



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BREAKING THE MOULD:

changing belief systems and
gender norms to eliminate
violence against women

ENOUGH
TOGETHER WE CAN END VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



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CRÉDIT

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Cover picture: Danna Iriel Valencia is 21 years old and lives in La Paz, Bolivia. Thanks to her perseverance against the macho culture in her country that determines that girls shouldn't practice extreme sports, Danna is one of the first women skaters in La Paz.

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1.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 1831 women died at the hands of men in 2016, and three out of ten women have suffered male violence during their lives.¹ In recent years, countries in the region have made significant progress in tackling the problem by adopting national laws to protect women. Today, 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries have laws in place punishing violence against women, and 15 have incorporated femicide/feminicide as a specific crime.

This legislative progress is a significant step forward. But gaps in implementation allow a culture of impunity for men who commit violence against women and girls. Without adequate financing and effective means to prevent, report and punish violence against women, the problem will not go away.

Male violence must be prevented and eradicated. To do this, one of the main challenges is to change the harmful belief systems and gender norms that are used to justify violence against women. It also means recognizing that beliefs and behaviours built on a patriarchal system that is also sexist and racist are part of the structural causes of inequality that feed violence against women.

This report provides insights into the prevalence of belief systems and gender norms among

young women and men in the region. It looks in depth at the most entrenched beliefs and behaviours among the younger population and provides ample evidence that we must challenge and change the prevailing belief systems and gender norms if we are to make real progress in guaranteeing the right of all women and girls to a life free from violence.

The results of our research are alarming. In our sample across eight countries, 56 percent of men and 48 percent of women aged 20–25 know a female friend who has endured male violence in the past 12 months – a clear indication that this problem is rife. Moreover, six out of ten young people believe that women do not escape violent relationships because the man threatens to kill them. Five out of ten women consider that violence against women is normal.

SO, IS IT NORMAL?

The perception that male violence against women is normal is one of the key problems in tackling the issue. The normalization of violence pervades our discourse, our conversations, the way we relate to others, and also the sources of mass knowledge and public policies. This normalization is fuelled by beliefs and behaviours that are deeply engrained, not only among young people in their families and social circles, but also within public institutions – beliefs and behaviours that are reinforced through daily practices.

¹ Figures on the 1,831 killings in the region are taken from the ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory (<https://oig.cepal.org/es/indicadores/feminicidio>). The figure stating that 30 percent of women in the region have suffered violence throughout their lives is taken from the World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. WHO: Rome.

Male violence has become normalized to the extent that 86 percent of young women and men in the region would not interfere if a male friend hit their female partner, and 25 percent consider that their friends would not do anything if an assault occurs in a public space such as the street, a park or a disco. The situation in **Nicaragua** is alarming, with four out of ten young men reporting that they know a friend who hits his female partner. In the **Dominican Republic**, three out of ten young people state that their male friends hit their female partner.

Although 84 percent of young women and men believe that violence against women is a product of inequalities, they believe that solving the problem is not up to them. Two-thirds (67 percent) believe that the state should be responsible for reducing the consequences of male violence.

‘Women get used to being beaten and defend their aggressors... So it is best not to get involved.’ (Man, focus group, Bolivia)

This indifference in the face of violence is all the more worrying if we consider that almost 62 percent of young men (15 to 19) in the region justify sexual violence due to men having drunk too much alcohol, while 72 percent blame women because of the clothes they wear.

As for sexuality, there is also a highly normalized belief system regarding pleasure and sexual desire, with 87 percent of young men and women aged 15–25 believing that men have greater sexual desire than women. This portrays women as incapable of feeling either desire or pleasure, and firmly establishes their enjoyment as secondary to a man’s desires.

Moreover, a very high percentage of young people also deny women’s right to make decisions about their own bodies: 72 percent of young people aged 15–25. Likewise, 77 percent of young women and men agree that all women should be mothers. In Bolivia, for example, we found that 61 percent of men aged 20–25 believe that when a mother works outside the home, the children suffer abandonment.

‘I think every woman is a mother, even if she doesn’t have any children.’ (Woman, focus group, Cuba)

WHAT OXFAM IS DOING TO CHANGE HARMFUL BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS

Oxfam has been working with feminist and women’s organizations to eradicate male violence through specific programmes and campaigns for around 20 years. We have been supporting the agendas of feminist and women’s organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean through stand-alone programmes on women’s rights, working on initiatives for the eradication of all types of violence against women, the economic rights of women, transformative leadership and participation of women, and campaigns led by feminist organizations in 9 of the 13 countries in which we work.

Much progress has been achieved since 2017. We have committed to going beyond a funding role in the campaign **Enough! Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls**², which focuses on young women and men aged 15–25 to transform the belief systems and gender norms which reinforce violence against women. This campaign is being implemented in eight countries, led by feminist and women’s organizations, young activists and Oxfam.³

² **Basta!**, is the Campaign name for the Latin America and Caribbean region. **Basta!** involved 8 countries in the region (Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). **Basta!** is part of Oxfam’s Global Campaign, **Enough: Together we can end violence against women and girls**, involving 35 countries worldwide.

