

8-16-1991

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Costa Rica: Report On Sexual & Physical Abuse Suffered By Women." (1991). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/5926>

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Costa Rica: Report On Sexual & Physical Abuse Suffered By Women

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, August 16, 1991

According to official figures cited by the Agence France- Presse, every year 20 Costa Rican women are beaten or shot to death, 20 commit suicide, and more than 500 seek medical attention because of domestic violence. Ines Gonzalez, director of the year-old Costa Rican Women's Delegation, said that in response to the magnitude of violence against women, the Delegation and the Women's Legal Aid office are supporting legislation to double existing minimum penalties for psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Women's Legal Aid office director attorney Yolanda Bertozzi estimates that half of all Costa Rican women have been victims of domestic violence at least once in their lives. The legal aid office was created to monitor compliance with 1989 equal rights legislation focused on women. Gonzalez said women submit an average 50 domestic violence complaints per day. While domestic violence is hardly a new phenomenon, she added, awareness has increased because "now women have the option of coming here and reporting their cases." In contrast, the incidence of crimes such as rape and incest has increased, and most victims are adolescents. Gonzalez said 64% of female adolescents have experienced at least one pregnancy. Of the total pregnancies, 16% were the result of rape or incest. A recent study by the National Council on Infancy indicated that 50% of women suffer sexual and/or physical abuse. The high level of abuse was attributed to "antagonistic social and cultural values" inherent in traditional gender roles assigned women and men. According to the Council, "As long as [such roles] exist,...the tendency is for the subordinated partner to suffer aggression in any relationship (marriage, free union, or courtship)." (Basic data from AFP, 08/10/91)

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