Reporting and Registering Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls in
Brazil and Colombia:
An Analytical Model

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Abstract

Since the onset of COVID-19 and its rapid spread throughout the globe, several actors and international players have expressed deep concerns about the effects of the pandemic on domestic violence. Although this problem has triggered commitment and cooperation between key actors in the international community to find concrete and durable solutions to address gender-based violence (GBV), from a data- driven solution perspective decisive actions remain to be. Gender data gaps mapped and identified by relevant organizations across key areas of development have shown that the availability, quality, and use of gender data, especially data on violence against women and girls (VAWG) need to be urgently addressed and resolved. Under this

scenario, **Unidas Network** and **Data-Pop Alliance** joined forces to create an analytical model that estimates the probability of registering domestic violence in the localities of Bogotá and the *subprefeituras* of São Paulo, given the profile of women and girls who report and considering the most relevant contextual (risk) factors. In light of the high rates of underreporting across the globe, and the urgent need of having VaWG quality data that informs policy-making, the project sought to answer the question: **what are the factors that significantly impact the registering and reporting of VaWG in the domestic setting (, including those resulting from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic)?**

The report's key findings show that for the two cities, there is a significant surge in hotline calls and a decrease in police reports (in-person registries). These changes in behavior vary according to the confinement measures and quarantine periods that were experienced in each city. Regarding measuring the impact of the most relevant risk factors on reported prevalence, in São Paulo, women between 15 and 49 years old are those more likely to report domestic violence, whereas in Bogotá these are women between 20 and 40 years old. Considering marital status, São Paulo shows that women in stable unions or in some sort of romantic involvement (i.e. that could be a relationship or engagement) are more likely to report, whilst in Bogotá, single, separated and widowed women are the most likely to report. Concerning changes in mobility, throughout 2020, in Bogotá it is possible to observe that the more mobility decreased in commercial and work areas, the more the number of domestic violence reports also decreased.

Throughout the project, several data-related challenges were faced, which limited its scope. As a result, at the end of the report, we enlisted eight recommendations (grouped in four main areas) for government's data collection agencies and policy-makers alike, the areas are: 1) Quality of Data; 2) Access to Data; 3) Coverage and Data Disaggregation; and 4) Data Governance. Based on these recommendations, we expect to fulfil the initial aim of this project, which was to better understand and provide heightened visibility to the VAWG phenomenon, while highlighting the gaps and key issues on the gender data landscape in Latin-America. We hope that this data driven approach helps address the most salient VaWG issues so that a better and safer

environment for women can be constructed upon evidence-based policies and programmes.

I.   Introduction

1.1   Violence Against Women and Girls: What Does the Data Say?

Despite the growing consciousness and progress made towards achieving gender equality and the protection of women to live lives free of violence, the statistics behind Violence against Women and Girls (VaWG) are ever more alarming. Globally, around 30% of women have been subject to intimate partner violence or sexual violence (UN Women, 2020a). One of the most astounding facts about this situation is that a large share of abuses and murders are perpetrated by intimate partners or family members. Specifically, about 27% of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner and 38% of women's murders worldwide are estimated to be perpetrated by an intimate partner (WHO, 2013). Due to the startling figures and vast consequences of this public health and human rights crisis, VaWG has become one of the biggest feminist issues human rights groups are fighting to erradicate.

Unfortunately, the situation is even more troubling in Latin America, a region that holds the highest rate of sexual violence in the world by non-partners and the second-highest rate of violence by partners or ex-partners (UNDP, 2017). The region also presents a devastating magnitude in femicide rates with 4,640 cases of femicide recorded by the Gender Equality Observatory during 2019 in 24 countries of the region (ECLAC, 2020a). This situation prevails despite there being an advancement in the typification of violence against women and femicide in normatives at the national level in Latin America. In the region, Colombia and Brazil stand out as having one of the most advanced legislative frameworks for combating domestic and intrafamilial violence, as well as femicide. However, the staggering presence of cases of violence against women and girls persists and there continues to be an inadequate implementation of prevention and mitigation strategies with policies being highly unarticulated between

institutions, and even remaining unknown to victims (Instituto Igarapé, 2018).