³ See Annex 1, of the full report for a list of the 53 organizations participating in the **Enough** campaign in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

As part of Oxfam's role in the campaign, this report helps to identify and analyse the belief systems and gender norms that fuel violence against women and girls in the region. We hope it will focus attention on this pernicious problem, which reproduces beliefs and behaviours, particularly among young people, and which entrenches social impunity for male violence. Oxfam has had the support of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) in the management of the national research teams for collection and processing of data in seven countries, while data collection in Bolivia was coordinated by Oxfam, Coordinadora de la Mujer and, Diagnosis.

The research findings are based on analysis of 4731 surveys carried out with young women and men aged 15–25 in March and April 2017, together with reflections derived from 47 focus group discussions and 49 in-depth interviews carried out in June and July 2017.⁴ The report provides an overview of regional trends, as well as a comparative analysis across **Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua** – the eight countries involved in the Enough campaign.

As well as information collected at country level, the report uses other key sources of insights on belief systems and gender norms, such as regional discussions convened by Oxfam, with broad participation from the feminist movement, and particularly the regional conference, 'Resistance and alliances in the face of inequalities and violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean', held in Medellín, Colombia, in March 2016. The report also reflects the processes for Enough campaign design in

the various countries and on a regional level, which have provided platforms for debate and collaboration between partner organizations, young people, and Oxfam teams.

We trust that the analysis provided by this research will be useful for all actors working to eradicate violence against women and girls in the region, and that it will also help to improve coordination between the various programme and campaign strategies seeking to achieve change. In this sense, the report should be central to the design of country campaigns, and a tool for collaboration between feminist and women's organizations, young people and Oxfam.

BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS: HOW TO IDENTIFY THEM?

In this report, we use the concept of belief systems and gender norms to explain that the beliefs and behaviours that constitute them are deeply entrenched in the system that produces, reproduces and sustains violence against women. Language also plays a significant role, with discourse and repetition or replication (of both discourse and actions) shaping our ways of seeing, hearing, thinking and doing. Chauvinistic, sexist and racist beliefs and behaviours are replicated at the personal, group and society levels.

The concept of gender norms stresses the importance of institutions or reference groups that have the power to determine which behaviours are appropriate for women and men, and which are not. These reference groups include friends, teachers, artists or musicians, parents, religious leaders, social networks or sports personalities, among others.

⁴

Of the survey sample, close to 90 percent were young urban women and men, with a clear majority being students. Also, in the case of Bolivia, there are some differences due to the fact that the study was carried out earlier, between September and December 2016, and not all the questions used in the other seven countries were included.

DIAGRAMA 1.

UNDERSTANDING BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

BELIEF SYSTEMS



SOURCE: COMPILED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON STUDIES AND WORKSHOPS FOR DESIGN OF THE ENOUGH CAMPAIGN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.

The concept of belief systems takes into consideration the elements that determine gender norms (reference groups and behaviours), but also places context and culture in a central role, where certain institutions have acted to build and define structures which, in effect, serve to regulate what people should think, believe and do. Such institutions (family, church, markets, the media and educational institutions) have the power to dictate rules and deny the interests of certain groups (Figure 1). They thus succeed in institutionalizing gender-based inequalities by encouraging girls and boys, men and women, to internalize the roles prescribed to them by society. These institutions also tend to have

substantial influence on the implementation of public policies^{5 6}.

It is important to stress that male-dominated, sexist and racist belief systems and gender norms, with their associated beliefs and behaviours, can be transformed. All of us can play a part in promoting alternative belief systems and gender norms, through individual as well as collective action. Changes at a personal level are vital, while bearing in mind that it is essential that any transgression of beliefs or behaviours must have an influence on the group: we must influence those whose power and control over consciences and behaviours has entrenched inequality.

⁵ Villa, M. E. (2009). *Los imaginarios sociales*. Facultad de Educación, Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia, Vol. 9 No. 3 versión digital.

⁶ Miranda, A. (2014). *El imaginario social bajo la perspectiva de Cornelius Castoriadis y su proyección en las representaciones culturales de Cartagena de Indias*. Universidad de Cartagena.

2.

BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS FUEL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: EXPLORING THE BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOURS OF YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN

The report identifies **eight belief systems and gender norms** that fuel violence against women in the region. The accompanying beliefs and behaviours for each belief system and norm are described, showing both the regional trend and a comparison across the eight countries studied, highlighting the country or countries with the highest prevalence. These belief systems and gender norms are related to control of women's bodies and sexuality and are rooted in the construction of a subordinated femininity and a hegemonic masculinity.⁷ The persistence of such beliefs and behaviours has a direct correlation with social impunity for perpetrators of violence against women and girls.

