

COUNTRY SPECIFIC INFORMATION





COLOMBIA

ACTIVE CONFLICT



SOACHA



PHOTOGRAHS TAKEN BY YOUTH IN SOACHA OF THEIR COMMUNITY AS PART OF THIS RESEARCH

THE SITUATION IN COLOMBIA



OVERVIEW

Latin American writer Eduardo Galeano once described Colombia as a “democra-tatorship.” This is an apt characterization for a country filled with contradictions and extremes. Over the past fifty years Colombia’s history has been a roller coaster of visions for peace dashed by forces that talk peace and act war.

Hopes for peace co-exist with repeated human rights violations; people of enormous wealth and privilege live in happy obliviousness to the wretched conditions of displaced families a few kilometers away. Most recently the Colombia government repealed a law to provide reparations for victims, saying that it would be too costly.

Colombia is a young country – its population stands at 45.6 million with 16.8 million or 36.9 % under 18 years of age. (UNICEF, accessed May 2009) It is also a heavily militarized world. Colombia spends nearly 6.5% of its GDP on the military – equal to the country’s combined expenditures in health, sanitation and education. It has approximately 208,600 government armed forces – about one for every 75 children. (FIRE, accessed June 2009)¹ This does not include the irregular armed groups.

It is estimated that the country has three million illegal small arms in addition to the one million legal ones. All of this promotes an atmosphere of violence - Colombia has the second highest homicide rate in the world, second only to Swaziland.

It is hard to identify a starting point for this country’s war. Various forms of violence, insurgency and armed combat have been operating since the early 1950s. Neither is it easy to pinpoint a clear cause for this conflict as the objectives of the rebel armed groups, paramilitary forces and government have changed considerably over these years. Unlike Northern Uganda’s conflict which operated inside a fairly defined territory, Colombia’s conflict has jumped from one region to another, largely fuelled by struggles for control over resources, shipping routes and strategic territories.

“La violencia” has had an enormous impact on Colombia society. According to CODHES (Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento)² there were 380,000 new displacements in 2008. In a population of approximately 45 million people 2.8 million are registered as internally displaced, the second largest number in the world, only exceeded by Sudan. It is estimated that 38% of these are children.

The length of the conflict means that both young people and their parents have grown up with war – two generations have no direct knowledge of what it means to live in peace. Young people have been actively recruited by all armed groups, particularly the FARC (rebel force) and the AUC (paramilitary groups).

Colombia is reported to have the fourth largest number of child combatants in the world. Children in rural areas live inside an atmosphere of fear where collective memories of past massacres are reinforced by daily threats and acts of intimidation. Young people who escape with their families to the displaced communities find a harsh world of limited options. Children tell stories of seeing family members killed; adolescents describe the ‘death lists’ of those who have in some way violated rules set by the paramilitary groups.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: INSTRUMENTS OF CONTROL & WEAPONS OF WAR

Colombia’s long and varied war has principally been about control of resources: minerals, land, and people. To accomplish these objectives the different armed groups use various forms of intimidation with sexual violence being an important tool, as recently acknowledged by the Colombia’s Constitutional Court³:

“Sexual violence against women is a commonly used tactic within the context of the conflict in Colombia: it is widely, regularly and systematically practiced, and remains invisible.”

This invisibility is caused partly because victims, as in most countries, are reluctant to report these crimes. But the statistics are also skewed because Colombia homicide reports do not include information about a related sexual attack, even if there is evidence that this has occurred.

In its statements the Constitutional Court declared that all irregular armed groups were guilty of these violations, while conceding that “a few” members of the armed forces might also participate. This is at odds with a report submitted by 16 women’s organization to the UN High Commission for Human



Graffiti, Soacha

Rights on October 28, 2008. This submission maintained:

“According to official data from the Prosecutor’s Office and the National Institute for Forensic Medicine State security forces rank highest among all the combatant groups that perpetuate sexual violence. According to analyses by NGOs, the participation of the State security forces in acts of sexual violence almost tripled, in percentage points, in the last five year period in comparison to the immediately preceding period.”



Graffiti, Soacha

How does sexual violence figure in the strategies of the armed groups? How are young people used inside these tactics?

Answers to these questions begin with the nature of the war and worldview of the paramilitary groups. Central to this are rigidly defined gender roles and the assertion of a strongly ‘machismo’ attitude. This has translated into the imposition of strict codes of behaviour for local populations, particularly young people.

