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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: Public outrage after murder of Anti-Femicide activist

The latest victim of gendered violence in the country was an anti-femicide activist who had been missing for a week.

To Μωβ (09.04.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2nEJDxB> -

“Ni una menos!” (“Not one less!”)

“Vivas nos queremos!” (“We want ourselves alive!”)

“Estado responsable!” (“The state is responsible!”)

These were some of the chants heard in the town of Moreno, Buenos Aires, where thousands gathered Saturday (8/4) to protest the femicide of **Micaela Garcia**, who herself was an activist against sexist violence.

The 21-year-old Argentine had been missing for a week after she had attended a nightclub in nearby Gualeguay. Her naked body was found Saturday morning in a rural area with signs of having been strangled.

Her suspected killer, Sebastian Wagner, arrested the same day, is a serial rapist with previous charges of rape against him. While his original sentencing was to be imprisoned for those instances of rape until at least 2020, when he was convicted in 2010, a judge had reduced his sentence. As such, the target of the protests in Moreno was also Judge Carlos Rossi, who had been responsible for releasing Wagner early.

“Here are two people responsible: the murderer of Micaela and a judge who released him despite being advised against doing so,” said Fabiana Tuñez, the president of the National Women’s Council.

Garcia, a university student, was involved with various social movements and championed the struggle against femicides of women in Argentina, her father told reporters.

“We are going to live to try to achieve a more just society, as Micaela intended. Pain has to serve us to change society,” explained Nestor Garcia, the young woman’s father.

A recent documentary by Alejandra Perdomo, titled “Every 30 Hours,” found that gendered violence in Argentina kills one woman every 30 hours.

According to Casa del Encuentro, almost 3,000 women have been killed since 2008, when the organization started to monitor femicides. Despite the inclusion of “femicide” in the criminal code in 2012, only one man has been sentenced for femicide charges since then.

According to Pedromo, the anti-femicide movement “Ni Una Menos” made the issue more visible, resulting in a surge of complaints.

While Argentina has been a pioneer in implementing laws defending the rights of the LGBTI community over the past decade during the progressive administrations of Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernandez, the country only recently started to measure the extent of the femicide issue, after an accumulation of horrendous murders were covered in the media.

The movement against femicide saw a resurgence in Argentina last year, sparking a wider uprising across the region against gender violence and the systemic impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of femicide and domestic abuse.

For additional, important information, from “Newsweek”, 10 April:

Pope Francis—one of Argentina’s best-known citizens—telephoned Garcia’s parents, Yuyo Garcia and Andrea Lescano. Writing on Facebook, Yuyo Garcia said: *“This is how far your*

fight and message has come, my beautiful. Thank you Holy Father for your humility and your respect!"

Speaking to the Argentinian Radio Mitre on April 9, Argentine President Mauricio Macri argued that "the laws we have are enough" but criticized the judge for releasing Wagner early.

"We cannot keep these kinds of judges. We all have to understand that we have to take responsibility, there is not a president or a government that solves the problems magically, we all are."

According to La Casa del Encuentro, an Argentinian feminist organization monitoring femicides in the country, 230 women were murdered between January 1 and October 31, 2016—roughly one every 30 hours.

CANADA: Woman or girl murdered every 2.5 days on average during 2018: femicide report

A goal of the report is to acknowledge that circumstances surrounding women's violent deaths differs from those of men so that femicide can be better prevented

By Nicole Thompson

The National Post (20.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2MDr0TQ> - A woman or girl was killed every 2.5 days on average in Canada last year, according to an inaugural report on femicide that argues the issue must be better understood in order to reduce the number of slayings.

The first annual report by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability — titled "#CallItFemicide" — was released Wednesday and answers a call from the United Nations for countries to better track gender-related killings of women, said lead author Myrna Dawson, the observatory's director and a professor at the University of Guelph.

"It really drove home how often this was happening when we were monitoring this on a daily basis," she said. "Women are still most at risk of men that they are intimate with or who they should be able to trust."

The goal of the report, at least in part, is to acknowledge that the circumstances and motivations surrounding women's violent deaths differs from those of men so that femicide can be better understood and prevented.

"The context in which women and girls are killed is vastly different because they're most often killed by people they know, and that's in contrast to males who are most often killed by acquaintances and strangers," Dawson said. "Calling it for what it is and recognizing the distinctiveness underscores the fact that we need different types of prevention."

The report said 148 women and girls were killed in 133 incidents in 2018, with 140 people accused in their deaths. In 12 of the 133 incidents, no accused has been identified. Some cases involve multiple accused.

More than 90 per cent of those accused were men.

In many cases, a police investigation is still ongoing, Dawson said, adding that researchers intend to follow the cases through the justice system the coming years to better understand the factors that went into each.

The statistics include a van attack that left eight women and two men dead in Toronto last year. The accused in that case, Alek Minassian, has been charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 of attempted murder. He is set to stand trial in February 2020.

The women who died in the van attack are among the 21 per cent allegedly killed in 2018 by a stranger. By contrast, 53 per cent were allegedly killed by intimate partners, according to the report. Another 13 per cent were allegedly killed by other male family members.

That includes the case of Krassimira Pejcinovski and her 13-year-old daughter Venallia, who were allegedly slain by the elder Pejcinovski's partner in May 2018. Her 15-year-old son Roy was also killed in the incident, but is not included in the statistics.

The numbers and demographic information were pulled from media reports of the deaths, the study said. Dawson said information from the media was more handily available and at least as accurate as information from official sources. But the report notes that in coming years, as these cases progress through the justice system, researchers will look at court records to track updates.

Dawson said there are some demographics disproportionately represented in the statistics. For instance, the report indicates Indigenous women represent only about five per cent of the population, but made up 36 per cent of the women and girls killed by violence. Thirty-four per cent of the women and girls were killed in rural areas, where only 16 per cent of the population lives, the report said.

Understanding these issues is key to preventing further femicides, said Julie Lalonde, a women's rights advocate and public educator.

For instance, she noted, funding for sexual assault centres and women's shelters is distributed on a per capita basis in Ontario, which puts women in sparsely populated areas at an even greater disadvantage.

"The argument is there's less of a need (in rural areas). Perhaps in terms of numbers, but you have a more complex need in rural communities that requires more resources, because you have to travel long distances. You don't have public transit for people to get away," Lalonde said.

She said statistics like those in the report also help cut down on misconceptions about violence against women, such as the idea that women in abusive relationships should just leave.

"We don't talk about things like criminal harassment or the fact that most women are killed after leaving or declaring that they're going to leave a partner," she said. "We have to challenge all the myths and stereotypes that tell women it's their own fault."

COLOMBIA: 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> - Leticia 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 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 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 unearthened 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.”

EL SALVADOR: 'Police never turned up': El Salvador's devastating epidemic of femicide

Pressure is growing to tackle the rising toll of violence in one of the world’s most dangerous places to be a woman

The Guardian (06.06.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2Lsjo4Q> - the day before she was found dead in a garden in a suburb of the El Salvadoran capital, Graciela Eugenia Ramírez Chávez had gone to buy shoes for her wedding. Her fiancé was later arrested and charged with her murder – she had been stabbed 56 times – in a case that briefly made headlines in a country where femicide is a grisly daily reality.