For the analysis, we have used the metaphor of three mirrors: *distorting mirrors*, *augmenting mirrors* and *worn/outdated mirrors*. We consider belief systems and gender norms as representing mirrors in which men and women are obliged to see themselves, behaving in such a way as to ensure compliance with the gender stereotypes prescribed for them throughout their lives.

Distorting mirrors are the belief systems and gender norms associated with direct control over women's bodies in relation to one of the strongest champions of hegemonic masculinity: male virility. *Augmenting mirrors* are beliefs and norms associated with expressions of control, but in relation to romantic love and the obligations of a concept of sexuality that leaves no room for anything other than compulsory heterosexuality. The main aspect of *worn/outdated mirrors* is the standardization of certain forms of violence and the provisions that have become entrenched as the attributes of a 'good woman'.

DISTORTING MIRRORS: FROM MALE VIRILITY AND SEXUAL DESIRE TO CONTROL OVER WOMEN'S BODIES

Belief systems and gender norms in distorting mirrors are supported by beliefs and behaviours associated with desire, but only inasmuch as it relates directly to male virility. Women should not experience sexual pleasure and must be monogamous; their bodies should always be available for satisfying a man's sexual desires, and subject to male scrutiny; and they should be denied all capacity for taking their own decisions (Figure 2).

7

Dominant male attitudes that determine what attributes men should have, such as control, strength, success or sexual desire.

FIGURE 2.**THE THREE BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS OF DISTORTING MIRRORS,
WITH THEIR ASSOCIATED BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOURS**

The numbers in parenthesis are the age ranges of the people that answered to each associated belief and/or behaviour.

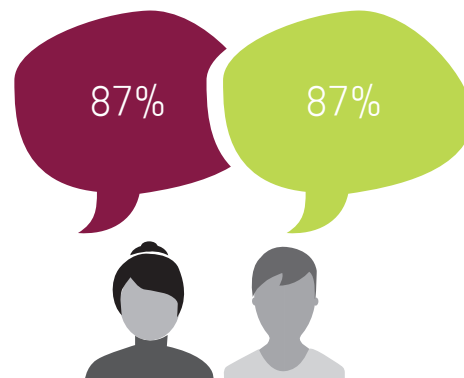


A REAL MAN MUST HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WHEN HE WANTS AND WITH WHOEVER HE WANTS, NOT SO WOMEN

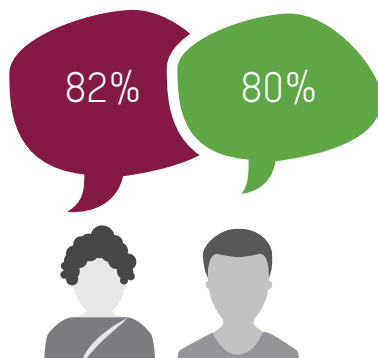
- It is common for a man who is drunk to beat or force a woman to have sexual relations (15-19).



- Men have greater sexual desire than women, % who think that their friends believe this (15-25).



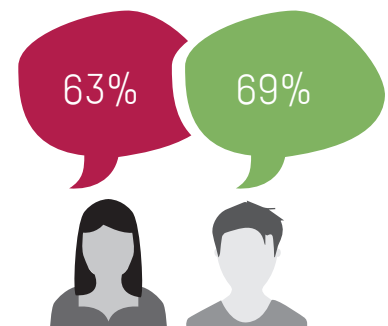
- Men can have sexual relations with whoever they want, women cannot, % who think that their friends believe this (20-25).



- Women sometimes act hard to get for having sexual relations, saying NO when they really mean YES (15-19).



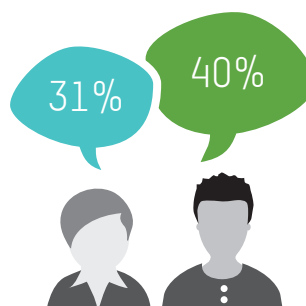
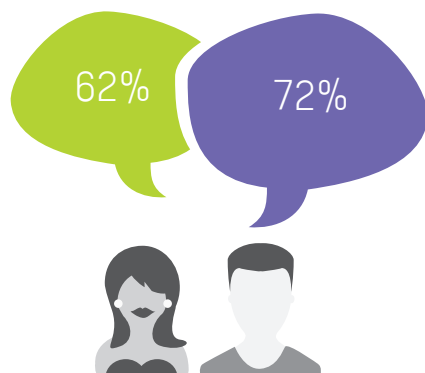
- Men get angry if their partner does not want to have sexual relations, % who think that their friends do this (20-25).



MEN SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARISE, WOMEN TYPICALLY GIVE GROUNDS FOR THIS.

- A decent woman should not dress provocatively, nor walk alone on the streets late at night (15-19).

- If a woman gets drunk, then a man can have sexual relations with her, even if she is unconscious (15-19).