The AUC operates as a kind of moral police, insisting on modest clothing, curfews and proper haircuts. But the double standard is a major factor – as much as the paramilitary groups compel youth to adhere to their rules, they don’t require the same for themselves. Stories are told of AUC members forcing girls to provide sexual services. Alejandra Miller Restrepo, Cauca regional coordinator for Ruta Pacifica⁴ described the position of young females inside this overall situation:

“Young women particularly, violence affects them in a distinct way. It’s much more aggressive sexual violence. They’re the preferred victims for forced recruitment, and their bodies are used as arms of war.

They are preyed upon emotionally. The police get young women to infiltrate the guerrilla, which always ends in them being assassinated.

In Jambalo here twelve women from ages 12 – 17 have received death threats from the FARC for allegedly being romantically linked to policemen. Pregnant women linked to members of the armed forces are often reported by the State Family Commission in Putumayo as being malnourished.

We’ve held protests against the army checkpoints and camps that they setup even in kids, big tents where they often lure girls.” (upsidedown world, accessed 2009)



The Violence in Our Lives

Studies confirm that sexual violence is steadily increasing and that young people are heavily implicated. A recent study by IOM found that 75.7% of reported sex crimes were against females under the age of 18. An investigation by the Family Commission conducted in Quibdo in 2003 and 2004 reached the same conclusion. Of the 241 cases of sexual violence that were reported, 153 or 63.5% involved girls.

If it is difficult to obtain statistics on sexual violence, it is all but impossible to acquire age desegregated data. However, the following points and quotes illustrate the extent to which young people, particularly girls, are targeted in the activities of the legal and illegal armed groups:

- ◆ The Coalition⁵ to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2008 report stated that:

“Girls recruited into the FARC were subjected to sexual abuse including rape and forced abortions.”

The Office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of Children, Women and the Family confirms these findings. According to them, girls who have left the FARC stated that they were forced to practice birth control (intrauterine devices) and to have abortions if they became pregnant.”

- ◆ The Inter-American Commission⁶ on Human Rights (IACHR) recently conducted hearings on sexual violence and discrimination against women. Its report identified the following situations where young people were especially victimized:

In the Cauca region, paramilitary leaders were reported to “order the search” of girls between the ages of 12 to 14. Girls who were selected were expected to live with paramilitary operatives, provide sexual services and perform domestic duties.

The Commission heard evidence of the case of a young pregnant woman who was murdered as punishment for trying to escape.

In areas under their control, the irregular armed groups, particularly the paramilitary, have established a protection system. Families and small business owners must contribute “paga diario” to ensure that no harm is done them. According to the IACHR report “as payment for debt, they demand the surrender of the body or of their daughters.”

In the IACHR meetings there were many testimonies on the social control imposed by the paramilitaries. They described notices that listed unacceptable behaviour, most of which related to the interests and potential actions of young people.

For example, one notice stated, “ We will capture people with tattoos, nightcaps, dyed hair and strange haircuts.” Minors found out after a 10 pm curfew were to be severely punished. Those caught smoking marijuana or jumping over walls would be “executed on the spot.” Modest clothing was an absolute requirement.

Amnesty International’s report (*Scarred Bodies, Hidden Crimes*) described how “both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas appear to be competing to demonstrate that they are the guardians of a traditional form of sexual morality associated with the idea of order.”

This report documents these practices and relates them to an overall need to tightly monitor and control young people’s actions. Included with this is the requirement that girls recognize their place in the AUC’s world. Its report stated:

“Exercising independence by not having a male partner can drive the armed groups to persecute women and inflict on them the most appalling punishment.”

The issue is control – of female’s bodies, dress, behaviour and sexuality.



P:rotest March on the silencing of women, Ibaque

Overlapping Circles of Violence

Colombia's war does not end at the battlefield. The nature of this conflict and its types of violence, with a high level of intimidation of civilian population, means that it has infiltrated all aspects of domestic and community life. A World Food Program report stated:

“Violence embedded in Colombian society has become a way to build social relationships and a means of resolving conflicts both in private and public spheres.”



