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ARGENTINA: Legalize abortion

End insurmountable barriers.

HRW (31.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33fazWD> - The life and health of anyone who is pregnant in Argentina will be at risk as long as access to abortion and post-abortion care remains heavily restricted, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Congress should legalize abortion to protect their fundamental rights, given the insurmountable obstacles they face when trying to access abortion under the limited exceptions authorized by law.

The 77-page report named "[A Case for Legal Abortion: The Human Cost of Barriers to Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Argentina](#)," describes the consequences of the Senate's rejection of a 2018 bill that would have fully decriminalized abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. Human Rights Watch documented cases of women and girls who have, since then, encountered an array of barriers to access legal abortion and post-abortion care. The barriers include arbitrarily imposed gestational limits, lack of access to and availability of abortion methods, fear of criminal prosecution, stigmatization, and mistreatment by health professionals.

"Since the Argentine Senate narrowly rejected the 2018 bill to legalize abortion, thousands of women and girls either had to overcome major barriers to access legal abortion or resort to clandestine, often unsafe, abortions that endanger their health and lives," said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch. "The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown have only exacerbated the limited access to reproductive health services, making legalizing abortion more urgent than ever."

During his presidential campaign, President Alberto Fernández promised to submit a bill to Congress to decriminalize abortion. Since taking office in December 2019, he has publicly supported decriminalizing abortion. One of the first measures by his health minister was to update and improve the "National Protocol for Comprehensive Care of People Entitled to Legal Termination of Pregnancy," which, if applied properly and consistently throughout the country, would contribute to improving access to comprehensive reproductive and sexual health services.

Submitting the bill was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but Fernández's top legal adviser has said that the government hopes to submit it this year.

Human Rights Watch visited the provinces of Salta, Chaco, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, and Buenos Aires, as well as Buenos Aires City, in November and December 2019, and interviewed 30 people, including women and girls who sought abortion care in the public and private health systems, health workers, lawyers, and activists who support those seeking abortions. Human Rights Watch also conducted follow-up interviews, requested

information from the Argentine government, and analyzed laws and policies, reports by United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations, official health data and public health studies, and medical journals and news outlets.

A nearly century-old “exceptions model” largely bans abortion in Argentina. The only exceptions, under Section 86 of the 1921 criminal code, are when a pregnancy endangers the life or health of a woman or girl, or when it results from rape. In all other circumstances, abortion is illegal and punishable with up to 15 years in prison. The sentence for self-inducing abortion or consenting to have an abortion is up to four years.

Human Rights Watch documented cases of women and girls whose situations fell within the legal “exceptions” but who faced insurmountable barriers to access abortion and post-abortion care. Obstacles included a lack of public information about the scope of legal grounds for abortion; health facilities imposing arbitrary hurdles or waiting periods; health officials illegally requiring production of police reports or court orders to proceed with the procedure under the rape exception; and lack of access to safe and legal methods or lack of nearby health facilities providing abortion services. The invocation of conscientious objection by providers also created severe burdens or delays.

Women, health professionals, and feminist activists said that stigmatization and fear of legal consequences, including criminal prosecution, deter people from seeking – and health professionals from providing – abortions, even when Section 86 of the criminal code exception requirements are met. Women and girls faced abuse and mistreatment, including cruelty and humiliation by healthcare providers, denial of access to legal health services, and violation of medical confidentiality in health care settings.

Access to legal abortion and post-abortion care depends heavily on a person’s location and socioeconomic background, Human Rights Watch found. A lack of clear and consistent regulations across the country has resulted in a patchwork of practices that disproportionately harms people with limited resources or little access to information about their rights.

In addition, the Covid-19 lockdown has made access to any reproductive health care more difficult. Furthermore, the need to visit multiple health centers and travel sometimes for hours to obtain access to services multiplies the risks of contagion.

Criminalizing abortion does not prevent people from ending unwanted pregnancies. It forces them to seek abortions outside the regulation of the state, and many are performed unsafely. Many, particularly those who live in poverty or in rural areas, resort to self-induced abortions or seek assistance from untrained providers.

Unsafe abortions can lead to short- or long-term health problems, and even death. In 2018, Argentina’s National Health Ministry reported 35 deaths from abortion, constituting 13 percent of maternal deaths. Many of these deaths are preventable.

In the latest available statistics, for 2016, 39,025 women and girls were admitted to public hospitals for health complications arising from abortions or miscarriages. Sixteen percent were ages 10 to 19. That is most likely a fraction of the total amount of pregnant people facing health consequences from illegal abortions, as stigmatization and fear of criminal prosecution often keep women who suffer complications from seeking care.

Authoritative interpretations of treaties ratified by Argentina have long established that highly restrictive abortion laws violate the human rights of women and girls, including their rights to life, to health, and not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. As long as Argentina criminalizes abortion, pregnant people will confront unjust

difficulties in exercising their rights, particularly those who rely on the public health system, and who live in provinces that lack or do not implement abortion regulations.

Argentina should decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and regulate it in a manner that fully respects the autonomy of those who are pregnant, Human Rights Watch said. Argentina should also ensure that pregnant people have access to legal abortion as currently regulated and that healthcare workers cannot invoke conscientious objection to refuse to perform abortions in public care services in a manner that imposes burdens or delays in accessing legal abortion services.

For selected cases documented by Human Rights Watch, see below.

Selected Cases

Veronica R. (pseudonym), 25, was receiving free contraceptive injections at a health facility when, in February 2019, the providers saw she had a new address and told her that, to continue getting free services, she would have to visit a health center closer to home. She went to a health center nearer her home and requested a tubal ligation, she told Human Rights Watch. A gynecologist there told her she was “too young and might want to have children in the future.” The gynecologist, because of his personal beliefs, also refused to provide any form of contraception. Veronica had neither the time nor the resources to find an alternative source of contraceptives, and, in April 2019, she became pregnant. At six weeks pregnant, Veronica sought a legal abortion, citing the health exception, at a clinic in a small provincial city. Healthcare providers there refused, offering no reason, so she went to another clinic, where a healthcare provider told her that she was too far along in the pregnancy to have an abortion there. Veronica became so desperate, she said, that she considered getting hit by a car to end the pregnancy. When she was 20 weeks pregnant, a feminist organization referred her to a medical team that performed the abortion in a city a 4-hour drive from where she lived.

In September 2019, Leticia H. (pseudonym), 19, went to a public hospital in northern Argentina to end a pregnancy caused by rape. She was 17 weeks pregnant. The hospital denied the abortion, citing an informal rule under which the hospital provided abortions only up to 16 weeks. The rule lacked a legal basis. Leticia took medication to induce an abortion, a lawyer involved in the case told Human Rights Watch, but the abortion was incomplete; tissue remaining in her uterus placed her at risk of infection. Recognizing that something was wrong and that she needed medical intervention, Leticia went to a hospital, where health personnel left her waiting for two hours before treating her. Bleeding profusely, she lost consciousness several times in the emergency room corridor. “If you liked having an abortion,” a hospital employee told her, “you’ll now have to wait.”

In November 2018, Carmela Toledo, 23, found out that she was carrying a fetus with anencephaly, a condition that makes it difficult for the fetus to survive. Carmela was 25 weeks pregnant. She went to a public hospital in Buenos Aires province to request a legal abortion, but doctors told her that the bill decriminalizing abortion had not passed and added, falsely, that abortion was completely illegal. They said she had to wait until she was seven months pregnant, so they could say she had had a premature birth. When she was seven months pregnant, health professionals tried unsuccessfully to induce birth. The doctor involved frightened Carmela by outlining the risks of the procedure, including the possibility of difficulties in having a child later. She decided to continue the pregnancy, and whenever she felt the fetus move, she cried. She had a caesarean section at week 41 and delivered a daughter who died eight days later.

ARGENTINA: Femicides in Argentina reach 10-year high under coronavirus lockdown

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (19.05.2020) - <https://reut.rs/3bUn2RU> - The number of women killed in Argentina has reached a 10-year high under coronavirus lockdown, a leading rights group said on Monday, with more than 50 femicides in less than two months.

Three of those women were murdered in just the last four days, according to La Casa del Encuentro, a Buenos Aires-based feminist group that said not only the numbers but the severity of the violence was hugely concerning.

"We're very worried. It's the highest number in 10 years," said Ada Rico, the group's president and director of the organization's Femicide Observatory watchdog project.

"(Women) are being beaten to death or strangled," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Twelve women are killed every day in Latin America because of their gender in a crime known as femicide, according to the United Nations, and the region is home to 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world.

The vast majority of killings go unprosecuted.

The data in Argentina follows a worldwide trend of rising gender-based violence under lockdown that has left women trapped at home with their abusers and unable to seek help while tensions due to COVID-19 escalate, experts say.

"She's isolated with the person who's attacking her," said Rico. "Sometimes when a woman's locked up, she can't make a phone call."

Along with the three most recent deaths, at least 49 women were killed between March 20 and May 14, the group said. That is up from 40 in the same period last year and an increase of nearly a third compared with 2018.

Calls to Argentina's emergency 137 line for domestic abuse victims increased by two-thirds in April versus a year earlier after shelter-in-place measures were ordered in mid-March.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called on governments to take urgent measures to tackle a "horrifying global surge" in domestic violence, adding that for many women, being in their own homes was often the most dangerous.

Argentina has recorded more than 7,800 confirmed coronavirus cases and about 360 deaths, according to a Reuters tally.

The number of femicides was calculated using local media reports, Rico said.

ARGENTINA president to introduce bill to legalise abortion

If the bill is approved, Argentina will be the largest jurisdiction to legalise the procedure in Latin America.

By Natalie Alcoba

Al Jazeera (02.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2PL73NM> - Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez will send a bill to Congress in a matter of days that seeks to legalise abortion, marking the first time the initiative will have the backing of the president in what could be a significant breakthrough for abortion rights in Latin America.

Fernandez made the announcement in the National Congress on Sunday, with thousands of people gathered outside, including women brandishing the green handkerchief of abortion rights. Some wiped tears from their eyes during his speech.

In Argentina, abortion is illegal and can mean jail time, except in instances of rape, or if a mother's health is at risk.

The new bill comes two years after a dramatic debate in the home country of Pope Francis in which the legalisation of abortion was narrowly rejected by the Senate.

Fernandez called the current law "ineffective" because it has had no deterrent effect.

"It has also condemned many women, generally of limited resources, to resort to abortive practices in absolute secrecy, putting their health and sometimes their lives at risk," he said.

"A state that is present must protect citizens in general and obviously women in particular. And in the 21st century, every society needs to respect an individual's decision to make choices over their own bodies.

"That is why, within the next 10 days, I will present a bill for the voluntary interruption of pregnancy that legalises abortion at the initial time of pregnancy and allows women to access the health system when they make the decision to abort."

Advancing women's rights

Argentina's feminist movement is pushing to legalise elective abortion in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy.

The president will also send a project to Congress that will provide better support to mothers and newborns, as well as a plan to ensure sexual education is delivered in schools.

The Argentine government estimates that 350,000 illegal abortions take place every year in the third-most populous country in South America, putting women's lives at risk. Human rights groups estimate the number could be as high as 500,000. Many women who try to access abortions that are legal also face obstacles, with doctors invoking religious or moral objections.

Ana Correa, a women's rights activist who wrote *Somos Belen*, a book about an Argentine woman who was imprisoned after suffering a miscarriage said she was delighted with Fernandez's decision.

"We're very happy and hopeful," Correa told Al Jazeera. "We will have some important opponents, but it's going to be very difficult for legislators to oppose this project because there really is very compelling proof of how clandestine abortions impact women."

Daniel Lipovetsky, a legislator in the province of Buenos Aires, told Al Jazeera that Sunday's announcement showed how far Argentina had moved ahead on the issue.

"Just a few years ago, it would have been unimaginable that a president would send a project to legalise abortion to the Congress," said Lipovetsky, who forms part of the political opposition and in 2018 was part of the group who worked in favour of legalisation.

Argentina is in the midst of an important transformation around the advancement of women's rights. In 2015, a feminist movement known as Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) took to the streets to denounce high rates of violence against women and triggered a broader debate that set the stage for the vote in 2018.

Correa, one of the founders of Ni Una Menos, highlighted three cases that have served to "unmask" the truth of abortion in Argentina: that of Belen, who spent more than two years in prison after a court ruled that what doctors had diagnosed as a miscarriage was an abortion (her conviction was overturned in 2017 following a public outcry); that of Ana Maria Acevedo, who sought an abortion in 2007 in order to undergo chemotherapy, was refused, and died; and that of an 11-year-old girl known as Lucia, who was raped by her grandmother's partner and denied a legal abortion by health authorities in 2019, until a court finally intervened. An emergency caesarean section had to be performed, the baby did not survive, and the doctors were then accused of homicide. No indictments were filed.

Correa said Fernandez's project to provide support to new mothers also serves "to deconstruct that false notion that those of us who are in favour of legal abortion are against maternity - that's not true."

Influence of Catholic church

The president's speech opening the session of Congress addressed a slew of other issues in Argentina, which is in a deep recession and in talks with the International Monetary Fund and other international creditors to restructure its debt. He made repeated references to taking care of the most vulnerable.

"His discourse was steeped with his set of values, of an Argentina that is inclusive, that is innovative, of a state that is present, and a state that is attending to, and listening to the new demands," said political scientist Paola Zuban, director of the public opinion consultancy Zuban Cordoba & Associates. But the issue of abortion remains deeply divisive, according to polls she has conducted.

The Catholic Church is likely to play an influential role in the debate. During the president's speech, the Episcopal Conference of Argentina sent a tweet reminding people of the mass it is planning for International Women's Day on March 8 to express opposition to abortion and "yes to women, yes to life."

"The culture of death advances," Monsenor Jorge Eduardo Scheinig, an archbishop, said in a recorded message. "We need to pray so that in Argentina, the yes to life is stronger than death."

Lipovetsky believes that the votes are there for approval in the lower house, but the Senate will be close. Still, he is optimistic.

"The chances that this will finally become law are many," he said.

And Correa says the feminist movement will keep the pressure on.

"There's no doubt that we're going to stay present in the streets and we're going to keep insisting so that legislators vote in favour," she said.

COLOMBIA : COVID-19 sees more expectant Colombian mothers turn to traditional help

'We go to the most difficult parts, where the doctors cannot go.'

By Ana Luisa González

The New Humanitarian (07.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2LtqjjW> - In November, Juana del Carmen Martínez, an Afro-Colombian midwife self-taught in traditional medicine, waited outside the door of a zinc-roofed shack on the outskirts of Quibdó, the capital of Chocó, a region in western Colombia.

Inside waited Elina Chamorro, a young Indigenous woman about to deliver a baby girl.

Martínez had come to find out if Chamorro had gone into labour. She had brought a medicinal plant, celandine, to brew with cinnamon and sugar. If labour pains continue after the expectant mother drinks the tea, the birth is imminent.

The scene reflected ongoing maternal care not only in Chocó, but in communities throughout Colombia.

In rural areas, the COVID-19 pandemic has driven up maternal mortality as pregnant women have avoided health centres. Many women have instead resorted to Afro-Colombian midwives – who have inherited ancestral knowledge and skills – for care prior to their deliveries. But these health workers often lack official recognition of their work.

In her 38-year career as a traditional midwife, or partera, Martínez, who is 58, has helped deliver more than 780 babies. Since the start of the pandemic, she has helped with at least five home births and has delivered care to at least 10 pregnant women.

Chamorro, 27, belongs to the Emberá Dobida indigenous community – Dobida means “people of the river” – based mostly in the Chocó department. Her earlier children were born at the local hospital. But not this year.

“I prefer to deliver my baby at home,” she told The New Humanitarian by phone. “At the hospitals, the service is very slow and the doctors are not taking the time to check up on me because they have several patients.”

During the pandemic, midwives like Martínez have been essential in delivering maternal healthcare to Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, especially in rural areas, where access to hospitals and clinics is difficult.

Martínez travels throughout the Chocó department, one of the poorest parts of the country – and one in which illegal armed groups flourish. She is well-respected in her community and able to deliver assistance in areas that are too dangerous for others to enter.

“I wear my midwife’s uniform, with my card and bag, so I can pass anywhere,” she said. “We go to the most difficult parts, where the doctors cannot go.”

Mothers more vulnerable

The work of Martínez and others like her has been critical to improving maternal health in Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities in Chocó. Midwives here extend the reach of prenatal and birthing services beyond the small villages and towns – like Quibdó – to the more remote areas. They also often detect dangerous conditions during pregnancies and urge mothers to go to the hospital for prenatal checks.

As COVID-19 has overwhelmed healthcare services globally, pregnant women around the world face serious risks. In many countries, a rise in stillbirths has been recorded due to the closure of maternity units during surges in coronavirus cases.

And women who need critical sexual and reproductive health services are avoiding health centres because they feel they will be exposed to the virus. Others have lost access to healthcare due to lockdowns and restrictions on movement.

Such restrictions in Chocó have been enacted not by the government, but by illegal armed groups that have imposed strict lockdowns.

The weather also reduces movement. This region is one of the rainiest places in the world, where average annual precipitation totals 8,000 to 13,000 mm.

“When mothers are about to deliver their babies, some of them are assisted by midwives, while others go to doctors,” said Martínez. “But sometimes we are stuck. The recent landslide in the Lloró municipality took everything away. It took the health centre, several houses, and people lost everything.”