The death of 22-year-old Ramírez on 13 February came less than a month after Dr Rosa María Bonilla Vega, 45, died in hospital after being found injured at the foot of the stairs at her home in the city of Santa Ana. Two months later Karla Turcios, a 33-year-old journalist, was found, strangled and suffocated, on a road near the western town where she lived. The partners of both women have been charged with their murders.

These were just three high-profile cases among 152 murders of women between 1 January and 1 May in El Salvador, according to the National Women’s Development Institute (Isdemu). The statistics mark an increase from last year, when 123 women were murdered from 1 January up to 30 April in the Central American country, considered one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman. As the rate of femicide has increased, so have demands for the government to act.

Last month the attorney general’s office responded by launching a new unit to combat the crisis. Four officials will coordinate nationwide efforts to halt violence against women, children and adolescents, the LGBT community and other vulnerable groups. Graciela Sagastume, who led the investigations into the murders of Bonilla and Turcios, will head up efforts to stop violence against women.

"The goal of this new unit is the standardisation, creation and coordination of criteria, strategies and guidelines that permit the attorney general's office to pay integral attention to the process of investigation and victims of violence," said the attorney general, Douglas Meléndez, as he inaugurated the unit.

"We have confidence that this will get results and make a difference," said Silvia Ivette Juárez Barrios of Ormusa (the Organisation of Salvadoran Women for Peace). "This integrated approach is what we asked for in the strategy we developed."

She said the crisis was linked to impunity and tolerance by authorities and police. "When the authorities don't react, that sends out a message that nothing will be done."

Meléndez said that in the case of Ramírez, police had failed to act on warnings in the months leading to her murder. "On repeated occasions neighbours called the [emergency number] to report the victim was being attacked but the police never turned up."

The main reason that women did not report violence was that they found it difficult to access public services, said Vanda Pignato, the secretary for social inclusion, adding that women were often disbelieved if they did manage to report it. Accounts of violence did not match surveys that found, for example, that four in 10 women had experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.

The new unit will focus on better allocation of resources and will prioritise prevention, including mobilising civil society to raise awareness, said Salvador Martínez, at the attorney general's office. "We won't just be working on cases where murders have occurred, but on prevention. We have found many women are not even aware they are being abused and schools and other institutions will be mobilised to educate people."

He attributed the rise in femicide to "a total social breakdown – a lack of values, a lack of education, a lack of respect and tolerance".

Pressure to tackle the femicide epidemic has been mounting. In March the UN office in San Salvador called for government action to strengthen special tribunals for women and specialist services at PNC (national civil police) branches. A month later women's rights organisations protested outside the attorney's general's office, with banners reading: "It's not a crime of passion, it's a crime of patriarchy", and "We demand the state guarantee the right to a life free from violence".

According to the UN, Latin America and the Caribbean is the most violent region in the world for women, with femicide occurring on a "devastating scale" in Central America, where two out of three women who are murdered die because of their gender. In El Salvador 468 femicides occurred in 2017, one every 18 hours, according to the Institute of Legal Medicine.

For Graciela Ramírez, whose family released photographs of the wedding dress she planned to wear, her murder ended a life long marred by violence. She had fled to a new area of the country to escape a former partner who had abused her. Police had simply advised her to "take justice into her own hands" when she reported those attacks, her mother told reporters. "It never stops. People talk about violence against women, but when you look for help, nothing happens."

FRANCE: Protestors mark 100 domestic violence deaths in France in 2019

[100 deaths and counting: France's femicide problem](#)

By Vincent Coste & Lindsey Johnstone

Euronews (03.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2IYCF6A> - A demonstration was held in Paris on Sunday to denounce the 100th femicide in France this year, at which people held signs showing the names of the women killed by their partner or ex-partner between January and September 2019.

On Monday, a 92-year-old woman became victim number 101, when she died after being beaten by her husband with his cane.

In 2018, 121 women were killed in France by their partner or ex-partner, according to the Ministry of Interior.

Protesters on Sunday called on the French government to act, ahead of a meeting on domestic violence on Tuesday.

The national forum on domestic violence or "day of dialogue" – an initiative led by Marlene Schiappa, the French Secretary of State for Equality – was attended by police officers, lawyers, representatives of women's associations and the families of victims of femicide, with domestic violence prevention and victim support workshops planned.

Schiappa last week pledged €1 million for organisations tackling domestic violence, but the announcement has been met with criticism from such groups, who deem it inadequate.

Sunday's demonstration was organised by the feminist organisation Nous Toutes (All of Us), which is demanding the government prioritise the issue and allocate more funds to tackle it.

Chief executive Caroline De Haas tweeted: "They are [the] 100. Murdered because they are women. This evening, with Nous Toutes, we have named them. We are asking the state to wake up. We need funds and public policies that are up to the task."

Schiappa on Tuesday announced the creation of a new helpline 3919 – after the date of launch, 3/9/19 – and encouraged people to share it. She tweeted a message beginning "I'll be taken seriously when I'm dead" and went on to say: "Today, 3/9/19, at the coffee machine, at lunch, at the school gate, on the phone, on social networks... share 3919. You never know who might need it."

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced after the summit a raft of new measures including the creation of 1,000 additional places in emergency accommodation for women who are the victims of domestic violence and an audit of police handling of domestic violence. From November 25, women will be able to file domestic violence complaints at the hospitals where they have been treated for injuries inflicted, and legal powers to limit fathers' parental rights in the case of domestic violence, while still allowing the mother to receive alimony, will be introduced.

Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer also announced the creation of a working group focused on the prevention of domestic violence through education.

According to the NGO "Femicides par compagnons ou ex" (Femicides by partners or exes), a woman is killed by a partner or former partner every two days in France. The collective told Euronews last month that among those killed this year, many had already gone to the police about domestic violence issues but that their concerns had not been taken seriously.

The group also called on French authorities to take a new approach by removing violent men from their partners and families, rather than women and children being the ones to move to shelters. "They come out of a conjugal hell and are plunged into another kind of hell, while their violent partners are at home and can continue to harass them through the children because they retain their parental rights," they said.

According to a study by the Victims' Delegation of the National Police and National Gendarmerie, in 2018 21 children were also killed in the context of domestic violence. The study showed that the vast majority of domestic murders were carried out using a weapon and that 83% occurred in the home of the couple, the victim or the perpetrator. The most prevalent motive was non-acceptance of the separation of the couple.

GERMANY: Domestic violence affects over 100,000 women in Germany

For the first time, federal police have released national data on violence in relationships in Germany. The information shows that murder, sexual offenses, bodily harm and stalking are not uncommon between partners.

DW (22.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2qgh1m5> - The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) together with the German Minister for Family Affairs, Manuela Schwesig, released the statistics in Berlin on Tuesday. This is the first time police were releasing numbers showing the extent of violence in intimate relationships, the BKA said in a press statement.