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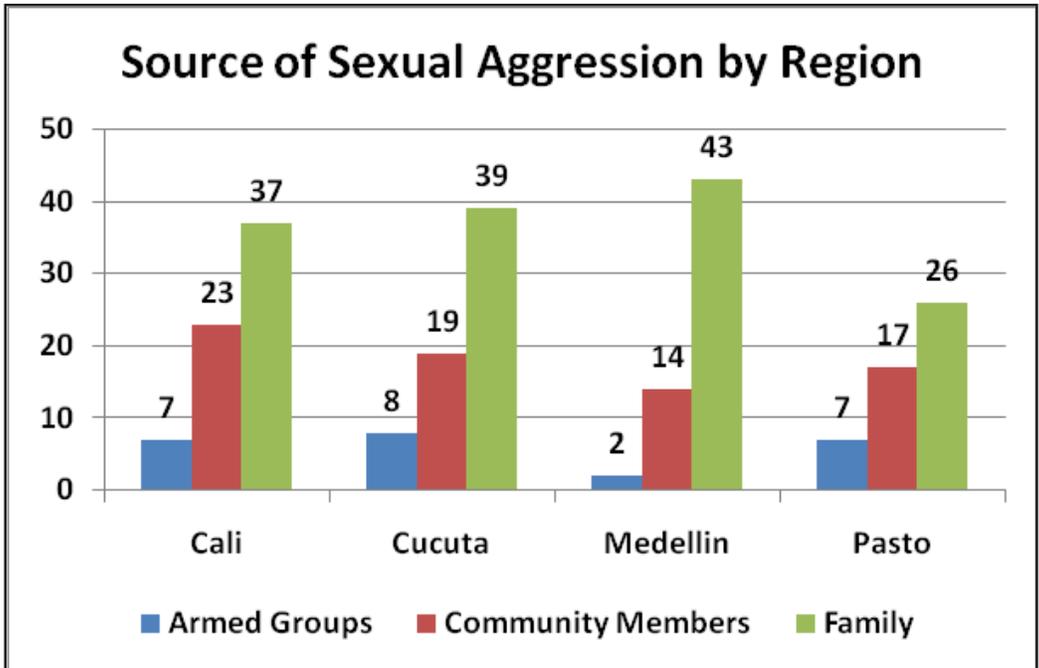
World Food Program

On the surface it can be hard to differentiate between the sexual violence caused by armed groups and that inside the civilian population because the two worlds are so intertwined. But a distinction can be made between the nature, motive and types of violations. Unlike the sexual violence perpetrated by the militarized groups, the violence inside community life has no obvious purpose. Instead it is a function of the massive sadness and social alienation afflicting so many people's lives, particularly in the resettled communities.

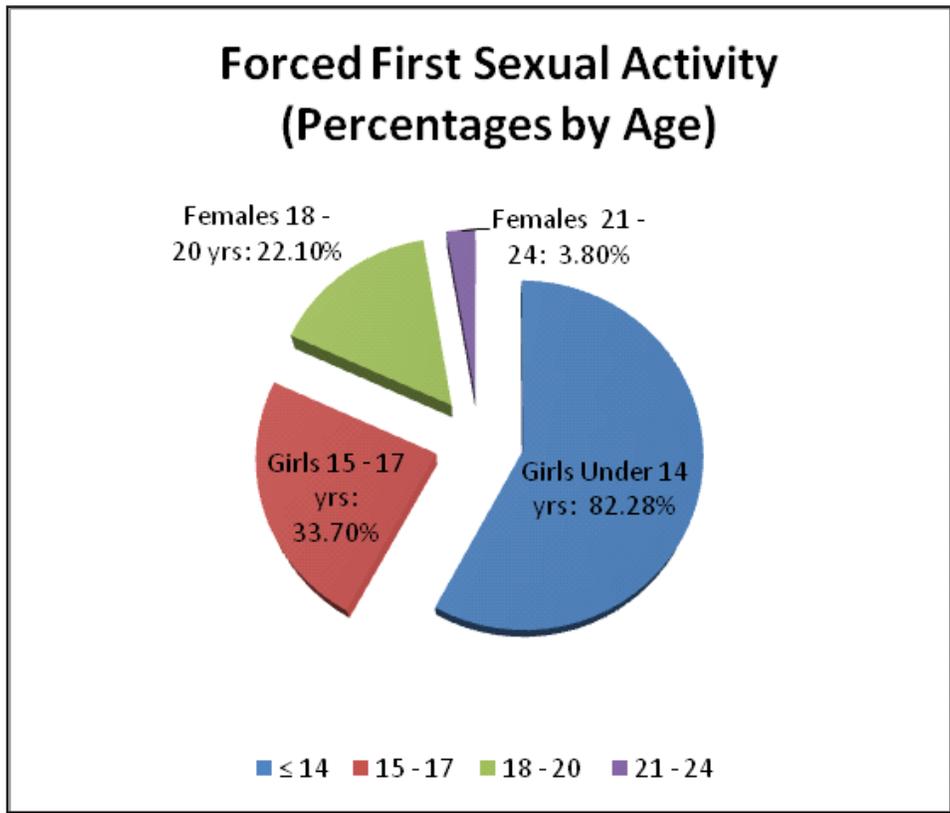
There are 2.8 million registered displaced people in Colombia. According to the UNHCR report of March 2009, 66% of these are female. It is estimated that 98% of displaced homes are living below the country's poverty line. These communities include a mixture of people from different cultural background and regions. The resettled areas are notorious for the presence of the illegal armed groups and a heavy police occupation. Young people are observed by all.