And it’s not just in Colombia that conditions during the pandemic are impacting women’s health.

The United Nations Population Fund, or UNFPA, found that, worldwide, “many hospitals and health centres are reporting declines in the number of women and girls receiving critical sexual and reproductive healthcare, including antenatal services, safe delivery services and family planning.”

And the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has reported a 40 percent decrease in pregnancy checks in 11 Latin American countries.

In addition, UNFPA experts in Colombia have warned local authorities about an increase of maternal deaths during COVID-19.

Preliminary data from Colombia’s National Institute of Health (INS) documents the human cost: In 2019, 298 maternal deaths were recorded in Colombia. In 2020, the number was at least 350 – a 17.5 percent increase.

“These partial numbers are alarming because women are not going to [health] services, because they are not close enough to them to prevent these deaths,” said UNFPA expert Ana María Vélez. “We have not organised a healthcare system outside hospitals or clinics.”

Even before the pandemic began, maternal mortality in Colombia was high – although not as high as Venezuela, Peru, or Ecuador. According to the INS, the maternal mortality rate in 2019 was 46.7 deaths per 100,000 live births, with numbers even higher in rural communities. But Afro-Colombian women die at twice the national rate, and the mortality rate in Indigenous communities is five times higher than the average.

As part of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, UNFPA hopes to achieve zero preventable maternal deaths by 2030. However, during this pandemic, Vélez reported that

Colombia lost eight years, with rates of maternal mortality returning to levels not seen since 2012.

That, in the opinion of many, is where traditional midwives can help.

“The work of midwives is fundamental, but it is not only working with them, it is working with a healthcare system, and that implies several actions,” Vélez said. “First, the community works with the midwives. And second, [it’s necessary] to work on the different cultural worldviews within the institutions, because often the problem is discrimination.”

Midwifery and health centres’ response

In Colombia, midwifery was officially recognised as an International Intangible Culture Heritage in 2016. But unlike in Mexico, which has also seen a rise in midwife-assisted birth during the pandemic, these traditional health workers still receive no financial backing from the state. And many of them, including Martínez, say their work is not valued by the government. Furthermore, according to Vélez, newborns assisted by midwives are not counted by DANE, the national statistics department.

Nonetheless, Martínez said, midwives like her play a crucial role.

“First, we value the pregnant mother; we tell her to go to the doctor so that the doctor can do the relevant exams, and she can go to about five or six check-ups,” she said. “Then I can help them without problems.”

But during this pandemic, requests for assistance have exceeded the capacities of the midwives. Local organisations are trying to respond to such shortfalls. Asoredipar Chocó, an association of more than 800 midwives in Chocó, focuses on training and supporting their work.

Manuela Mosquera, a former volunteer nurse at the Colombian Red Cross and the leader of Asoredipar Chocó, said there had been an increase of 20 percent in home births assisted by midwives within the association since the start of the pandemic.

While the services of these traditional midwives are on the rise, Mosquera views COVID-19 as an opportunity for health centres to better acknowledge their work.

“The pandemic should imply a recognition of midwifery by local health institutions, since they have identified that pregnant women are not attending their health centres,” she said.

UNFPA is currently working on developing a phone app with Asoredipar Chocó to register home births, newborns, or maternal or neonatal deaths by mobile phone. The project aims to integrate Chocó’s traditional midwives with health services and with DANE. This will help midwives establish a “live birth certificate” of newborns that is sent directly to DANE to better integrate the records of newborns assisted by parteras. This way, home births may be recognised.

“This innovation can help ensure that women do not experience discrimination in services, that midwives who help can register births, and that those births count,” said Vélez.

The integration of midwives within the formal health system, with an ethnic and intercultural approach, could, it is hoped, increase communities’ access to health services and reduce preventable maternal deaths.

Recently, PAHO analysed the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous and Afro-descendants in the countries of the Americas, working with local leaders to rethink the health system.

They discussed not only reducing the inequity in access but also how to place greater value on ancestral knowledge – including that of parteras and healers.

The need for regional investment

Even though the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, except for Haiti, are not among those with the highest rates of maternal mortality globally, PAHO has reported an increase due to COVID-19 in the region, with the highest rises in Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia.

PAHO encouraged countries in the Americas to step up their efforts to ensure access to prenatal care services for pregnant women, while UNFPA urged more funding to meet rising needs due to the pandemic, secure maternal healthcare, and promote reproductive health.

According to a recent study, government funding can contribute significantly to the reduction of infant mortality in Latin America. But the amount of money invested is different in each Latin American country. In Colombia, for example, the entire national health development budget (which includes maternal health) was only \$70 million in 2020.

That is why the work of Martínez, and people like her, is crucial.

A week after she visited with the herbal tea, Chamorro went into labour. Martínez took a motorcycle to Chamorro's home early in the morning to help her with the delivery.

"The labour wasn't difficult, but it was longer and painful because her last baby was eight years ago," Martínez said.

Still, after eight hours of labour, and with Martínez's help, Chamorro gave birth to a healthy, five-pound baby girl. Her name is Helean Sofía Serna.

COLOMBIA sees surge in femicides amid uptick in violence

Femicide Observatory records 86 killings of women and girls in September, the highest monthly total since 2017.

By Megan Janetsky

Al Jazeera (20.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/34t1USc> - Letica Estacio hoped the wave of gender-based violence that surged during the coronavirus lockdown in Colombia would slow after the South American country eased restrictions in early September.

But after the five-month lockdown was lifted, femicides – the killing of women due to their gender – surged across the country, data from Colombia's Femicide Observatory shows.

An average of nearly three women a day were killed in Colombia in September, with 86 femicides recorded in the month. It is the highest monthly total researchers have documented since they began tracking the killings in 2017.

Watchdogs said the spike in violence against women is a product of compounding long-term ripple effects of the pandemic – a resurgence of armed group violence and economic fallout – that disproportionately affect women.

"Every day the conflict gets worse and worse. The narco-trafficking, the killings," said Estacio, a 52-year-old women's rights leader in the western coastal city of Tumaco. "It's incredibly heavy, and even more so for women."

Surge in gender-based violence

At the beginning of the pandemic, countries across the world saw rises in domestic violence as lockdowns and restrictions closed women in with their abusers. Latin America, a region which recorded high rates of gender-based violence before the pandemic, felt that even more acutely.

Estacio and other leaders in Tumaco, a hub for narco-trafficking and armed conflict, were overwhelmed by an initial surge in domestic violence cases after the country entered a nationwide lockdown in March.

But as the state diverted resources from some parts of the country in order to focus on bringing the coronavirus outbreak under control, a patchwork of criminal groups – left-wing fighters, right-wing paramilitaries and narco-trafficking gangs – moved into areas vacated by the government and waged territorial war.

"Here, there's no such thing as law," Estacio said.

As a result, mass killings and similar bloodshed reminiscent of times before the country's 2016 peace process have jumped country-wide.

Sexual and gender-based violence have long been used as tools of war to sow terror in communities. Now, Estefania Rivera Guzman, a researcher at the Observatory, is concerned that the strategic targeting of women could be on the uptick.

So far in 2020, the group has registered 445 cases of femicide, up from 431 cases across the same period in 2019. The numbers recorded in September were more than double levels witnessed earlier this year.

Since September, women's rights leaders have also noted another disturbing development: As armed groups clash in rural areas and exploit vulnerabilities caused by the pandemic to increase child recruitment, there has been a spike in the number of women and girls killed by firearms.

In recent weeks, one man pleaded guilty to beating and stabbing a woman who rejected his sexual advances, throwing her into the western Cauca River where her body was found floating.

Near Tumaco, armed men reportedly stopped and shot up the car of a local women's and Indigenous rights leader.

And in the central town of Segovia, one 14-year-old girl was reportedly killed by a hitman and, a day after being buried, her body was found unearched and naked in the cemetery.

"It's these acts of violence that are so extreme that they send a message," Rivera Guzman said. "And the message isn't just for women, but also for the men who live in the zone, and it's: Who has the power?"

While officials in Segovia said they "reject all violent acts" against women and girls and police say they are investigating the crime, the majority of femicides in the country end in impunity.

In Tumaco, Estacio and other observers say women are often too scared to report gender-based violence because men working with armed groups camp outside government offices where women would normally report.

Economic distress

Meanwhile, the economic fallout caused by the pandemic and the lockdowns has disproportionately affected women, putting them at heightened risk.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, Colombia had one of the highest economic gender gaps in Latin America. In recent months, female-dominated industries like tourism and the service sector have taken severe hits.

In August, the unemployment rate for women was 21.7 percent, and the unemployment rate for men was 31.4 percent, according to the most recent government data.

Estacio said women in her community who would normally support themselves by working informally and selling street food were left with no income, as work dried up amid the lockdown.

It has stripped at-risk women of “economic autonomy”, explained Carolina Mosquera, researcher at the Bogota-based think-tank, Sisma Mujer. And with it, their ability to escape from an abusive situation that could escalate to something as extreme as femicide.

In one recent case, a woman called the organisation’s domestic abuse helpline, and they worked to get her out of her home where she was being abused by her husband. Hours later, when they called back, she told aid workers she could not leave because she was surviving off her husband’s salary.

When they tried to follow up “she simply stopped answering.”

“It’s a loss of 10 years of work toward gender equality because women are returning to these patriarchal spaces,” Mosquera said. “It brings us back to this old dynamic of the man as the provider and the woman who cares for the home.”

The pandemic left more than 15,000 women in Colombia at extreme risk of femicide, according to the National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Science. Similar upticks have been seen in other Latin American countries like Guatemala and Mexico.

While local and national governments attempted to respond to the violence, setting up resources like local and national domestic violence attention lines, critics have said it is not enough and that women lack effective judicial resources.

Colombia’s Ombudsman’s Office, which oversees the protection of human rights, declined to comment, saying that due to lack of state presence caused by the pandemic, they haven’t been able to officially register the femicides.

“A line doesn’t guarantee access to justice, to a restitution of their rights. No, a call is just a call.” Mosquera said. “This effort by the government falls short compared to the volume of cases, killings and violence we’ve seen in the pandemic.”

HAITI: Lifetime ban for football chief

Players demand end to sexual abuse in sport.

HRW (24.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37kfGqH> - Football's lifetime ban for Haitian soccer federation president Yves Jean-Bart is an important step forward to protect children and young women athletes in sport from sexual abuse, Human Rights Watch said today. The International Federation of Association Football (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, FIFA) decision should be followed by swift action to sanction other abusers and their accomplices, criminal prosecutions in Haiti and other jurisdictions, and ongoing therapeutic support for survivors.

After reports by The Guardian and Human Rights Watch and pressure from Haitian rights groups Kay Fanm, Solidarite Fanm Ayisyèn (SOFA), the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH), and others, over the past seven months, FIFA investigated serious allegations of sexual harassment and abuse against Jean Bart, also known as "Dadou." FIFA's Ethics Committee handed him the maximum punishment in football on Friday, November 20, 2020.

"FIFA's decision is a vindication for all the courageous survivors of abuse and witnesses who came forward to report sexual abuse," said Minky Worden, director of global initiatives at Human Rights Watch. "As Human Rights Watch has documented, they faced personal threats and stigma in society. FIFA's punishment is an important signal that if you are an abuser in football, your days are numbered."

Jean-Bart had been president of the Haitian Football Federation (Fédération Haïtienne De Football, FHF) since 2000. Following their investigation into evidence of systematic sexual abuse of female players, FIFA's Ethics Committee found Jean-Bart guilty of "having abused his position and sexually harassed and abused various female players, including minors." He is now banned from the sport for life in Haiti and internationally, and fined 1 million Swiss francs (approximately US\$1.1 million). He can appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, and has said he will.

Survivors of sexual abuse in Haiti told Human Rights Watch that they want justice for abuses by the president but also football sanctions for all officials who aided and knew about abuses in the national football academy.

"Playing for Haiti, I gave my heart," one women's national team player told Human Rights Watch. "Without us players, you don't have a game. I am so happy Dadou can't abuse his power and stop us from achieving our dreams anymore."

Since May, Human Rights Watch has worked together with the international football players' union FIFPro, who provided lawyers and support for athletes, helped to interview witnesses, and collected evidence of systemic human rights abuses in Haitian football, including confiscation of players' passports, labor rights abuses, grooming child athletes for sexual exploitation, and threats to kill witnesses and survivors.

Jean-Bart has been Haiti's football federation president since 2000 and was re-elected to a sixth term in February. Jean-Bart has publicly denied all allegations and successfully sought to have a judge in Haiti purportedly "clear" him of all charges and exonerate him. That a judge made this pronouncement the day before Jean-Bart's lifetime ban is testament to the power he wields in Haiti and the challenge survivors face in taking on Jean-Bart and his allies. In August, Human Rights Watch documented threats and attacks on witnesses and whistleblowers, which could prevent them from coming forward with evidence of abuses.

FIFA's statement signals other sanctions against abusers and officials who knew about or facilitated abuses in the Haiti federation could come soon:

The aforementioned ethics proceedings are part of an extensive investigation concerning Mr Jean-Bart, as well as other officials within the FHF, who were identified as having allegedly been involved (as principals, accomplices or instigators) in acts of systematic sexual abuse against female football players between 2014 and 2020. The proceedings are still pending with respect to other FHF officials.

It is essential for FIFA to discipline others who took part in sexual abuse and to remove them from football, Human Rights Watch said. FIFA needs to ensure ongoing therapeutic and logistical support for players, and enforcement of any bans and fines.

"In addition to protecting survivors and witnesses, FIFA should exercise its authority to ban and sanction all officials implicated in sexual abuse or threatening or menacing witnesses during its investigation," Worden said. "In its best form, football is fun, empowering, and healthy for young people and FIFA should do its part to ensure player safety."

LATIN AMERICA: Women's movement sweeps Latin America to loosen abortion restrictions

By Daina Beth Solomon & Cassandra Garrison

Reuters (01.12.2020) - <https://reut.rs/3orDvUe> - Several weeks pregnant and about to start a job away from home, Lupita Ruiz had no doubts about wanting to end her pregnancy, despite knowing she could face jail time for having an abortion under a law in her state of Chiapas in southern Mexico.

She asked friends for help until she found a doctor two hours from her town who agreed to do it in secret.

Five years later, lawmakers in Chiapas are set to consider an initiative to halt prosecutions of women who terminate their pregnancies, part of a movement sweeping Latin America to loosen some of the world's most restrictive abortion laws.

Several out of more than 20 Latin American nations ban abortion outright, including El Salvador, which has sentenced some women to up to 40 years in prison. Most countries, including Brazil, the region's most populous, allow abortion only in specific circumstances, such as rape or health risk to the mother.

Just Uruguay and Cuba allow elective abortions.

In Mexico, a patchwork of state restrictions apply, but the debate is shifting, Ruiz said.

"When someone talked about abortion, they were shushed," said the 27-year-old activist, who helped draft the Chiapas initiative. "Now I can sit down to eat a tamale and have a coffee and talk with my mom and my grandma about abortion, without anyone telling me to be quiet."

Change is palpable across the predominantly Roman Catholic region. A new Argentine president proposed legalization last month, Chilean activists are aiming to write broader reproductive rights into a new constitution, and female lawmakers in Mexico are resisting abortion bans.

The push can be traced to Argentina's pro-abortion protests in 2018 by as many as one million women to back a legalization bill that only narrowly failed to pass - in Pope Francis's home country.

Catalina Martinez, director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the Center for Reproductive Rights, a legal advocacy organization, said Argentina's example inspired protests across Latin America.

"It was an awakening," she said.

Outrage at worsening gender violence in Latin America, where the number of femicides has doubled in five years, has also spread awareness of the abortion rights movement and fueled demands for recognition of women's rights in a conservative, male-dominated society.

"Women are finally understanding that they are not separate issues," said Catalina Calderon, director for campaigns and advocacy programs at the Women's Equality Center. "It's the fact that you agree that we women are in control of our bodies, our decisions, our lives."

The rise of social media has afforded women opportunities to bypass establishment-controlled media and bring attention to their stories, Calderon said.

"Now they're out there for the public to discuss and for the women to react, and say: 'This does not work. We need to do something'," Calderon said.

As in the United States, where conservatives have made gains in restricting a woman's right to an abortion, there is pushback in Latin America against the calls for greater liberalization.

Brazil, under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, is making it even harder for women to abort.

The Argentine Episcopal Conference has said it does not want to debate abortion during the coronavirus crisis, and alluded to comments by the Pope urging respect for those who are "not yet useful," including fetuses.

Yet trust in the Catholic Church, which believes life begins at conception, is fading, with many Latin Americans questioning its moral legitimacy because of sexual abuse by priests.

Spreading 'green wave'

Argentina could be first up for sweeping change, with a bill submitted to Congress by center-left President Alberto Fernandez seeking to legalize elective abortions.

Approval for legalization has risen eight percentage points since 2014, according to an August Ipsos poll, with support split nearly evenly between those who favor elective abortion and those who are for it only in certain circumstances.

"The dilemma we must overcome is whether abortions are performed clandestinely or in the Argentine health system," Fernandez said.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, a U.S.-based reproductive health research organization, an estimated 29% of pregnancies in Latin America and the Caribbean from 2015 to 2019 ended in abortion, encompassing 5.4 million women. The abortions are often clandestine, so figures are hard to determine.

The mass demonstrations in Argentina two years ago, known as the “green wave” protests, have reverberated.