Only in 2018, Brazil registered 263,067 domestic violence injuries and 1,206 cases of femicide, establishing it as the country with the highest total femicide rate and fourth per 1,000 habitants in the region (Phillips, 2019). Furthermore, this situation of violence is increasingly present against black women in the country not only through the higher rates of violence they experience but also in the obstacles they face in terms of accessing legal resources when compared to white women (Gonçalves, 2017). On the other hand, according to the Colombian National Institute of Legal Medicine, during the year 2019, 1,001 women in the country were murdered and in 4 out of every 10 of these cases the crime was executed by someone they knew. Moreover, 39.2% of the times, the murder took place in the victim's household. Additionally, it is estimated that 7 out of 10 cases of intrafamilial violence in Colombia are carried out by an intimate-partner (44.5%) or an ex intimate-partner (32.5%) (UN Women, 2020b). Compounding this phenomenon is the decades-long armed conflict that the country has lived through and that has disproportionately affected women whose bodies have been utilized as weapons of war (Andrade, 2017).

1.2   The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Under these already worrisome scenarios, an additional burden arises: the impact of the COVID-19 health emergency on women. This includes but is not limited to the overburden of household tasks, social isolation, restricted autonomy in their reproductive and sexual health, lack of available services, economic shocks that may lead to financial dependence, among others (Chaparro and Alfonso, 2020). For example, the increased impact of the pandemic on women has led the ECLAC to assert that women's labor participation rates will experience a backslide of approximately 10 years (CEPAL, 2021). Additionally, it is estimated that over 70% of the global health workforce are women (UNFPA, 2020). Specifically, in Brazil and Colombia women represent 75.7% and 78.3% of the healthforce, respectively, and as such are overrepresented in the group of frontline health workers that face higher risk of COVID-19 infection (CEPAL, 2021).

Nonetheless, the effects of the pandemic are not limited to these domains; the VaWG phenomenon has also received a high impact. Since the outbreak and latter declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization in early March 2020, international agencies, researchers and grassroot women's organizations have expressed deep concerns regarding the potential increase of VaWG (UNTF, 2020). Time has shown that these concerns were not misplaced as the demand for certain emergency services has unmistakably escalated throughout different countries in comparison to periods before the onset of the pandemic.

A main driver of these increases certainly centers around the fact that with the application of stay-at-home orders worldwide, women and girls have been tragically forced to confinement with their potential aggressors at home. Perpetrators were left to exert further control over their victims, restricting them access to monetary resources, executing greater surveillance of their daily activities and cutting them off from whatever formal or informal networks of support they had left at their disposal. UN Women and other international organizations have highlighted how "mobility restrictions are expected to increase women's vulnerability to abuse and their need for protection services" (UN Women, *et.al*, 2020). Nonetheless, due to the suspension or reduction of key social protection services —both for resource diversion to attend to other issues of the pandemic or as result of mobility and social distancing procedures— women's search for support, protection and emergency alternatives was noticeably jeopardized (Marques *et al*., 2020). In this context, the United Nations Population Fund (2020) has estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic will likely reduce by one-third the advancements made towards ending gender-based violence.

II.   Project Presentation: A Data-driven Approach

In light of this context, this project seeks to address the problematic of Violence against Women and Girls in the domestic setting for the case studies of São Paulo and Bogotá. The importance of using data to map the incidence of phenomena such as VaWG is undeniable but the lack of good evidence and regularly collected data, that is reliable, representative, free of biases, and holds a good level of coverage, complexity, and comparability (Buvinic, Furst-

Nichols, and Koolwal, 2014), is a long-established problem in the VaWG agenda (Data2x, n.d.). It is therefore paramount to leverage available gender-disaggregated data that can give us insight into how women experience violence and how these experiences have been affected by the pandemic.

Nevertheless, data on gender-based violence is largely incomplete and filled with gaps. The main issue is the large amount of underreporting in these cases. According to some authors, records of VaWG represent only the "tip of the iceberg", as most of GBV is typically not reported. Data can therefore fail to reflect the nuances and magnitude of the phenomenon, and thus, women who do not report incidents of violence (via a call, a legal complaint, or by seeking institutional support) may end up being unreached by services given that policies and programs are often designed based on characteristics of the group of individuals who do report violence.

Against this backdrop, the Unidas women's network (an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office) decided to join forces with Data-Pop Alliance to find a data-driven solution to the problem. The objective was not only to provide a better grasp of the problem than was previously held through traditionally collected data (i.e. national surveys and/or administrative records), but to come up with an innovative approach that offered actionable insights to mitigate and reduce VaWG, particularly in the domestic setting. To achieve this goal, the organizations behind the project decided to develop an analytical model that uses traditional and non-traditional data to identify the multidimensional 'capabilities' to report and register domestic VaWG at the locality level in Bogotá and the *subprefeitura* level in São Paulo.

