivities. These data debunk the myth of marginalization, and attest to the prevalence of violence against female university students in Chile.

The results for psychological violence are organized into four dimensions and presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Prevalence of psychological violence

Assertions	At least once	Never	Dimensions
A partner has ignored me or treated me with indifference to make me give in to his demands.	51. 7%	48.3%	
A partner has insulted me or made me feel bad about myself while we were arguing.	64.3%	35.7%	**Psychological violence through devaluation**
A partner has undermined or humiliated me in front of other people.	36.6%	63.4%	
A partner has tried to stop me from seeing friends or family.	46%	54%	**Psychological violence through isolation and control**
A partner has repeatedly demanded to know my whereabouts at each moment.	49%	51%	
A partner has verbally threatened to harm someone or something important to me.	10%	90%	**Psychological violence through emotional blackmail**
A partner has threatened to harm or kill himself if I did not give in to his demands.	28%	72%	
A partner has frightened or intimidated me intentionally.	30.4%	69.6%	**Psychological violence through threats**
A partner has verbally threatened to harm me.	15.3%	74.7%	

Source: compiled by authors.

Physical violence in romantic relationships is understood to encompass all actions intended to hurt, jeopardize the integrity, cause intense fear, and erode the self-esteem of the victim (Fundación Mujeres, 2017). The category was subdivided into two dimensions: intense physical aggression, including slapping, shoving, hair pulling, kicking, or striking; and extreme physical assault, such as burning, choking, and threatening with a weapon or another intimidating object. In the case of sexual violence, understood as any form of unwanted sexual contact (Fundación Mujeres, 2017), the study sought to shed light on the pressure that abusers exert on women to achieve their goals. Here, two types of sexual aggression were discerned: subjection, in which a woman has engaged in unwanted sexual relations through fear or a feeling of inability to express rejection; and coercion, which involves physical force. This is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2
Perpetuation of physical and sexual violence

Assertions	At least once	Never	Dimensions
A partner has shoved me, grabbed me, or pulled my hair.	32.1%	67.9%	
A partner has slapped me or thrown something at me that might have caused me harm.	17.4%	82.6%	**Intense physical violence**
A partner has kicked, dragged, or struck me.	5.5 %	94.5%	
A partner has tried to choke or burn me on purpose.	4.2%	95.8%	**Extreme physical violence**
A partner has threatened me with a knife or another intimidating object.	1.9%	98.1%	
A partner has pressurized or compelled me to engage in a sexual practice that I did not want or found humiliating.	27%	73%	
I have engaged in unwanted sexual relations with a partner out of fear of what he would do if I refused.	19.5%	80.5%	**Sexual violence through subjection**
A partner has forced me to engage in sexual relations when I did not want to.	31.6%	68.4%	
A partner has tried to force me to engage in sexual relations against my will through subjection or harm.	10%	90%	**Sexual violence through coercion**

Source: compiled by authors.

The data presented in Table 3 reveal that traditional sexual constructs have eroded to some extent.

Table 3
Traditional gender constructs

Assertions	Women		Men		Total	
	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat
Women are inferior to men	96.9%	3.1%	93.6%	6.4%	95.9 %	4.1%
If the man is the sole breadwinner, the woman must be subservient to him.	95.%	4.5%	88.7%	11.3%	93.4%	6.6%
The man is the head of the family, so the woman must obey him.	98.1%	1.9%	95.9%	4.1%	97.4%	2.6%
A woman is obliged to have sexual relations with her partner, even if she does not feel doing so at any point.	98.9%	1.1%	98.3%	1.7%	98.7%	1.3%
A woman must have the dinner ready when her partner comes home.	87.9%	12.1%	85.2%	14.8%	87.1%	12.9%

Source: compiled by authors.

However, the responses to some of the assertions provide clearer evidence of sexism in the student imaginary, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4
Sexist imaginaries

Assertions	Women		Men		Total	
	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat
A woman seeks to commit to a man in order to control him.	86.6%	13.4%	61.%	38.3%	78.9%	21.1%
Generally, when a woman is beaten fair and square she complains she has been discriminated against.	66.4%	33.6%	42.5%	57.5%	59%	41%
Feminists want women to have more power than men.	69.2%	30.8%	43.5%	56.5%	61.3%	38.7%
In the name of equality, many women try to obtain certain privileges.	34.8%	65.2%	23.9%	76.1%	31.4%	68.6 %
Many women ridicule men by using their sexual appearance to attract and then reject them.	49.9%	50.6%	37.8 %	62.2%	45.8%	54.2%

Source: compiled by authors.