Included in this section are young people's descriptions of the realities of their lives, including art work, discussions and individual opinions. They focus on the civilian side of this war. They speak of great difficulties, of an environment which is undercut by violence, machismo attitudes and a fierce male entitlement. In this way it is a kind of mirror reflection of the world orchestrated by the armed groups.

Not all of the sexual activity properly fits inside the definition of “sexual violence”. However, the high level of sexual license, particularly inside the youth population, indicates a community that is struggling to find meaning and protection inside a world that offers little to nurture them.



Source: Defensoría Del Pueblo



Source: Defensoría Del Pueblo



1. Defensoría Del Pueblo recently conducted a study on the situation of females in four towns: Cali, Cucuta, Medellin and Pasto. Some of their findings are included here. As noted in the accompanying chart, the study reported that 33.7% of girls aged 15 – 17 had their first sexual encounter against their will. Their research also revealed that a high level of sexual violence occurred inside the family, though these statistics may be affected by the fact that people would be reluctant to identify armed groups for fear of reprisals.

2. The 2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices reported the following:

- ◆ The National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science (Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses) reported an 25% increase in the number of sex crimes from 2003 to 2004 with 65% of these violations being committed by family members or those known by the victim.
- ◆ The National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences reported approximately 7,628 cases of child abuse in the first nine months of 2008. The institute also estimated that approximately 40% of the 9,959 sex crimes that were reported involved sexual abuse of children, most of whom were under the age of 14.

3. According to the Inspector General’s Office 3,588 minors were reported as sexual workers in 2008, although many other cases were unreported.

4. According to Radio Internacional Feminista (FIRE) the domestic violence rate inside the resettled communities stands at 50% (national average: 41%)

5. Teen pregnancies “ While there is general agreement that teen pregnancies rates are very high, the numbers differ considerably, from 19% (ICBF) to 37% (UNHCR).

The study by Defensoría Del Pueblo/OIM which was released in June 2008 identified a rate of average pregnancy rate of 32% for girls aged 14 – 17 in its four research sites. A chart is provided in the key findings section.

6. MSF states that 35% of its patients in mobile clinics and 22% of its patients in fixed clinics have suffered an episode of sexual violence at least once in their lives (this includes both adults and youth)

This information paints a fairly dismal picture. However, in reading the comments by young people from a mixture of backgrounds another impression counters this one. It is of resistance to this worldview and a conviction that young people, through their personal lives and public commitments, can create another way of being. Their efforts, as well as those of many women's organizations, have exerted considerable pressure on the Colombian government.



On July 28, 2008 the President of Colombia ratified a new law to increase the legal penalties for sex crimes. This law provides for sentences ranging from 8 to 15 years of imprisonment for violent sexual assault. For acts of spousal sexual violence, the law mandates sentences of six months to two years and denies probation or bail to offenders who disobey restraining orders. Rape is now being prosecuted as a weapon of war.

These measures are appearing to have an effect in terms of the number of crimes that are being reported. In May 2007 there were only 12 cases of sexual violence filed with prosecutors appointed to carry out Colombia's special Justice and Peace Law. In May 2009 there were 228 cases recorded.

These actions, which require cooperation and work on many levels, bring hope for a much needed change. In speaking about these ideas young people made the following recommendations:

- ◆ We need to unlearn the habits of violence. We have to consciously look at our ways of being with each other.
- ◆ As youth, we need to participate in a different way of being. This includes males and females.
- ◆ Educational campaigns are important to promote self-respect, non-discrimination and human relations based on affection and caring, particularly between parents and children.
- ◆ The judicial courts need to prosecute offenders and ensure that Colombia's new laws against sexual violence are enforced. There needs to be publicity about this work to ensure that the population is aware of these laws.

**We need to understand that
we can stand for something different.**

Our Lives, Our Views

Inside Our Lives



“My cousin Stephanie was walking in front of the Santa Teresa church and some guys came and took her and sexually abused her and just left her lying in a place.”