By carrying out this research and answering questions like who reports, and what are the factors that enable reporting and registering domestic violence, the study identified and analyzed COVID-19-related and other factors (personal, relational, community, institutional and transversal) associated with the capability to report and register domestic VaWG. It is important to point out that the term "capabilities" is understood under the definition provided by Amartya Sen in his homonymous "Capability Approach" theory where it is defined as the substantive freedoms or opportunities needed for a person to attain his or her functionings, that is, his or her achievements. This means that to develop these functionalities (e.g. seek and

obtain help as a victim), the person depends on having access to the contextual conditions that are conducive to facilitating the reporting process.

III. Methodology

The methodology adopted for the creation of this project is based on a mixed-methods approach with two main components. First is the quantitative component, under which an analytical model was developed through a two-stage process to identify the factors that influenced the probability that a woman or girl who experienced domestic violence would report the case. In stage one of the process, the team measured the 'reported prevalence' of the violence using administrative databases. The goal here was to gain a perspective of the total number of reported cases in each city, as well as by locality (Bogotá) and *subprefeitura* (São Paulo), and in so doing, paving the way for a comparative analysis of areas with a higher or lower number of reports (not to be equated with the actual prevalence of VaWG). The second stage involved measuring the relationship between factors associated with VaWG and underreporting to assess the influence of contextual and personal features on the reported prevalence (i.e. capability to report) estimated in the first stage. Non-traditional data sets including Google mobility reports (that register human movement), as well as traditional databases (national surveys), were used in the second stage of this process to further detail information about the risk factors associated with the capability to report and register domestic violence.

The other main component of this mixed-method approach was the qualitative component. It consisted of a literature review of 147 articles in English, Spanish and Portuguese to identify the risk factors that may increase a women's vulnerability to suffering domestic abuse. The research team based its mapping of the factors on the Ecological Model Approach, framing and classifying the identified factors within six categories of analysis: personal, relational, community, institutional, transversal, and COVID-19 related (see Figure 1). The Ecological model was selected as the preferred framework given that it provided a holistic approach to understanding the etiology of VaWG through an integrated, multifaceted process. Of the identified factors, several were also established as barriers to

reporting and registering, such as the fear of being re-victimized —in general, shame and stigma—, distrust of authorities, financial co-dependence on the abusive partner, lack of awareness and/or access to support services, mobility restrictions, the digital divide, and cultural beliefs (including the normalization of violence). Subsequently, 12 semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants from academia, government, and civil society organizations both in Colombia and Brazil to validate the risk factors outlined in the literature review. The interviews provided insights with regards to the presence and relative importance of the factors in the context of each city; how the issue of violence against women is being addressed by the different actors in the respective societies; and the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on service provision for victims of VaWG in each context.

Figure 1. VaWG risk factors exacerbating women's vulnerability
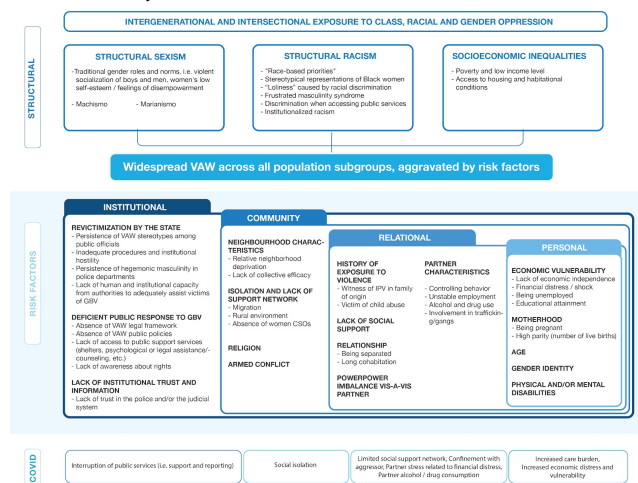
Finally, it is important to note that both components of the project were developed under the supervision of an advisory Council for the Orientation of Development and Ethics (CODE), which was composed of 12 experts from different sectors (civil society, government, academia) in each city. The participation on the council was voluntarily and in it the members offered recommendations on ethical principles of investigation and data management and participated in three virtual group sessions that took place throughout the six months of the project. During each session, the research team presented the progress of the project and received feedback regarding ethical, gender, and data considerations.