Since mid-2018, lawmakers in Mexico have filed more than 40 proposals to end punishment for abortion, according to Mexican reproductive rights group GIRE.

In Chiapas, the de-criminalization effort is the first of its kind since a brief period in the 1990s when abortion was legalized during the left-wing Zapatista rebellion.

Although Chiapas does not on paper punish abortion with prison, it can jail women for the “killing” of their infants.

With Mexico’s first leftist government in a century in power, national lawmakers are considering two initiatives to open up restrictions and strip away criminal punishments from places like Sonora state, where abortion can be punished by up to six years in prison.

Only two federal entities, Mexico City and Oaxaca, allow elective abortions.

Wendy Briceno, a Sonoran lawmaker who has backed a nationwide legalization bill, said the initiatives have a good chance to pass if the debate centers on women’s health, especially given rising outrage over femicides.

In Chile, activists are celebrating a vote in October to write a new constitution as a chance to expand a 2017 law that permitted abortion to save a mother’s life, in cases of rape, or if the fetus is not viable.

Colombia, where the constitutional court has agreed to consider a petition to remove abortion from the penal code, could set an example, said Anita Pena, director of Chilean reproductive rights group Corporacion Miles.

Activists agree there is still a long way to go, with restrictive laws entrenched in many countries.

To Briceno, Brazil’s shift to the right under Bolsonaro, who has vowed to veto any pro-abortion bills, was a reminder to push even harder for abortion rights.

“No fight is ever finished,” she said.

LATIN AMERICA: Activists in Latin America battle to guarantee access to safe abortion in COVID-19 world

For decades, women human rights defenders across Latin America have been fighting an uphill battle to ensure sexual and reproductive rights, including access to safe abortion, are a reality for all. Over the last five months that battle has turned into a war.

By Josefina Salomón & Christopher Alford

Amnesty International (07.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/35BQ5dr> - The figures have been shocking for a long time. The COVID-19 pandemic has turned them into a catastrophe, with a potential bleak future.

Over the last five months, already high rates of violence against women have risen exponentially across the world. Countries such as Chile and Mexico have reported increases of more than 50 percent in calls to emergency helplines for women who are victims and survivors of violence.

Experts worry about the many women who are trapped at home with their abusers without access to a phone, a computer or anyone they can contact for help or support.

Enforced lockdowns and other barriers to mobility have also prevented many women from accessing essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health care, contraceptives and safe abortions.

The UN has painted a bleak picture of what is to come. Their latest estimates say that lockdowns over a six-month period could leave 47 million women across the world unable to access contraceptives. This could lead to an estimated seven million additional unintended pregnancies. Many could take place in Latin America, where access to safe abortions has been limited by draconian laws and a lack of information.

Experts and frontline workers worry that many of those women, trapped in vicious cycles of marginalization and violence, will turn to unsafe and life-threatening procedures. The consequences are too frightening to contemplate. But activists across Latin America have been stepping up to the challenge and designing strategies to help those in need.

'Things have changed a lot'

Johana Cepeda, a nurse and human rights activist from Colombia, says the pandemic has added additional hurdles to those that many women already faced when trying to access a safe abortion.

Voluntary termination of a pregnancy is only legal in Colombia under three specific circumstances that the country's Constitutional Court approved in 2006: when the life or health of the woman is at risk, when the pregnancy is the result of rape, or in cases of fatal foetal impairment.

"The barriers to access range from lack of information to incorrect interpretations of the health clause of the ruling. Many consider the concept of 'health' as limited to having an illness but lack a wider understanding of it as including physical, mental and social wellbeing," Cepeda explains.

Most clinics offering abortion services in Colombia are located in urban centres. With a significant proportion of the population living in rural areas, geography is often a factor that prevents women from accessing health care.

Appointment with doctors are usually booked over the phone or the internet. But since the start of the pandemic and the lockdowns that followed, many women have found themselves living in abusive situations or lacking the privacy needed to seek help confidentially.

"For women who have been in isolation with violent partners who abuse them or control their decisions, even calling for information has been extremely difficult," Cepeda says. "Strict quarantines make it difficult for women to travel. For many, if a police officer stops them and asks where they're going, it's not easy to say they're going to get an abortion."

The Collective for the Life and Health of Women, a feminist organization that provides support for women to access legal abortions in Colombia, has documented 30 cases of women who have faced barriers when trying to access abortions between March and the

end of May 2020. The unreported number is likely to be much higher. They found that private and public health services are deprioritizing any health issues not related to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the fact that some, such as unwanted pregnancies, are particularly time sensitive.

The situation is similar in other countries across the region. In Chile, abortion has also been permitted since 2017 in just three circumstances: when the pregnancy is a result of rape, when the life of the pregnant woman is at risk, and in cases of fatal foetal impairment. Even then, a woman seeking an abortion must secure approval from two specialist doctors. Activists say these requirements amount to life-threatening hurdles.

Gloria Maira, a human rights activist and coordinator of the Action for Abortion in Chile, a network of organizations and activists working for women's right to access safe abortions, says that, despite the recent legislation, abortion remains extremely hard to access in the country.

"There are many obstacles that limit women's ability to make their own decisions," Maira says. "The lack of information about the law, problems with its implementation and the difficulties when it comes to the accreditation of the reasons for the abortion are some of them. The implementation of the law has been minimal."

Half of obstetricians in Chile are believed to refuse to provide abortions, even under the circumstances permitted under the law, due to objections on the grounds of their religious beliefs, according to a poll by the Ministry of Health. Feminist organizations say many others lack information about the law, a subject that is yet to be included in most medical schools' curriculums.

This leaves many women with no option but to resort to life threatening back-street abortions.

Javiera Canales, a lawyer and human rights activist with Miles Chile, an organization that promotes sexual and reproductive rights, says that the figures tell a very concerning picture.

"In the last three years, we've documented 128 cases of access to lawful abortion by children under 14 years of age. However, in 2019 alone, there were 647 children aged 10 and 13 that were admitted to programmes for prenatal care. This tells us their lawful access [to abortions] is being blocked," Canales says.

"The question is: why wasn't the law applied in those rape cases? Nobody has explained this because no one has been looking at it."

A bleak future

The difficulties in accessing health care services paint a bleak picture of the future for women in Latin America.

"Women will continue to abort," Canales says. "Our concern is that they will turn to unsafe back-street abortions again."

Local activists are extremely worried that a lack of access to safe abortion will lead to a rise in preventable deaths.

The organization Marie Stopes International estimates that around 1.9 million women that were served by their programmes around the world were not able to access their services

between January and June 2020. They estimate that the disruption could lead to an additional 1.5 million unsafe abortions and 3,100 additional maternal deaths.

Maira says that, in Chile, human rights organizations have been filling in the gap left by authorities when it comes to prioritizing the provision of sexual and reproductive health services for women, particularly for those living in rural areas who have less access.

"The networks are reporting an increase in the demand of safe abortions, which would not be surprising as sexual violence has also increased but the lack of abortion medication is making any response very challenging," Maira explains.

Fernanda Doz Costa, deputy director for the Americas at Amnesty International, says that by denying turning a blind eye to women's sexual and reproductive rights, world leaders are risking a new pandemic.

"For decades, activists across Latin America have warned of the wave of preventable deaths and health complications caused by the lack of adequate health care for women. Health authorities, the UN and the IACHR are already calling on governments to guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health services, which are essential health care and, as such, should not be suspended under the pandemic."

Fighting back

Faced with a shortage of contraceptives and medicines used during abortion procedures since Chile closed its borders and the reprioritization of non-COVID-19 related health services, local activists are taking a proactive approach to helping women.

Almost as soon as the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, local organizations found ways to continue to provide free legal, health, social and psychological assistance online.

Miles, for example, is organizing transport for women living in cities where no doctor would approve a legal abortion so that they can reach other health centres. Other networks of activists have been expanding to reach the whole country.

Maira says part of the problem is that President Sebastián Piñera, who is a vocal opponent of the law allowing safe abortions, has kept the issue off the table.

"The pandemic is providing an excuse to the government who, since before, did not want to guarantee access to abortion," she explains.

Things have also changed a lot in Colombia since the eruption of the pandemic as activists say reproductive health services have been deprioritized.

"We had to rethink our strategies and the way we support women, but what unites us is the need women have to access these essential services and the responsibility we feel for other women who need us," Cepeda says.

One of the strategies they have been pushing for in Colombia is the use of telehealth in the public sector, so women can have access to the medication they need and take it at home, without the need to go to a clinic. This is a service that is already in use in the private sector, Cepeda explains.

"The situation is very frustrating," Canales adds. "But the small battles that we win, such as seeing a woman able to access the care she needs or free herself from her aggressor are the little victories that fuel our fight."

MEXICO: UN experts call on Mexican police to protect women protesters

OHCHR (20.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2IWGZPL> - Ahead of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, UN human rights experts* today called on Mexican authorities to protect, not attack, women who peacefully demonstrate against violence.

“There is nothing more ironic – and outrageous – than the recent sight of police attacking women who were protesting against the violence and death women face every day in Mexico,” the experts said.

They made the call ahead of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, the start of the annual 16 Days campaign that ends on UN Human Rights Day on 10 December.

“Violence absolutely cannot be used to repress women who only want to live a life free of violence for themselves and all women and girls, and who protest against femicide, the most lethal form of violence against women, and demand justice for victims.”

“Now more than ever, it is vital that Mexican authorities respect and protect the right to peaceful assembly, as well as promote it in public discourse” they said. However, they added, during demonstrations the threat of sexual harassment, violence, arrest, and detention that women face daily in public becomes even worse.

The Mexican government at all levels, has an obligation to create an environment where women can fully and safely exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, without fear of reprisal. It must ensure that the force is only used as a last resort and in accordance with the principle of proportionality, that lethal weapons are not used, and that women are not sexually assaulted in future protests.

The experts called for specific steps to fight the machismo culture within the police force, such as strengthening mechanisms of police accountability, but also to fight gender stereotypes in society.

“Above all, there must be accountability for the way police officers treat women protesters and women human rights defenders, who play a crucial role in promoting women’s right to a life free from violence,” they said.

In June, the experts raised with the Mexican government their concern over intimidation and threats against those promoting women’s rights, particularly threats against women human rights defenders. They are aware of the authorities and other public institutions’ efforts to tackle this pattern of violence in the context of protests and violence against women.

MEXICO: Despite the coronavirus, Mexican women are fighting femicide

With little help from the government, citizens are now relying on grassroots organizing and support to combat gendered violence and discrimination.

By Ann Deslandes

Foreign Policy (20.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3c5ZW15> - On March 8, International Women's Day, an estimated 100,000 women of all walks of life poured into Mexico City's center. With a small group of male allies taking up the rear, they marched the mile and a half from the Monument to the Mexican Revolution to the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza. The march coincided with other large demonstrations in cities across the country, from Tapachula to Tijuana. The outsized rallies were just the beginning of a landmark 48-hour effort by Mexican women to demonstrate the urgency of the national emergency of femicide and other violence against women in the country.

In 2019, on average, 10 women were killed per day in Mexico, and the figure remained unchanged going into 2020. Moreover, Mexico's near-total impunity for crime (hovering around a 90 percent rate of impunity) is even worse when it comes to femicides—more like 99 percent, according to the National Citizen's Observatory on Femicide. Women are also over-represented in the already high numbers of kidnappings and forced disappearances in Mexico. The last major survey on family violence in Mexico, conducted in 2016, found that for approximately every 100 women aged 15 years and over who have had a partner or husband, 42 of the married women and 59 of the separated, divorced, or widowed women have experienced situations of emotional or economic abuse, or physical or sexual violence during their current or last relationship—a clear indication of women's overall vulnerability to security risks of all kinds.

Following large demonstrations in August and November 2019, which left parts of the center of Mexico City covered in graffiti and broken glass from the smashed windows of government buildings, feminist organizers went into 2020 saying that women would continue to take political action until real policy changes were made. On March 9, following the International Women's Day rallies, tens of thousands of Mexican women went on strike—staying indoors, not going to work, and not buying products—in a coordinated national effort to demonstrate to the country what it would be like if women simply ceased to contribute to society, if they continued to die and disappear. Up to 57 percent of women in the Mexican workforce intended to participate in the daylong strike when surveyed, resulting, by some estimates, in a potential economic loss to the country of \$1.5 billion.

In a somewhat surreal twist of events, within two weeks women were once again being called on to stay away from their workplaces—this time for public health reasons, as part of Mexico's measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, and this time with an amplified risk of violence against women as family incomes are threatened and the majority of the population is required to stay in their homes, potentially trapped with abusive family members. Advocates for women are determined that the momentum of March 8-9 not be lost as the country faces the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

Layda Negrete, a lawyer and researcher with the World Justice Project and expert on impunity in Mexico, said the events of March 8 and 9 mark a key moment for a political solution to violence against women in Mexico, noting that the numbers in the streets and on strike was "a very clear display of political muscle ... that has really caught the attention of the federal administration." Against this background, the renewed "political muscle" observed by Negrete is already facing its first test as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread.

The Brujas del Mar (Sea Witches), a collective that played a key role in calling for the strike, has swung into action to mitigate the increased risks to women that come with a country facing a period of lockdown. The group has established a hotline for women to

access psychological help if they are experiencing domestic violence. They are often approached by women in their home state of Veracruz, and from elsewhere in the country, for assistance to find refuge or to report abusers, and they are putting together a network to provide accessible legal advice. The collective is also coordinating a system of food donations for women who work in the informal sector and are likely to be hit the hardest by the economic fallout of quarantines and lockdowns.

In the first month of coronavirus quarantine starting in March, the national network of women's shelters reported an 80 percent increase in calls seeking help for gender-based violence. Forty-four percent of the calls were from the capital region, where stay-at-home and social distancing measures are scheduled to be in place until May 30. As per some media and activist estimates, 209 women have been killed as stay-at-home measures were announced, with at least 163 of these registered as femicides, or crimes in which the woman was killed because of her gender.

In early May, the president said he did not believe there had been an increase in domestic violence under the stay-at-home measures. In response, a group of feminists shared an open letter on social media that noted the high number of family violence-related calls to 911 per hour during that period—a figure that comes from his own government's data, which shows calls to report abuse or violence in the home increased overall by 22.7 percent between February and March. Then, the president claimed 90 percent of these calls were false reports.

Women's shelters remain operational as an essential service while coronavirus measures are in place in Mexico, new government funding has been provisioned, and the federal government says a woman experiencing violence can call the emergency number for a response from police or a variety of hotlines to find a place in a shelter. But Mexico is already grappling with several preexisting conditions that will make an effective response more difficult: funding cuts to shelters that occurred in 2019, a decrease in funding for the Mexican federal government's department for women's issues, a systemic underspending of funds allocated to state governments for programs to support women, and near-blanket impunity for criminal violence against women. As the pandemic progresses, it's clear that Mexican society will still rely on the leadership of citizens, as demonstrated during the protests, to prevent and punish violence against women.

There's little doubt that structural sexism and impunity are the greatest barriers to justice for victims of femicide, and to bringing the numbers down. Additionally, indigenous women, transgender women, and women with disabilities face compounded discrimination and risk. Women who work in Mexico's large informal economy are particularly vulnerable to poverty and violence.

Despite the current stay-at-home measures, many of these women must continue to seek a salary, placing them between the precarity of a slowed street economy and the economic pressures of raising a family. These factors are correlated with gendered violence: In a 2018 study, researchers found a link between disruption of employment in the informal economy and violence against women in Mexico City—women already vulnerable to high levels of violence at home find it increases when there are disruptions to their earning income.

Mexico does have a powerful law in place, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, which was passed in 2007. The law provided sweeping measures to "prevent, treat, punish, and eradicate violence against women," defined as including psychological, physical, economic, patrimonial (involving violation of women's property rights), and sexual violence; it also defined femicide as a hate crime targeting women. But as too many cases have demonstrated, the mandate is not enough.

Despite relatively high levels of reporting of family violence to police, women have come to expect little to no response from authorities. “When a woman is experiencing such violence, she has very little recourse,” Negrete said. “If she calls the police, they might not come, and even if they do, they have no training in how to respond to family violence. To pursue charges and protection from the violence they must go to the prosecutor’s office, who typically fail to do anything about the complaint.”

Under the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, “there are no clear proposals different from previous governments at the federal level or the local level,” said María de la Luz Estrada, a sociologist and the coordinator of the National Citizen’s Observatory on Femicide. In response to the rallies and the strike, the administration said it will not be altering current policy or making new policy to fight femicide and other violence against women. “We see a lot of money being put into things like a national policy against drug cartels, but not to prevent violence against women,” Negrete said.

A recent government service measure known as Women’s Justice Centers was starting to work until budget cuts hit. “The woman would arrive, and they would have a social worker, a psychologist, and child care provided; they would also have a legal branch to it, so they could prosecute cases that were suitable for prosecution,” Negrete said. Similar service responses are successful elsewhere in the world, but most of the centers have struggled to maintain the full suite of services since López Obrador cut the public security budget, resulting in a loss of nearly 80 percent of funding. Most of the centers are still operational at reduced hours and must do a lot more with a lot less as needs for their services rise under coronavirus conditions.