According to the BKA's figures, in 2015, a total of 127,457 people in relationships were targets of murder, bodily harm, rape, sexual assault, threats and stalking. Eighty-two percent, or over 104,000, of these were women.

Among the women, over 65,800 suffered simple injuries, 11,400 were badly injured, 16,200 were subjected to threats and nearly 8,000 were victims of stalking. Three hundred thirty-one women were killed intentionally or unintentionally by their partners.

In cases of rape and sexual assault, almost all the victims were women. Over ninety percent of victims of stalking and threats were also female, according to the statistics.

In a press statement, the BKA's President Holder Munch explained that police had registered several cases of abuse, starting from subtle forms of humiliation, insults and intimidation, psychic, physical and sexual abuse to rape and murder.

"Domestic violence against women, against men, against children is not a private affair, it is a punishable offence and must be tracked accordingly," Family Minister Manuela Schwesig told reporters.

"Violence, that takes place within one's own four walls, in a place where one should feel secure, is unfortunately true for many women. This taboo, of not speaking about it, must

be broken. For the first time numbers for this particular subject have been specifically evaluated," she added.

"We need these numbers, because they help in making domestic violence visible. They also help in developing measures to prevent and fight against domestic violence," she said.

Schwesig also urged victims to call the "Gewalt gegen Frauen" (Violence against women) helpline at 08000116116. The 24-hour number offers free counselling to victims in 15 languages.

INDIA: Balrampur: Anger grows after new India 'gang rape' death

The death of a second Dalit woman in a few days after an alleged gang rape has shocked and angered India.

BBC News (02.10.2020) - <https://bbc.in/33AmZJW> - The 22-year-old was dragged into a vehicle after going to apply for admission at a local school and raped, her mother told the BBC.

The news follows the death of another Dalit woman, 19, on Tuesday after an alleged gang rape by upper-caste men.

Dalits are at the bottom of the caste system. Despite laws to protect them, they face widespread discrimination.

Both attacks took place in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. News of the first sparked protests in the streets in the state.

Police have registered complaints of rape and murder and arrested two men in connection with the latest case, which took place in Balrampur district.

The earlier attack happened some 500km (310 miles) away in Hathras district. The victim was grievously injured and died in a Delhi hospital on Tuesday after fighting for her life for two weeks.

Police said on Thursday that according to a forensic report the first victim was not raped. But a Delhi hospital recorded on admission that she was both raped and strangled on 14 September. The woman's family also said she had been raped - her mother telling media that she found her daughter naked, bleeding and seriously injured in a field.

The second victim also died on Tuesday but national media picked up the news on Thursday, after a heavy backlash on social media over sexual assault and caste violence in India.

Dalits, formerly known as untouchables, have suffered public shaming and attacks for generations at the hands of upper-caste Hindus.

What do we know about the latest incident?

The victim's mother told the BBC that the family started to panic when she did not arrive home at her usual time on Tuesday evening. She said her daughter had gone to a nearby

school to apply for admission on Tuesday morning. When she was returning home, a group of three or four men stopped her and forced her into their vehicle.

The mother alleges that they drugged her before raping her. "They broke my daughter's leg, they broke her waist," she said, adding that the men put her in a rickshaw after and sent her home.

"When she arrived, she looked very weak. Our daughter couldn't speak or get up. When we asked her what had happened, she couldn't answer," she added.

Ten minutes later, the victim complained of a "burning sensation" in her stomach, prompting the family to rush her to a local hospital.

"But since her condition was very serious, the doctor asked us to take her to a larger hospital in the city - but she died on the way there," the mother added.

"While officials are not confirming whether the victim was raped, they have also not denied the family's allegation," local journalist Saurabh Mishra said.

What reaction has there been?

The news has spurred furious reactions on social media. The state's former chief minister, who sits in opposition now, hit out at the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

"After Hathras, another daughter has been gang raped and brutalised in Balrampur," Akhilesh Yadav tweeted, adding that the government should act quickly in this incident.

On Twitter, the case has been among the top discussion trends with thousands of tweets from political leaders and Indians decrying the attack.

The previous incident also continued to dominate social media and news. Officials imposed Section 144 in the district, which means no more than four people will be able to gather - a measure often used to contain protests.

On Thursday, Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi, leaders of the opposition Congress Party, walked into Hathras to meet the victim's family after the leaders' vehicle was stopped by officials. Video footage on social media showed Mr Gandhi falling down in the ruckus which ensued as Congress party workers walked alongside the Gandhis, even as police officials try to stop them.

The two leaders were later seen being taken away in vehicles by police.

Startling pictures and video footage have also emerged showing of hundreds of workers from the Samajwadi Party, which sits in opposition in the state, being rounded up and detained by police in the area.

Earlier on Wednesday, activists condemned the police after the family accused them of cremating her body without their permission. Protests also broke out in Hathras and other cities, including the capital, Delhi.

A senior district administration official, however, denied the allegation, saying the family's consent had been obtained.

Rape and sexual violence have been under the spotlight in India since the 2012 gang rape and murder of a woman in Delhi, which led to huge protests and changes to the country's rape laws.

But there has been no sign of crimes against women and girls abating.

INDIA: Dalit woman dies weeks after gang rape, triggering protest

The 19-year-old victim was gang raped by four men in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras town, about 100km from New Delhi.

Al Jazeera (29.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/34cR2GZ> - A woman died in hospital in the Indian capital, New Delhi, on Tuesday, weeks after authorities said she was raped by a group of men, triggering protests and opposition criticism over what it said was a failure to protect women.

Her case was the latest in a string of gruesome crimes against women in India that have given it the dismal reputation of being one of the worst places in the world to be female.

One woman reported a rape every 15 minutes on average in India in 2018, according to the latest government data released in January.

"There is next to no protection for women. Criminals are openly committing crimes," Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, a leader of the opposition Congress party, said on Twitter.

The 19-year-old victim, belonging to the Dalit community – formerly known as "untouchables" – was attacked and raped on September 14 at a field near her home in Hathras district, 100km (62-mile) from New Delhi, authorities said.

Police have arrested four men in connection with the crime.

On Monday, the woman was brought from a hospital in Uttar Pradesh state to New Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, where she died while undergoing treatment, authorities said.

About 300 protesters from the Bhim Army, a party championing the rights of Dalits, entered the hospital building and shouted slogans near the mortuary where the woman's body was kept.

"We will take the matter to fast-track court for the faster investigation and collection of evidence," district authorities in Hathras said in a statement.

#Hathras trended on Twitter as social media users expressed outrage at the latest case of gruesome sexual assault.

The woman's home state of Uttar Pradesh, which is governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), ranks as the most unsafe state for women in the country.

Last December, a 23-year-old Dalit woman was set ablaze by a gang of men as she made her way to a court in Uttar Pradesh to press rape charges.

