

Violence against Women and Girls, a Challenge to Address in the Tourism Industry

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Abstract: *This article examines the multifaceted issue of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on how it manifests within the global tourism industry. It explores the interplay between gender-based violence, systemic inequality, and the tourism economy, including cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, and labor discrimination. Drawing attention to case studies from Mexico and referencing international frameworks, the paper argues for coordinated public, private, and institutional efforts to address and eliminate such violence. Ultimately, it advocates for inclusive tourism policies that promote gender equity, safety, and sustainable development.*

Keywords: Gender-based violence, tourism industry, women's rights, human trafficking, Discrimination

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the use of social media in people's daily lives has become an essential tool, as it allows them to address different aspects of life, such as work, economic, health, and environmental issues, among others. It also allows us to understand the social order and provides humans with a safe and supportive space where they can integrate and adapt to social processes and practices.

However, the inappropriate use of social media has generated a new landscape called cyberbullying. According to UNICEF (2024), cyberbullying is defined as intimidation through digital technologies. It can occur on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms, and mobile phones. It is a repeated behavior that seeks to frighten, anger, or humiliate others. Examples include spreading lies or posting embarrassing photos of someone on social media, sending hurtful messages or threats through messaging platforms, and impersonation, that is, impersonating someone else and sending aggressive messages in that person's name.

In recent years, cyberbullying has been closely linked to violence against women and girls, which constitutes a serious public health problem with a marked social and economic impact, as well as a violation of the human rights of this group of people. Thirty percent of women have been victims of some type of abuse by another person at some point in their lives (World Health Organization, 2021). A significant number of these violent acts are committed by their partner or ex-partner. There are multiple forms of violence against women, related to the lack of equality, opportunities, and rights, wage discrimination, and, in some cases, the State's failure to guarantee equal access to power.

Violence against women and girls affects their reproductive capacity, as well as their physical and psychological health, especially when they are victims at an early age. It generates behavioral patterns that force them to submit to situations similar to those they experienced in their childhood and

adolescence. Many women are victims of homicide and murder, while others even commit suicide to escape the violent situation they live in (Huisman, 1996). Abuse and aggression against women by their partners has increased in the last three years. The implications of this social phenomenon have increased dramatically in recent decades due to the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

The purpose of the following research paper is to analyze violence against women and girls, how this activity has been normalized in society and has been present throughout history; and to establish why, despite the efforts of various organizations, it is on the rise worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) states unequivocally that violence against women is on the rise and widespread throughout the world. It is a problem of global impact that affects a significant number of women and demands immediate solutions from all possible intervention angles: public, state, and sectoral policies, legal strengthening, rapid response and resolution of cases, community, school, and family interventions, professional mental health services, etc.

Violence against women in tourism manifests itself in various forms, including workplace violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and physical and psychological violence, both in public spaces and in tourism-related workplaces. This issue affects women workers in the sector, tourists, and residents, generating insecurity and vulnerability.

Violence against women in tourism not only affects individual victims but also damages the reputation of the tourism destination and undermines the sustainability of the sector. It is essential to take measures to prevent and eradicate violence, creating safe and inclusive tourism environments for all.

Violence against girls and women: a journey through history

Throughout history, violence against women and girls has

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intensified from the time of the Conquest to the present day, events that have become part of history. Such is the case of the Mirabal sisters, who, along with their husbands, participated in the June 14th revolutionary movement under the pseudonym Mariposas. However, on November 25, 1960, they were captured in an ambush and killed by military intelligence. The brutal murder of these sisters deeply shocked Dominican society and signaled the end of the dictatorial regime on May 30, 1961, with the assassination of the dictator.

The role of tourism in eradicating violence against girls and women

"Tourism activities will respect the equality of men and women. They will also aim to promote human rights."

Gender equality is a long road ahead, and in order to achieve Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is necessary to accelerate the pace to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres worldwide.

Although much progress has been made, millions of women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence. In every region, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and stereotypes pose serious risks to women, both as workers in the tourism sector and as travelers.