“Once a little cousin of mine was sleeping. At that time she was very trusting of her father and when he went to her she pretended to be asleep and he began to touch her and she remained silent to avoid trouble.”

“Yes, a little girl called Ani lived right next to my house; her father hit her and abused her. One day the neighbors realized what was going on and called the police. They took Ani to family welfare and the father is free.”



“Someone from my family was touching me up and tried to do more, and when I told my mother she didn’t believe me.”

“Rage can build inside you. And if in the house you are treated badly, you grow up feeling that anger. So you treat others – your girlfriend, friends, the same way - the way you are treated badly, you will treat others badly as well.”



“Sexual violence isn’t just the physical violence – it is also about the double standard.”

“If I, as a male, am telling a girl to do this or do that, it can be a lot easier to just physically force her, rather than having to use words.”

“We are all animals. If you go to feed a dog or you are showing him the food, and then you take that away, what more can you expect than that he will bite your hand. You have been taunting him, he is angry with you. It is similar with human behaviour.”

If girls go out with these guys from the paramilitary it gives them a sense of rebellion, of power. They guys protect them – a gun with a gun. It is very common – there are a lot of girls like that.



“Girls are always measuring themselves in terms of how males see them. They think about how many boys talk to them, how many come around to her. She is always thinking about this, it is a measure of whether she is pretty enough.”

“If the guy doesn’t receive something from a girl but he wants it, he is expecting it, he is going to use force against her, he is going to hurt her. That is just the way it is – everyone knows that.”

Inside Our Lives...



“Many girls inside the paramilitary get passed around. They go from one to another. Other girls move around just because they want to. If one relationship ends, they may start a romance with a boy from another group. They don’t care so much about the politics, it is all the same for them. They are just looking for a powerful guy. But if they do that, the gossip can start about them.”

“All men think about who might be available. So if a girl is known to have been with the paramilitary – whether she was willing or not, you can think it probably wouldn’t be that hard to violate her. You can expect that and she can too.”



“We all suffer, we suffer equally. The advantage, however, is for the male because he is stronger psychologically. The female is weaker, she is weak.”

“I am not sure if females suffer more. But men are better at demoralizing and dehumanizing us.”

“The man is the one that orders. You see that in your home. You grow up where there is always obedience to the male – whether it is you to your father or your mother’s obedience to her husband.



And so this mentality is passed down to you. What else would you expect except that you will do the same? You have had an authoritative father figure and so you repeat these roles in your own adult life. Having a boyfriend is like having another father.”

“We also have to be realistic in terms of living inside all that warfare that is in Colombia. So the violence is inside and out, in your home and on the street.

What I can see also is the new ones, the ones coming from the countryside. They don’t know what to do and they don’t know how to be careful in the city. They get exposed to people who are looking for nothing good from them. It increases the possibility for sexual violence because they don’t know or understand the world they are going into. And it is not only girls that they get sexually violated, it is boys as well.”



“Inside the paramilitary groups, the girls who have been raped have big problems. They have very low status. Other girls won’t want to associate with them. It is seen as their fault.”

Inside Our Lives...



“A lot of times, kids have no control over the situations that they have had to grow up in. In the city prostitution is very common, due to opportunity. Because the military is an armed force, they don’t care what happens, whether it affects children or youth – they have the guns so they are going to continue with whatever they want to do. It doesn’t matter if it is just kids.”

“You can see in our community how the militants and the paras use sexual violence. It helps strengthen their image, this power in the community. They use these tactics, along with other warfare tactics – the two go together. And this leads to more violence – it will keep increasing.”



“Yes, a person that violates must think of himself as in power and act in a very authoritarian way. A girl’s rights end where his begin. Well, maybe the word “rights” is not correct, it is more about a person who doesn’t know any limits – that is the characteristic. It is almost like he is untouchable, he is beyond questioning.”

For me, as a female, it can be hard. How can I create my identity, a strong identity, when I live in a world where males are always denigrating females?

“We have to unlearn the habits of violence. It is all around us so we have to consciously look at our ways of being with each other. This is important – to stop these habits that we may not even be aware of. “

In Our Opinion

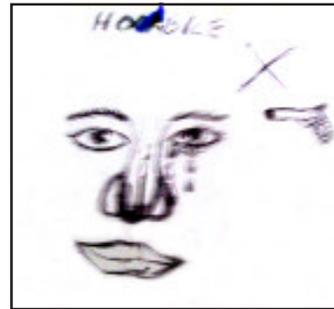
Results of a Survey Conducted with Youth in *Comuna Seis para alta, Medellin*

What is the meaning of sexual violence – how do you define it?