The mass demonstrations of early March were largely initiated through online media, and campaigning for gender justice in Mexico continues via those networks while the country remains in lockdown. Young women at the country’s largest public university who have been protesting against sexual assault and rape on campus over the last several months hacked the intranet of the Department of Political and Social Science, which had scheduled virtual classes. The Organized Women of the Department of Political and Social Sciences collective then published a communique accusing department administration of punishing women professors for supporting students who speak out against gender violence, and they disabled the intranet’s functions so that grades could not be assigned and classes could not be scheduled.

Other examples of online campaigning include a virtual vigil for Ana Paola, a 13-year-old victim of femicide in her home after stay-at-home measures began, and a virtual protest, coordinated with other countries in Latin America, held on May 9, the day before Mother’s Day, with the purpose of posting material en masse to social media networks, depicting the dangers being faced by women in the home under coronavirus measures.

The massive support for a social transformation of gender relations in Mexico, evidenced by the protests of early 2020, continues despite the quarantine, and there are clear budget and policy decisions that Mexican authorities can take in order to respond right now. For women at risk in their homes, there need to be clearer, better-funded avenues to support women and children fleeing violence, enabled by community support. Mexican women do reach out for help—if they are asked to stay in their homes to stop the spread of a dangerously contagious virus, authorities must ensure they are not exposing them to greater vulnerability.

MEXICO: The grisly deaths of a woman and a girl shock Mexico and test its president

The murders of Ingrid Escamilla, 25, and Fátima Aldrighett, 7, are forcing a reckoning in a country that has wrestled with violence against women. The president's response has been harshly criticized.

By Kirk Semple and Paulina Villegas

The New York Times (19.02.2020) - <https://nyti.ms/32qYqqu> - The gruesome murders this month of a woman and a girl in Mexico have shocked the nation, triggering a groundswell of outrage punctuated by near-daily street protests, unbridled fury on social media and growing demands for incisive government action against gender-based violence.

The woman, Ingrid Escamilla, 25, was stabbed, skinned and disemboweled, and the girl, Fátima Cecilia Aldrighett, 7, was abducted from school, her body later found wrapped in a plastic bag. The outcry over their deaths is forcing a reckoning in a country that has long wrestled with violence against women, analysts and activists say.

It is also amounting to a major leadership test for President Andrés Manuel López Obrador — and critics, who have called his response at turns anemic, insensitive and condescending, say he is falling far short.

Xóchitl Rodríguez, a member of Feminasty, a feminist activist collective, said she has been deeply disappointed by the response of Mr. López Obrador, who campaigned as a transformative figure who would defend marginalized populations.

“He was supposed to represent a change and it turns out that he is not,” she said. “The fact that you wake up in the morning and your president cannot reassure you on what specific actions he is taking to deal with the issue, is outrageous.”

In 2019, the Mexican government recorded 1,006 incidents of femicide, the crime of killing women or girls because of their gender — a 10 percent increase from 2018. The overall number of women who die violently in Mexico has also increased, rising to 10 killings per day in 2019 from seven per day in 2017, according to the Mexico office of U.N. Women.

“Women are demanding a shift of paradigm and nothing less,” said Estefanía Vela, executive director of Intersecta, a Mexico City-based group that promotes gender equality. “These are not only hashtags. These are students protesting at the universities, and mothers demanding justice for their daughters.”

But Mr. López Obrador has seemed to struggle with how to respond to the issue.

Speaking at one of his regular morning news conference last week, the president bristled at journalists' questions about femicide, and tried to bring the conversation back to his announcement that the government had recovered more than \$100 million in criminal assets and would be channeling it into poor communities.

“Look, I don't want the topic to be only femicide,” he said. “This issue has been manipulated a lot in the media.”

And on Monday, when asked about Fátima's death, he sought to blame femicides on what he called the “neoliberal policies” of his predecessors.

Mexican society, he said, “fell into a decline, it was a process of progressive degradation that had to do with the neoliberal model.”

Amid the escalating violence and facing a lack of what they consider effective government response, a feminist protest movement has gained momentum in the past year and become more violent, with some protesters smashing windows of police stations and spraying graffiti on monuments.

The deaths of Fátima and Ms. Escamilla, both in the past two weeks, have injected even greater urgency into the debate surrounding gender violence and machismo and have intensified the demands for a more effective government response.

The killing of Ms. Escamilla, whose body was found on Feb. 9, was so ghoulish it managed to transcend the daily drumbeat of bloodshed and shock the nation. A man, found covered in blood and said to be her domestic partner, was arrested and confessed to the crime, the authorities said.

Adding to the outrage was the fact that photos of Ms. Escamilla’s mutilated body were leaked to tabloids, which published the images on their front pages.

On Feb. 11, Fátima went missing after she was led away from her primary school by an unidentified woman — an abduction that was captured by security cameras. The discovery of the girl’s body over the weekend, wrapped in a plastic bag and dumped next to a construction site on the outskirts of the capital, added to the rising anger.

Last Friday, protesters, most of them women, spray-painted “Femicide State” and “Not One More” on the facade and main doorway of the National Palace in Mexico.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the mayor of Mexico City, said Wednesday night on Twitter that suspects in the killing of Fátima had been detained in the State of Mexico. Several days ago, the mayor said prosecutors would seek the maximum sentence against Ms. Escamilla’s killer and called femicide “an absolutely condemnable crime.”

“Justice must be done,” Ms. Sheinbaum said.

In the lower house of the Mexican Congress on Tuesday, lawmakers approved a reform to the penal code that would increase the maximum prison sentence for a femicide conviction to 65 years from 60 years. The measure has been sent to the Senate for a vote.

Also on Tuesday, a coalition of representatives from several political parties issued a declaration condemning gender-based violence and demanding that all levels of government strengthen the fight against it.

“This is a national crisis,” Ana Patricia Peralta, a representative from Morena, Mr. López Obrador’s party, said in a speech on Tuesday. “What else needs to happen for us to accept that violence against women in our country is an epidemic that has extended to all social strata?”

A senator from the National Action Party, Josefina Vázquez Mota, filed a proposal in the Senate to create a special commission that would monitor the prosecution of femicides against minors.

But Mr. López Obrador has been seen as dismissive. To the women who spray-painted calls for change on the National Palace, for example, he said “I ask feminists, with all due respect, not to paint the doors, the walls. We are working so that there are no femicides.”

His attitude was met with scorn by critics, particularly women's rights activists.

"If trashing monuments makes authorities look at us and listen to our demands, then we will continue to do so," said Beatriz Belmont, a student in economics and international relations at ITAM, a Mexico City university, and a member of the Fourth Wave, a feminist student collective.

She called the president's responses to the crisis "unacceptable and unfitting for someone who should be acting as a national leader."

"It seems like he is closing his eyes before a reality that is not only sitting in front of him but is slapping him in the face," Ms. Belmont said.

On Wednesday morning, however, Mr. López Obrador seemed more receptive to the protesters' demands, applauding the congressional vote in favor of harsher prison terms and attributing it in part to societal pressure. He even drew a parallel between the protesters and leaders of the Mexican Revolution.

"That is why the participation of citizens is important," he said. "If there hadn't been a Revolution, we wouldn't have the 1917 Constitution."

MEXICO: Mexican diplomacy has gone feminist

Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration has boldly reoriented its foreign policy toward gender equality.

By Lyric Thompson

Foreign Policy (14.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/38Cpyv1> - Last week, Mexico became the first global south country—and only the third country worldwide—to launch an explicitly feminist foreign policy. With this new policy platform, the government is setting a new global standard and, in its own words, "breaking glass ceilings."

"The government of Mexico is feminist, and our foreign policy should be, too," said Foreign Secretary Marcelo Luis Ebrard Casaubón. Starting now, the new policy mandates that gender equality be core to all aspects of Mexican foreign policy.

The first feminist foreign policy was debuted by Sweden in 2014, to "giggles" and suspicion at the time, according to then-Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom. Canada became the second, with its Feminist International Assistance Policy, in 2017, followed by announcements by Mexico, France, and Luxembourg that such policies were under development. And last week, Mexico publicly rolled out its new policy guidance as all of Mexico's ambassadors and heads of mission were gathered in Mexico City for their annual training and policy updates.

The Mexican policy is already setting the tone for other countries that want to follow suit as they grapple with how best to take on the most pressing issues facing the world today: violence and war, climate change, and structural and social inequality.

But what exactly is a "feminist" foreign policy?

Following more than a year of global consultation and research on the world's handful of existing feminist foreign policies, the International Center for Research on Women has

established a working definition for government policy that “prioritizes gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocates significant resources to achieve that vision and seeks through its implementation to disrupt patriarchal and male-dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defense and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups and movements.”

By our measure, the Mexican government has laid out a foundation for what is emerging as a global gold standard. “Mexico is determined to move forward a progressive foreign policy,” said Cristopher Ballinas Valdés, the director-general for human rights and democracy at the Mexican foreign ministry, “with a main focus on promoting human rights, equality, and women’s rights. The feminist foreign policy is based on five principles that rule all foreign-policy activities.”

Those five principles include: conducting all aspects of foreign policy with the intent to advance gender equality and a feminist agenda; achieving gender parity at all levels of staff in the foreign ministry; combatting all forms of gender-based violence, including within the ministry; making equality visible; and practicing intersectional feminism, which is to say, an approach that values not only women’s rights but also other intersecting social, economic, and environmental justice issues.

The government of Mexico has opted for a very broad vision for what its policy would achieve—not simply the advancement of women, but also the fulfilment of rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (the Mexican foreign ministry participated in Mexico City’s pride march for the first time last year) and the advancement of broader social and economic justice initiatives. Quoting work by the International Center for Research on Women, the policy explicitly obligates Mexican leadership to advance “issues that others are not prioritizing,” including sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as climate change.

Given the prevalence of gender-based violence and femicide in Mexico, the new policy marks a welcome change of pace. With the policy, according to Ballinas Valdés, “Mexico will pay justice to a long overdue agenda on women’s and girls’ rights.” This is the first time such an overt women’s rights agenda has been advanced in Mexican foreign policy, and officials inside the ministry have indicated that the establishment of a gender-balanced cabinet in President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s administration went a long way toward enabling such change.

Mexico’s feminist foreign policy commits to an ambitious number of immediate actions across all five areas of engagement, stipulating precise timelines by which they are to be achieved. Trainings, workshops, working groups, and manuals are to be developed and deployed within the first year. By 2024, the government is aiming for full employment parity, equal pay, and the application of a gender lens to every foreign-policy position, resolution, and mandate. This is a tall order—and one that will undoubtedly encounter resistance.

But if past is prologue, Mexico seems positioned to excel. The new policy’s antecedents have already been shaping Mexico’s behavior internally and on the world stage. Case in point, Mexico took a clear leadership position at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25) held last month in Spain, where the government promoted gender equality as a nonnegotiable component of any agreement on climate change.

“[Mexico is] simply one of the few [countries that comes to the table with gender equality and human rights as a red line,” said conference attendee Bridget Burns, a climate activist and the executive director of the Women’s Environment and Development Organization. “Many other actors say it’s a priority for them, but Mexico showed real strength in not

letting these principles become bargaining chips in a process that often dwindles issues down to the lowest common denominator.”

The lowest common denominator appeared to be the likely outcome of COP25 at one point, as countries worked together to exclude activists from the negotiations and even locked a number of activists and indigenous women out of in the cold. But Mexican negotiators made sure feminist climate activists had a seat at the table and led a process that ultimately developed a Gender Action Plan, one of the only tangible outcomes in a conference that otherwise “fell short” of meaningful progress on climate initiatives.

“Having witnessed Mexico championing human rights and gender equality in the context of the U.N. climate negotiations, it’s exciting to see the launch of this feminist foreign policy, principled on an intersectional feminist approach,” Burns said. “We know that to be truly ‘feminist,’ foreign policy must understand gender equality in the context of all issues, from environment and trade, to peace and economy. We look forward to seeing Mexico put these words into action, and to serving as inspiration for other governments, particularly given their leadership in the upcoming Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum.”

That forum marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, watershed agreements outlining women’s human rights. It also marks the first major multilateral test of Mexico’s new foreign policy. Mexico and France, which has also recently announced but not yet released a feminist foreign policy, will be co-hosting a “champions only” progressive, multilateral space, where heads of state from progressive countries will gather to make commitments to the next generation of women’s rights issues.

The path forward will not be an easy one. Retrogressive foreign policies, including that of the United States, have instilled little trust in some governments to advance and protect the women’s rights standards laid out 25 years ago. But if Mexico’s level of ambition and the growing number of countries turning their eyes on their own foreign policies are signs of what is to come, the momentum may be just enough to carry this movement forward.

“It’s very encouraging to see,” said Kristina Lunz, a co-founder of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, “that with Mexico the first global south country presented a feminist foreign policy. In international circles, there still tends to be this biased perception that industrial countries such as Germany would be leading on topics of social justice and equality—but especially when it comes to feminism in foreign policy, Germany and others can learn lots from Mexico.”

USA: State moves to restrict abortions continue

By Howard Friedman

Religion Clause (30.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3ufasXj> - A number of states continue attempts to restrict abortion rights.

In Montana, Governor Greg Gianforte last Monday signed three bills: HB 136 ([full text](#)) barring "perform[ing] an abortion of an unborn child capable of feeling pain unless it is necessary to prevent a serious health risk to the unborn child's mother; HB 140 ([full text](#)) requiring that before an abortion a pregnant woman must be given the opportunity to view an active ultrasound and hear a fetal heart tone; and HB 171 ([full text](#)) setting out procedures for prescribing abortion-inducing drugs, barring delivery of such drugs by mail and prohibiting providing such drugs in schools or on school grounds. Also yesterday the

Montana legislature approved HB 167 ([full text](#)) calling for a referendum on the adoption of the Born Alive Infant Protection Act. [Law & Crime](#) reports on these developments.

In Oklahoma in recent days Governor Kevin Stitt has signed five bills on abortion: [HB 1102 \(full text\)](#) which defines “unprofessional conduct” to include the performance of an abortion unless performed to prevent the death or significant physical impairment of the mother; [HB 1904 \(full text\)](#) requiring doctors performing abortions to be board certified in obstetrics and gynecology; [HB 2441 \(full text\)](#) barring abortions if a fetal heartbeat can be detected, except to prevent death or serious risk of significant physical impairment of the mother; [SB 584 \(full text\)](#) extending ban on funding of provider who has been found by a court to have trafficked in fetal body parts to funding by cities or counties, as well as the state; [SB 918 \(full text\)](#) making abortion illegal if the U.S. Supreme Court overrules *Roe v. Wade* or a federal constitutional amendment restores state authority to outlaw abortions. [AP reports](#) on some of these developments.

Yesterday the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments ([audio of full oral arguments](#)) in *Memphis Center for Reproductive Health v. Slatery*. In the case, a Tennessee federal district court issued a temporary restraining order barring enforcement of two bans on pre-viability abortions. One bans abortions when a fetal heartbeat is detectable. The other bans pre-viability abortions sought because of the race or sex of the fetus or a Down syndrome diagnosis. (See [prior posting](#).) [Courthouse News Service](#) reports on the oral arguments.

USA: Tennessee fights to reimpose ban on selective abortions

The Volunteer State wants an appeals panel to reinstate two abortion restrictions, including a ban on the procedure when a woman is seeking it because of the gender or race of the child.

By Kevin Koeniger

Courthouse News Service (29.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3vxlx6r> - The constitutionality of two Tennessee abortion regulations was debated before an appeals panel on Thursday, as the state seeks to reimpose a ban on selective abortions and those performed after the detection of a fetal heartbeat.

The restrictions, passed as part of House Bill 2263 in June 2020 and signed into law a month later, impose criminal penalties on doctors who perform abortions when the woman seeks the procedure based on the unborn child’s gender or race, or when the fetus has been diagnosed with Down syndrome. Physicians also faced Class C felony charges for performing abortions after the detection of a fetal heartbeat under the statute.

The Memphis Center for Reproductive Health and Planned Parenthood of Tennessee and North Mississippi, among others, sued Tennessee and [won a preliminary injunction](#) to prevent enforcement of the laws in July 2020.

U.S. District Judge William Campbell Jr., an appointee of Donald Trump, cited the 1992 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and the decisions of several appeals courts across the country in his opinion, ruling that states cannot ban pre-viability abortions.

Campbell struck down the portion of the law regarding abortions in cases where the woman’s decision is based one of several characteristics of the unborn child. He said the

language regarding a physician's knowledge of the reasoning behind a woman's choice is "imprecise," and ruled that "when a law threatens criminal sanctions, such vague provisions and potential varied interpretations cannot stand."

The district judge also referenced an Ohio law that banned abortions in cases where the woman knows her unborn child has Down syndrome. While a federal judge initially struck it down as unconstitutional, the full Sixth Circuit recently [reinstated](#) the ban in *Preterm-Cleveland v. McCloud*.

In its [brief](#) to the Cincinnati-based appeals court, Tennessee called the lower court's analysis "deeply flawed," and claimed the provisions act to prevent abortion from "becoming a tool of modern-day eugenics."

"By prohibiting physicians from knowingly participating in eugenic abortions," it said, "the law directly furthers the state's interests in protecting unborn life, promoting human dignity, safeguarding the integrity of the medical profession, and preventing discrimination."

The Volunteer State accused the lower court of concocting hypothetical scenarios to render the antidiscrimination portion of the law void for vagueness, arguing the "speculative danger of arbitrary enforcement" cannot be used to strike down a law as unconstitutional.