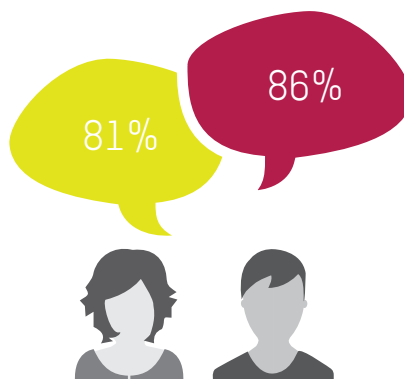
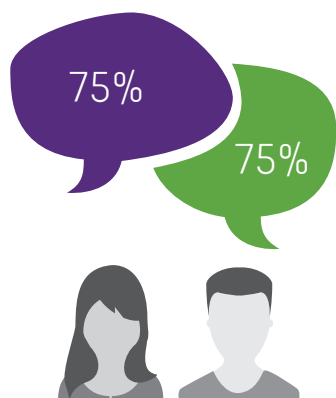


WOMEN'S BODIES SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONTROLLED, AVAILABLE AND CRITICISED.

- It is normal for a man to compliment a woman on the street. % who think that their male friends do this (15-25).

- It is safer for women if a man accompanies them on the street, % who think their friends think this (15-25).

- It is not appropriate for a woman to end an unwanted pregnancy (15-19).



One of the strongest belief systems and gender norms evident in the region is the construction of **male virility**. The link with violence is reflected in young people's beliefs that men cannot control themselves, and that women must comply with men's sexual desires even if they do not want to, thus assuming that women are passive bodies, devoid of desire, and forbidden from freely experimenting with their own sexuality.

Most of the beliefs and behaviours linked to male virility are especially prevalent among young men, followed by women.

The research finds that women are often blamed for male violence because of the way they dress, for being out on the streets late at night, or for drinking alcohol. Seven out of ten young men aged 15–19 believe that *a decent woman should not dress provocatively, nor be out on the streets late at night*; six out of ten women of similar age share this belief. The countries with the highest prevalence of this belief among young men aged 15–19 (blaming women because of the way they dress) are **El Salvador** (85 percent) and **Guatemala** (75 percent).

Another belief used to justify sexual violence – that *when women say NO, they actually mean YES* – is much higher among men aged 15–19, at 65 percent. Among young people aged 20–25, 87 percent believe that *men have greater sexual desire than women*. As such, 77 percent of young people believe *it is normal for men to have sexual relations with more than one woman, but wrong for women to do the same*. The **Dominican Republic, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala** and **Nicaragua** are the countries with the highest prevalence of this belief among men and women aged 15–19.

Sexual harassment in the street curtails women's use and enjoyment of public spaces. The seriousness of this type of violence affects and restricts the development and self-sufficiency of young women in particular. Among young people

75 percent accept this type of harassment as normal. **Cuba** (75 percent) and **Dominican Republic** (84 percent) have the highest percentage of men aged 15–19 who say their male friends believe they have the right to shout call out compliments to women.

'A compliment is like poetry; a woman has to like it. In other words, something that you say to make her feel attracted to you. So, if you then said something else that might be considered a bad word, that would not be a compliment.' (Man, focus group, **Dominican Republic**)



Appropriation and control over women's bodies extends to sexual and reproductive rights, with 72 percent of young people believing it is wrong for a woman to end an unwanted pregnancy.

El Salvador is the country with the highest prevalence of this belief, at 95 percent (young men) and 87 percent (young women).

AUGMENTING MIRRORS: VIOLENCE THAT GOES UNSPOKEN AND CONTROL THAT BECOMES NATURALIZED – ROMANTIC LOVE

These two belief systems and gender norms are underpinned by beliefs and behaviours that increase men's control over women (Figure 3).

The study shows that high percentages of young women and men do not regard control over mobile phones and social networks as violence. Nor do they regard as violence men controlling who women relate to, how they should dress, when and how they can move about in public spaces, or the imposition of heterosexuality as a norm.

Augmenting mirrors reinforce the practices of *romantic love and heterosexuality as the only socially acceptable form of sexuality*. More than half of these beliefs and behaviours are highly prevalent among young women and men aged 15–25.



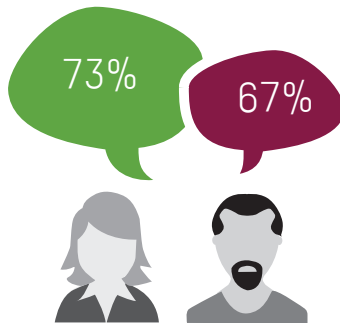
CREDIT: YAMIL ANTONIO/OXFAM IN BOLIVIA

FIGURE 3.**THE TWO BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS OF AUGMENTING MIRRORS,
WITH THEIR ASSOCIATED BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOURS**

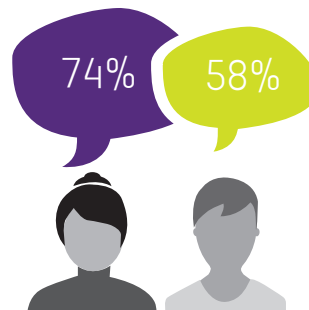
The numbers in parenthesis are the age ranges of the people that answered to each associated belief and/or behaviour.