- I understand that sexual violence is an attack against human dignity. It is a violation of a person’s body. Rape is the most atrocious form of this.
- It is violation which involves a high use of force against one person to satisfy the sexual pleasure of the perpetrator, however that person decides it pleases him.
- In certain cases it is used for punishment for groups to show their power. In this case it is mostly directly at females, but sometimes to children as well.
- Part of defining sexual violence is also for the victim to define it, to understand that this is what happened to her.
- Sexual violence is a strategy, a way for one person to exert power over another by using fear, intimidation, violence or coercion.
- To use sexual violence is to force another person’s body to do something it doesn’t want to do. It is to distort, aggress and manipulate a body. This is normally, but not always, done by a male against a female.

What is the difference between sexual violence and gender based violence?

- Gender is the life style of each sex, males and females. So gender violence is the use of force and aggression of one sex onto another.
- Gender based violence is like an anger which is both physical and emotional.
- Gender based violence is about discrimination and rigid ideas what it means to be a male or female.
- Gender based violence says that there is a greater value to the word “man” . It says that the man is superior.



Collective Drawing, Gender Workshop,

- If you are homosexual, a gay male, it is seen as an outrage by Colombian society, especially the paramilitaries. So this justifies a violence, a gender based violence against males who have different haircuts or lifestyles than what is considered to be what a true male should be.

Which population suffers the most from sexual violence?

- The child population suffers the most because they are weak, they cannot defend themselves.
- Females. Because in our society, the mere fact of being a female can trigger sexual violence against you – you don't have to do anything.
- Being young makes you a target for violence. The men prefer young ones.
- It is the females because we are weaker than males and because everyone always believes that we are to blame for everything. So if it happens to you, people can blame you rather than the man who did it.
- For the child it can generate a kind of vulnerability that continues.

Who or what is to blame for sexual violence in your community?

- The paramilitary groups who think they can do whatever they want.
- A certain amount of blame is because of poverty. Because under these conditions it is not possible to have education to change these patterns of violence.
- The social breakdown that our country is going through. So there is no one to protect young people against this violence.
- Partly because of the inattention of parents.
- The bonds of trust between parents and children are weak. Parents give no credit to their child's complaints and so can put them in a dangerous situations.
- Young people are on their own a lot and so come in contact with people and opportunities. Sometimes these are not good.



- For youth sexual violence and gender based violence are always ‘crisscrossing’ so that gender based violence can lead to sexual violence.
- The continuous contact of young people with armed groups that are either under or outside the law.
- In some cases the role of youth is two-sided, they are both victims and victimizers. They can help facilitate sexual violence against others and also put themselves inside situations where they are vulnerable to being violated.
- Females function inside a world which automatically makes them victims – they are victims of machismo practices of males but are also reproduced by other females.
- A girl can be subjected to sexual violence because she does not comply with the rules that are established in our community, ones that are male dominated. To be safe a female needs to live quietly and not have any personal goals.
- The GLBT population (gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals) is going to be treated with violence. All this is based on how they look and express themselves in ways which are not accepted.
- Youth who show any fragility are going to be targeted because the perpetrators think they can get away with it.

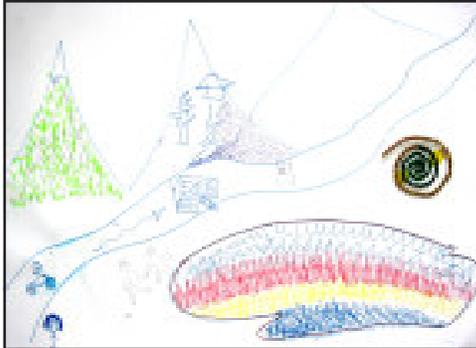


What impact does sexual violence have on young people?

- First there is the physical damage and pain.
- The victim will bear psychological marks especially if she is young. She may have strange behaviours while she is getting over it but people will not know how to handle them which will hurt her recovery.
- There is the feeling of hopelessness that comes with it. Because of the social breakdown people are always saying that violence is going to increase.
- There is the problem of social isolation. This is partly because a victim may feel a lot of distrust and fear against others. Also, other girls are often scared to be around a rape victim.
- Sometimes families can be angry, blaming a girl for what happened
- Some girls will feel that once this has happened, that no one will respect them and they do not respect themselves either.
- There is a lot of fear of others and fear to speak openly about the problem



Inside My Heart



What was making me a man?

The bicycle compared with my little sister's tricycle was making me a man. It is an unfinished road because it has no color; there are two mountains because I lived in a mountain: the first one is where I lived with my grandparents.