IV. Stage 1: Key Results Reported prevalence of VaWG

For **São Paulo,** the prevalence reported through different databases (total number of complaints, aggregated per month) evidenced a rather complex scenario in the city (see **Graph 1**). On the one hand, the police emergency line *'Line 1-9-0'* presented the most salient trend with an 18% increase in the number of received calls between 2019 and 2020[1]. On the other hand, the reports on *'rape (and rape of vulnerable), personal injury and threat'* registered in the *Secretaria de Segurança Pública do Estado de São Paulo* (Secretariat of Public Security of the State of São Paulo in English) database showed the opposite trend —at least in the short term— with a stark decrease in the number of complaints: registers decreased by 27%, from March to July, between 2019 and 2020[2]. It is noteworthy to highlight that when comparing January and February for both years, the period prior to the onset of the pandemic, these records presented a similar behavior (less than 1% variation), hinting at a disrupting effect of the COVID-19 crisis on the reported prevalence of this type of records.

Nonetheless, when other reported prevalence data sources were analyzed, results were more ambiguous. For example, no clear trend was evident for either the '*homicide of women*' or the *'femicides'* records. Additionally, the '*emergency protective orders*' database from São Paulo's Court of Justice presented an upward trend in reports throughout 2019 that was interrupted by a decrease in the number of records from January to April 2020. When comparing both years on a monthly basis to account for potential seasonality, only April and May presented a lower reported prevalence in 2020 than in 2019 (-22.7% and -5.9% respectively). This result potentially points to a fleeting impact of the COVID-19 related measures on the reporting behavior of this type of incidents, but data is too scarce to elucidate any sound takeaway[3].

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[1] Data available and compared between March and November of each year.
[2] Data available and compared between March and November of each year.
[3] Data available from January 2019 until September 2020. Impact after September 2020 could not be assessed.

Graph 1. *[São Paulo] Reported prevalence through different data sources (total number of records from different databases).*
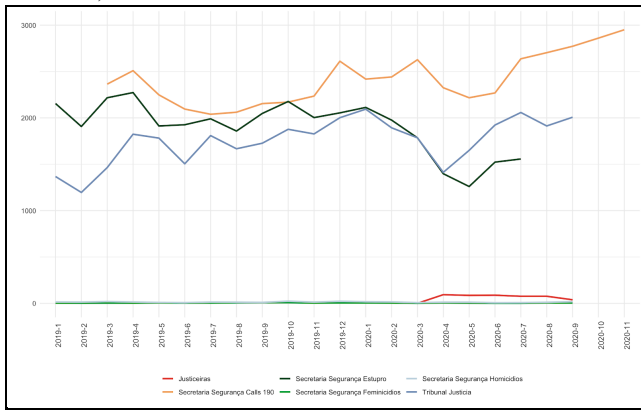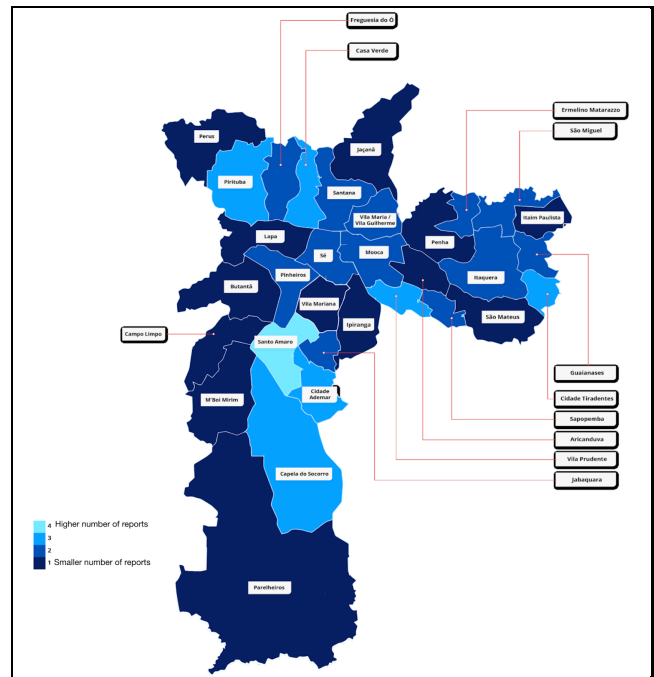

Source: *Prepared by the authors with data from Justiceiras; Secretaria de Segurança Pública do Estado de São Paulo and Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo*
Notes: Temporal granularity: Monthly; Spatial granularity: locality.