INDIA: Death penalty for rapists of young girls could push them to kill

With the majority of rapes committed by someone known to the victim, the new law could drive offenders to murder to avoid detection

By Rituparna Chatterjee

The Guardian (24.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2qZ8CKP> - n Saturday India's government approved the death penalty for convicted rapists of girls under the age of 12, amid a groundswell of public outrage following the gang-rape and murder of an eight-year-old Muslim girl in Jammu and Kashmir state.

The shocking case involved a girl from the Bakarwal nomadic tribe, who was out grazing her horses when she was abducted, drugged and murdered after a week of torture and repeated rape. It led to a nationwide outcry for swifter justice.

However, the hastily issued executive order is facing criticism from activists and politicians, who say the death penalty, usually meted out for severe crimes in India, will not be a deterrent to child rapists without an overhaul of the criminal justice system.

"I am afraid this [executive order] has very little credibility because what is required is certainty of punishment," the leader of Communist Party of India (Marxist), Brinda Karat, told reporters.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau data from 2016, in 94.6% of cases, the perpetrator is known to the victim – usually a brother, father or someone from the family's social circle. Reporting rape in India's patriarchal family structure is often fraught with victim shaming and further alienation.

Child rights activists fear the introduction of the death penalty will make families more likely to cover up sexual crimes, and that rapists might kill their victims to avoid detection.

Critics are also concerned that the order, which was approved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet on Saturday, makes no mention of boys. In a country where male children often grow up in an atmosphere that discourages them from showing vulnerability, experts say such a discriminatory legal provision will fail boys who have been sexually assaulted.

Unlike the current Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (Pocso) 2012, which is gender-neutral and defines any person under 18 as a child, the new ordinance will stop boys who have been sexually abused from seeking the same justice accorded to a girl of their age, says gay rights activist Harish Iyer.

"I principally stand against the death penalty. This discriminatory legislation implies what boys are taught growing up – that they have to be the protector and not the protected. Children are vulnerable to sexual assault, irrespective of gender," Iyer said.

A nationwide survey of crimes against children conducted by the ministry of women and child development in 2007 found that half of India's children had been sexually abused.

Iyer said the new executive order was a shortcut for an overhaul of a criminal justice system that often discriminates against the poor. "This is sexism of a different nature, it favours one gender. What about protection of intersex children? Unless the crime is

female foeticide, which is specifically gender-oriented, this is a shortcut for real measures.”

He said the government should prioritise fast-track courts, child-friendly police stations, and a national registry of sex offenders. The new law proposes stricter punishment for convicted rapists of children under 16 years of age. Its definition of the victims and proposed age limit has triggered a debate about categorising victims of the same crime.

“What’s the explanation for death penalty for ‘gang rape of children below 12 years’? The state is a man. Why else would the reproductive age of a girl be the determining factor for the kind of punishment meted out to the rapists?” journalist Kota Neelima wrote in a Facebook post.

In 2016 India recorded an alarmingly low conviction rate (18.9%) for crimes against women. In that year, of all the child rape cases that came before the courts under the Pocso, less than 3% ended in convictions.

An issue of such a grave nature should have had a public discourse with participation from civil society stakeholders. By its nature, an executive order can be announced by the president of India on recommendation from the federal cabinet and does not require consultation.

After the gang rape of Jyoti Singh in Delhi in 2012, India introduced tougher rape laws and launched fast-track courts, but the measures have not deterred violent sexual crimes.

In addition, homelessness and poverty increase the vulnerability of children to sexual predators as parents have to leave them on their own to go to work, making them easy targets.

In an election year, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wants to be seen as proactive in taking strong steps to make India safer for women. However, it is implementation, the real challenge in India, that will determine its true intention.

Further reading:

[India's cabinet adopts death penalty for rape of girls under 12](#)
[The death penalty ordinance has no leg to stand on](#)

IRAQ: Slaying of Instagram star shocks the country

By Sinan Salaheddin

ABC News (03.10.2018) - <https://abcn.ws/2DTa8b8> - She was a 22-year-old former beauty queen, fashion model and social media star, whose daring outfits revealed tattoos on her arms and shoulder.

Tara Fares won fame and 2.8 million Instagram followers in conservative, Muslim-majority Iraq with outspoken opinions on personal freedom, such as: "I'm not doing anything in the dark like many others; everything I do is in the broad daylight."

It was also the way she died.

Last week, she was shot and killed at the wheel of her white Porsche on a busy Baghdad street during the day, apparently by a man who leaned in briefly and opened fire before speeding away on a motorcycle with an accomplice.

The killing, caught on security camera video, followed the slaying of a female activist in the southern city of Basra and the mysterious deaths of two well-known beauty experts.

The violence has shocked Iraq, raising fears of a return to the kind of attacks on prominent figures that plagued the country at the height of its sectarian strife.

Iraq is still recovering from its bloody fight against Islamic State militants. The country has been without a government since national elections in May, and riots have repeatedly broken out in the south over the authorities' failure to provide basic services.

"These harrowing crimes are worrying us," said Iraqi human rights activist Hana Adwar. "There are groups that want to terrify society through the killing of popular women and activists ... and to tell other women to abandon their work and stay at home."

It is not clear whether the deaths of the women are connected, and reports that they knew each other could not be confirmed.

Fares, with an Iraqi father and a Lebanese mother, first became famous in 2015 when she won an unofficial Baghdad beauty pageant organized by a social club. She has become a social media darling, with bold posts and photos of herself posing in elaborate makeup, tight jeans and blouses that showed off her tattoos.

A YouTube channel drew more than 120,000 followers in addition to those on Instagram, where she shared makeup tips.

She gave details of a brief marriage at 16 to an abusive husband who posted intimate photos of her on social media and took away their now 3-year-old son. Fares said the experience taught her "strength ... and how not to let anyone control me in anything."

Fares also spoke out occasionally against religious, tribal and political leaders.

While many young Iraqis shared her videos and pictures, others criticized her lifestyle as racy and un-Islamic.

She lived in Iraq's self-ruled Kurdish region with her family, visiting Baghdad from time to time. In a TV interview this year, she said her family had converted to Islam in 2002.

Hours after she was gunned down on Sept. 27, a video on social media showed her body being carried away by a group of young people, with her face and white shirt stained with blood. She was buried in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, her grave decorated with a black-and-white photo of her, along with red plastic flowers.

In August, Dr. Rafeef al-Yassiri, a plastic surgeon labeled "Iraq's Barbie," died under mysterious circumstances. Authorities initially called it a drug overdose but have not offered an update in over a month, leading to rumors she might have been poisoned.

Al-Yassiri, a Shiite Muslim with a prominent social media presence, ran the Barbie medical center, which offered cosmetic surgery as well as treatment for war victims and those with birth defects.

She posted photos of herself in full makeup and fashionable clothes, promoting her latest projects to more than 1 million Instagram followers. She also worked with local and religious charities.

A week after her death, Rasha al-Hassan, the owner of a well-known beauty center in Baghdad, was found dead in her home. Authorities initially said she suffered a heart attack.

On Sept. 25, a gunman killed Soad al-Ali, a prominent activist in the southern city of Basra. Al-Ali had organized protests demanding better services and jobs and decried the growing influence of Iran-backed Shiite militias in the area. Police said the killing was "purely personal" and had nothing to do with the protests.

