



Women and girls in contexts of armed violence: a case study on Rio de Janeiro

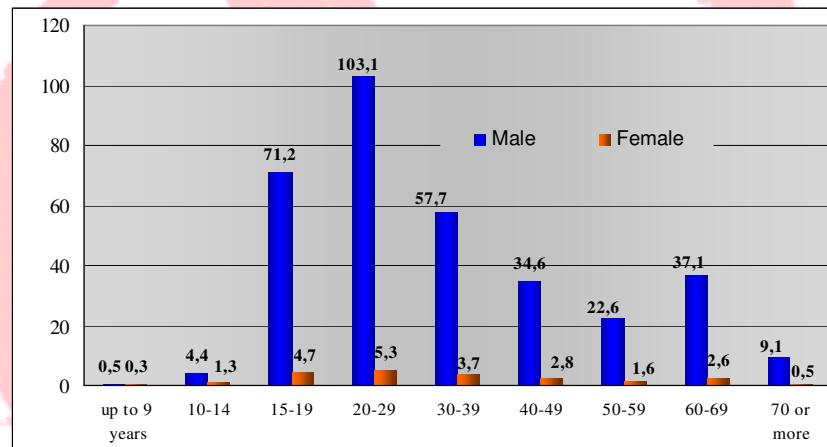
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Gun violence in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil

- Gun death rate in Brazil is among world's highest; Rio about twice national rate at around 45/100,000 residents
- In Rio state there are just 87 men for every 100 women, and life expectancy for men is 12 years less than for women
- Rapid increase since the 80s: growth in drug trade and resulting conflict between police and traffickers, gaping socio-economic inequalities, booming gun industry

Why women?

Young men are the most visible risk group and most often addressed in programs and projects



Lack of information and understanding of how these issues affect women – needed for a more complete and effective gendered response to the problem.

The project

18-month case study supported by Ford Foundation to analyze women's needs and issues in terms of their

- involvement or participation in armed violence;
- the impact this violence has on their lives; and
- formal and informal responses to the problem.

Research-action partnership between Peace Studies Group at Coimbra University and Viva Rio

Active participation in processes such as

- lobbying for new domestic violence law,
- health data collection on DV,
- facilitating women's contributions to disarmament initiatives such as campaign for Disarmament Referendum and voluntary weapons collection campaign.

Approach

- Need to look beyond traditional categories and definitions (war / peace, involvement and victimization)
- Need to gather and interpret data in innovative and creative ways (e.g. beyond health and police data, which give us numbers on direct violence)

Qualitative focus

- Complement literature review and analysis of existing data with emphasis on women and girls' testimonies through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups
- Women and girls in prison; women, men, boys and girls from affected communities, women police officers and other public security experts, girlfriends of drug traffickers, survivors of armed violence, etc.

Involvement / participation

Women and girls direct involvement is far less than men and boys'. However, criminal data shows

- A 28% increase in incarceration of girls (18 and under) in Rio state between 2001 and 2005, more than twice the increase among boys (11%) in the same period
- Increase of 17% in women imprisoned in Rio state between 2004 and 2005.

Most of this growth appears to be a result of drug-related offenses for both groups.

Support roles

Women and girls are also involved in other less visible roles that contribute to armed violence:

- **Transporting drugs or weapons**

“Women have always been used to transport drugs... Because they are draw less suspicion than men. So that’s it, women were there, because they were addicted to drugs, you know, and then they were used to bring the drugs from the asphalt to the favelas.” 53-year old male resident of City of God favela

- **Hiding or holding drugs or weapons**

“Its like this: “I have to keep my man’s gun here in my house – if not he’s going to hide it in some other woman’s house”. And she holds it... she could go far, even get involved [in trafficking] to keep her man.” 53-year old resident of City of God favela

Support roles

- **Bringing information** – for example, when a man involved in armed violence has to be in hiding or when he is imprisoned, a woman is often expected to prove her “faithfulness” to him by taking messages back and forth from the “outside world”
- **Lookouts** – women and girls interviewed told us that men sometimes ask them to keep watch for enemy drug factions or for police
- **Encouraging or incentivating men to use guns**
The girls say, “I want this, I want that,” and the boys don’t have any way to buy it, because they don’t have jobs, so they go out and steal, and the girls don’t care at all [about where it came from]
- 17-year old girl from Mare favela

Why do girls get involved?

- The reasons are similar to boys: seeking recognition / acceptance, money for consumer goods and sometimes drugs, adventure or adrenaline.