Disaggregated reported prevalence also provided unique insights into the trends of VaWG in the city. Heatmap 1 illustrates the reported prevalence by locality at week 13 in 2020, which corresponds to the beginning of the social distancing period in São Paulo. Interestingly, Santo Amaro —the locality with the highest reported prevalence— is located between Campo Limpo and Vila Mariana, the two lowest reported prevalence rates of the city. This brings to the fore questions on the differential capabilities that influence and determine the level of reporting in each locality.

Heatmap 1. *[São Paulo] Heatmap of the reported prevalence rate by locality (2020, week 13, beginning of the lockdown period)*

Source: *Prepared by the authors with data from Justiceiras; Secretaria de Segurança Pública do Estado de São Paulo and Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo*

In contrast with the complex scenario presented by the different data sources for the city of São Paulo, **Bogotá** exhibited more straightforward trends in VaWG reported prevalence. As shown in **Graph 3**, registers from the 24-hour local helpline *'Purple Line' (Línea Púrpura[4])* — aggregated by week— increased during the beginning of the lockdown in the city (March 20th) and maintained a similar trend throughout the year. *Línea 155* (the national helpline) showed the same pattern.

Conversely, when performing the same analysis on the *'National Police database'* it can be seen that the number of registers decreased in the same period. This behaviour is potentially explained due to both the impossibility of leaving the household to report a crime given social distancing measures and the reduction of attention services at police stations. The rest of the databases used for Bogotá portrayed a more ambiguous behavior, decreasing in the last trimester of 2019, and remaining stable throughout 2020 up until a surge in reports after June-July.

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[4] Until September 2020

Graph 3. [Bogotá] Reported prevalence through different data sources (total number of records from different databases)
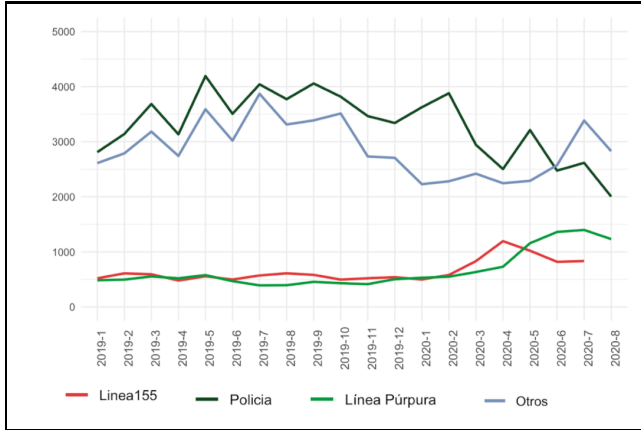
Notes: Temporal granularity: Monthly; Spatial granularity: Locality

As with the previous heatmap, **Heatmap 2** depicts the reported prevalence by locality in Bogotá at week 13 in 2020. It was during this week that the lockdown period came into effect and lasted until August 31st (Health Intervention Tracking for COVID-19, 2020.)

Heatmap 2. [Bogotá] Heatmap of the reported prevalence rate by locality (2020, week 13, start of the confinement period)
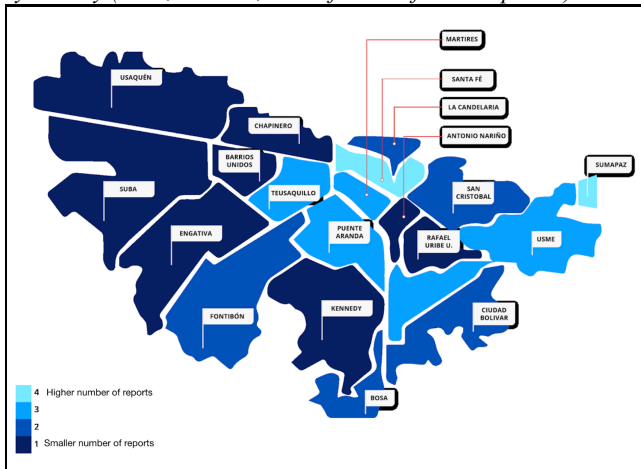
IV. Stage 2: Measuring the impacts of risk factors by city

The reported prevalence is the result of the capabilities enabled by the State and other contextual factors that facilitate (or hinder) a victim's possibility of reporting violence. These capabilities are constituted by various risk factors of institutional, community, relational, or personal nature, and their incidence varies in time and space. In terms of analyzing the impact that risk factors have on reporting capabilities, three important caveats are worth highlighting. Firstly, risk factors are analyzed under the assumption that violence occurs equally among all subgroups of the population. Secondly, the impact of the different factors —due to data limitations and availability— is discussed in terms of statistical significance rather than in terms of cause-effect. Lastly, the **probability** of reporting, conditioned to the victim's characteristics, is based on the reported prevalence the project had at its disposal and therefore results are not exhaustive nor representative of the entire population.