Getting close to my uncles, where machismo prevails but not in a rough way, made me a man. The second mountain is of Soacha, the resettled community where I moved with my mother.

Here gender violence is exerted through social cleansing over young men. When I painted this I thought about a lake, it represents the peace that the water gives me, and even the sea. There is a taller mountain because the idea is to grow. There is a spiral because everything that comes out of me ends up by coming back.

Male Youth from Soacha



No Crying

The drawing shows a dark sky and the black that has pursued me since I was born. There isn't any tree, any river. The heart represents my daughter, without her I wouldn't be. The lights represent many dreams, but they have remained as dreams because I haven't been able to achieve them.

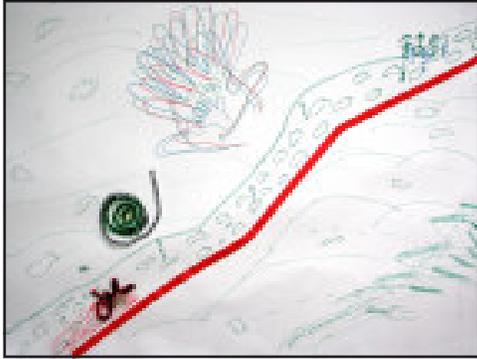
I used to draw myself tied up. For me men have been hard. My father tried to abuse me. That's why I don't draw flowers, butterflies. I don't know if love died for me.

I left my home and found a guy I became an ELENA when I was 11. I suffered. Now I don't depend on a male and I don't let them manipulate me.

Neither do I cry.

Female Former Member of FARC

Note: This artwork was produced as part of an initial training with CAP Colombia network members.

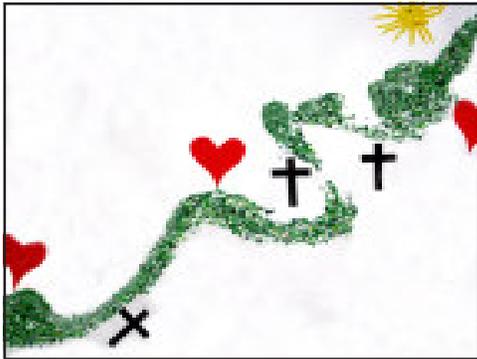


Good and Negative Things

I did my drawing like this: there is a red road and there is another part which is green. There is a person who has fallen, it is spilled blood, there are many footsteps.

We've all had difficulties, there are good things but there are also negative things. There may be deaths caused by armed actors or men who have no self-esteem and decide to abuse women, assassinate or kill children. Life has to be seen from the good side and the bad side.

Tears come to one's eyes when one goes back to moments in the past. The biggest challenge is to be able to tell this.



My Life As A Female

In my road, I thought about my life as a woman. I thought that if I had been a man, how I would be. When I begin, the little road is green and there is a heart; my father tells me that I was looked for, they were waiting for me. My father is a special man; in my home he doesn't make himself felt, he seems to be one of us, we don't feel the exercise of power.

We left the village and went to the city. My mother thought I would be safer there. Then in my life something that was very hard happened and it was caused by a man. I began to identify men as bad.

When I thought about the war, the conflict, the city, I identified it with men. I saw that in our community it was men who gave the orders, men who beat women. My mother told me to prepare myself. She said that it is the lot of women to be mothers, to wash clothes, to follow the husband wherever he goes; to dedicate ourselves to them.

I decided to move on. I realized that we see men as those who always have the answers but that sometimes they are more confused than we are. I am beginning to think of myself as a woman, having clarities about what I want and think.

Female Youth from Ibaque

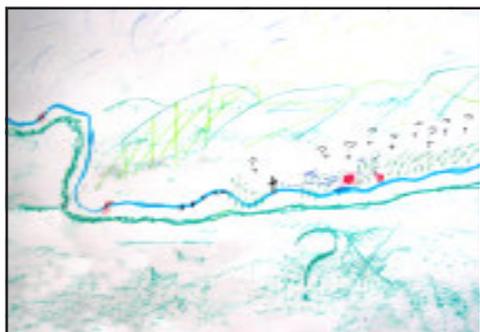


Violence

Violence has been in my life since I was very little. Where we lived, on the street there were clashes between gangs from different sectors and shootings. My mother is the figure that represents protection; my mother taught us equity at home, there were no preferences.

When there were acts of violence and my mother wasn't there, the protection symbol was under the bed. What our mother did has taken me to be surrounded by persons now and that I'm valuable for them, I protect them.