Conversely, the abortion providers commended the district judge on his decision, and claimed in their [brief](#) to the Sixth Circuit that H.B. 2263 is an attempt to criminalize nearly all abortions in Tennessee. They accused the state of using "rhetorical gymnastics" to defend the law, and reminded the appeals court that every ban on pre-viability abortions has been struck down as unconstitutional by various courts throughout the country.

Attorney Sarah Campbell argued on behalf of Tennessee on Thursday and told the three-judge panel the court's decision in *Preterm-Cleveland* "forecloses plaintiffs' argument."

Campbell said the district court "egregiously misapplied the void-for-vagueness doctrine" when it determined the terms "knowledge" and "because of" were not properly defined in the statute, and said the meaning of those words are well-settled in Tennessee law.

U.S. Circuit Judge Karen Moore, an appointee of Bill Clinton, asked why a ban on abortions after the detection of a heartbeat does not constitute a substantial burden on women seeking abortions.

The state's attorney cited a "growing consensus" in the medical community that unborn children can begin to sense and experience pain at 15 weeks, and pointed out that over 90% of abortions performed in Tennessee are done before that point in a fetus's development.

Attorney Rabia Muqaddam argued on behalf of the abortion providers and told the panel "decades of Supreme Court precedent" requires it to uphold the lower court's decision. She called the Tennessee law unique because it fails to provide doctors with clearly defined parameters to avoid criminal prosecution.

"Under the language of the statute," the attorney said, "a physician could be prosecuted under a wide array of circumstances."

Muqaddam disputed her colleague's statement regarding fetal pain and told the judges her clients provided rebuttal testimony before the lower court. In her conclusion, she reiterated that no state interest can justify a ban on pre-viability abortions.

Moore was joined on the panel by Senior U.S. Circuit Judge Martha Daughtrey, also a Clinton appointee, and U.S. Circuit Judge Amul Thapar, a Trump appointee. No timetable has been set for the court's decision.

The Sixth Circuit has grappled with numerous abortion restrictions from various states over the past several years, and Thursday's case won't be the last time Tennessee's abortion laws are debated before the court.

The court recently [granted](#) the state's motion for an initial en banc hearing of Planned Parenthood's challenge to a law that requires a 48-hour waiting period before a woman can get an abortion, although those arguments have not yet been scheduled.

Although a federal judge temporarily halted enforcement of the law, a recent [order](#) from the appeals court stayed that injunction and expedited scheduling for the arguments.

USA: Arizona enacts new abortion restrictions

By Howard Friedman

Religion Clause (28.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3qZTFUj> - Yesterday Arizona Governor Doug Ducey signed SB 1457 (full text) placing additional limits on abortion in the state. The new law bans abortions sought because of a genetic abnormality of the fetus, except in medical emergencies. It prohibits performance of abortions in facilities run by or located on the property of public educational institutions, except when necessary to save the life of the mother. It prohibits the use of public funds for research that involves fetal cells. It prohibits mail delivery of abortion-inducing drugs. It requires that bodily remains from a surgical abortion be disposed of by cremation or burial, and gives the mother the right to determine the method to be used. ADF issued a press release announcing the bill signing.

USA: Hundreds of women unite to protest against Biden's transgender executive order, Equality Act

By Brandon Showalter

The Christian Post (09.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3eozApz> - A diverse coalition of women's rights campaigners numbering into the hundreds protested against the Biden administration's executive order allowing boys who identify as female to compete in girls' athletic competitions, among other moves to enshrine transgender policies into law.

On Monday, some 200 women hailing from all across the United States descended on the nation's capital to participate in Women Picket-DC, a nonpartisan event to protest an [executive order](#) signed by President Joe Biden on Jan. 20 that enshrined "gender identity" into federal law.

The event intentionally coincided on International Women's Day and was held on the corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue adjacent to the National Mall near The Ellipse. Many held placards urging senators to reject the [Equality Act](#), a pending update to the 1964 Civil Rights Act that would enshrine gender identity as a category into the federal legal code.

Dawn Odell, a conservative Catholic mother, traveled from Washington state to lend her voice in support of women's rights, and to oppose social and medicalized gender-

transitioning of [children](#) and trans-activist initiatives like [Drag Queen Story Hour](#) at libraries and in [school curricula](#).

"There are so many ways where kids are being taken advantage of, and completely and irreparably altered forever, and their lives ruined by this transgender movement. It's awful," Odell said in an interview with The Christian Post.

"I see an entire generation of people in ruin, not able to have kids, not able to have any meaningful relationship at all," she added. "It's changing everything." Holding a Save Women's Sports flag, Beth Scaer, a computer programmer from Nashua, New Hampshire, told CP she believes Biden's executive order is destroying women's sports.

"Whenever a man can come in and take a spot on a woman's team or on a podium, you're depriving women of their rights. Men are bigger, stronger, taller. They can destroy women in sports. It's totally unfair," she said.

Charlie Rae of Raleigh, North Carolina, the writing lead for the Women Picket-DC rally, said the central issue is that the public views gender identity as a human rights cause when it in truth assaults human rights.

"It changes our already existing structures of human rights," Rae said. "And I think that a lot of people mean really well, and they want to protect people and implement human rights. That's why we're here too. But gender identity as a concept — transgenderism, the medicalization, the altering of our social policies and institutions — it doesn't protect people."

"We're here because we want to protect people," however they identify, she stressed.

The protesters' efforts are nonpartisan because they're rooted in "basic common sense," Rae stressed. "And that doesn't have a political party — to know that women are female."

Lead organizer Courtney Piper, who was one of the four speakers at the event, told CP that the narrative of self-declared gender identity has been systematically rolled out in the last 15-20 years and asserted that its propaganda is fueled by massive amounts of money and has spread throughout school systems and government entities.

"The general public truly is under a mass hypnosis and deceit," regarding this issue and others, she said.

"It's the inverse of material reality and spiritual reality. Women are here today to expose the truth and speak truth to power," Piper declared.

When asked what she and her fellow compatriots plan to do should the Senate vote to pass the Equality Act, which Biden has promised to sign into law, Piper said their efforts would never stop.

"If indeed it does [pass], we won't stop fighting. We are going to continue to roll out action after action until our voices are heard and our demands are met," she said.

In remarks before the crowd with the Washington Monument in the background, Suzanne Vierling, a psychologist from Southern California, noted that the sex-based rights of women should be in cement and not even debated, given the hard-fought gains. She drew analogies between present scourges against women to previous ones, particularly black women who were once enslaved.

"Today we have come full-circle, back to women as chattel, if we don't fight. It doesn't seem possible. But today, while the woman is erased as a woman in the name of the law, woman is now stretched out on a platter, stretched out for use, for profit," she said.

"Yesterday's slave woman who endured gynecological medical experiments is today's girl-child being butchered in a booming gender-transitioning sector. Ovaries removed, pushing her into menopause and osteoporosis, uncharted territory, and parents' rights and authority decimated," Vierling added.

Facing the White House and flanked by a participant holding a banner with a quote from the suffragist movement in the early 20th century that read: "Mr. president, how long must women wait for liberty?" Kara Dansky, a radical feminist attorney who serves on the steering committee of the U.S. chapter of the Women's Human Rights Campaign, addressed the Biden administration, demanding that the Jan. 20 executive order be reversed.

"Mr. president, whether or not you understand it, you have issued an executive order that is set to erase women and girls as a protected category under federal administrative law. Men are not women, even if they say they are; even if they say they identify as women. Women, also, are not men, even if they say they are," Dansky declared.

She went on to express gratitude for a December 2019 tweet by *Harry Potter* series author [J.K. Rowling](#), who voiced support for [Maya Forstater](#), a British woman who was ousted from her job for stating opinions online about the reality of biological sex in the context of the U.K.'s Gender Recognition Act.

That short post on social media from the beloved author was a game-changer, Dansky continued. Rowling has since spoken out at considerable length about her concerns about how radical transgender ideology is diminishing women's rights.

Dansky then quoted from Biden's inaugural speech, in which the president spoke of the importance of rejecting a culture in which facts are manipulated and manufactured.

"Mr. president, I agree. Please stop manipulating and manufacturing facts," Dansky asserted, speaking of gender identity ideology.

She continued: "Mr. president, are you willing to protect the rights, privacy, and safety of women and girls or do you stand with men who pretend to be women? The time to decide is now. Mr. president, we ask you: How long must women wait for liberty."

"So-called gender identity is a corporate takeover of humanity, and you, Mr. president, are complicit. Get it out of our laws. Get it out of our schools. And stop mutilating children's healthy bodies."

"Mr. president, the jig is up. The emperor has no clothes. Women are tired of waiting for liberty. Mr. president, rescind the order."

USA: 'The other half of my soul': Widows of Covid-19 bond over sudden loss

Men have died of the coronavirus in larger numbers than women, leaving untold thousands of spouses suddenly alone. Some have turned to bereavement groups on Facebook.

By Julie Bosman

The NY Times (31.12.2020) - <https://nyti.ms/39ancVX> - One Friday evening, Sandra McGowan-Watts, a 46-year-old doctor from suburban Chicago, opened her laptop, stifled her nerves and told strangers on a Zoom call what had happened to her husband, Steven.

"He died by himself," said Dr. McGowan-Watts, who joined the call after an invitation on a Facebook support group for widowed Black women. "Not being able to see him, being able to touch him, all of those things. The grief is kind of complicated."

The women listening understood instantly. They were all widows of Covid-19.

For nearly two hours that summer night, their stories tumbled out, tales of sickness and death, single parenting and unwanted solitude, harrowing phone calls and truncated goodbyes.

More than 340,000 people have died of the coronavirus in the United States. Men have died of the disease in larger numbers than women, a gender disparity that some researchers have suggested could be partly attributed to men's generally poorer health. That has left untold thousands of spouses suddenly widowed by the virus.

Women have witnessed the pandemic from a miserably close angle. They have been left behind with family responsibilities, financial burdens, worries about their children's trauma and their own crushing loss and guilt. Many nursed their partners at home until they were so ill they had to be hospitalized; there, they often died with little warning.

Coronavirus widows, as well as many widowers, are spread out across the country, young and old, in big cities in California and small towns in Utah.

In more than a dozen interviews, women told of feeling stunned by the swiftness of the experience, even months after their husbands' deaths.

"It's very traumatic because of the unexpectedness of it," said Jennifer Law, whose husband, Matthew, died of the coronavirus in Texas in November, years after serving in the Army in Iraq. "He made it back from two deployments, two separate, dangerous deployments. He came home and this is what killed him."

Some feel unacknowledged, struggling to manage the aftermath of their partners' deaths amid an unending health crisis.

"It was really difficult for me because I felt like, man, I'm all alone," said Pamela Addison, 37, a teacher in Waldwick, N.J. Her husband, Martin, a speech pathologist who worked in a hospital, died of the virus in April. "If Covid wasn't here, all of our husbands would still be here."

Ms. Addison eventually sought out other Covid-19 widows to talk to, and other women have managed to find each other by joining Facebook bereavement groups, which are also open to men. They have forged ties similar to those found among other clusters of women whose husbands died unexpectedly and prematurely, including military spouses or widows of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The women on the Zoom call in July who live in the Chicago area have since become friends who meet for dinner and check in daily with quick texts.

Widows of the coronavirus recounted a painful set of commonalities: the experience of frantically taking care of their husbands when they fell ill, worrying about when to take them to a hospital and feeling haunted by the images of their partners dying without loved ones beside them.

"The generation that I'm from, we took care of our husbands — that's how we were raised," said Mary Smith, of Pekin, Ill., who lost her 64-year-old husband, Mike, to the virus. "That was our job, to be their cheerleader. They're used to having that, and all of a sudden you're not there."

After her husband died, she scrolled through his phone and found the lonely pictures he had snapped from his hospital bed. His food, in a cardboard container. The oxygen machines. A selfie as he wore breathing equipment.

"It was so stark," Ms. Smith said. "He was in there by himself so much of the time."

Jennifer Kay Jensen, who lives in Delray Beach, Fla., has been tormented by the notion that her presence in the hospital — barred to prevent further transmission — could have helped her husband recover. Her husband, Peter, a 56-year-old real estate broker, died of the virus in August.

"The guilt, it eats me up every day," she said. "I think it could have made a difference, if I was there seeing him, to soothe him or scratch his arm or kiss his head."

In St. George, Utah, Donna Heintz has been marooned, physically and emotionally, since her 78-year-old husband, Fred, died in October. Her neighbor across the street calls her to check in, or waves if they are outside at the same moment. But the isolation of widowhood is raw and unending.

"I wake up in the morning and the first thing I do is try to get out of bed quietly so I don't wake him," she said, choking back sobs. "Then I look to see if he's there, and he's gone."

Her husband, an Army veteran and longtime police officer, was the cook in their house, preparing meals that they would share on TV trays in the living room, watching their favorite shows and making each other laugh. Now Ms. Heintz barely wants to eat a thing, and cannot shake the feeling that her husband is still there.

"Sometimes at night I look in the kitchen and wonder what he's fixing for supper," she said.

A report published in May by the Global Fund for Widows, a nonprofit organization based in New York, called the coronavirus a "widow-making machine," an outbreak that could create "unprecedented numbers of widows across the developing world."

By late December, at least 163,000 men had died from the virus in the United States, compared with at least 138,000 women, according to federal data.

Sarah S. Richardson, a historian at Harvard who directs its GenderSci Lab, said men have died of the coronavirus in greater numbers in part because of its disproportionate effect on Black men, and by a surge in deaths of men early in the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, she added, women were more likely to be widowed than men.

The Facebook group for Black women who have been widowed has seen a tragic influx of new members this year.

Sabra Robinson, its creator, became a widow in 2012 after her husband died of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Spurred by that experience, and her dissatisfaction in traditional grief support groups, she started her own, with a heavy focus on empowerment and encouragement for Black women.

"When Covid hit, oh my goodness, the group was receiving so many requests from widows who lost their husbands due to Covid," said Ms. Robinson, a project manager from Charlotte, N.C. "They are experiencing more complicated grief than I would say the average widow that posts in the group. How in the world can they heal as long as Covid is out there?"

For younger widows of Covid-19, the task of raising small children alone has been one of the most daunting tests of the pandemic.

After her husband died in April, Diana Ordonez sold her house in New Jersey to downsize and move closer to friends, family and their church. Ms. Ordonez described her husband, Juan, as a warm, funny and cheerful man who was "the other half of my soul."

Ms. Ordonez said she had been propelled forward by a desire to be a good example for their 5-year-old daughter, Mia, to show her that she should live fully, as Juan did.

"This whole experience is so depleting and so draining," Ms. Ordonez said. "You have to lead your kid by example. You want them to be happy, and you're showing them how to behave."

Some women's grief has been laced with anger.

Mara Vaughan, of Prosper, Texas, lost her husband, Bryan, to the coronavirus in April, after he quite likely contracted it on a business trip. Ms. Vaughan, who has three children, has connected with other widows online and read about their struggles, financial and emotional.

She pointed to President Trump and his downplaying of the coronavirus crisis, especially early on, when her husband became sick. It is difficult to see people in her community still shunning masks and ignoring advice on safety and social distancing.

"Imagine the pandemic and losing someone to it and then doing it alone," Ms. Vaughan said. "I will never have peace and closure on the death of my husband. It should never have happened."

USA: 'I won't be the last': Kamala Harris, first woman elected US vice-president, accepts place in history

With victory speech, California senator brings tears to eyes of crowd in Delaware.

By Lauren Gambino

The Guardian (08.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Ie65cw> - Kamala Harris accepted her place in history on Saturday night with a speech honoring the women who she said "paved the way for this moment tonight", when the daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants would stand before the nation as the vice-president-elect of the United States.

With her ascension to the nation's second highest office, Harris, 56, will become the first woman and the first woman of color to be elected vice-president, a reality that shaped her speech and brought tears to the eyes of many women and girls watching from the hoods of their cars that had gathered in the parking lot of a convention center in Wilmington, Delaware.

Wearing an all-white pantsuit, in an apparent tribute to the suffragists who fought for a woman's right to vote, Harris smiled, exultant, as she waved from the podium waiting for the blare of car horns and cheers to subside. Joe Biden, the president-elect, would speak next. But this was a moment all her own.

She began her remarks with a tribute to the legacy of the late congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis.

"Protecting our democracy takes struggle," Harris said, speaking from a stage outside the Chase Center on the Riverfront in Wilmington. "It takes sacrifice. But there is joy in it. And there is progress. Because we, the people, have the power to build a better future."

With Harris poised to become the highest-ranking woman in the history of American government, this milestone marks the extraordinary arc of a political career that has broken racial and gender barriers at nearly every turn. As a prosecutor, she rose to become the first Black female attorney general of California. When she was elected to the Senate in 2016, she became only the second Black woman in history to serve in the chamber.

In her remarks, Harris paid tribute to the women across the country – and throughout history – who made this moment possible.

"I reflect on their struggle, their determination and the strength of their vision, to see what can be, unburdened by what has been," she said. "I stand on their shoulders."

She specifically honored the contributions of Black women to the struggle for suffrage, equality and civil rights – leaders who are "too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy".

As a candidate for president, Harris spoke often of her childhood spent attending civil rights marches with her parents, who were students at the University of California, Berkeley. When protests erupted in the aftermath of the police killing of George Floyd this summer, Harris joined activists in the streets to demand an end to police brutality and racial injustice.