Last weekend, another former beauty queen, Shaimaa Qassim, posted a video on Instagram in which she tearfully said she had received threats through social media.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has ordered an investigation into what he called "well-planned kidnappings and killings." He said organized groups are "carrying out a plan to destabilize the security situation under the pretext of fighting perversion."

Security agencies have not yet commented on the investigation into Fares' death and no group has claimed responsibility.

Iraq once boasted a liberal society and progressive laws for women and the family, going back to the 1950s. Those gains were eroded after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, which toppled Saddam Hussein and led to the emergence of powerful religious parties and a rise in extremism.

Posters on some streets, particularly near shrines, exhort women to cover their hair and wear an abaya — a long, black cloak that covers the body from shoulders to feet.

"After the killing of Tara Fares, I feel speechless," columnist Mohammed Ghazi al-Akhras wrote on his Facebook page. "We've reached the moment of total anarchy. They will kill everyone they don't like. ... The state of death is taking shape."

In one of her videos, Fares had chastised a Shiite cleric who she said had sought a temporary marriage with her, a tradition in Shiite communities that critics compare to prostitution.

"I'm not afraid of the one who denies the existence of God, but I'm really afraid of the one who kills and chops off heads to prove the existence of God," she wrote on Instagram in July.

LEBANON: Nine Lebanese women murdered by partners in single month

By Florence Massena

Al-Monitor (26.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2EyNPUH> - Nada Bahlawan was shot and killed by her husband at dawn Jan. 22 in Beirut. The same day, a man stabbed his wife in south Lebanon after a dispute over doing the dishes. On Dec. 16, British diplomat Rebecca Dykes was raped and murdered.

Nine women were killed in December and January by their fiances or husbands. There seems to have been a rise since Dykes was killed, feminist activist Maya Ammar told Al-Monitor. She and others held a vigil in front of Beirut's National Museum on Jan. 23.

"In the last week of December, four women were killed. The night we organized the vigil about violence against women, we learned about Malak Moukdad, who was stabbed to death by her husband. Two days later, a woman killed herself because she couldn't handle the violence at home," Ammar added.

On Jan. 6, Zarifa Z. was stoned to death and her body was found on a beach in south Lebanon five days later. Her husband admitted to having committed an honor killing. A woman and her baby were found dead on Jan. 12, killed by repeated blows to the head.

Ghida Anani, the director of ABAAD, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that fights for gender equality, told Al-Monitor, "With the absence of national statistics on domestic violence in Lebanon and monitoring mechanisms, we cannot confirm for sure if domestic violence crimes are rising."

She added, "What can be confirmed for certain is a rise in women's awareness about reporting domestic violence incidents, seeking help outside their social and family spheres and disclosing [what happened to them], as the stigma around gender-based violence has been broken thanks to the persistent efforts of women's movements and campaigns in the last decade."

However, Minister of Women's Affairs Jean Ogasapian told Al-Monitor, "The people working in specialized associations and NGOs say that at least 12 women die annually as a result of their husband's violence."

"It was not the first time that we've had no cases for two months and then five in a week," Ammar said. "Because people can now see the situation is changing, women no longer accept violence and discrimination. There is some resistance and backlash from some men who want to prove they still have power in an extreme way."

Women are seeking support from the ABAAD-affiliated Model Community Holistic Care Unit, which provides safe spaces for women in the north, Bekaa Valley, south, Beirut and Mount Lebanon provinces. The centers were established in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Based on that and on the number of women turning to these emergency safe houses, Anani observed that violence against women in 2017 seems to be changing in nature. There is more sexual violence reported than physical and psychological violence and murders are more common than in previous years. The civil society NGO Lebanon Support and the feminist organization Kafa (Enough) developed a map to display statistics on violence against women per year. In 2017, 12 women have been killed, five more than in 2016, most of them victims of their husband, ex-husband, fiance or boyfriend.

Law 293 was adopted in April 2014 to address domestic violence, but several organizations have criticized it for being incomplete. Human Rights Watch said after the law passed that it "has serious flaws and the parliament should consider amendments to fully protect women from domestic violence." The law defines domestic violence very narrowly, doesn't criminalize marital rape except if physical violence can be proven. Protection orders are a difficult and lengthy process to obtain.

"According to recent NGO reports on the Lebanese judicial system, the number of unofficial documented cases of women killed as a result of family violence crimes since Law 293 was passed reached 40, and the number of official protection orders issued to

date exceeds 500," Ogasapian said. The data shows that a growing number of women know they can be protected and don't hesitate to ask for help.

"The work done by the judges is very encouraging since the law passed, they answer to these women with efficiency," Kafa media and communication officer Diala Haidar told Al-Monitor. "We have been campaigning in the media and social networks for years and now women are becoming more aware. But the media shouldn't hesitate to call these crimes femicides and should stop being apologetic toward the killer, like we see sometimes."

Kafa has been collaborating with the Ministry of Justice to amend Law 293 with a draft proposition that was accepted by the government in August 2017. They are now waiting for the vote by Lebanese parliament. "In light of all these recent crimes, we hope the vote will be pushed forward," Haidar said. The draft amendments will improve the implementation of the law, for example with a faster process for a protective order, stricter penalties and immediate custody rights for the mother in cases of domestic violence.

The Ministry of Women also started to develop an action plan for gender equality. "We are in the process of developing a national strategy on gender-based violence," Ogasapian said. "It will be developed with an action plan and a monitoring process and be submitted for implementation with the relevant stakeholders."

He added, "We are conducting a study on the economic cost of gender-based violence in Lebanon. It will result in the development of policies to prevent violence against women."

Ogasapian insisted that the ministry is taking the issue of women's rights very seriously, with seven draft laws processed in a year. "Three draft laws were approved by the council of ministers and now sent to the parliament for approval: one against sexual harassment, one granting paternity leave and another for equal privileges in Social Security funds. We are also supporting all the amendments proposed to Law 293."

Even if the draft amendments are passed and applied quickly, some fear the Lebanese justice system is too slow to prosecute these crimes fast enough for the victims' families. "Roula Yaacoub's murderer still hasn't faced a judge since 2013," Haidar pointed out. "This needs to change."

LIBYA: Prominent activist killed in eastern Libya

Prominent human rights lawyer shot dead in Libya.

Middle East Monitor (11.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2ID94eM> - A prominent human rights lawyer and activist was killed in a shooting in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi yesterday.

Hanan Al-Barassi was livestreaming to Facebook from her car when gunmen opened fire on her vehicle. A security source told AFP that Al-Barassi "was shot dead in Road 20, one of the main commercial streets in Benghazi."

Benghazi is controlled by the Libyan National Army (LNA) who are loyal to warlord Khalifa Haftar.

"[Al-Barassi's] tragic death illustrates the threats faced by Libyan women as they dare to speak out," the UN mission in Benghazi said in a statement, urging a prompt investigation into the killing.