Male Youth from Barranquilla



Changes

When I was seven, we went from Cauca to Putumayo. I painted two points with a red asterisk because my father used to beat my mother. My mother said that I had to be like my father, a macho man.

I learned to be like that. The black points represent the ups-and-downs of life. I was aggressive in school with my friends. I used to make trouble about everything.

My father left the house, mother is now alone and she's a woman of the community. A very special priest, father Alcides, went to my school; he made a big impact on me, he helped us to find our spirituality. He was a very important influence in my life. The black cross represents the moment when Padre Alcides was killed, a very difficult moment for me. I work with the communities and I continue to ask, why are so many dead?

Youth from Putumayo



Solitary

My childhood wasn't "normal." I had the life of a nomad; we would cross rivers in the plains. I had a second home with my uncles and grandmother.

What really marked me a lot was my grandmother's death. That marked much more than being in the war and belonging to an armed group. She was the most valuable thing to me – she always gave her all for me.

I'm a solitary person, locked up in my world, in my room. When I go out with someone, I sometimes don't even talk, I just drink. A while ago I went to the plain and thought of making peace with the whole world, even my mother who shows no interest in her son. But when I go there, I get angrier.

I can't find the light.

Male Youth, Former Paramilitary



Black and White

Almost everything in my drawing is black and white because that's what's happening, it's related with me. You can see the river where I went to swim with friends. Why is it in black and white? That's how I saw things: what one learns is what gives color to one's life.

Friends involve one "in things". One gets caught up and all this is because one has nothing more to do. To hold the weapon gives you strength. I never had the dream of being an astronaut or a pilot. I dreamed of having a rifle. But I wasn't born like this; circumstances lead me.

But when you start to understand it, you think, "What have I done? What am I doing here? Where I am going?" It is hard to see a way out. I fear that it's too late.

Male Former Paramilitary



Male/Female

In my drawing there are bodies tied down and tied up, bodies behind bars. This is meant to represent all the duties of being a female in our culture and all the people who've been near me in the construction of that body.

With the gagged mouth I wanted to symbolize sexuality and a female's shut mouth because we have been told that we don't have much to say.

I put cultural elements like man's pants and the kitchen elements to show how women are at the service of men.

I feel now that though women have a tied body, males are no less tied than females. They have fears and frights just like we do in relation to sexuality, the future, their emotions, their desires.

All of us have tied emotions, we would have to think about the masculinity and femininity that we have constructed in our world, in this war.

Female Youth, Pereira



Water of Life

This represents what we've lived and what we can become.

The road begins on the right side and then it joins the other. At the beginning there is a moment of silence, then it opens to two sources: on one hand there is destruction, slaughter, the dark side. On the other is the possibility of harmony, of a joyful community, where happiness can begin.

Very few will be in contact and in balance with nature.

The sacred place for us is where we purify ourselves, where an elder refreshes us. Because on the road one can be convinced and go to the dark side. But there is another road above, it turns and once more toward the river. The river represents the water of life.

In life there are many options and many possible roads.

Male Youth, Cauca

END NOTES

1. FIRE or Radio Internacional Feminista has prepared an overview of the information provided by 18 women's organizations in Colombia at the meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on October 28, 2008. This document was prepared by Maria Suarez Tor. The information provided in the following paragraph is also provided by FIRE's website. (http://www.radiofeminista.org/mar09/notas/effects_intersection.htm)
2. CODHES is a well respected source for to date and comprehensive information on the human rights situation in Colombia.
3. This quote from the Colombia's Constitutional Court was taken from notes prepared by FIRE.
4. Ruta Pacifica is a thirteen year old movement of Colombian women against violence. The group is famous for its groundbreaking actions which have joined campesino, Afro-Colombians, indigenous and rural women in massive mobilizations or "rutas", often held in locations controlled by armed groups who have had a habit of targetting women. Ruta Pacific has two main objectives: 1) to make visible the effects of war on the bodies of women and 2) to insist on a negotiated outcome to the war. This movement has 350 grassroots organizations.
5. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is a worldwide movement to monitor and report on the recruitment and use of children as soldiers by government and rebel groups. The Coalition also engages in advocacy work to stop these violations against children's rights.
6. The Inter- American Commission on Human Rights conducted a major investigation on the human rights situation of Colombia and its effect on women. This included an on-site visit by the former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women of the IACHR, Ms. Susan Villaran to Colombia on June 20 - 25, 2005. Findings pertinent to the situation of younger females are included in this report.