As Biden searched for a running mate, pressure built to choose a Black woman in recognition not only of the role they played in salvaging his presidential campaign – which Biden acknowledged in his remarks on Saturday night – but of their significance to the party as a whole. Yet a narrative began to form that Harris was a somewhat conventional choice, a senator and one-time Democratic rival who brought generational, ideological and racial balance to the Democratic ticket.

But Harris disagreed emphatically, saying that her presence on the stage was a testament to "Joe's character – that he had the audacity to break one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country and select a woman as his vice-president".

Yet Harris's presence on the ticket was not only a reflection of the nation's demographic future but a repudiation of a president who relentlessly scapegoated immigrants and repeatedly attacked women and people of color.

In a moment of reflection, Harris invoked her mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris, who left her home in India for California in 1958, at the age of 19.

"Maybe she didn't quite imagine this moment," Harris said. "But she believed so deeply in an America where a moment like this is possible."

In interviews and on the campaign trail, Harris often quoted her mother, sharing the advice and admonitions of a woman she describes as diminutive in stature but powerful in her presence.

On Saturday, Harris made a promise to the country.

"While I may be the first woman in this office," Harris vowed, "I will not be the last, because every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities."

USA: Mexico says two women may have had non-consensual surgery in U.S. detention center

Reuters (13.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/374HT64> - Mexico's Foreign Ministry said it has identified two Mexican migrant women who may have had surgery performed on them without their consent while detained at a U.S. immigration center in the state of Georgia.

While being held at the Irwin center in Georgia, one Mexican woman was reportedly subject to gynecological surgery without her approval and without receiving post-operative care, the ministry said in a weekend statement.

The ministry said its findings were based on actions taken by consular staff and interviews Mexican officials conducted at the center.

Officials were also verifying the case of a second woman who may have been subject to surgical intervention "without her full consent," without receiving an explanation in Spanish of the procedure, or her medical diagnosis, it added.

It did not name the women. The ministry last month said it had identified a woman possibly subjected to surgery in the center, but did not specify whether she had given her consent.

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency did not respond to a request for comment.

The ministry also said it is in touch with a lawyer about a possible class action lawsuit by Mexican women who have been detained at the facility.

In September, a complaint by a whistleblower nurse alleged medical abuse within the Georgia detention center, including unauthorized hysterectomies, a surgery to remove the uterus.

Reuters could not independently confirm those claims. In its statement, the Mexican foreign ministry said the first woman it referred to was not subject to a hysterectomy. It gave no further details on the second.

ICE Health Service Corps said in September that since 2018 only two people at the center were referred for hysterectomies, based on approved recommendations by specialists.

The contractor that runs the facility has said it strongly refutes the allegations and any implications of misconduct.

USA: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court justice and legal pioneer for gender equality, dies at 87

By Robert Barnes & Michael A. Fletcher

The Washington Post (19.09.2020) - <https://wapo.st/32SSAGz> - Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second woman to serve on the high court and a legal pioneer for gender equality whose fierce opinions as a justice made her a hero to the left, died Sept. 18 at her home in Washington. She was 87.

The death was announced in a statement by the U.S. Supreme Court. She had recently been treated for pancreatic cancer.

Born in Depression-era Brooklyn, Justice Ginsburg excelled academically and went to the top of her law school class at a time when women were still called upon to justify taking a man's place. She earned a reputation as the legal embodiment of the women's liberation movement and as a widely admired role model for generations of female lawyers.

Working in the 1970s with the American Civil Liberties Union, Justice Ginsburg successfully argued a series of cases before the high court that strategically chipped away at the legal wall of gender discrimination, eventually causing it to topple. Later, as a member of the court's liberal bloc, she was a reliable vote to enhance the rights of women, protect affirmative action and minority voting rights and defend a woman's right to choose an abortion.

On the court, she became an iconic figure to a new wave of young feminists, and her regal image as the "Notorious RBG" graced T-shirts and coffee mugs. She was delighted by the attention, although she said her law clerks had to explain that the moniker referred to a deceased rapper, the Notorious B.I.G. She also was the subject of a popular film documentary, "RBG" (2018).

When she was named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people in 2015, her colleague and improbable close friend, conservative Justice Antonin Scalia, wrote about her dual roles as crusader and judge. "Ruth Bader Ginsburg has had two distinguished legal careers, either one of which would alone entitle her to be one of Time's 100," wrote Scalia, who died in 2016.

After Scalia's death, the Senate took no action to confirm President Barack Obama's nominee to the court, U.S. Appeals Court Judge Merrick Garland. President Trump, who took office in 2017, has nominated two new justices to the court, Neil M. Gorsuch and Brett M. Kavanaugh, the latter succeeding Justice Anthony M. Kennedy.

NPR reported that Justice Ginsburg, in a statement dictated to her granddaughter in recent days, said, "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed."

A landmark moment for Justice Ginsburg came in 2011, when the court for the first time opened its term with three female justices. Justice Ginsburg said in an interview with The Washington Post that it would "change the public perception of where women are in the justice system. When the schoolchildren file in and out of the court and they look up and they see three women, then that will seem natural and proper — just how it is."

Her outspoken feminism played a role in Justice Ginsburg's success. President Bill Clinton acknowledged that in 1993 when he nominated her to replace retiring Justice Byron White. At the time, she was a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

"Many admirers of her work say that she is to the women's movement what former Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall was to the movement for the rights of African Americans," Clinton said in Rose Garden ceremony. "I can think of no greater compliment to bestow on an American lawyer."

(Justice Ginsburg herself usually demurred when the comparison was made, saying that Marshall literally risked his life defending Black clients in the segregated South and that her legal work required no such sacrifice.)

On the court, Justice Ginsburg's most notable rulings and dissents advanced feminist causes.

In 1996, she authored a groundbreaking decision ordering the Virginia Military Institute to admit women, ending a 157-year tradition of all-male education at the state-funded school.

While Virginia "serves the state's sons, it makes no provision whatever for her daughters. That is not equal protection," Justice Ginsburg wrote in *United States v. Virginia*. The 7-to-1 decision — her friend, Scalia, was the dissenter — was the capstone of the legal battle for gender equality, she said later.

"I regard the VMI case as the culmination of the 1970s endeavor to open doors so that women could aspire and achieve without artificial constraints," Justice Ginsburg said after the decision.

Later in her career, discrimination against women was the theme of several forceful dissents Justice Ginsburg read from the bench, a sparingly used bit of theater that justices employ to emphasize deeply held disagreements with a majority opinion.

Among them was a protest of the court's decision to uphold a federal ban on so-called partial-birth abortions. "The court deprives women of the right to make an autonomous choice, even at the expense of their safety," Justice Ginsburg wrote. "This way of thinking reflects ancient notions about women's place in the family and under the Constitution — ideas that have long since been discredited."

In another, she objected to a ruling that said workers may not sue their employers over unequal pay caused by discrimination alleged to have begun years earlier. That case had been filed by Lilly Ledbetter, the lone female supervisor at a tire plant in Gadsden, Ala., who sued after determining she was paid less than male co-workers.

In an interview with *The Post* in 2010, Justice Ginsburg said the Ledbetter case struck a personal chord.

"Every woman of my age had a Lilly Ledbetter story," she said. "And so we knew that the notion that a woman who is in a nontraditional job is going to complain the first time she thinks she is being discriminated against — the one thing she doesn't want to do is rock the boat, to become known as a complainer."

She called upon Congress to take action, and once Democrats were in control, it did. Obama signed the law relaxing the deadlines for filing suits.

If the law is often complex, her view of equality was simple, she once said.

"It has always been that girls should have the same opportunity to dream, to aspire and achieve — to do whatever their God-given talents enable them to do — as boys," Justice Ginsburg said in a 2015 conversation at the American Constitution Society. "There should

be no place where there isn't a welcome mat for women. . . . That's what it's all about: Women and men, working together, should help make the society a better place than it is now."

Baton twirler and bookworm

Joan Ruth Bader — her mother suggested using her middle name in kindergarten to avoid confusion with other Joans in the class — was born on March 15, 1933. She was the second daughter of Nathan Bader, a Jewish immigrant from Russia who became a furrier and haberdasher, and the former Celia Amster.

As a schoolgirl, Justice Ginsburg — known to friends as "Kiki" — was smart, popular and competitive, both a bookworm and a baton twirler. But her early life was also shadowed by tragedy. Her older sister, Marilyn, died of meningitis at age 8, leaving Justice Ginsburg to be raised as an only child. She later said she grew up "with the smell of death."

Raised in Flatbush, then a striving working-class neighborhood of Jewish, Italian and Irish immigrants in Brooklyn, Justice Ginsburg was molded largely by her mother, who had graduated from high school at 15. Her mother never went to college, instead taking a job to help her oldest brother through Cornell University.

Celia Bader was determined that her daughter would have a different path. She stored away money given by her husband for personal expenses to establish a college tuition fund.

But tragedy struck again. By the time Justice Ginsburg was a teenager, her mother was battling cervical cancer. She died in 1950, on the day before Justice Ginsburg graduated near the top of her class from Brooklyn's James Madison High School.

By the time Celia Bader died, the college fund was \$8,000. But her daughter did not need it; she had won enough scholarships to cover her expenses. She ended up giving most of the money to her dad.

Justice Ginsburg, like her uncle, attended Cornell, where on a blind date she met her future husband, Martin Ginsburg, a confident, fun-loving fraternity member and a standout on the university's golf team. She later said he was the first boy she ever dated who cared about what was in her head.

After graduation, Martin Ginsburg enrolled at Harvard Law School while Ruth completed her senior year, graduating first in her class in 1954.

Shortly after, they married. He was drafted into the Army, and the couple moved to Lawton, Okla., where Martin was stationed at Fort Sill. While Martin served his two-year hitch, Ruth took a civil service exam and came close to landing a good job at Lawton's Social Security office.

A problem emerged when she mentioned that she was pregnant. She was told that she would not be allowed to go Baltimore for training, forcing her to settle for a lower-paying job as a typist.

After Martin's Army discharge in 1956, the couple went to Cambridge, where Ruth also enrolled in Harvard Law, one of nine women in a class of more than 500.

Those were the days of relentless grillings by professors using the Socratic method, a high-pressure situation made even more intense for female students by the prevailing view that they were operating in a realm where they did not belong.

At one point, Dean Erwin Griswold asked the women of the class what it felt like to occupy seats that could have gone to deserving men. (In 1993, on the eve of her Supreme Court confirmation, Griswold told the Harvard Crimson he long favored admitting women but that he had been overruled by the university's governing board. He added that in asking women such a provocative question, he was playing devil's advocate. "I think she completely misunderstood it and should have known better," he said.)

Further complicating matters for Justice Ginsburg as a Harvard student was the responsibility of being a new mother after the birth of her daughter, Jane. (Jane eventually attended Harvard Law as well, one year behind future Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.)

Through it all, Justice Ginsburg was an academic star at Harvard. She earned top grades and a spot on the law review. But crisis soon invaded her life once again when her husband was diagnosed with testicular cancer. The prognosis was dire. "At the time, there were no known survivors," Justice Ginsburg said.

Doctors treated the ailment with both radiation and surgery. Justice Ginsburg collected carbon copies of class notes from Martin's classmates, and she typed his papers as he dictated before turning to her own studies. Martin eventually recovered and after graduation snagged a job at a New York firm.

In 1958, Ruth transferred from Harvard to Columbia Law School to complete her legal training. There, she continued to thrive, again making the law review and tying for first in her class at graduation in 1959.

Once she started looking for work, she could not find a job at New York's top firms.

"I struck out on three grounds — I was Jewish, a woman and a mother," Justice Ginsburg reflected later. "The first raised one eyebrow; the second, two; the third made me indubitably inadmissible."

Nor could she land an interview for a clerkship with Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, despite a recommendation from a dean of Harvard Law School. Frankfurter made it clear that he simply wasn't ready to hire a woman.

Eventually, she landed a position as a clerk for a federal district court judge, after a Columbia law professor lined up a man as a replacement in the event Justice Ginsburg faltered.

After her clerkship, Justice Ginsburg signed on for a summer fellowship to study the legal system in Sweden. The six weeks in Stockholm proved to be an awakening, as she was thrust into the midst of that country's burgeoning debate about gender roles in raising families.

The question was easily settled in Justice Ginsburg's personal life, even as it roiled around her. She and Martin shared child rearing and household duties. She liked to tell the story of her response to receiving repeated calls from school administrators about discipline problems with her son, James.

On one "particularly weary" day, she told the school, "This child has two parents. I suggest you alternate calls, and it's his father's turn."

During her tenure on the court, Martin, a tax expert and later a Georgetown University Law School instructor who died in 2010, often baked cakes for justices' birthday celebrations.

He also was a reliable contributor to the spouse lunches and dinners held by the justices at the court.

Martin Ginsburg once proposed this response to public requests for Justice Ginsburg's "favorite recipe": "The Justice was expelled from the kitchen nearly three decades ago by her food-loving children. She no longer cooks and the one recipe from her youth, tuna fish casserole, is nobody's favorite."

A 'sparrow,' not a robin

In 1963, Justice Ginsburg became the second woman to join the faculty at New Jersey's Rutgers Law School. There, her feminist awakening continued, even if she probably would not have described it that way.

When Justice Ginsburg learned that her salary was lower than that of male colleagues, she joined an equal pay campaign with other female teachers, which resulted in raises for the women.

While teaching at Rutgers, she also began taking on cases on behalf of the New Jersey branch of the ACLU. She battled successfully for maternity leave rights for teachers in New Jersey, who previously faced the threat of dismissal when they became pregnant.

In 1972, Justice Ginsburg became the first woman hired with tenure at Columbia Law School. Around that time, she also became the first director of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project.

At the ACLU, Justice Ginsburg led a team of lawyers that brought six cases before the Supreme Court between 1973 and 1979. They won five, victories that eventually altered the nation's legal terrain by establishing that the constitutional guarantee of equal protection applied not only to racial minorities but to women as well.

In many ways, she was an unlikely revolutionary. Friends called her shy, and detractors and even her family said she could be humorless. But at times, she could be whimsical and was known to have a wry wit. Opera was her passion, and she said she would have been a diva instead of a justice if she'd had the voice of a robin instead "of a sparrow."

In 1994, she and Scalia appeared in 18th-century costumes as extras in the Washington National Opera's production of Richard Strauss's "Ariadne auf Naxos." Later, composer-librettist Derrick Wang took words from their opinions and put them to music in an opera called "Scalia/Ginsburg." She often was asked why that order, instead of alphabetical?

Seniority reigns at the Supreme Court, Ginsburg answered, and Scalia got there first.

Roe and Clinton

Her early victories at the Supreme Court prompted President Jimmy Carter to appoint her to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in 1980.

On an appeals court that often divided along ideological lines, Justice Ginsburg frequently straddled the middle. She dissented from the majority's refusal to hear the case of an Air Force officer who wanted to wear a yarmulke while on duty, saying the prohibition reflected "callous indifference" to his religious faith.

On the other hand, Justice Ginsburg voted to dismiss a case brought by a gay sailor discharged from the Navy, and she voted against a minority set-aside program in O'Donnell

Construction Co. v. District of Columbia. She developed enduring friendships with conservative jurists Scalia and Robert H. Bork while all three served on the appeals court.

A strong supporter of abortion rights, Justice Ginsburg nonetheless alienated some of her erstwhile allies with a 1984 speech at the University of North Carolina, where she criticized the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Roe v. Wade* that guaranteed abortion rights.

The court's 1973 ruling was too sweeping, she said, contributing to the divisive rancor that has accompanied the abortion issue ever since. She suggested that the court and the cause of abortion rights would have been better served had the court simply overturned the Texas law outlawing almost all abortions, which was at issue in the case.

She clarified her position in a 1993 lecture in which she argued that the justices should have grounded the right to abortion not in the concepts of "personal liberty" and "privacy" that spring from the 14th Amendment, but in the amendment's equal protection clause.

Her novel views on *Roe* created a significant hurdle for her ascension to the high court. After White announced his resignation in 1993, Justice Ginsburg, then 60, was among a large group of potential nominees placed before Clinton.

Justice Ginsburg faced opposition from a new generation of women's activists who, citing her abortion rights speeches and record as a moderate on the appeals court, argued that her views were too narrow and that time had passed her by.

Justice Ginsburg also had her supporters, including her husband, who helped organize an effort that resulted in a torrent of letters and telephone calls to the White House that prompted Clinton to give her a second look. Clinton was also spurred on by Senate conservatives who pointed to Justice Ginsburg as a moderate that they could support, which appealed to Clinton's New Democrat leanings. Clinton announced her nomination on June 14, 1993. She was confirmed just over two months later by a 96-to-3 vote.

After the president announced her nomination, the normally reserved Ginsburg took time to thank a list of people and causes, including the civil rights and women's movements, her husband and two children, her mother-in-law and first lady Hillary Clinton. Then, she offered one final tribute.

"It is to my mother, Celia Amster Bader, the bravest and strongest person I have known, who was taken from me much too soon," Justice Ginsburg said. "I pray that I may be all that she would have been had she lived in an age when women could aspire and achieve, and daughters are cherished as much as sons."

A prolific dissent writer

Justice Ginsburg's lot was to serve on a court with a majority more conservative than she was. As a result, she became much more known for her dissents than her majority opinions. More-moderate justices such as Sandra Day O'Connor, whom Justice Ginsburg greatly admired, and Kennedy often were the ones who wrote when the court was ideologically divided.