Al-Barassi has been known to criticise human rights abuses by Haftar's forces. On Monday she posted on social media that said she was planning to publish a video exposing the corruption of Hafar's family.

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/3c5ZWI5> - 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/32qYqgu> - 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."

RUSSIA: For Russia, journalist's self-immolation is a wake-up call

Irina Slavina's last message was: 'For my death I ask you to blame the Russian Federation.'

By Eva Hartog

POLITICO (09.10.2020) - <https://politi.co/3lInVlK> - Before the pallbearers walked out there was a protracted silence. Then, as Irina Slavina's two children led the white coffin carrying her scorched corpse toward the hearse, the crowd of several hundred broke out into spontaneous applause.

To many of her supporters, Slavina's self-immolation was an act of stoic self-sacrifice and the ultimate rallying cry. Many compared her to Jan Palach, the Czech student who set himself on fire to protest Soviet occupation in 1969.

On October 2, Slavina made her way to the Interior Ministry, sat down on a bench between two bronze figures, a monument dedicated to Russian law enforcement "through the ages," and set herself on fire.

There is no doubt she meant to die — footage shows her pushing away a bystander who tried to save her from the flames even as she must have suffered excruciating pain.

Several hours earlier she had written a post on Facebook: “For my death I ask you to blame the Russian Federation.”

Older social media posts that have surfaced since suggest Slavina had been considering the idea for at least a year.

In her home city of Nizhny Novgorod, some 400 kilometers east of Moscow, Slavina held celebrity status as the founder of the independent news website Koza.Press. A one-woman band, it was nonetheless among the most cited outlets in the region, providing relentless coverage of local misdeeds in a no-nonsense factual style.

“She was a straight shooter but very balanced, she never let her emotions affect her writing, ” Stanislav Dmitriyevsky, a prominent human rights activist, told POLITICO at a memorial service Tuesday. “But underneath it she suffered.”

He recalled her driving him home after he was released from the umpteenth detention and saying: “I can’t live like this. I keep writing about all of this injustice but nothing is changing.”

Though many in her circle could recall similar moments of despair, the 47-year-old was known for her stoicism and her suicide has come as a huge shock.

Above all, it has drawn new attention to the toxic triple whammy faced by independent journalists in Russia generally, and regional journalists in particular; of financial pressure, harassment facilitated by draconic laws and a seemingly apathetic readership.

A day before Slavina’s suicide she wrote that 12 law enforcement officers had raided her apartment at 6 a.m. after forcing open her door, confiscating USB sticks, phones and computers in a hunt for evidence of ties to Open Russia, an organization backed by former oligarch-turned-Putin-critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

The case itself and its connection to Slavina are, to put it mildly, tenuous: She had merely attended an event organized by the election monitoring organization Golos, at a property owned by a local businessman who, to add a tragicomic spin, also heads the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, a parody cult.

It is he who is under investigation for supposed links to Open Russia (a connection both sides have denied). But that hasn’t stopped the authorities from implicating Slavina alongside a number of activists and opposition politicians — supposedly as witnesses.

“The pressure she was under would have been bearable if it had just been about her personally. But it was affecting everybody who in any way raised their voice,” Marina Chufarina, who as a regional coordinator for Golos organized the event in question, said.

Chufarina said she was expecting a similar raid at her own home “any day now.”

Slavina was no newbie to harassment. In recent years, Russia has introduced a spate of increasingly restrictive laws and last year alone the journalist was given a taste of a number of them.

In March she was convicted of breaking protest laws for leading a small group through the city to commemorate the murdered opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, a Nizhny Novgorod native.

Just before summer, she was convicted of cooperating with an “undesirable organization” (Open Russia again) for promoting a series of pro-democracy lectures on social media. And in October she was convicted of “disrespecting the authorities” after mocking a memorial plaque to Stalin online.

More recently, she was found guilty of “spreading fake news” after writing about an alleged first case of coronavirus in a different town.

Combined, the convictions resulted in fines totaling some 160,000 rubles (€1,700) — about five times the average Nizhny Novgorod salary. Moreover, every day spent in court was one she couldn’t spend writing.

The use of the lawbook over the fist or bullet — or other means of silencing independent voices which were popular in Russia in the nineties and noughties — might look like evolution. But especially for regional journalists, the constant court cases and raids, or risk thereof, pose an existential threat.

“For us crowdfunding the money to replace even a couple of laptops is a big problem,” Andrei Grishin, the editor of independent outlet Vesma in Russia’s Far Eastern Magadan, said.

Independent outlets like his face a bind: stripped of state funds they can’t accept foreign grant money lest they be labeled “foreign agents.” Meanwhile, local businesses are wary of placing ads in outlets that might be deemed anti-government. So even in good times, their futures hang by a silver thread — let alone in bad times.

“Irina made a radical choice in expressing her protest. But a huge number of editors and journalists at a local level are being pushed in that same direction by the Russian authorities. If nothing changes, I don’t know what will become of Russian journalism in the coming years,” said Grishin.

In Russia, harassment does not discriminate by size or location; journalists at large outlets in Moscow are persecuted, too. Famously, the investigative Moscow journalist Ivan Golunov was slapped with drug-dealing charges last summer and more recently the former military reporter Ivan Safronov was detained on treason charges.

But in both cases, visibility has acted as a shield, sparking public protest or at least ensuring the authorities’ actions do not go unnoticed. Sometimes, a regional case breaks through to national headlines such as that of Svetlana Prokopyeva, a journalist in Pskov, who risked landing in jail for “justifying terrorism” in a column but ending up receiving a fine.

Most of the time, however, distance from Moscow correlates negatively to visibility, even within the journalistic community. That leaves local journalists extra vulnerable to the grudges and gripes of local authorities equipped with increasingly draconian laws.

“For years we covered the news around Slavina. But we failed to see the systematic pressure being applied to one and the same person, our fellow journalist,” Alexei Venediktov, chief editor of the opposition-leaning radio station Ekho Moskvy, said in a broadcast. Venediktov is among those who have signed an open letter demanding the possible prosecution of officials who might have contributed to Slavina’s suicide.

Even the Russian authorities seem to have been cowed. Hours after Slavina's self-immolation, investigators released a defensive statement disputing any link between their raid and her action, saying she had just been a witness. And in a highly unusual personal Instagram post, the governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region, Gleb Nikitin, pledged he would take personal charge of a probe into her death.

But many in Slavina's circle are unimpressed, asking: If Slavina was only a witness, why was her home raided and her property confiscated? And if the governor appreciated her work, why hadn't he stopped the authorities from harassing her before? To them, the statements just underscore the arbitrariness of the repression she was subjected to.

At the memorial service on Tuesday, Slavina's inner circle was adamant that her suicide was not the result of mental instability — a narrative peddled by pro-Kremlin media and hinted at by Russian investigators — nor of helplessness. To them, her self-immolation was a final act designed to change minds in a way she felt her journalism could not.

"She didn't want to die tragically, she wanted change," Maria Popova, an environmental activist whose acquaintance with Slavina goes back a decade, said.