The responses to other assertions show that the structures underpinning the naturalization and minimization of violence toward women still endure. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Myths about gender violence

Assertions	Women		Men		Total	
	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree completely	Agree somewhat
If women really wanted to, they would know how to prevent episodes of violence.	74.8	25.2	61.1%	38.9%	70.6%	29.4%
For many women, their partner's abuse is a sign that they care.	64.5%	35.5%	62.5%	37.5%	63.9%	36.1%
The fact that most women tend not to call the police when they are being abused proves that they want to protect their partner.	49.8%	50.2 %	48.1%	51.9%	49.3 %	50.7%
Many women deliberately provoke their partners to make them lose control and lash out.	91%	9%	80.7%	19.3%	87.7%	12.3%

Source: compiled by authors.

These data are particularly interesting, given the level of agreement with the assertions that place responsibility for violence on the victim, or blame the victim for not reporting abuse. This is important given the multitude of factors that explain the lack of reporting of abuse against women; according to one study, in Spain it takes almost eight and a half years for women to report abuse through formal channels, but this varies according to the profile of the victim and can even be as high as eleven years (Gómez Plaza, Villajos, Candeira de Andrés, & Hernández, 2019).

Indeed, the scientific literature provides evidence that abuse engenders higher levels of emotional dependence on the part of the victim in comparison with relationships without domestic violence (Aiquipa, 2015).

5. Discussion

The results of this study show the continuity of high rates of violence, in all its manifestations, against women in romantic relationships. When it comes to psychological violence, more than half of respondents stated that they had felt devalued by a current or former partner on at least one occasion. The dynamics of isolation and control—often displayed by abusers and regarded as one of the first signs of abuse (Domenech Del Rio & Sirvent García, 2017)—are also much in evidence. Emotional blackmail is also prolific; almost a third of the women said that a partner had threatened to harm or kill himself if his demands were not met. These threats constitute a common pattern among abusers, and even feature in femicide. Persistent offenders use emotional blackmail as a means of controlling the victim and preventing her from ending the relationship (Santos, Blanco, De Juan, & González, 2019). Thus, it is a recurring practice in which the aggressor shifts the focus onto the actions that the victim may or may not carry out as a means of laying the blame for the violence on her.

In sum, psychological violence in its various forms was found to be very high among the female students. Socially, aggressions of this type tend to be downplayed, and their evident harmful effects include the loss of self-esteem and sense of personal security (Domenech del Río & Sirvent García, 2016; Lara- Caba, 2019).

In turn, the high level of physical and sexual violence experienced by participants is alarming, revealing how relationship abuse affects lives from an early age. As far as sexual violence is concerned, the data are in keeping with previous studies about women students (Lehrer et al., 2007), though there is a need to continue exploring this area given the paucity of studies on the Chilean case.

Both types of violence conform to logics of domination and submission, which tend to consolidate the structural dynamics of violence (Osborne, 2009) that go hand-in-hand with the cultural mandates of female sexuality. These mandates relegate women's bodies to passive objects subject to the demands of their partners, even if this means engaging in unwanted practices.

Such aggressions have serious repercussions for the life of the victim, even once the relationship is over. The consequences of male violence on women's mental health include severe and moderate depression (Martínez, Mañas, & Montecinos, 2013). Another associated condition is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the American Psychiatric Association, female victims of domestic abuse present symptoms such as intrusive memories and/or dreams about the trauma, dissociation, physio-

logical stress, and negative alterations in cognitions or moods, all of which are typical of PTSD (American Psychological Association, 2018). Some Chilean studies have argued that this condition can be considered among the most appropriate to describe the consequences of domestic abuse (León et al, 2014). When it comes to traditional gender constructs, the explicitly misogynistic assertions tended to be rejected categorically, though in some cases the percentage difference between the sexes is notable; for example, in response to the assertion alluding to women's roles in domestic chores, the male students expressed greater acceptance of traditional divisions. Also salient is the statement about women's obligation to have sex with their partners; only 1.3% of respondents of both sexes agreed to any extent, but this is contradicted by the real-life experiences of women in general and, in particular, of the students who participated in this study, between 10 and 28.5% of whom said they had experienced sexual violence.

The results also point to the persistence of sexual imaginaries. For instance, there was a high level of acceptance, especially among male students, of the idea that women use the sociocultural changes that have improved their social conditions for their own benefit or to act against men. These findings suggest that a large proportion of the students regarded women's demands for change as excessive.