Justice Ginsburg wrote a powerful dissent in one of the pivotal cases in her time on the court — *Bush v. Gore* — which resulted in George W. Bush's win in the 2000 election. The majority criticized and then shut down a recount by Florida officials, which she would have allowed to continue.

"Ideally, perfection would be the appropriate standard for judging the recount," she wrote. "But we live in an imperfect world, one in which thousands of votes have not been counted."

I cannot agree that the recount adopted by the Florida court, flawed as it may be, would yield a result any less fair or precise than the certification that preceded that recount.”

When Justice John Paul Stevens retired in 2010, Justice Ginsburg became the senior justice among the court’s liberals: her fellow Clinton nominee Stephen G. Breyer and Obama’s choices for the court, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

Under Justice Ginsburg’s direction, the liberals often answered major decisions with which they disagreed with one unified dissent. And they swallowed any differences they had with Kennedy to join him in a string of liberal victories at the court on same-sex marriage, affirmative action and abortion. (Justice Ginsburg later became the first justice to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony.)

When the court in 2016 struck down Texas restrictions on doctors and abortion clinics, Kennedy assigned the majority opinion to Breyer. But Justice Ginsburg issued a rare concurrence to make the point that abortion rights remained — for now — firmly established.

As long as Roe remains good law, Justice Ginsburg wrote, laws that “do little or nothing for health, but rather strew impediments to abortion, cannot survive judicial inspection.”

Justice Ginsburg did most of her work in dissents. She said she most lamented the court’s decisions in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), which opened the way for greater corporate and union spending in elections, and *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), in which the court threw out a key provision of the civil rights-era Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In a famous passage, she faulted Roberts’s logic that restrictions on states with past desegregation needed to be justified anew.

“Throwing out pre-clearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet,” she wrote.

Justice Ginsburg sometimes drew attention for more than her legal opinions. Tiny and frail-looking, despite the fact that she worked out with a trainer and boasted of doing push-ups, photos of Justice Ginsburg falling asleep at the State of the Union address became the subject of news reports. She explained that it wasn’t fatigue; in fact, she was known as something of a night owl, working late. Instead, she said, Kennedy had brought a good bottle of wine to the dinner that the justices traditionally hold before crossing the street to the Capitol.

Justice Ginsburg was also criticized for speaking too frankly in interviews and speeches, especially about abortion rights and same-sex marriage.

She drew criticism for surprisingly critical remarks about businessman Donald Trump, saying she feared for the court and the country if he were elected president. After several days of controversy, she issued a statement saying it was wrong of her to have commented about politics, but not apologizing for her views.

During her court tenure, Justice Ginsburg had several bouts with cancer, although she never missed a day of the court’s public schedule.

She had colon cancer surgery in 1999, which was accompanied by precautionary chemotherapy and radiation treatment, but she never missed a day of oral arguments. And

in February 2009, she underwent surgery for early-stage pancreatic cancer but managed to return to the bench when the court returned from recess less than three weeks later.

Instead, cancer took her husband first. Again, she was on the bench the next day.

It was the final day of the court's term, and she had an opinion to deliver. She thought of having another justice read the summary for her, but her children insisted she go herself, saying it was what their father would have wanted.

Justice Ginsburg's survivors include two children, Jane C. Ginsburg and James S. Ginsburg; four grandchildren; two step-grandchildren; and a great-granddaughter.

USA: More migrant women say they did not consent to surgeries at Ice center

AP review finds no evidence of mass hysterectomies but files show growing allegations of operations women did not fully understand.

By Nomaan Merchant

The Guardian (18.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3clezJ8> - Sitting across from her lawyer at an immigration detention center in rural Georgia, Mileidy Cardentey Fernandez unbuttoned her jail jumpsuit to show the scars on her abdomen. There were three small, circular marks.

The 39-year-old woman from Cuba was told only that she would undergo an operation to treat her ovarian cysts, but a month later, she's still not sure what procedure she got. After Cardentey repeatedly requested her medical records to find out, Irwin county detention center gave her more than 100 pages showing a diagnosis of cysts but nothing from the day of the surgery.

"The only thing they told me was: 'You're going to go to sleep and when you wake up, we will have finished,'" Cardentey said this week in a phone interview.

Cardentey kept her hospital bracelet. It has the date, 14 August, and part of the doctor's name, Dr Mahendra Amin, a gynecologist linked this week to allegations of unwanted hysterectomies and other procedures done on detained immigrant women that jeopardize their ability to have children.

An Associated Press review of medical records for four women and interviews with lawyers revealed growing allegations that Amin performed surgeries and other procedures on detained immigrants that they never sought or didn't fully understand.

Although some procedures could be justified based on problems documented in the records, the women's lack of consent or knowledge raises severe legal and ethical issues, lawyers and medical experts said.

Amin has performed surgery or other gynecological treatment on at least eight women detained at Irwin county detention center since 2017, including one hysterectomy, said Andrew Free, an immigration and civil rights lawyer working with attorneys to investigate medical treatment at the detention center. Doctors on behalf of the attorneys are examining new records and more women are coming forward to report their treatment by Amin, Free said.

"The indication is there's a systemic lack of truly informed and legally valid consent to perform procedures that could ultimately result – intentionally or unintentionally – in sterilization," he said.

The AP's review did not find evidence of mass hysterectomies as alleged in a widely shared complaint filed by a nurse at the detention center. Dawn Wooten alleged that many detained women were taken to an unnamed gynecologist whom she labeled the "uterus collector" because of how many hysterectomies he performed.

The complaint sparked a furious reaction from congressional Democrats and an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general. It also evoked comparisons to previous government-sanctioned efforts in the US to sterilize people to supposedly improve society – victims who were disproportionately poor, mentally disabled, American Indian, Black or other people of color. Thirty-three states had forced sterilization programs in the 20th century.

But a lawyer who helped file the complaint said she never spoke to any women who had hysterectomies. Priyanka Bhatt, staff attorney at the advocacy group Project South, told the Washington Post that she included the hysterectomy allegations because she wanted to trigger an investigation to determine if they were true. Wooten did not answer questions at a press conference Tuesday, and Project South did not respond to interview requests Thursday on behalf of Bhatt or Wooten.

Amin told the Intercept, which first reported Wooten's complaint, that he has only performed one or two hysterectomies in the past three years. His attorney, Scott Grubman, said in a statement: "We look forward to all of the facts coming out, and are confident that once they do, Dr Amin will be cleared of any wrongdoing."

Grubman did not respond to new questions Thursday.

Since 2018, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement says it found records of two referrals for hysterectomies at the jail, which is in Ocilla, Georgia, about 150 miles (240km) from Atlanta.

"Detainees are afforded informed consent, and a medical procedure like a hysterectomy would never be performed against a detainee's will," Dr Ada Rivera, medical director of the ICE Health Service Corps that oversees healthcare in detention, said in a statement.

LaSalle Corrections, which operates the jail, said it "strongly refutes these allegations and any implications of misconduct".

Women housed at Irwin County detention center who needed a gynecologist were typically taken to Amin, according to medical records provided to the AP by Free and lawyer Alexis Ruiz, who represents Cardentey. Interviews with detainees and their lawyers suggest some women came to fear the doctor.

Records reviewed by the AP show one woman was given a psychiatric evaluation the same day she refused to undergo a surgical procedure known as dilation and curettage. Commonly known as a D&C, it removes tissue from the uterus and can be used as a treatment for excessive bleeding. A note written on letterhead from Amin's office said the woman was concerned.

According to a written summary of her psychiatric evaluation, the woman said: "I am nervous about my upcoming procedure."

The summary says she denied needing mental health care and added: "I am worried because I saw someone else after they had surgery and what I saw scared me."

The AP also reviewed records for a woman who was given a hysterectomy. She reported irregular bleeding and was taken to see Amin for a D&C. A lab study of the tissue found signs of early cancer, called carcinoma. Amin's notes indicate the woman agreed 11 days later to the hysterectomy.

Free, who spoke to the woman, said she felt pressured by Amin and "didn't have the opportunity to say no" or speak to her family before the procedure.

Doctors told the AP that a hysterectomy could have been appropriate due to the carcinoma, though there may have been less intrusive options available.

Lawyers for both women asked that their names be withheld for fear of retaliation by immigration authorities.

In another case, Pauline Binam, a 30-year-old woman who was brought to the US from Cameroon when she was two, saw Amin after experiencing an irregular menstrual cycle and was told to have a D&C, said her attorney, Van Huynh.

When she woke up from the surgery, Huynh said, she was told Amin had removed one of her two fallopian tubes, which connect the uterus to the ovaries and are necessary to conceive a child. Binam's medical records indicate that the doctor discovered the tube was swollen.

"She was shocked and sort of confronted him on that – that she hadn't given her consent for him to proceed with that," Huynh said. "The reply that he gave was they were in there anyway and found there was this problem."

While women can potentially still conceive with one intact tube and ovary, doctors who spoke to the AP said removal of the tube was likely unnecessary and should never have happened without Binam's consent.

The doctors also questioned how Amin discovered the swollen tube because performing a D&C would not normally involve exploring a woman's fallopian tubes.

Dr Julie Graves, a family medicine and public health physician in Florida, called the process "absolutely abhorrent".

"It's established US law that you don't operate on everything that you find," she said. "If you're in a teaching hospital and an attending physician does something like that, it's a scandal and they are fired."

Binam was on the verge of deportation Wednesday, but Ice delayed it after calls from members of Congress and a request for an emergency stay by her lawyer.

Grubman, Amin's lawyer, said in a statement that the doctor "has dedicated his adult life to treating a high-risk, underserved population in rural Georgia".

Amin completed medical school in India in 1978 and his residency in gynecology in New Jersey. He has practiced in rural Georgia for at least three decades, according to court filings. State corporate records also show Amin is the executive of a company that manages Irwin County Hospital.

In 2013, state and federal investigators sued Amin, the hospital authority of Irwin county and a group of other doctors over allegations they falsely billed Medicare and Medicaid.

USA: U.S. Supreme Court permits broad religious exemption to birth control coverage

By Lawrence Hurley

Reuters (08.07.2020) - <https://reut.rs/2CIaJfq> - The U.S. Supreme Court on Wednesday endorsed a plan by President Donald Trump's administration to give employers broad religious and moral exemptions from a federal mandate that health insurance they provide to their workers includes coverage for women's birth control.

The court ruled 7-2 against the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, which challenged the legality of Trump's 2018 rule weakening the so-called contraceptive mandate of the 2010 Affordable Care Act, commonly called Obamacare. Christian conservatives, a key constituency for Trump as he seeks re-election on Nov. 3, had strongly opposed the Obamacare mandate.

The federal government has estimated that up to 126,000 women could lose contraception coverage through their employer-provided health insurance under Trump's regulation.

The Obamacare mandate requires employer-provided health insurance to give coverage for birth control with no co-pays. Previously, many employer-provided insurance policies did not offer this coverage. Republicans have sought to repeal Obamacare, signed by Trump's Democratic predecessor Barack Obama in 2010, and Trump's administration has chipped away at it through various actions.

White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany called the ruling "a big win for religious freedom and freedom of conscience."

"Ensuring that women receive the healthcare they need does not require banishing religious groups that refuse to surrender their beliefs from the public square," McEnany added.

Trump's rule allows any nonprofit or for-profit employer, including publicly traded companies, to seek an exemption on religious grounds. A moral objection can be made by nonprofits and companies that are not publicly traded. The Trump exemption also would be available for religiously affiliated universities that provide health insurance to students.

Writing for the court, conservative Justice Clarence Thomas said Trump's administration "had the statutory authority to craft that exemption, as well as the contemporaneously issued moral exemption."

Liberal Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor dissented. "Today, for the first time, the court casts totally aside countervailing rights and interests in its zeal to secure religious rights to the nth degree," Ginsburg wrote.

The court's other two liberal justices, Elena Kagan and Stephen Breyer, agreed with the outcome but did not sign on to Thomas' opinion. Kagan wrote that the regulations could yet be challenged on other grounds, including that the moral exemption is overly broad, which she said is a "close call."

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, a Democrat, pledged to continue the fight against Trump's regulation.

"Our case is about an overly broad rule that allows the personal beliefs of CEOs to dictate women's guaranteed access to contraceptive medicine," Shapiro said.

'Overjoyed'

Rules implemented under Obama exempted religious entities from the mandate. A further accommodation was created for religiously affiliated nonprofit employers, which some groups including the Little Sisters of the Poor, a Roman Catholic order of nuns that was one of the groups seeking an exemption, objected to as not going far enough.

"We are overjoyed that, once again, the Supreme Court has protected our right to serve the elderly without violating our faith," said Mother Loraine Marie Maguire of the Little Sisters.

Groups supporting the contraception mandate criticized the decision.

"Today's ruling has given bosses the power to dictate how their employees can and cannot use their health insurance - allowing them to intrude into their employees' private decisions based on whatever personal beliefs their employers happen to hold," said Lourdes Rivera of the Center for Reproductive Rights.

The legal question was whether Trump's administration had the legal authority to expand the exemption under both the Obamacare law itself and another federal law, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which lets people press religious claims against the federal government.

The administration was joined in the litigation by a Pittsburgh affiliate of the Little Sisters. Under a separate court ruling, the group already had an exemption to the mandate.

Thomas wrote that the Little Sisters "have had to fight for the ability to continue in their noble work without violating their sincerely held religious beliefs" and that Trump's rule resolves their concerns.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sided with Catholic schools in a separate legal dispute with teachers who said they were unlawfully dismissed, ruling that religious institutions like churches and schools are shielded from employment discrimination lawsuits.

USA: A century after women gained the right to vote, majority of Americans see work to do on gender equality

About three-in-ten men say women's gains have come at the expense of men.

By Juliana Menasce Horowitz & Ruth Igielnik

Pew Research Center (07.07.2020) - <https://pewrsr.ch/2ZNAumx> - A hundred years after the 19th Amendment was ratified, about half of Americans say granting women the right to vote has been the most important milestone in advancing the position of women in the country. Still, a majority of U.S. adults say the country hasn't gone far enough when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, even as a large share thinks there has been progress in the last decade, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

Among those who think the country still has work to do in achieving gender equality, 77% point to sexual harassment as a major obstacle to women having equal rights with men. Fewer, but still majorities, point to women not having the same legal rights as men (67%), different societal expectations for men and women (66%) and not enough women in positions of power (64%) as major obstacles to gender equality. Women are more likely than men to see each of these as a major obstacle.

Many of those who say it is important for men and women to have equal rights point to aspects of the workplace when asked about what gender equality would look like. Fully 45% volunteer that a society where women have equal rights with men would include equal pay. An additional 19% say there would be no discrimination in hiring, promotion or educational opportunities. About one-in-ten say women would be more equally represented in business or political leadership.

In terms of the groups and institutions that have done the most to advance the rights of women in the U.S., 70% say the feminist movement has done at least a fair amount in this regard. The Democratic Party is viewed as having contributed more to the cause of women's rights than the Republican Party: 59% say the Democratic Party has done at least a fair amount to advance women's rights, while 37% say the same about the GOP. About three-in-ten (29%) say President Donald Trump has done at least a fair amount to advance women's rights, while 69% say Trump has not done much or has done nothing at all. These views vary considerably by party, with Republicans and Republican leaners at least five times as likely as Democrats and those who lean Democratic to say the GOP and Trump have done at least a fair amount and Democrats far more likely than Republicans to say the same about the Democratic Party.

Views of the role the feminist movement has played in advancing gender equality are positive overall, though fewer than half of women say the movement has been beneficial to them personally. About four-in-ten (41%) say feminism has helped them at least a little, while half say it has neither helped nor hurt them. Relatively few (7%) say feminism has hurt them personally. Democratic women, those with a bachelor's degree or more education and women younger than 50 are among the most likely to say they've benefitted personally from feminism.

Views about how much progress the country has made on gender equality differ widely along partisan lines. About three-quarters of Democrats (76%) say the country hasn't gone far enough when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, while 19% say it's been about right and 4% say the country has gone too far. Among Republicans, a third say the country hasn't made enough progress, while 48% say it's been about right and 17% say the country has gone too far in giving women equal rights with men.

There is also a gender gap in these views, with 64% of women – compared with 49% of men – saying the country hasn't gone far enough in giving women equal rights with men. Democratic and Republican women are about ten percentage points more likely than their male counterparts to say this (82% of Democratic women vs. 70% of Democratic men and 38% of Republican women vs. 28% of Republican men).

The nationally representative survey of 3,143 U.S. adults was conducted online from March 18-April 1, 2020.¹

Click [here](#) for other key findings and the full report.

USA: Coronavirus recession will hit women harder, experts warn

Women of colour in particular could suffer disproportionately from virus-fuelled economic downturn.

By Kaelyn Forde

Al Jazeera (16.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3br5vkV> - Crystal Crawford, 34, loves her job as a social worker at a nonprofit private school for children who have experienced homelessness. But the pay has never been enough to live on in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, so Crawford has always nannied for up to 10 families at a time, taking care of kids after school, on parents' date nights, during school vacations and more.

"A lot of hourly workers look like me, and unfortunately, when they get rid of those jobs, people are having to seek resources from the government or from food pantries," Crawford told Al Jazeera. "People who thought they had it all together - right now, we're struggling to maintain our households."

Crawford also runs a small business that pairs families with nannies. The money she earned caring for children herself used to bring in an extra \$900 to \$1,200 per month, she said, in addition to the \$45,000 she makes per year as a social worker.