**LESBIAN AND TRANS PRACTICES MUST BE KEPT PRIVATE.**

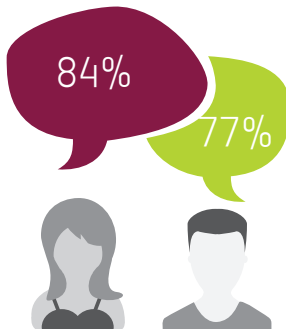
- Lesbians should not show their sexual orientation in public, % who think that their friends believe this (15-25).



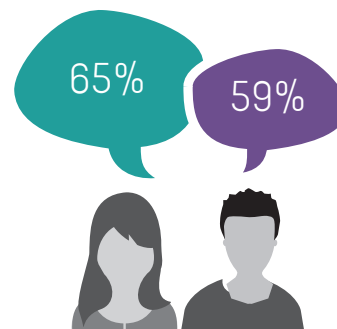
- It is NOT normal for people who are born with male genitalia to dress as women (15-25).

**MEN MUST CONTROL WOMEN.**

- Checking your partner's mobile phone is not violence, % who think that their male friends do this (15-25).



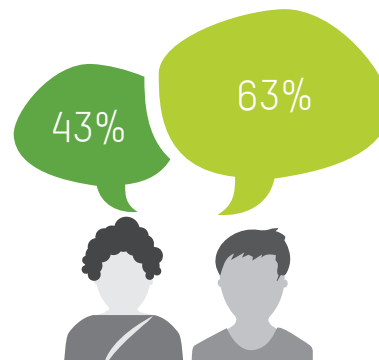
- Controlling your partner's social networks is not violence, % who think that their male friends do this (15-25).



- Telling your partner what clothes to wear is not violence, % who think that their male friends do this (20-25).



- Jealousy is an expression of love (15-19).



One of the beliefs that strengthens male power over women is the construction of romantic love. The belief that *he who loves you, cares for you*

is fed by ideas that distort and pervert romantic relationships, with control over women becoming normal.⁸ In this interpretation, jealousy becomes evidence of love.

ROMANTIC LOVE: 'I GET JEALOUS BECAUSE I LOVE YOU'^{9,10}

Throughout history, love has been depicted in different ways, building up certain models that are presented as natural and therefore impossible to modify. Often, the emotional ties created between men and women are based on dependency and the promise of loyalty within the relationship, with the premise that love and suffering go hand-in-hand.

Women are encouraged to endure all kinds of male abuse in the name of love. The relationship is idealized and a yearning for romantic love places all priority on the object of your love, changing attitudes and setting aside friendships and even studies, work and ambitions. Romantic love promotes heterosexual, monogamous love, which is limitless in time and assured through marriage.

The relationships we experience throughout our lives can be wonderful experiences that fill us with energy. But it is essential that young women and men can put romantic love in context and build equal relationships.

Across the region, six out of ten young men aged 15–19 believe that *jealousy is an expression of love*, a belief that is echoed in all the countries studied. In **Dominican Republic**, 76 percent of men aged 15–19 justify jealousy as an expression of love, followed by **Honduras** at 65 percent. This belief is less widespread among women aged 20–25.

Additionally, 80 percent of young people in the sample state that their male friends monitor their partner's phone, and 62 percent of young people (15–19) say their male friends monitor their girlfriend's social networks. **Colombia and Nicaragua** have the highest percentage of women aged 15–19 stating that their male friends check their partner's phone.

Public spaces as a means for social control also restrict expressions of diverse sexual options.

Across all eight countries, seven out of ten young people state that their friends believe lesbians should keep their sexual orientation private. Countries with the highest levels of lesbophobia are **Honduras, Nicaragua and, Dominican Republic**.

'Sometimes I would be on the bus with my partner and people would say "What a waste of women", or "You haven't had a proper shag; if I had been with you, you wouldn't be this way." That is really awful.' (Woman, focus group, El Salvador)

Moreover, six out of ten men aged 15–19 believe that it is not normal for people who are born with male genitalia to dress as women. **Dominican Republic** and **El Salvador** are the countries with the highest levels of transphobia.

⁸ La Corriente Feminista (2014). Campaña *¿Y vos, cómo haces el amor?* Nicaragua. http://lacorrientenicaragua.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MANUAL_AMOR_SEGUNDO.pdf.

⁹ Rodríguez, V. (Ed.) *Violencia machista y mitos del amor romántico*. Oxfam & Colectivo Rebeldía. Bolivia.]