Women make up a majority of the tourism workforce. Therefore, tourism not only has the potential to contribute to economic and social development but also to the prevention and eradication of violence against women.

The major challenges

According to the "World Report on Women in Tourism, Second Edition," the challenges are evident:

- More than half of all workers in the tourism sector globally are women, or 54%.
- However, women are highly concentrated in the lowest-paid and lowest-status jobs.
- In terms of salaries, women earn 14.7% less than men.
- They are the ones who perform the vast majority of unpaid work in family tourism businesses.

Power relations and male domination systems place them in certain occupations with greater risk of exposure to violence.

According to the UN Women website:

- 1 in 3 women is affected by some type of gender-based violence.
- Every 11 minutes, a woman or girl is murdered by a family member.

How gender-based violence occurs in tourism there are various scenarios in the tourism sector where violence against women occurs:

- 1) Violence in the workplace
- 2) Violence symbolically through promotion and advertising
- 3) Violence in community settings by residents and/or tourists
- 4) Violence in destinations and infrastructure through organized crime networks

1) Violence in the Workplace

In hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, air, land, or sea transportation lines, nightclubs, nightclubs, entertainment centers, spas, or attractions, women can be victims of violence perpetrated not only by their coworkers but also by customers.

2) Symbolic influence through promotion and advertising

In the case of tourism, women are frequently objectified and sexualized to promote tourist attractions.

Resident women, as well as those who are present as travelers, are seen as an opportunity to fulfill the fantasies of clients, including workers and residents.

3) Violence in community settings by residents and/or tourists

According to the Global Women in Tourism Report, tourism is an increasingly important sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. Arrivals are increasing, and certain factors affect women's interactions with the tourism sector. This region has high rates of gender-based violence and the highest regional average rate of "femicides" in the world. In 2017, Forbes included seven destinations in Latin America and the Caribbean among the most dangerous destinations in the world for female tourists.

4) Trafficking in destinations and infrastructure through organized crime

There are 40.3 million victims of human trafficking (HT), of which 71% are women and 29% are men. In short, human trafficking has a female face.

According to the Global Modern Slavery Index and the 2018 International Labor Organization (ILO) Report, HT is one of the illicit forms of trafficking that uses the services and infrastructure of the tourism sector to carry out their activities.

HT, in the travel and tourism sector, also known colloquially as sex tourism, refers to the sexual exploitation by national or foreign tourists who engage in sexual activities with victims, primarily women, under exploitative conditions.

What can be done to eradicate gender-based violence in tourism?

Visibility:

Bring to light the manifestations of violence in the sector, name them, focus on them, and point them out so they are denatured.

Awareness:

Raise awareness among each of the sector's stakeholders to thoroughly review the scenarios and relationships that promote violence.

Mobilization:

Invite sector representatives to participate in each campaign in support of women's human rights and against violence.

The rights of women and girls under international scrutiny

In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly in New York adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women under the Law, as well as the duty of States to suppress all forms of sexual exploitation and trafficking in women. In 1981, within the framework of the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting, the Dominican delegation proposed establishing November 25th as the Day of Non-Violence against Women. From that moment on, feminist organizations throughout Latin America adopted the commemoration.

By 1993, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and just one year later, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, the Belem do Pará Convention, recognized violence against women as a crime against human rights and freedoms, an offense against human dignity, and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.

In 1999, the UN General Assembly declared November 25th as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in order to make society aware of the importance of this problem; however, it was not until 2008 that the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, launched the UNITE campaign to end violence against women, proclaiming the 25th of each month as Orange Month. Among other activities during that month, people are encouraged to wear some clothing of that color to highlight the call to eradicate violence against women.