We earn a lot of money, a lot of money. I bought all kinds of clothes, cel phones... Its like an addiction, a really good adrenaline and afterwards you have a huge wad of cash in your pocket

- 18-year old female, in juvenile dentention for armed robbery

- Important for boys is also to feel “more a man” and to “get women,” which are not concerns for young women. Because opportunities are so limited, sometimes girls seek access to these through involvement with a man.

Women love drug traffickers! I mean, it even makes them more good looking! Good looking! Powerful! [...] He has a position [in trafficking]. Girls are very undervalued. Girls from favelas can't buy Gang Pixação [brand name clothes] – and a trafficker can!

- 17-year old female, in juvenile detention for trafficking

Why do women get involved?

Women, on the other hand, cited their motivations for involvement as providing basic needs and sustaining families, especially when they are unemployed and heads of household.

So what led me to do this was that I wanted to give the best things to my grandchildren... It was all an illusion, I got involved because of an illusion

- 48-year old woman, in prison for trafficking

Characteristics of involvement / participation

- All the girls and women interviewed said they became interested through their male friends, boyfriends or acquaintances.
- Maternity as a factor that influences changes in values (girls may want to distance themselves from traffickers and violent activities if they become pregnant, saying they don't want this life for their children).
- Women and girls perceptions of firearms are heterogeneous – like men and boys. In our interviews most tended not to like weapons and associate them with fear and death, while some found them fascinating symbols of power, defense and protection.

Men think that guns give them power and status, but women less so. I use a gun, but only as a last resort. That's why we have training, we learn techniques, we don't go around shooting.

- Woman civilian police

Guns death among women in Brazil

While women are killed far less frequently by guns than men (10% of total), guns do represent a serious threat to their safety

Guns are the weapons most used to kill women in Brazil: 42% in 2002

Cities like Florianopolis, Porto Alegre – with high concentrations of guns in circulation – are particularly dangerous for women

Characteristics of direct gun violence

Both women and men are killed more often than injured by guns in Brazil. But non-fatal injuries make up a larger proportion among women than among men.

Most women know their killers: in homicides and attempted homicides with firearms, 53% knew their aggressor and 37% had an intimate relationship.

Firearms used to threaten and intimidate

A rapid assessment via questionnaire of women denouncing domestic abuse in Rio city showed that, where there was a gun in the home:

- 76% said the accused had threatened them;
- 73% said that the presence of a gun stopped them from responding verbally or physically to the violence
- 68% said they wanted to end the relationship but didn't because they feared retaliation with the gun

Impacts on physical and psychological health

W – I gained 25 kilos, I couldn't lose it [...] I took Valium for a year. My daughter was treated by a psychologist for two years. She couldn't hear a gunshot, she couldn't see a police officer... she would start shaking all over.

J – Your daughter. And your son, how did he react?

W – My boy was so angry, he wanted to kill them too.

- Mother of victim of gun violence

Economic impacts

- Loss of income as a result of death
- Cost of treatment
- Other members of the family who stop working to care for the person shot or because of trauma

Some women stop working in order to fight for justice

“Yes, [...] you can either fight for justice or you can go to work. So it gets complicated. Many of us don’t work.”

- Sister of victim of gun violence

Social impacts

- Problems within the family, separation
[After the death of a loved one] *the man decides he wants to start over and goes out with his friends, "I don't want to go home, because my wife is a mess, she just cries all the time, she doesn't want to go out, we don't have sex anymore.*
-Mother of victim of gun violence
- Difficulties continuing with work or studies
- In some cases, having to prove that the victim was not a criminal
You know, it was a question of honor for us to prove that they were honest workers... Thank God, we were able to prove that they [weren't criminals] we didn't let them [the police] lie.
- Mother of victim of gun violence

Lessons learned

- Gun violence is transversal to different contexts: war, post war and formal peace. Full implementation of SC Resolution 1325 but should also be seen as applicable to non-war contexts.
- Women working on violence in Brazil tend to fall into two categories, either victims (or indirect victims) of armed violence or experts on violence against women. Basic information to demonstrate links can facilitate their participation in these processes, helps clarify that they too have expertise and inputs.
- The new gun laws in Brazil did not include references to gender or special concerns for women. However, with some advocacy work, proposed domestic violence laws included a reference to removing guns from offenders.
- If the links between gun violence and violence against women are also made clear to health professionals and law enforcement officials, this also facilitates the development of strategies to incorporate additional safety measures. For example, search and apprehend guns in cases of domestic violence.

Obrigada!

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