São Paulo

For the case of São Paulo, Graph 3 illustrates the magnitude of the impact on reported prevalence of the available and statistically significant risk factors, grouped by category. Among groups of significant risk factors, the most salient category was personal factors with numerous indicators weighing more than double than any of the other individual risk factors. For the communal and transversal categories, a wide-ranging number of factors had an impact, but with a much lower degree of incidence than the personal factors. As for COVID-19, two related factors appear to influence the reporting capabilities: the number of COVID-19 cases and Mobility. Institutional factors were also included but none of them turned out to be statistically significant.

Graph 3. *[São Paulo] Impact of the risk factors on the reported prevalence, by category (total São Paulo)*
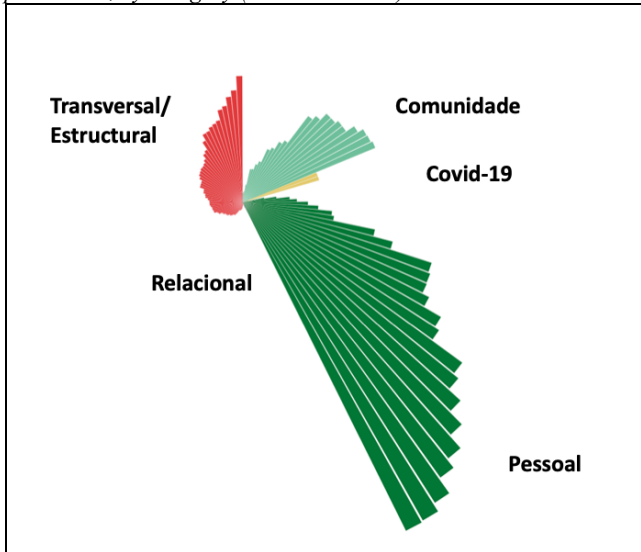
Source: Prepared by the authors

Specifically regarding personal factors, the most relevant variables were *'age'* and *'race'*. Within the risk factor *'race'* the likelihood of reporting conditional to race was very similar between white and black women. According to the Brazilian Public Security Forum/Datafolha (*Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*/*Datafolha*) (De Lima and Bueno, 2020), black and white women share very similar figures in terms of domestic violence suffered but black women disproportionately suffer more violence (+ 8.3%) on the streets than white women. However, Graph 4 shows a slightly different trend on the reporting capabilities disaggregated by *'race'*. Contrasting the reporting probability conditional to '*white women*', for localities with high reported prevalence (i.e. Capela do Socorro), the probability to report for '*black women*' is higher; while in localities with low reported prevalence (i.e. Sé), the probability to report for black women is lower**.**

**Graph 4.** *[São Paulo] Number of records per locality, disaggregated by race*
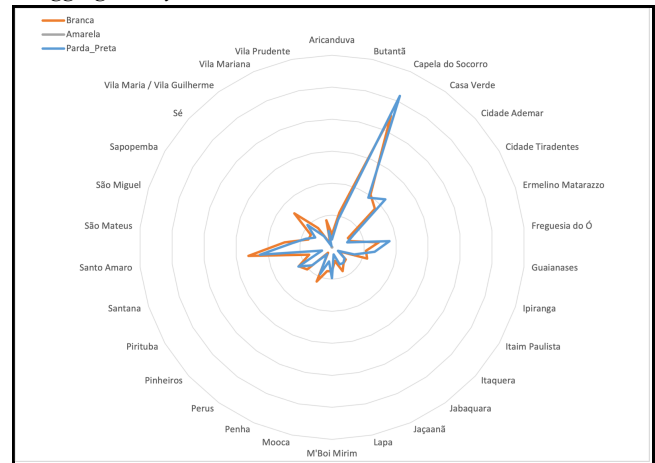
Source: Prepared by the authors

Bogotá

For the case of Bogotá, Graph 5 portrays a different distribution of the available and statistically significant risk factors, grouped by category. The personal risk factors category, as is the case with São Paulo, encompasses the most significant variables. However, it should be noted that in the case of Bogotá, the communal, transversal, and relational categories present similar levels of magnitude. Albeit, the two latter categories present considerably fewer factors. Another difference between the cities is that whilst no significant institutional factor was found for São Paulo (and only two for the COVID-19 related category), one significant institutional factor is recorded for Bogotá and none for the COVID-19 related category.

