

**“Women’s Police Stations  
in Latin America:  
Contributions to Accessing Justice and Ending  
Domestic Violence in Women’s Lives”**

**Nadine Jubb, Regional Coordinator,  
“Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Violence:  
A Comparative Study of Women’s Police Stations  
in Latin America”**

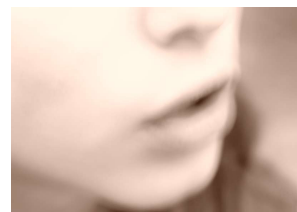
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**“Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Violence:  
A Comparative Study of Women’s Police Stations  
in Latin America”**

[www.ceplaes.org.ec/AccesoJusticia](http://www.ceplaes.org.ec/AccesoJusticia)  
[nadine.jubb@gmail.com](mailto:nadine.jubb@gmail.com)

Image credit: Centro de Planificación y Estudios Sociales (CEPLAES)



“She’d been having problems with him for a while and we had told her to leave him, that that man wasn’t any good for her. She stayed with him because of mutual interests, not out of love. We know she didn’t kill herself - I’m convinced she was killed – but we trust in God.”

Isabel Lezama Suazo, *El Nuevo Diario*, Managua, 23 April 2009, p. 1A, 11A.

**Questions raised by this quote**

- Why did Luz Marina stay in an abusive relationship?
- Did she report it to a women’s police station (WPS)? What was the result?
- How can the WPS and other actors contribute to protecting women, ending domestic and other forms of violence against women, and accessing justice?

**Backstory to quote**

- Domestic violence, and other forms of GBV, is increasing being linked to femicide throughout Latin America
- In Nicaragua and Peru, some women killed by their husbands had already pressed charges at a WPS
- Luz Marina Lezama Suazo was the chief of a WPS in Diriomo, Nicaragua

**Common Features of WPS in LA**

- All or mostly women staff
- Have specialized training
- Located in a separate building or with a separate entrance from a common police station
- Multidisciplinary services are available in the WPS and/or in coordination with other agencies (government or NGO) in the community

### A few facts about WPS in LA

- First WPS in Latin America was founded in Sao Paulo, **Brazil** in 1985; there are now 403 in Brazil
- **Peru** : Lima, 1988; there are now 21
- **Nicaragua**: Managua, 1993; now there are 35
- **Ecuador**: Cuenca, 1994; until recently there were 31
- Set up mostly in post-conflict situations
- Locally and nationally driven

### Introduction to Project

- 2 ½ year comparative research project carried out in Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru.
- National mapping study; primary research in one locality in each country involving: survey, interviews, observation, document analysis
- Project objective: Carry out a comparative study on Women's Police Stations in Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru regarding access to justice for survivors of violence against women and the exercise and respect for their rights, in order to make proposals for the improvement of public policy in this sector.

### Do Women Use the WPS? -1

- Almost universal recognition of the WPS (98% and above in Brasil, Ecuador and Nicaragua, 84.6% in Peru)
- Most women say they would go to a WPS if faced with domestic violence (from 82.9% in Peru to 94.9% in Brazil)

### Do Women Use the WPS? -2

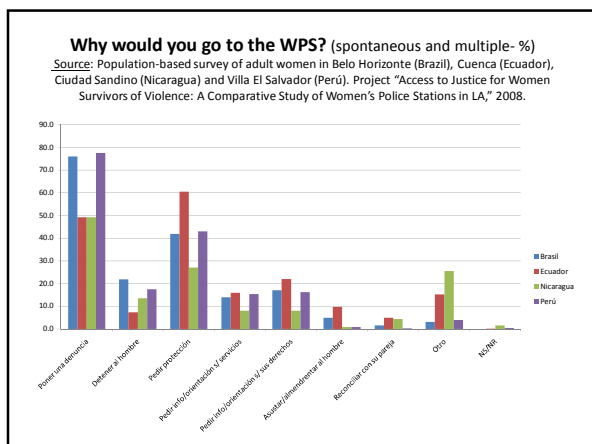
- However data from actual cases tell us :
  - That relatively few women press charges in the WPS
  - Women can take up to 20 years or more to press charges, most go to the WPS after months or years, while a very small number go immediately
  - Sentencing happens in even fewer cases:
    - Only about 15% of cases are transferred to the courts (Nicaragua; Peru)
    - Only 11% receive sentences (Ecuador)

### Women's Knowledge and Exercise of Their Rights -1

- Most women surveyed have general but not in-depth knowledge of their specific rights as women, the law on violence against women, and the WPS
- Most women recognize their rights when asked directly than when asked spontaneously:
  - Equality between husband and wife
  - Domestic violence is a violation of women's rights
  - Men who batter their wives should be punished according the law

### Women's Knowledge and Exercise of Their Rights -2

- 96.5% or more of women surveyed said a man who beats his wife should be punished according to the law
- Of the 82.9% to 94.9% who would go to the WPS, ...



