

# Domestic Violence

## Women's Way Out

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## PREFACE

We already know that violence against women and girls is a health and human rights problem of staggering proportions. We know, for example, that at least one of every five women worldwide will have been abused physically or sexually at some point in her life. We know that for women of childbearing age, violence has been estimated to be as serious a cause of death and disability as cancer. Sadly, we also know that domestic violence—violence perpetrated by a current or former partner—is the most common form of violence that women suffer. And, regrettably, research confirms that the situation in our Region of the Americas is no different.

The Pan American Health Organization has spearheaded several efforts designed to understand the problem and measure its magnitude, as well as to advocate the development of strategies, policies, and initiatives to combat domestic violence. This protocol was developed to identify the services, organizations, and persons to which battered women turn. It has been applied in all seven Central American countries and in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, with enlightening results. It has yielded critical information on how women who are victims of domestic violence go about seeking help—a critical first step in improving existing services and creating new needed ones. We now offer the English version of the protocol, so it can be put to good use in our Region's English-speaking countries. We hope that it will become an effective weapon in the fight against domestic violence, and, as such, help eliminate one of the most egregious manifestations of gender inequality.

George A. O. Alleyne  
Director

## INTRODUCTION

The Regional Program on Women, Health, and Development (HDW) of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), with support from Norway and Sweden coordinated the development of the research protocol *Domestic Violence: Women's Way Out*, in the framework of the HDW Program's subregional project *Strengthening and Organization of Women and Coordinated Action between the State and Civil Society at the Local Level to Prevent and Address Family Violence*.

The specific issue of family violence is a priority area of action for the Program. *Domestic Violence: Women's Way Out* is intended to draw attention to violence against women and girls as a priority problem and to identify resources that can help to address it. The situation analysis of domestic violence reveals the complexity of the problem and shows that solving it will require coordinated intersectoral policies and action, with the participation of both the State and civil society.

This research protocol is the result of the cumulative work and commitment of numerous investigators, activists, and officials to address violence against women and improve the services available for women affected by it.

The development of the protocol began with the drafting and review of a preliminary version by the team of investigators in the course of three workshops. The final protocol was applied in 15 communities in 10 countries, 7 in Central America and 3 in the Andean area, and it was tailored to each country's conditions. Through field interviews, qualitative data were collected from a wide range of women, service providers, and community members, representing groups of varying age, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, and marital status.

As do other organizations, PAHO considers the problem of family violence within a social context. All governmental and nongovernmental institutions—in the social, professional, political, judicial, law enforcement, and civil society spheres—that seek to promote equity between men and women need to understand the path followed by women who are affected by family violence in order to provide the best possible response to their situation.

It is our hope that this protocol will be an effective instrument of support in the effort to prevent and control violence in society, and especially violence against women and children.