But the coronavirus pandemic has caused her childcare work to dry up completely, and her social worker's salary is not enough to cover almost \$1,400 in rent, plus utilities and food, per month. She is also faced with the uncertainty of when her school will reopen, and whether a full-time social worker will be part of its distance learning plan if kids cannot go back to their classrooms.

"The cost of living is super high in Atlanta, and to just have one-third of your salary gone on the drop of a dime, that's a hard hit for someone," she explained. "Every day, we're just hoping to keep our doors open, hoping that the kids get to go back to school in August. Everything is just kind of up in the air right now."

Crawford is far from alone. Women are a huge part of the workforce responding to the coronavirus pandemic, but on average, they are paid less than men and poised to lose more from the continuing economic fallout, according to an analysis by the World Economic Forum.

Part of it has to do with the jobs women fill, but the gender pay gap and the large burden of unpaid childcare and housework also play a role, said Caitlyn Collins, an assistant professor of sociology at Washington University in St Louis.

"Women's disproportionate burden for caregiving hinders their ability to participate fully in the paid labour force. This is true in the best of times, and especially true, and dire, in times of economic crisis," Collins told Al Jazeera.

"Women also hold a disproportionate share of jobs in the care and service sectors - especially women of colour - so they're at the front lines and in the trenches of the coronavirus pandemic," she added.

Women comprise 70 percent of health and social sector workers in 104 countries, according to a 2019 report from the World Health Organization, and contribute \$3 trillion per year to global health, half of which is in the form of unpaid care work.

But on average, women healthcare workers earn 28 percent less than men and are less likely to be employed full-time, according to the WHO. Both of those factors make women more likely to feel the effects of the coronavirus recession more acutely.

'Well-worn path of inequality'

Of course, it is not just healthcare workers who are on the front lines of the crisis - grocery store workers, domestic workers, delivery people and transit workers are all still working outside their homes, and many are women and people of colour, said Elise Gould, a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute, a progressive-leaning US think tank.

"Some of the front line workers are going to be disproportionately Black and brown people - people working in grocery stores, transportation, public transit, lots of different sectors - and they're continuing to work," Gould told Al Jazeera. "At the same time, we know that Hispanic workers and Black workers are much less likely to be able to telework, so that tells you about the kind of jobs that they have and their ability to weather this storm from a health security standpoint or a financial security standpoint."

And while unemployment has soared across the United States in every demographic, "initial data suggests that women are more likely to lose their job at this time, and that's somewhat due to the types of jobs that are being lost," which include jobs in the service and care sectors, Gould said.

In some of the states hardest hit by the coronavirus - including New York, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia and Minnesota - unemployment rates for women surged between 13 and 35 points above average figures during the last two weeks of March, according to data obtained by journalists at the nonprofit Fuller Project.

That is a contrast to the 2008 financial crisis, which first impacted industries that mostly employed men, said Gould.

"The Great Recession, to a large extent, was driven by initial losses in manufacturing and construction, which are dominated by men," she said. "These sectors that are being hit first and hardest now are not the typical sectors. So it's not just that you might have women being hit, it's that you're having more low-wage workers being hit, and that's an important distinction."

Among those low-wage workers are the US's 2.2 million domestic workers, who care for children and the elderly, cook, clean and perform a variety of other household tasks. Some 91 percent of them are women, according to an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute, and many are women of colour and immigrants.

Since domestic workers have never had a social safety net - including paid time off, living wages and health insurance - that makes them even more vulnerable in a crisis, said Haeyoung Yoon, the senior director for immigration policy at the nonprofit, National Domestic Workers Alliance.

"The coronavirus pandemic is travelling the well-worn path of inequality, and we are already seeing that low-wage workers, and women low-wage workers in particular, are hit the hardest," Yoon told Al Jazeera. "Poverty and gender inequality will be a decisive factor in how this virus will spread and its long-term effects."

The coronavirus has already taken a major short-term toll. A recent survey by the National Domestic Workers Alliance found 72 percent of domestic workers had no work for the week beginning April 6, a 9 percent increase from the previous week.

And while the median wage for domestic workers is just \$10.21 per hour, the same survey found that 77 percent of domestic workers are their family's primary breadwinners. The coronavirus crisis has the potential to thrust entire households into poverty.

"Many domestic workers earn poverty wages, work with no job security, and no safety net," Yoon said. "Domestic workers cannot telework from home. They must still go to work. But, for nannies and house cleaners, they are experiencing sudden and devastating unemployment or underemployment."

Working more - for free

Women also do the lion's share of unpaid care work at home, including taking care of children and the elderly, cooking meals and cleaning.

Globally, women perform 76.2 percent of unpaid care work, more than three times as much as men, a 2018 report by the International Labour Organization found, and "unpaid care work is the main barrier preventing women from getting into, remaining and progressing in the labour force".

Even in families that are used to dividing up tasks more equitably, if a father earns more at his job, a mother might be expected to spend more time caring for or homeschooling kids during the pandemic.

Women working full-time in the US earn roughly 82 cents to every dollar a man earns, according to the US Census Bureau. That gender pay gap becomes even more pronounced for women of colour, with Black women earning only 62 cents on average compared to every dollar a white, non-Hispanic man earns, and Hispanic women earning only 54 cents.

"Because the gender wage gap exists, it could be the case that if somebody has to cut their hours to take care of these things, then it's more likely going to be the woman," Gould said.

Uncertain future

All of it makes for an uncertain economic future for many women.

Crawford said she has no childcare work lined up, and only two of her 10 regular clients have reached out to ask her how she is faring in the crisis. None of them have continued to pay her, even though she had standing appointments with many of them.

But the crisis might mean going back to being a full-time nanny, even though Crawford has a master's degree.

"We don't know when the kids are going to go back to school, so we can't really plan for August right now. It's unpredictable because we might be doing distance learning until God knows when," Crawford said. "I'm thankful that if this all tumbles down and I'm no longer able to work at the school, that I'm able to get a full-time nanny gig once the pandemic is over."

USA: U.S. soccer says women don't deserve equal pay because they have less skill

By Kim Elsesser

Forbes (11.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2xo3oyX> - The United States Soccer Federation argued in a court filing that the gender discrimination lawsuit lodged by the U.S. women's national team (USWNT) does not have legal standing because, among other reasons, men have more ability, strength and speed.

Thirty-eight members of the women's national team sued the U.S. Soccer Federation last March, accusing the federation of failing to promote gender equality. The women have asked for \$67 million, while U.S. Soccer is asking for the suit to be dismissed.

The federation filed its latest motion on Monday, and one of their arguments is the different abilities and skills held by male and female soccer players. The court filing argues, "it's not a sexist stereotype to recognize the different levels of speed and strength required for the two jobs," referring to the athletes on the men's and women's teams. They cite a study indicating a 10-12% performance gap between elite male and female athletes. The federation also refer to the testimony from two time Olympic gold-medal winner, Carli Lloyd, stating, "As Plaintiff Carli Lloyd's testimony admits, the WNT could not compete successfully against the senior men's national teams because competing against 16- or 17-year old boys 'is about as old as [the WNT] can go.'"

"The point is that the job of MNT player (competing against senior men's national teams) requires a higher level of skill, based on speed and strength, than does the job of WNT player (competing against senior women's national teams)," the filing states. Men's teams, they argue, face tougher competition as well.

There is no argument that men are stronger than women. It's a well-documented biological difference. It's why we have separate teams for men and women.

Here's what U.S. Soccer doesn't understand. The selection of speed and strength as the criteria for pay is biased, and here's why.

Imagine a world where women's sports dominated for hundreds of years. Only female athletes are sports heroes, and only women's sports are televised. Then men begin playing sports at a professional level. Would we still use strength and speed to define ability in a sport? No, we'd likely say the men's game is too physical and lacks the finesse, intelligent playmaking and teamwork of the women's game. If we had to rationalize paying men less, we might further cite studies indicating men lack the flexibility of women.

We value strength and speed, because we are accustomed to strength and speed from watching years of men's sports. However, these are clearly not the most important skills for succeeding at the national level. Recall, the USWNT won the World Cup last summer, while the country's men failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

The USWNT believes that U.S. Soccer's arguments actually illustrate the gender discrimination that caused the women to file the lawsuit in the first place. "This ridiculous 'argument' belongs in the Paleolithic Era. It sounds as if it has been made by a caveman," Molly Levinson, spokeswoman for the U.S. women, said in response to the filing.

The outcome of this lawsuit will send a message to aspiring female athletes as to whether women's skills will be recognized and appreciated or whether the biological differences between men and women will result in women taking a back seat to the men—even when representing our country. On March 30, the judge will rule on whether the case will proceed.

USA: Harvey Weinstein verdict is #MeToo milestone but changes little for world's sexual assault survivors

Many women still face retaliation for reporting abuse.

By Leah Rodriguez and Pia Gralki

Global Citizen (24.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3ccQILy> - Harvey Weinstein was found guilty of criminal sexual assault on two counts in a New York City court on Monday.

During a trial that lasted more than a month, six women testified that Weinstein, the founder of The Weinstein Company — a film studio behind popular films from Halloween to Inglourious Basterds — had sexually assaulted them.

The jury of seven men and five women deliberated Weinstein's case over the course of five days. Weinstein, pleaded not guilty and denies all allegations of non-consensual sex. He was convicted for a criminal sexual act in the first degree for forcing a sex act on former production assistant Mimi Haleyi at his apartment in July 2006, as well as rape in the third degree for raping aspiring actress Jessica Mann at a hotel in 2013. He was acquitted of two counts of predatory sexual assault, which would have resulted in a life sentence.

Weinstein's sentencing is scheduled for March 11, when he will face five to 25 years in prison. He also faces separate sex crimes charges in Los Angeles.

The verdict is a major win for the #MeToo movement, founded by activist Tarana Burke and relaunched by actress Alyssa Milan when high-profile women started going public about Weinstein's abuse in 2017. Nearly 100 women have come forward against Weinstein, and the movement has inspired hundreds of thousands of other sexual survivors to speak out. Several US states have expanded workplace harassment protections since.

As the movement picked up steam, the United Nations emphasized the need to ensure no one is left behind in the fight to achieve gender equality. The social media campaign also sparked an international rallying cry for justice in developing and wealthy countries alike. Namibia launched one of Africa's first #MeToo movements. Nigeria, Egypt, and other countries followed suit, while women in Japan introduced the #KuToo campaign to protest sexist dress codes. South Africans shared personal stories of sexual assault and gender-based violence on Twitter. And Indian women started speaking out against rampant sexual harassment in the workplace.

But experts say Weinstein's case will likely not impact the treatment of sexual assault survivors globally.

"This case reminds us that sexual violence thrives on unchecked power and privilege," Burke said in a statement released to Global Citizen. "The implications reverberate far beyond Hollywood and into the daily lives of all of us in the rest of the world."

Yasmeen Hassan, global executive director of women's rights organization Equality Now, considers the verdict a victory but said it's a "drop in the ocean" in the effort to protect sexual assault survivors worldwide.

"I can't say that this has a huge impact on international legal systems that actually prevent women from coming forward," Hassan told Global Citizen.

It is estimated that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner. While the #MeToo

movement has encouraged women worldwide to report sexual abuse, Hassan said many are met with defamation lawsuits or other forms of retaliation. Sexual assault and rape laws are still far behind in countries around the world, she said.

There is no international treaty on gender-based violence in the workplace. While 154 countries have sexual harassment laws, the laws aren't always enforced or they don't meet international standards. The majority of rapes and sexual assaults go unreported because survivors fear retaliation from their abuser or society, don't think the authorities would help, and don't want to be retraumatized if the justice system doesn't believe them.

On March 11, the United Nations will hold the annual Commission on the Status of Women, where world leaders will gather to discuss the state of gender equality. Hassan hopes to use Weinstein's case and the #MeToo movement to put pressure on governments to reevaluate how the justice system treats sexual violence survivors at the commission.

"It takes a key change, country by country, to get women the courage to come forward," Hassan said.

USA: A well of grief: the relatives of murdered Native women speak out

Native American women and girls are targeted at rates that far outweigh other American women, and are 10 times more likely to be murdered.

By Sara Hylton

The Guardian (13.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/30qH4iU> - On a warm summer day in 2018, Lissa Yellow-bird Chase packed her vehicle with sunscreen, iPads, spiritual items and water. She drove to the bank of Lake Sakakawea on the edge of Fort Berthold Reservation, in western North Dakota.

She parked her vehicle, bearing the license plate "SEARCH", and prepared for a long day ahead. As she'd done several days that summer, she began to scour her territory for clues. With fishing sonar equipment and a dilapidated old boat, she had nothing to go by but her instincts.

It was here, in the deep blue lake, that she and volunteers from her group the Sahnish Scouts of North Dakota, found the body of Olivia Lonebear. The 32-year-old and mother of five had last been seen in New Town, a small oil-boom city on the edge of Fort Berthold Reservation, nine months prior.

A hidden epidemic

Countless women have been victims of similar, less high-profile cases, but Lonebear's death exposed the reality in which Native American women and girls live – what the former North Dakota senator Heidi Heitkamp called a "hidden epidemic". The facts are dire. Native American women and girls are sexually assaulted and targeted at rates far greater than other American women, and they are 10 times more likely to be murdered.

In 2015, the Canadian government announced a national inquiry into the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). In June, the commissioners found the state responsible for "a race-based genocide". The treatment of Indigenous women is no less alarming across the border: while Canada collects some data, the US

federal government does not track how many people like Lonebear go missing or turn up murdered.

Twenty-three-year-old Heather Belgrade, Lonebear's cousin who lives across the border in north-eastern Montana, has also been grieving the death of her best friend Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, who was brutally murdered in 2017. The case helped to bring about Savanna's Act, which enacted a set of reforms in how law enforcement agencies deal with cases of missing and murdered Native Americans.

The dangers of the oil industry

While the realities facing Native American women and girls are gaining more attention, what is less understood are the effects of extractive industries, mainly oil, on Native American women and communities.

Residents across Fort Peck Reservation are sensitized to the impacts of the oil industry. The reservation is situated not far from large oil boom towns like Williston and Watford City in North Dakota and is in the direct vicinity of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline expansion. Many of the community members I spoke to discussed the influx of crime, sexual violence and drugs when the Bakken oil boom began in 2006. They're bracing for what's to come.

Prairiedawn Thunderchild and her older sister Tahnee Thunderchild learned of those dangers early one evening when they were walking home to their apartment in Wolf Point, a small town of a few thousand people, on Fort Peck Reservation in Montana.

That evening, the girls saw a car with North Dakota license plates approaching. The car began to follow them, and the men, whom they didn't recognize from their community, told the sisters to get into the vehicle.

The girls knew that a car full of non-native men with North Dakota plates probably meant they were oil employees. They had heard stories of trafficking, kidnapping and sexual assault. They ran and called the tribal police. "[They] probably wanted gross things from us," Tahnee told me.

Some activists have linked the environmental impacts of extractive practices with an increase of rape among women in the region.

"Man camps," as they have come to be known, house thousands of temporary oil workers with disposable income, who are dealing with the stressors of dangerous working conditions. The proposed Keystone XL pipeline would bring in more "man camps" affecting Native American women and communities.

"Oil industry camps may be impacting domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking in the direct and surrounding communities in which they reside," the Department Of Justice found.

Eight-year-old Macylilly Whitehawk was sexually assaulted and abducted when she was just four years old, and meth was found in her system from the assailant's semen. Though the assailant was from the reservation, Macylilly's grandmother and caregiver, Valerie Whitehawk, believes what happened to her granddaughter is linked to the increase in drugs and violence stemming from the region's oil industry.

The complications of dealing with crimes in Indian country often means that cases fall between the cracks or go unreported. In cases of sexual assault, non-native men who assault women on reservations cannot be arrested or prosecuted by tribal authorities. A

minority of reservations, including Fort Peck Reservation, fall under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which allows tribal authorities jurisdiction to prosecute non-native men who commit crimes within their territory.

According to Stacie Smith, Fort Peck's elected tribal chief judge, this jurisdiction was established in 2013 in order to respond to threats facing the community in large part by the oil industry. Smith is working with community activist Angeline Cheek to develop a set of tools to educate the community on the dangers of "man camps" and to prepare for the worst. They are also working to establish "Amber Alert", an early warning system to help find missing and abducted people.

On one of my last days in Wolf Point, I attended the Fort Peck powwow. I noticed a tipi in the distance that the light seemed to particularly favor. I walked over and was greeted by the tribal chief of the Assiniboine tribe, a tall, gentle man, who goes by Joe Miller. He invited me to sit with him and shared the story of how he named his life partner Eagle Woman Flies Above.

I shared with Joe that a few weeks before, I had seen an eagle flying around in Brooklyn that perched above the tree where I was sitting. A rare occurrence in a concrete jungle. Joe told me that the eagle is a sacred symbol, representing courage and wisdom. "It brought you here," he said.

I sat with his response, feeling its significance. The sun was settling into a magenta hue and a crescent moon began to take shape. I asked Joe what he thought about the issues facing the women in his community, and he responded: "They are the life givers of our people ... if they weren't here, we wouldn't be here."

It occurred to me that perhaps if we paid more attention, we would notice many eagles flying above, calling us to listen with more wisdom and courage. Calling us to awaken to this assault against our common humanity.