¹⁰ La Corriente Feminista. *óp. cit.*

WORN/OUTDATED MIRRORS: MALE OPPRESSION AND THE ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD WOMAN

The three belief systems and gender norms in this mirror are underpinned by beliefs that leave women open to male violence due to the

importance given to certain conservative attributes used to typify what constitutes a 'good woman' (Figure 4). Most of these beliefs are strongly entrenched among young people aged 20–25.

FIGURE 4.

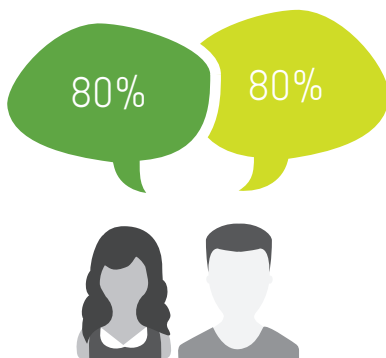
THE THREE BELIEF SYSTEMS AND GENDER NORMS OF WORN/OUTDATED MIRRORS, WITH THEIR ASSOCIATED BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOURS

The numbers in parenthesis are the age ranges of the people that answered to each associated belief and/or behaviour.

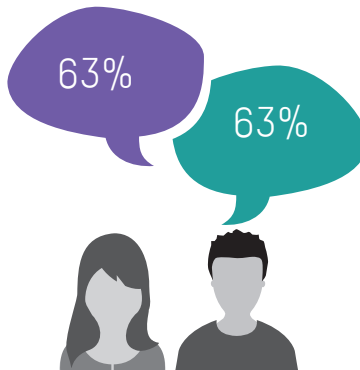


A MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO "CORRECT" OR DISCIPLINE THE BEHAVIOUR OF WOMEN AND FOR THAT HE CAN USE ANY TYPE OF VIOLENCE. THERE ARE REASONS WHY WOMEN ENDURE VIOLENCE

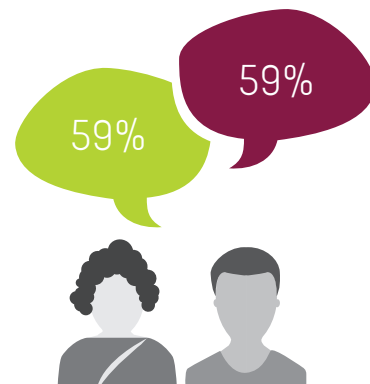
- Women endure violence for the shake of their children (20–25).



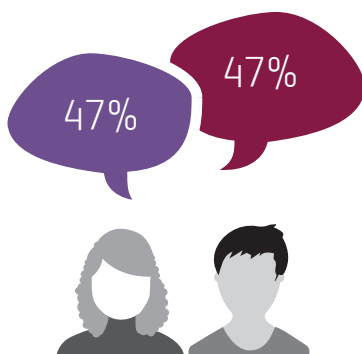
- Threaten to kill her (20–25).



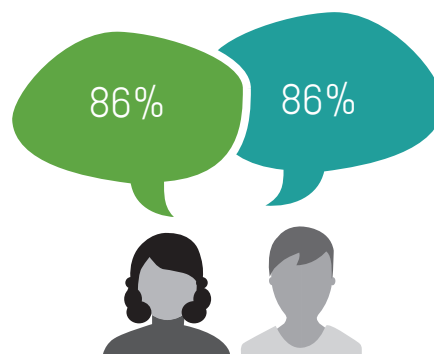
- Economically dependent (20–25).



- Believe that it is normal (20–25).

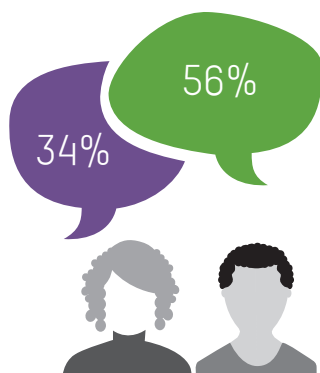


- No one should interfere in fights between couples (15–25).

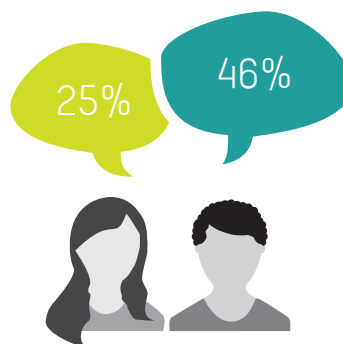


MEN SHOULD BE THE PROVIDERS, AND WOMEN CAREGIVERS, MAKING ONLY COMPLEMENTARY CONTRIBUTIONS.

- It is better for the man to be the family breadwinner and for the women take care of the children (15-19).