Graph 5. *[Bogotá] Impact of the risk factors on the reported prevalence, by category (total Bogotá)*
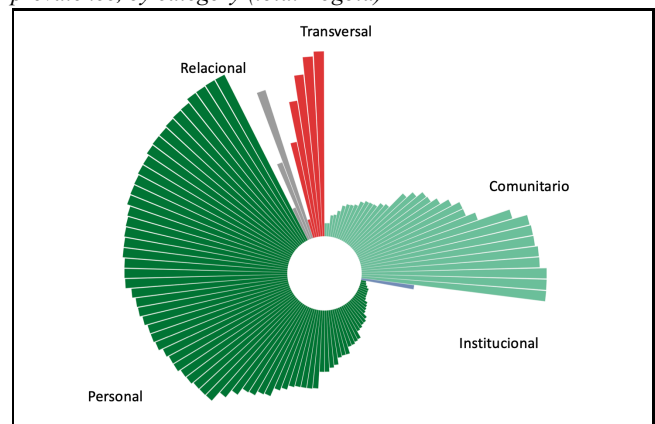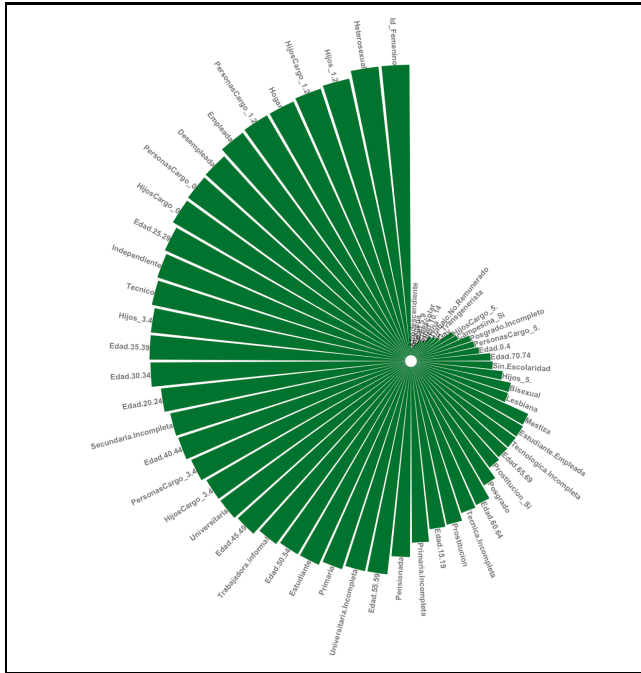

Source: Prepared by the authors

In terms of **personal** factors, since the *Simisional* database used for the model was very thorough, a wide range of risk factors were available and turned out to be significant. The most outstanding risk factors are *'female'*, *'heterosexual'* and *'having one or two children'* (see **Graph 6**).

Graph 6. *[Bogotá] Impact of the risk factors on the reported prevalence, personal factors (total Bogotá)*

Source: Prepared by the authors

For Bogotá, it can be said that since the beginning of the lockdown period, lower mobility in commercial and work areas corresponds to lower number of reports/complaints. Analogously, when mobility increased in residential areas, the number of registrations increased. The linear relationship for Bogotá is stronger than São Paulo when analyzed per type of area, despite 'Mobility' not being a significant risk factor in the reporting capabilities of the city as a whole.