Unlike in Palach's case, however, Slavina's death has largely been met with stunned resignation. In a city with a population of more than a million and a country of more than 140 million, the turnout of several hundred at the memorial is a drop in the ocean. "Where is everybody? Why aren't there tens of thousands of people?" asked Stanislav Dmitriyevsky, the rights activist.

Some of Slavina's acquaintances said she had become increasingly demoralized about the general apathy in Russian society and the lack of reader donations. A day after her mother's suicide, Slavina's daughter stood in the city center with a handwritten sign saying: "While my mother burned you stayed silent." The message will have been lost on many of those passing by.

Still, to her followers and peers, Slavina is a source of inspiration.

Speakers at the memorial service did not mince their words and hundreds marched through the city center towards the site of Slavina's death opposite the police headquarters, at one point chanting "Butchers!"

The website Koza.Press has continued to publish news, for now about Slavina herself. But there are plans to keep it running.

And in Magadan, too, work continues unabated. "You're always internally bracing for some bad turn of events, so you have to take precautionary measures," said Grishin, the editor of Vesma.

"But if they come for us, we'll know what to do."

SOUTH AFRICA: Environmentalists under threat in South Africa

Environmental activist Fikile Ntshangase was killed after her refusal to withdraw legal challenges to existing and future mining operations.

By Katharina Rall

HRW (04.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2UhmuiD> - While shocking, the killing of environmental activist Fikile Ntshangase is not surprising. Environmental defenders such as Ntshangase have long faced threats for voicing their concerns about mining activity on nearby communities.

When, in 2018, I visited Somkhele, a town near a coal mine in KwaZulu-Natal, several community activists told me they had been threatened, physically attacked and their property damaged after speaking out about the health risks of coal mining. Two years later, on October 22, Ntshangase was gunned down in her home. No arrests have been made.

Ntshangase was a vice-chair of a subcommittee of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO), a community-based organisation formed to speak up for people affected by opencast mining. The group has brought legal challenges against a planned expansion of the nearby coal mine. Community members have publicly expressed concern about how the mine affects their health and livelihoods, and 19 families have resisted being displaced from their ancestral land for the mine expansion.

SA groups have raised concerns that Ntshangase's killing may have been related to her outspoken advocacy and refusal to withdraw the legal challenges to existing and future mining operations. Tendele Coal Mining, the company operating Somkhele coal mine, told us in 2019 that they were "aware of claims of attacks, yet upon investigation and consultation with police, the information could not be verified/substantiated".

Last week, Tendele condemned what it called a "senseless killing" and called for a prompt investigation, in a joint statement with local leaders.

SA is the world's seventh-largest coal producer. The absence of effective government oversight has allowed mining to harm the rights of communities across the country in various ways. It has depleted water supplies, polluted the air, soil and water, destroyed arable land and ecosystems, and often resulted in displacement and inappropriate grave relocation practices.

In a scathing report, the SA Human Rights Commission found that "the mining sector is riddled with challenges related to land, housing, water, [and] the environment."

People living in communities affected by mining activities across SA have mobilised to press the government and companies to respect and protect community members' rights from the potentially serious environmental, social, economic, and health-related harm of mining. In many cases, such activism has been met with harassment, intimidation, or violence.

In our 2019 report, published jointly with groundWork, the Centre for Environmental Rights, and Earthjustice, we documented how activists in mining-affected communities across the country have experienced threats, physical attacks or property damage that they believe is a consequence of their activism. Most of these cases had not been investigated by police, and the investigations into the killings or attacks we documented are moving very slowly.

One high-profile case is the killing of Sikhosiphi "Bazooka" Rhadebe at his home in Xolobeni, Eastern Cape, in March 2016. He and other community members had raised concerns about displacement and destruction of the environment from a titanium mine proposed by the Australian company Transworld Energy and Mineral Resources. No suspects have been arrested in his killing.

We also found that government officials or companies sometimes deliberately created or exploited community divisions or closed their eyes to intimidation and abuse between community members, to isolate or weaken critics. Tendele has sought to brand community members opposing its operations as anti-development or acting against the community interest, putting them at further risk of being attacked or threatened by those benefiting from the mine.

In March 2018, a community member from Somkhele told me: "The mine is not directly threatening people, but they will [intimidate] their employees by telling them that they will lose their jobs if the activism continues." Earlier that year, the company's management had circulated a memorandum to employees warning of layoffs, blaming "a few community members [who] ... choose to stand in the way of future development and huge economic and social investment and upliftment in the community."

In a statement issued four days after Ntshangase's killing, Tendele, along with local leaders, called for an investigation of the killing and cited concerns about the closure of the mine as a result of the pending court cases and resistance to relocations.

The SA police should ensure a prompt, effective, impartial investigation into Ntshangase's killing and ensure that those found responsible are brought to justice. Failure to do so, or failure to thoroughly examine the extent to which her environmental activism was a factor in her targeting, will exacerbate the climate of impunity that has perpetuated violence and intimidation against activists.

They should not have to endure threats and danger to their very lives for defending their right to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and live on their ancestral land.

TURKEY: 440 women were killed in 2018: Women's rights group

By Zeynep Bilgehan

Hurriyet Daily News (25.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Xn39wK> - A staggering 440 women were killed in Turkey in 2018, according to an organization that keeps a tally of femicides across the country.

Of this number, 131 were logged as "shady deaths," in which there is no blatant connection between the cause or reason and the death. But women's rights groups have long blamed authorities for failing these women by ignoring circumstances and factors that may have led to the murders.

Some 43 women were killed just in January of this year, a report by Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu (We Will Stop Femicide Platform) stressed, adding that the bodies of seven out of the 43 women were found in lakes, streams or buried in the woods.

The number of women killed in 2017 was 409, according to a previous report published by the same organization.

"The forms of violence against women are changing. Shady deaths and femicides by unknown assailants are on the rise. Many incidents are being covered up. When [femicide] cases are identified as 'suicide,' it becomes exemplary for similar incidents," Fidan Ataselim, secretary-general of the platform, has told daily Hürriyet.

Ataselim underlined that the state's agencies "need to side with women" and police officers need to meticulously collect and analyze evidence in women murder cases.

"The more we bring shady deaths out into the open, the more the numbers will decline," she said.

"In our report, 10 out of 43 femicides are labeled as 'shady killings' [in January of this year], but this is only the figure we could have gathered [from news reports]," said Gülsüm Kav, the general representative of the platform, implying that the actual figure could be much higher.

"Unless perpetrators and their motives are identified, unless deterrent penalties are given to suspects and killers, and unless precautionary measures are taken, violence will continue," Kav said.

"It is getting more difficult to identify the perpetrator in femicides, because cases are not being taken seriously," said Leyla Süren, one of the lawyers of the platform. "In Turkey, if the victim is a woman, investigations are not being launched," Süren said.

The lawyer also stressed that when the Istanbul Convention, formally known as The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, was signed in 2011 violence against women had reached its lowest rates in recent years in Turkey. "Discourse has changed since, and since 2000 violence against women has increased by 1,400 percent," she said.

