

# Assessing the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies in Nicaragua between 1995 and 2015

## GRANT DETAILS

**PROJECT:** Candies in Hell +20: A mixed-methods study on the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies in León, Nicaragua

**ORGANISATION:** The Global Women's Institute, George Washington University

**PROJECT LOCATION:** León, Nicaragua



The Sexual Violence Research Initiative is hosted by the South African Medical Research Council



The Global Women's Institute  
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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## VIOLENCE IN NICARAGUA

In 1995, the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in León, Umea University in Sweden and Nicaraguan women's rights activists conducted the first prevalence study on violence against women and girls in Central America, titled "Candies in Hell".<sup>1</sup> The research team interviewed 488 women in León, Nicaragua. Results showed that one in two women had been beaten or raped by a partner and one in four had experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the interview.

The study findings were widely circulated and the research team engaged with policy-makers, health workers and community activists across Nicaragua. As a result of the study, the Nicaraguan government passed a landmark reform to the Nicaraguan Penal Code that criminalised domestic violence and increased support for survivors of violence. Other strategies implemented between 1995 and 2015 to reduce the prevalence of violence included introducing women's police stations and women's crisis centres, running awareness campaigns and passing the Comprehensive Law on Violence against Women in 2013.

## MEASURING PROGRESS

In 2016, the Global Women's Institute, the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in León and Intercambios, a local non-profit organisation, conducted a follow-up study using a similar sampling frame, questionnaire and methods to those used in the 1995 study. This follow-up study, "Candies in Hell +20", aimed to determine whether a combination of social activism, policy and legal reforms can improve women's safety and well-being within a generation.

Fieldworkers conducted 1 400 interviews with women aged 15-64 in León. They also

conducted interviews and focus groups with communities, service providers, government officials and women's rights activists in León and Managua.

## CHANGES IN LEVELS OF VIOLENCE OVER 20 YEARS

In comparing the results of the two studies, the research team found a significant reduction in the lifetime and 12-month prevalence of intimate partner violence experienced by women. Results from the interviews suggest that social norms have changed and that intimate partner violence is less acceptable among individuals, communities and civil society. The findings indicate that a combination of improved legislation, national programmes and social communication campaigns has contributed to the changes.

## KEY FINDING

**Violence against women and girls can be prevented and substantially decreased over a generation through a coordinated effort to increase women's access to justice, comprehensive services for survivors and greater awareness of rights.**

## POTENTIAL POLICY IMPACT

The findings are being widely disseminated among local, national and international stakeholders to promote evidence-based policy changes that prevent violence against women and girls in Nicaragua. New interventions and research activities will use the findings of the 2016 study to continue to reduce violence against women and girls. ■

<sup>1</sup> Ellsberg, M., Penā, R., Herrera, A., Liljestrand, J. & Winkvist, A. 2000. Candies in hell: Women's experiences of violence in Nicaragua. *Social Science & Medicine*. 51(11): 1595-1610. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11072881> [2017, May 26].