Classification of Violence against Girls and Women

Violence against women constitutes a huge public health problem not only at the national level but also internationally; the WHO (2016) estimates that at least 25% of the female population has experienced some episode of violence in their lives; in turn, violence against women has a strong social and economic impact; to determine the facts that cause it, it is necessary to take into account different factors such as poverty, victimization, dysfunctional families, ineffective educational and judicial systems; it is important to note that violence against women seriously affects their reproductive capacity, as well as their physical and psychological health, especially when violence occurs at a very early age, many women and girls are victims of homicide and others resort to suicide to escape the situation of violence they live (Huisman, 1996).

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly postulates that violence against women constitutes an obstacle to the development of equality, peace, and a violation of human rights. In 1993, the Assembly proclaimed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which defines violence as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life

The Belem do Pará Convention in () established the following classification:

a) *Physical Violence*: Any physical assault that causes

bodily harm to women, such as beatings, injuries, or abuse.

- b) *Psychological Violence*: Any act that causes emotional or psychological harm to women, including threats, humiliation, social isolation, intimidation, manipulation, and psychological control.
- c) *Sexual Violence*: Includes any sexual act without the woman's consent, such as rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual harassment, whether at home, at work, at school, or in public spaces.
- d) *Patrimonial Violence*: Any act that damages, destroys, or withholds material goods or economic resources belonging to women, affecting their economic autonomy and well-being.
- e) *Economic Violence*: Refers to the control of women's economic resources, which prevents them from achieving financial independence, such as denying them access to money or basic goods.
- f) *Political Violence*: Targeting women in the political sphere, such as when they are prevented from exercising their political rights, harassed, or attacked due to their participation in political or public activities.

These categories of violence are central to the Belém do Pará Convention, as they not only recognize the multiple ways in which women can be victims of violence, but also require signatory States to take effective measures to prevent, punish, and eradicate all the aforementioned forms of violence. Furthermore, the Convention establishes that countries must guarantee access to justice and provide comprehensive protection to victims of gender-based violence.

Regarding the above, it is important to note that there are other types of violence that also affect women, among which the following stand out: Domestic violence, defined from two perspectives by Quintero-Velásquez (2007), who understands domestic violence as real or symbolic aggression, which directly or indirectly affects family members, "the result of establishing inequitable transactions between different people, with the exercise of power and the lack of recognition of diversity." He also refers to domestic violence as aggressive acts in the domestic sphere, recognized by the State and penalized by law: "It is a behavior learned through socialization processes, which is why it is modifiable. It constitutes an obstacle to equitable development in equal opportunities."

These definitions are defined as distinct; however, domestic violence continues to be a social problem that primarily affects women in family relationships. Therefore, it is proposed to read the document on Domestic Violence (DV) as any type of intentional, aggressive action or omission that harms the mental and physical health of a family member, whether or not they live in the same household.

Violence against women and girls brings with it various social problems that affect not only a group of people but also the entire community. Despite efforts, its control or eradication has not been possible. Among the most notable are:

Human Trafficking

Currently, human trafficking is considered the new model of slavery of the 21st century. Around 2,400,000 people are

victims of this crime, 90% of whom are women and girls who are being sexually exploited. After drug trafficking, human trafficking is the illegal activity that generates the most money worldwide. This crime threatens security, well-being, and human rights. People are recruited daily by networks that operate all over the world and are subjected to sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, and organ trafficking.

In the case of our country, we can specifically mention Mexico City, which has a population of approximately 9 million inhabitants, occupying second place nationwide in terms of population level, consolidating itself as one of the most populated cities in the entire national territory and also ranking first in the crime of human trafficking. During the period from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2024, more than 1,110 investigation files for the crime of human trafficking have been initiated in this city.

Trafficking exploits vulnerability and occurs in different forms throughout the world. In Mexico City, sexual exploitation and child pornography are the most registered crimes against people. It is important to highlight that 80% of the victims of this crime are women. In the first months of 2023 alone, the Mexico City Prosecutor's Office was aware of 19 cases of child pornography, 7 people sexually exploited, 3 of labor exploitation, and 1 minor who was used to commit illegal acts. Currently, criminal groups dedicated to drug dealing, extortion, kidnapping, and homicide collaborate with traffickers who recruit minors to commit crimes and sexually exploit women and girls. Anti-trafficking activists warn that the dark figure is difficult to estimate, especially when institutions hide or dismiss cases. They also accuse that the record of the crime has decreased but not the number of victims.