**Women's Knowledge and Exercise of Their Rights -4**

- Some women who do go to the WPS press charges, but few of them finish the investigative process and are sent to the judicial sector for protection measures and/or sentencing
- Women's paths are long, complex and difficult

**Issues affecting women's access to justice -1**

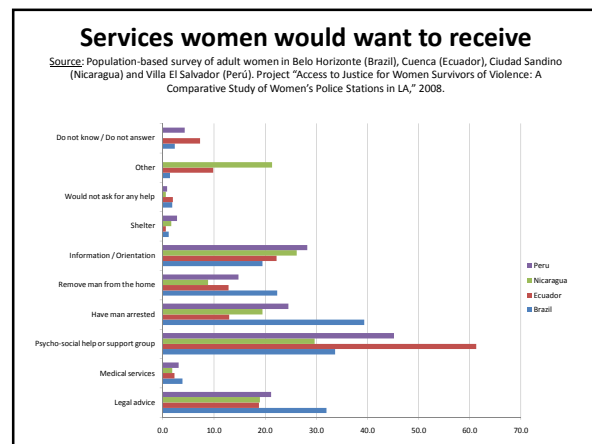
- **Conceptions of access to justice**
  - Women often do not associate access to justice with the application of a sanction against their own abusive partner
  - Accessing justice through the WPS is a means of achieving their primary concern: ending violence in their lives
  - Their awareness of women's rights is subordinated to concerns of maintaining family unity

**Issues affecting women's access to justice -2**

- Support from personal networks
- Socio-economic status and access to resources
- Knowledge of their rights; self-perception as subject of rights
- Continued violence or threat of violence by abusive partner

**Issues affecting women's access to justice -3**

- Access to information about rights, procedures and services
- Demand for multidisciplinary, integral services
- Responses received by the WPS and other actors



### Responses received in the WPS -1

- Little information provided about women’s rights, procedures or other services
- Limited access to protection
- Limited coverage and accessibility
- Mixed responses regarding quality of service: women often not treated as subjects of their own process, sometimes blamed or revictimized
  - Especially if they do not continue the process or return more than once

### Responses received in the WPS -2

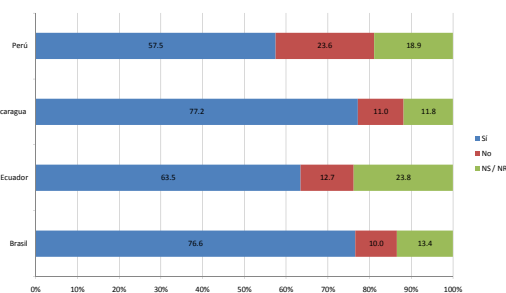
- Scope of WPS, information provided, actions taken and quality of service often affected by family values conceptions (operators, mandate)
- Operators not necessarily focused on ending VAW

### Measuring the Impact of the WPS

- How do women rate the WPS’s contributions to accessing justice and ending VAW?

### Do you consider that the WPS have contributed to reducing partner abuse? (spontaneous and unique - %)

Source: Population-based survey of adult women in Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Cuenca (Ecuador), Ciudad Sandino (Nicaragua) and Villa El Salvador (Perú). Project “Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Violence: A Comparative Study of Women’s Police Stations in LA,” 2008.



### Do you consider that the WPS in your community is a place that facilitates or provides justice to women who have been abused by their husband/partner? (spontaneous and unique - %)

Source: Population-based survey of adult women in Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Cuenca (Ecuador), Ciudad Sandino (Nicaragua) and Villa El Salvador (Perú). Project “Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Violence: A Comparative Study of Women’s Police Stations in LA,” 2008.



### Impact of the WPS

- The WPS have contributed to making the problem of violence against women more visible as a public, collective, and punishable issue and it offers women new opportunities to defend their rights, but they do not always or necessarily contribute to eliminating or reducing violence or guaranteeing women’s access to justice.

**How can UNIFEM and other IOs support the WPS and other actors to contribute more effectively to:**

- protecting women,
- ending domestic and other forms of gender-based violence, and
- accessing justice?

**Sincere thanks to UNIFEM.**

I look forward to your questions and comments.

[www.ceplaes.org.ec/AccesoJusticia](http://www.ceplaes.org.ec/AccesoJusticia)  
[nadine.jubb@gmail.com](mailto:nadine.jubb@gmail.com)

Image credit:  
Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán

Please consult our website for:

- all our publications
- information about the research team
- other materials related to the WPS