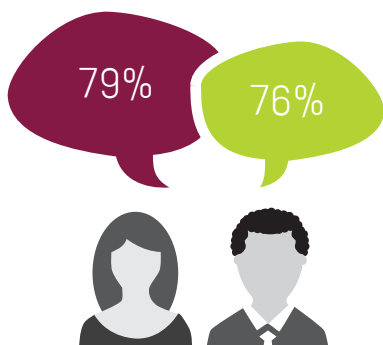


- In the event of firing someone, it is best to keep the man's job because they usually generate most of the family income (15-19).



ALL WOMEN SHOULD BE MOTHERS.

- All women should be mothers, % who think that their friends believe this (15-25).



One of the most pervasive perceptions among young people is the normalization of male violence due to men's inherently violent nature, which they use to subjugate women. Among young people aged 15–25, 50 percent of women and 38 percent of men believe that women endure violent relationships because they believe violence in a relationship with a man is normal, while 61 percent of women and 55 percent of men (of the same age group) believe that women do not leave violent relationships because the man threatens to kill them.

'Women fear they may be killed. That is why they do not speak out.' (Woman, Nicaragua)

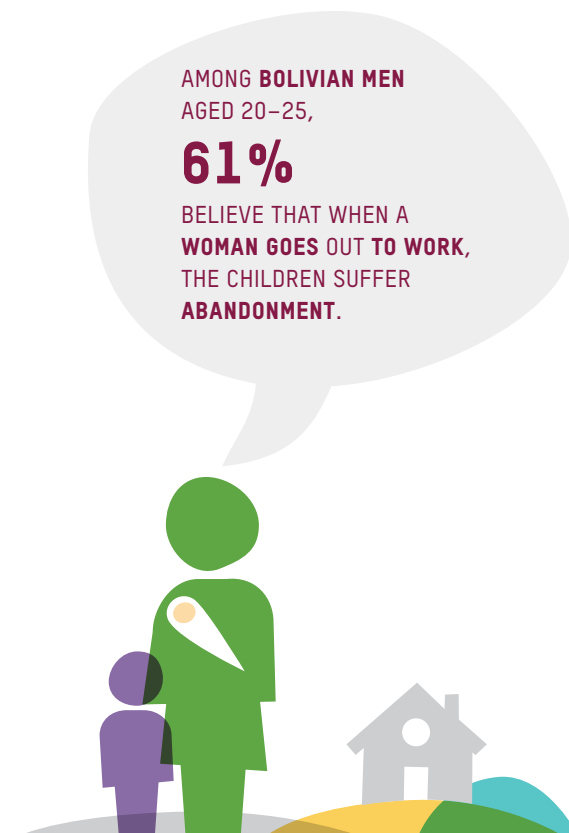
Fear of the threat of death is very high among women and men aged 20–25 in **Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Guatemala, while Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia and Honduras** have the highest percentage of young people who believe that *women endure violence in a relationship with a man because they consider it normal*.

In the 15–25 age group, 86 percent of men and women state that their friends believe it is better *not to get involved in arguments between couples*. Social indifference sets the scene for social impunity. Violence against women within a relationship is considered a private matter to be resolved in private, and this belief is also accepted and replicated in public spaces. **Honduras** (young men aged 15–19) and **Guatemala** (women aged 15–19) have the highest prevalence of young people stating that their friends (both male and female) believe that *no one should interfere in arguments between couples*. Conversely, **Cuba** is the country where the highest percentage of young women and men would consider getting involved if they witnessed a situation of violence.

Of the young people participating in the survey, 77 percent believe that all women should be mothers – a belief which is consistent with a

culture that idealizes motherhood. The idea of compulsory motherhood is most prevalent among young people aged 15–25 in **Cuba** and **Dominican Republic**.

Care duties are widely perceived as the exclusive responsibility of women, whereas men should be the sole providers for the family. Among men, 56 percent of those aged 15–19 state that it is better for the man to be the family breadwinner and for the woman to take care of the children; 46 percent of younger men (aged 15–19) also believe that in the event of firing someone, it is best to keep the man's job, with **Dominican Republic** having the highest percentage of young men who believe this (61 percent) and **Honduras** (62 percent) a close second. In **Bolivia**, 61 percent of men aged 20–25 believe that when a mother works outside the home, the children suffer abandonment.



3.

**THE PATH TO SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:
YOUNG PEOPLE AGAINST MALE VIOLENCE**

The right of women to a life free from violence has been one of the main priorities on the feminist agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean. The figures contained in this report point to enormous challenges, but also identify potential paths for transforming beliefs and behaviours that produce, reproduce and entrench violence against women. It is revealing that the most critical voices belong mainly to young women aged 20–25.

Eight out of ten young women and men believe that violence against women is rooted in the widespread inequalities that exist in the region, while seven out of ten believe that violence is a serious problem that the authorities should do something about.

Young people recognize that violence exists and should be addressed, essentially by the state. The urgent challenge is to raise awareness of the fact that young people themselves can play a key role in transforming the belief systems and gender norms that fuel male violence.