Sex tourism

Tourism is currently one of the main sources of income internationally. However, in recent years, a new type of tourism has emerged that has generated various problems internationally. This is the case of sex tourism, which is characterized by hosting women and transsexuals who earn a living through this practice, thus turning tourism into an industry with a dark side, in which underage women are sexually exploited in bars and hotels.

Child sex tourism is one of the cruelest forms of sexual exploitation in existence and is a phenomenon closely linked to human trafficking. In this practice, abusers travel from their place of residence, whether international, national, or local, to a specific geographic location to have sexual encounters with girls, boys, or adolescents. In exchange, the abusers offer money or goods directly to the victim or to trafficking networks dedicated to the child sex trade to feed their criminal organizations through the subjugation and exploitation of minors. Child sex tourism is a growing phenomenon that has not stopped adapting in recent years. The growth of tourism infrastructure, as well as the internet, have created new avenues for the sexual exploitation of girls and boys. Previously, the places most affected by this phenomenon were major tourist destinations such as beach destinations, where the Philippines and Thailand rank first worldwide. However, legal changes in many countries to combat this phenomenon have led predators and pedophiles to seek out new countries

with high institutional fragility and social inequality, coupled with conditions of violence and discrimination, finding in Latin America a vast variety of opportunities for the sexual exploitation of minors.

Based on the above, Mexico ranks first in Latin America in Child Sex Tourism and second worldwide, according to data from the National System for the Protection of Girls, Boys and Adolescents and EPAC Mexico (2024), they indicate that the state of Oaxaca is a sexual destination for girls and boys given the conditions of social inequality. Child sex tourism is growing in new low-cost and easily accessible tourist areas close to poor and excluded communities where the increase in tourists has not meant an improvement in life at the population level, but in many cases has deprived families of their traditional ways of life, leaving them few work alternatives outside of tourist areas; This inequality in which many rural populations live makes sexual exploitation a means of survival making the sex industry operate in the shadows.

Until recently, the majority of victims were boys, however the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024) points to an upward trend in girls; who suffer great emotional, psychological and physical disorders as a result of submission, most of the victims are stigmatized by their communities and face difficulties in accessing education and although Sex Tourism is classified as a crime with a penalty of between 8 and 14 years in prison, this phenomenon generates a culture in which the abuse of power goes unpunished to protect private interests, encouraging the exploitation of minors as sexual objects or negotiable goods, that is, child sex trade. This is why there is an urgent need to establish alliances between governments, the tourism sector and society to adopt effective measures to eradicate sex tourism from training and prevention to punishment of the crime.

2. Conclusions

Although the Convention has been instrumental in addressing gender-based violence in the region, several challenges remain:

- Impunity and lack of access to justice: Despite legal reforms, many women continue to face difficulties in accessing justice due to impunity, discrimination, and inefficient judicial systems.
- Persistent violence: In many countries, violence against women remains a serious and widespread problem, and prevention and punishment policies are not effectively implemented.
- Lack of resources: Although some countries have adopted laws to protect women, in many cases, the necessary resources to adequately implement these policies are lacking.

The Convention of Belém do Pará represents a crucial step in strengthening the protection of women's rights in Latin America and the Caribbean. By recognizing violence against women as a human rights violation and establishing clear obligations for States, the Convention has significantly contributed to improving women's conditions in the region. However, to truly eradicate gender-based violence, States must remain committed to the effective implementation of public policies and the comprehensive protection of victims,

in addition to ensuring that perpetrators are duly punished.

Violence against girls and women manifests itself in diverse forms and has profound implications for the lives of victims, affecting their physical, psychological, and social well-being. Despite advances in legislation and social awareness, it remains one of the most serious human rights violations in many societies. It is crucial to continue promoting effective public policies, educating the public, and strengthening support networks to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence in all its forms.



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