The distorted association between "the female" and "masochism," one of the myths of gender violence, is also in evidence. For instance, more than a third of all respondents thought that many women who experience abuse regard it as a sign of concern on the part of their aggressors.

The data also reveal the pervasiveness of the erroneous idea that abused women are complicit in, or even instigators of, their treatment; two out of ten male students believed that women incite their partners to lose control and abuse them.

These figures reflect a problematic issue: the attribution of violence to the victim and not to the abuser, which serves to excuse and diminish the responsibility of the latter.

The idea that jealousy is an expression of love inhibits an understanding of how it is, in fact, a possessive or controlling behavior on the part of the abuser, such that "the responsibility for abuse is transferred to the victim for not complying with [the abuser's] requirements" (Ferrer & Bosch, 2013, p.114). What is more, it reproduces the pathologization and individualization of the aggressor.

It can be seen, then, that sexist gender constructs and myths are prevalent at Chilean universities, which coincides with their cultural reproduction among students. Likewise, in accordance with numerous studies, the results

indicate that formal education in itself—that is, in the absence of specific programs dealing with these issues—does not destabilize unequal power relations between the genders (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013; León et al., 2014; León & Aizpurúa, 2020). In this way, gender roles and imaginaries are obvious control mechanisms that the patriarchy employs to sustain structural violence and structural inequality, while also perpetuating a traditional model of femininity and masculinity (Oblitas, 2009). Meanwhile, various studies have indicated that men uphold sexist imaginaries about gender relations and, accordingly, entertain a greater acceptance of violence (González & Mora, 2014; Biglia & Jiménez, 2015). This has been called gender bias, and is also visible in the data yielded in the present study.

To be sure, given the persistence of the aspects that propagate patriarchal power structures and concomitant gender violence, universities are an ideal place to initiate cultural changes; in addition, they play a central role in training future educators, who must be provided with the tools to address gender-based violence among the youth (Donoso Vázquez, Rubio Hurtado, & Vilà Baños, 2018).

However, given the entrenchment of the symbolic and material dimensions that drive violence against women, this will be a long-term process. As Fernández (2018) has pointed out, expressions of sexism persist in social imaginaries despite the transformations to the lives of women in recent decades, and these expressions can often be difficult to recognize.

6. Conclusions

Amid ongoing cultural changes and calls by young people for social transformations, the presence of feminism is growing at higher education institutions throughout Latin America.[6] In this context, old relationship structures have been dismantled in a transition from more authoritarian formulas to greater equality, whereby women have achieved a degree of liberation from traditional gender roles (Beck & Beck, 2001).

However, these advances coexist alongside traditional practices and beliefs that still persist, giving rise to contradictory values and practices within the imaginaries.

Thus, there is an urgent need for prevention strategies and for the introduction of a gender perspective across a range of everyday practices. These

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6   In 2018, Chile witnessed one of the decade's most important feminist mobilizations, whose most visible means of expression was a series of university occupations led on the national level by young women. For more information, see Faride Zeran (Ed.), 2018, *Mayo Feminista. La rebelión contra el patriarcado*). Editorial LOM..

measures are crucial to critical and analytical reflection about the roots of gender/based violence and its various consequences. Gender is not a private–domestic issue confined to romantic relationships, but one that also shapes the public sphere. Indeed, as the UN Women guidelines propose, altering the foundations that uphold and reproduce this type of violence in the educational sphere will necessitate a comprehensive approach to curricula, teaching, and civic education (ONU, 2019). Similarly, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) explicitly promoted an education free of gender stereotypes. In Chile, Law No. 21,091 for the Strengthening of State Universities (Ley de Fortalecimiento de la Universidades Estatales), promulgated in 2018, incorporates gender equality, respect, and human rights—essential dimensions in fighting violence against women.

Thus, universities must be committed to and participate in the formulation of policies and laws aimed at guaranteeing women a life free of gender-based violence. This will require a review of the applicable law currently in force in Chile, which is based on the concept of domestic violence and is regulated by Law No. 20,066 on Domestic Violence (Ley de Violencia Intrafamiliar). This law does not take into account the power structure of gender relations, and nor does it make allowances for relationships without cohabitation or children. As a result, many of students' experiences are beyond the scope of this law, which means there is a lack of legal protection for those women who decide to report acts of violence against them. Universities and their communities are spaces suited to the development of discourses and practices that foster these necessary processes of social transformation. Thus, a greater scientific understanding of the phenomenon of gender-based violence will help to denaturalize the problem, facilitating actions and public policies aimed at eradicating a social ill that violates the human rights of women.

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