Strategies put in place by feminist and women's organizations in the region are the main drivers for change, through mobilization, political advocacy and networking that is sustainable in the long term.

The media still has a major influence on public debate in the region. The surge in internet and smartphone use has facilitated access to information and entertainment through social

networks, which have themselves become leading platforms for information, communication and mobilization, enabling interaction and the creation of change processes. They have empowered a growing movement of 'cyberfeminists' who use social networks to gain visibility and speak up against male violence, through advocacy and mobilization. Such activism has given rise to campaigns with massive impact on a global level, in the media, among the population as a whole and in the political agenda. In Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.) are the most common source of information for young people, mainly among those aged 20–25.

Protests on the streets are used to denounce violence, with face-to-face political action, while social networks facilitate cyberactivism, which boosts wider connections for social transformation. Both street action and cyberactivism are essential and complementary elements for breaking the mould that perpetuates male violence.

Many young women and men are already building alternative realities. The region must take significant steps towards a culture free from male violence and, in order to achieve this, young people must take the lead, with actions that challenge ways of thinking, change the conservative discourse, drive sustained action and encourage people from all backgrounds to commit to this call for change.

This in no way means that legal consequences in cases of violence against women should not be pursued. The courts and legal systems still have a vital role to play in ending male impunity and the culture of violence. Significant legislative progress has been made in the region, but there are also significant gaps in implementation. But it is not only the legal system and young people who have a responsibility to build alternative belief systems and gender norms to challenge male violence; families, friends, teachers, civil society organizations, opinion writers and journalists also have a key role to play.

Oxfam's commitment is to strengthen our programmes on women's rights in the countries in which we work and to prioritize the transformation of belief systems and gender norms. One of our tools for doing this is the Enough campaign, which continues to strengthen the work of feminist organizations, in collaboration with young women and men, working with influencers, journalists and feminist communicators, and driving an ethical approach to news broadcasting.

Eradicating violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean is possible
Upholding the right of all women and girls to a life free from violence should be an absolute priority in our society and for our governments. We should celebrate the legislative progress that has been made. But we must continue to demand that governments apply all relevant laws, guarantee access to the justice system for women who have experienced violence, ensure that adequate budgets are provided for building capacity within our institutions and among public officers, ensure that women are not re-victimized, and contribute, through new messages and knowledge, to the transformation of belief systems and gender norms that sustain, normalize and create impunity for the violence endured by millions of women in the region. We must urgently look at ourselves and our societies and challenge beliefs and behaviours which have been instilled in us from a very early age.

Some of the actions and recommendations for the various sectors of society contained in this report are:

1. We need to give visibility to **families that are challenging** belief systems and gender norms and engage these mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers as active participants in processes and programmes to transform such belief systems and norms.
2. **Friends, both male and female**, can have a huge influence in building alternative belief systems and gender norms, and rejecting all expressions of violence against women. Action in terms of daily practices, conversations, jokes, gestures, language used or the images we share is highly relevant.
3. **People responsible for education** within the family and in the education system must rethink the language used in communications, in private conversations and in public spaces. We must all scrutinize our behaviours, because this is what **builds our culture**. Education systems can make an enormous contribution to building alternative belief systems and progressive gender norms.
4. It is essential that we continue to promote processes which enable **young women** to grow in confidence and become agents for change in their own lives and in their community. Women and girls must overcome their fears and sense of helplessness. Reappropriating or 'taking back' their own bodies is fundamental to this. Solidarity among women is one of the great challenges in overcoming violence.
5. **Young men** must build alternative models of masculinity and engage in spaces for reflection that allow them to rewrite the prevailing discourse and show that there are

other ways of being men that are not based on subordinating women. Male allies must take responsibility for the transformation of belief systems and gender norms and challenge criticism for going against the machismo culture. A major step towards this is men recognizing their privileged position, as well as the damage that sexism and racism causes not only to women but also to men themselves. It involves challenging the existing complicity between men, and never protecting anyone who uses violence against women.

6. Campaigns and mobilization of civil society

offer great potential for change, as long as they are accompanied by sustained processes. Campaigns should work with people that young men and women can identify with.

7. Journalists and opinion writers working for traditional and alternative media, as well

as freelancers, YouTubers, Facebook users, bloggers, Twitter users, and television and radio presenters all have a central role to play in promoting alternative belief systems and progressive gender norms.

Some immediate actions include:

- providing more spaces for joint work with feminist organizations
- taking on the recommendations set out in this report for addressing violence against women
- signing the Media Compact launched by UN Women in March 2016.

Finally, it is important to add that failure to bring legal proceedings to bear in cases of violence against women encourages repeat behaviours and undermines public confidence in the judicial system. Legal institutions and systems continue to play a leading role in ending impunity and the culture of male violence against women.



Violence is **NOT** the
fate of women.

If we **DO NOTHING**, we become
part of the **PROBLEM**.

Enough to violence
against women.



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