Figure 2. *Mobility changes in São Paulo and Bogotá (type of place vs. number of records)*
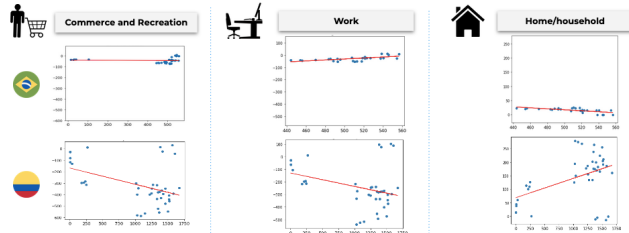
V. The Path that Lies Ahead: Public Policy Recommendations

Making violence visible depends to a large extent on the quality and accessibility of data. As a result of the research experience developing this analytical model, a specific set of public policy recommendations on data for the analysis, assessment and prevention of VaWG in Bogotá and São Paulo are outlined in this section. These recommendations are directed to public administration offices in both countries, particularly those responsible for collecting data on GBV, such as the Secretariat of Public Security of the State of São Paulo, the Brazilian Statistics and Geographics Institute (IBGE), the National Police of Colombia (in charge of SIEDCO statistical information system), and the Secretariat of Women in Bogotá.

The recommendations fall into four categories: *i) on data access*; *ii)* coverage and data disaggregation; *iii)* quality of data, and *iv)* data governance (see Table 2). The suggestions contained in these categories are needed for the eradication of and attention to VaWG given that the optimal data will allow for:

- Planning, monitoring, and evaluation of government programs;
- Identification of geographic regions where state capacities must be improved;
- Determining populations at greater risk;
- Visibilization of population diversity that will open the door for the creation of taylored and appropriately targeted response measures.

Table 2. *Four key areas of recommendations for improving the gender data landscape*

1. Access to data	2. Coverage and data disaggregation
3. Quality of the data	4. Data governance

1. On Data Access

In addition to legal instruments and government programs, well-structured data is needed to combat violence. Colombia and Brazil require an integrated approach to reinforce the legal framework and monitor public policies' effectiveness. In this sense, as necessary as data collection is, so is its availability.

Data access procedures should be made straightforward and of public knowledge, and its use by civil society and civil organizations should be encouraged. In brief, access to structured and quality open data needs to be increased to promote public policy analysis and the general use of these data by non-specialized users.

2. Coverage and Data Disaggregation

One of the main challenges of this analytical model was data disaggregation, so part of this project's recommendations for Bogotá and São Paulo's local governments is to increase the spatial and temporal granularity (including rural areas) in an aggregated manner safeguarding the safety of the victims involved.

Another requirement is the inclusion of additional sociodemographic indicators, especially disaggregated by gender, and the streamlining of data collection parameters between institutions. To achieve the above-stated objective, it is necessary to promote coordinated training and capacity building in data collection for a standardized understanding of the phenomena.

3. Quality of Data

The quality of data is vital for identifying populations at greater risk and to adequately address violence. In this sense, **having a better conceptualization of the different types of gender-based violence and its modalities** would allow for a better diagnosis of the phenomenon's behavior by increasing the comparability of different databases. Conceptual disparity between databases tends to invisibilize the violence that does not fit in the official interpretations (legal or statistical) of what is or is not considered as violence against women (Casique Rodriguez, 2017). Therefore, a standardization or conceptual equivalence guide is required so that the different bases complement and enhance each other.

Besides, and whenever possible, the addition of identifiers is required so as to measure the incidence of victims who use more than one government service and avoid duplicity. Once again, it is essential to remember that people's safety and data protection must be at the core of this strategy.

4. Data Governance

Finally, the organizing principle of all recommendations is data governance, which will allow:

1. Articulation and interoperability of data between public institutions and civil society organizations.
2. The establishment of ethical and data privacy guidelines (i.e. collection, sharing, use, interpretation, etc.) while working with VaWG data.
3. The promotion of a culture of evidence used to inform public policies for VaWG (e.g. the creation of better strategies for attention routes based on the incidence of user-victims per service).

Overall, the advancement of a data culture is required —nationally and regionally—, which in itself entails the creation of a National Open Data Strategy with a gender perspective that prioritizes data collection in rural areas of the city. In this respect, having a data monitor can bridge users and government institutions to establish collaboration and feedback regarding data accessibility and quality.

VI. Final Remarks

The team at Unidas and Data-Pop Alliance produced this executive summary to inform COVID-19 response efforts, preparedness measures for future crises, and actions to combat VaWG and support survivors more broadly. It further seeks to contribute to the fight for ending gender-based violence in general and emphasize a vision of a world where women are allowed to feel safe in their own homes, as well as empowered and free to experience every aspect of their lives without being harmed in any way, safeguarded by greater capabilities to be and live. We must continue to work from each trench and to collaborate across sectors to build a better present and future for all women.

Acknowledgements

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