Süren also drew attention to the importance of public opinion in femicide cases and said for cases which the public follows closely, the relevant court's decision of good conduct time "gets precluded about 83 percent."

An example of this is the case of Şule Çet, the lawyer said, referring to a 23-year-old university student who died after being thrown out of the 20th story of a tower in the capital Ankara in the early hours of May 29, 2018. Two male business partners have been indicted by a prosecutor for sexually assaulting and then murdering Çet by throwing her out of the window of the tower. The case is still ongoing.

"The case of Şule Çet has reached this level of importance thanks to the women's movement and the pressure of the public. People have come to the point of seeking justice on Twitter. They are sharing it [the case of Çet] on social media to access justice... Families only feel relieved after they are convinced of an efficient investigation," Süren said.

TURKEY: Report reveals 38 women killed in January

Turkish Minute (05.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2kpczrQ> - A report released by the Stop the Murder of Women Platform has shown that a total of 38 women became the victims of domestic violence in Turkey in January.

Most of the murders took place in the western province of İzmir, where six women were killed, followed by İstanbul, Balıkesir, Trabzon and Şanlıurfa, where three women were murdered in each province.

The platform said it could not determine whether all of the murdered women had state protection but said 8 percent of the women killed in January died while they trying to protect another woman.

"These data clearly show that women are not protected by the state. Thirty-one percent of the women were killed because they wanted to divorce, end a relationship or simply because they wanted to make a decision regarding their lives," the platform said in its report.

Women's rights organizations have for years been trying to raise awareness about the rise in violence against women that has taken place in the last decade.

According to local reports, between 2003 and 2010 there had been a 1,400 percent increase.

Many women think that this is linked to the policies or rhetoric of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, which has its roots in political Islam and has been in power since 2002.

Other reading:

[İHD Report: Human rights abuses systematically grew in Turkey following failed coup](#)

TURKEY: 35 women killed in October

Hurriyet Daily News (16.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2eZZvBF> - A total of 35 women were killed in October and 21 others were subjected to sexual violence, according to a report released by the Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, a women's rights activist organization that keeps track of violence against women.

According to the organization, a total of 42 children were left motherless as a result of femicides and 29 children were sexually abused.

Three hate crimes were committed against members of the LGBTI community.

The total number of femicides reached 272 since Jan. 1, the report also said.

Four women were killed in the southern province of Muğla, three of them were killed in Istanbul, and two murders each were committed in five provinces, the western provinces of Aydın and Manisa, the northwestern province of Balıkesir, the southeastern province of Şanlıurfa and the Black Sea province of Ordu.

Some 46 percent of the murdered women were married, according to the statistics presented by the organization. The statistics in the report also showed that 51 percent of the 35 women killed in October were murdered for making decisions regarding their own lives, for ending their relationships or for seeking divorce, while 9 percent were killed as they attempted to protect their daughters from their husbands.

Three of the murdered women had previously been subjected to violence, applied for state protection or were taken under police protection, the report also said.

More reading: [One of the 12 suspects arrested after rape of 14-year-old girl](#)

UGANDA: Male feminists inside Uganda's police strike out at killing of women

By Thomas Lewton

Thomson Reuters Foundation (05.03.2018) - <http://tmsnr.rs/2p9cTLo> - Balancing a heavy clay pot on his head with a baby tied to his back, policeman Francis Ogweng caused a scene as he marched down the busy highway towards Uganda's capital, Kampala.

With traffic backed up to the horizon, crowds of men stared and laughed as the baby girl swaddled in white cloth slipped precariously down Ogweng's back, pulling his khaki uniform into disarray.

"We want to put ourselves in the shoes of women," Ogweng, an assistant superintendent in the Uganda Police Force (UPF), told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Is it difficult to carry water? Is it difficult to carry a baby?"

Judging by the sweat dripping down his face, it is.

Onlookers were surprised to see a senior officer marching to stop violence against women, in a force that opponents of Uganda's long-serving President Yoweri Museveni accuse of spending more time suppressing dissent than tackling crime.

Police often break up opposition rallies in the east African nation with teargas and beatings, rights groups say they torture suspects to illicit confessions, and surveys often rank the force as Uganda's most corrupt institution.

"Their image has been tainted," said Regina Bafaki, head of Action for Development, a local women's rights group.

"They have actually been more violators than protectors of citizen's rights."

But a spate of unsolved murders of young women, with more than 20 corpses found beside roadsides south of the capital since May, is putting rare public pressure on the police.

They have charged more than a dozen suspects with the women's murders, listing possible motives range from domestic rows through sexual abuse to ritual murder linked to human sacrifice.

Battering of women

Ogweng was not alone, flanked by three policemen carrying bundles of firewood, a 50-strong police brass band and other officers carrying placards that read: "Peace in the home. Peace in the nation. Prevent Gender Based Violence".

"Men can also carry water, men can carry babies ... it does no harm at all, it doesn't make a man less of a man," said Ogweng, who describes himself as a feminist - a rarity in a country where women often kneel to show deference to men.

About half of Ugandans believe that domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances, such as when women neglect children or burn food, government data shows.

"There are those who still believe that battering of women, beating of women, is something normal," said Asan Kasingye, assistant inspector general, another unlikely ally in Uganda's fight for gender equality.

"We must invest our resources, our training, our recruitment ... into fighting against gender based violence," he said, seated in his top floor office at the police headquarters.

"It must percolate, it must be known by everybody. So it preoccupies us."

Stripped naked

The police demonstration calling for an end of violence against women went down well with locals around Entebbe, where about 20 women were raped and murdered in 2017.

"This government prides itself for bringing security ... but at the same time when these ladies were being murdered, the government didn't even talk about it," said Anatoli Ndyabagyera, whose fiancée Rose Nakimuli was killed in July.

The murders illustrate a broader problem in Uganda, where government data shows more than one in three women suffer physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, although few report it to the police.

"We have in our society a dangerous attitude of men thinking they can dispense with women and they can get away with it," said Ndyabagyera. "They look at women and tend to think of them as items of ownership."

Four in 10 girls wed before they turn 18, even though Uganda has banned child marriage, according to the United Nations children's fund (UNICEF), and few go beyond primary school.

Efforts to pass a bill seeking to ban traditional practices, like dowry and the inheritance of widows by their husbands' male relatives, and to grant rights to women in divorce have floundered for years.

Women wearing miniskirts were stripped by mobs of men following the 2014 Anti Pornography Act that banned "indecent" dressing and the police in 2015 stripped female opposition leader Zaina Fatuma naked in the street.

"There are (officers) who are badly behaved," said Ogweng, who works in the child and family protection department.

"But there are those who are good, and there are many."

Given the influential role of the police in Ugandan society, Ogweng believes he can help to change people's perceptions about what it means to be a man.

"People are so rooted in the culture where some things are only done by women and some things are done by men," he said.

"If a man, a police officer, can carry a baby, can carry a pot, then other men can do it ... Men even called me afterwards and said: 'You have opened my eyes' ... So I think people are beginning to understand."

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.
