

Systematic review on the scientific visibility and confrontation of gender violence in Cuba

Revisión sistemática sobre la visibilidad científica y enfrentamiento a la violencia de género en Cuba

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Cite: Enriquez Roche, M; Gonzáles Aróstegui, M; Durán Castellón, G. (2025). Revisión sistemática sobre la visibilidad científica y enfrentamiento a la violencia de género en Cuba. *Mujer Andina*, 3(2), e030203. <https://doi.org/10.36881/ma.v3i2.1029>

Mujer Andina, Enero-Junio 2025, Vol. 3(2)

Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the scientific visibility of the treatment of gender violence in Cuba, emphasizing the existing protocols and services to confront it from the scientific literature consulted. This responds to the priority that the issue has achieved in the national news due to a substantial increase in cases, which is endorsed in the demands of certain sectors of Cuban civil society, as well as the government support expressed in the new Constitution, as well as in specific programs such as "the advancement of women" that warn about the issue. The systematic review was used as a method, with a mixed and descriptive approach. The scientific articles were identified through an advanced search in the bibliographic bases "SciELO", "Scopus" and "PubMed". The information was processed through qualitative thematic analysis supported by quantitative analysis supported by frequency tables. As a result, only ten scientific works published in the selected databases were identified. The analysis of the documents revealed an alarming lack of studies published on the subject in the most visible databases. In them, studies approached from a medical perspective predominate; mainly diagnostic. Likewise, the actions proposed to confront gender violence in



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No interest conflicts declared

Recibido 28/02/2025
Revisado 07/04/2025
Aceptado 15/04/2025
Publicado 23/04/2025

Cuba are insufficient. The investigations do not transcend the general proposals. In this sense, they do not contribute sufficiently to the development and comprehensive implementation of services and protocols that contribute to counteract this phenomenon.

Keywords: gender violence in Cuba, scientific studies, diagnosis, protocols, services.

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la visibilidad científica del tratamiento de la violencia de género en Cuba, enfatizando en los protocolos y servicios existentes para su enfrentamiento desde la bibliografía científica consultada. Ello responde a la prioridad que ha alcanzado el tema en la actualidad nacional debido a un incremento sustancial de casos, lo cual se refrenda en las demandas de determinados sectores de la sociedad civil cubana, así como el respaldo gubernamental expresado en la nueva Constitución de Cuba y en programas específicos como “el de avance de la mujer” que alertan sobre el tema. Como método se empleó la revisión sistemática, con enfoque mixto y descriptivo. Los artículos científicos fueron identificados mediante una búsqueda avanzada en las bases bibliográficas “SciELO”, “Scopus” y “PubMed”. La información se procesó mediante análisis cualitativo temático apoyado en el análisis cuantitativo con tablas de frecuencia. Como resultado se identificaron, solo diez trabajos científicos publicados en las bases seleccionadas. El análisis de los documentos evidenció una alarmante escasez de estudios publicados sobre el tema en las bases de datos de mayor visibilidad. En ellos, predominan los estudios abordados desde la perspectiva médica; fundamentalmente de diagnóstico. Asimismo, son insuficientes las acciones propuestas para el enfrentamiento a la violencia de género en Cuba. Las investigaciones no trascienden las propuestas generales. En tal sentido, no aportan suficientemente al desarrollo e implementación integral de servicios y protocolos que contribuyan a contrarrestar este fenómeno.

Palabras clave: violencia de género en Cuba, estudios científicos, diagnóstico, protocolos, servicios

Introducción

Gender-based violence against women is a universal problem. However, for a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of violence and its causes, as well as to contribute effectively to its elimination, it is useful to begin by understanding the historical and sociocultural characteristics specific to each context. In this sense, it is fundamental to analyse the civic rights and responsibilities attributed to women in each society, how they compare to those assigned to men, and what forms of interaction arise between them (Rico, 2016).

During the 1990s, the first studies on gender-based violence began to develop in Cuba, driven by the growing interest and concern of the scientific community regarding this issue (Proveyer and Romero, 2017). Gender studies departments emerged in this context in various Cuban universities, especially the Women's Studies Department at the University of Havana. These institutions, and others that have joined over time, have dedicated themselves to delving deeper into the causes and characteristics of violence against women, with the aim of devising strategies to confront the problem.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by member states during the seventieth session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the target of being achieved by the year 2030. This framework recognizes the fundamental importance of gender equality, as well as the rights and empowerment of women, as key elements for achieving sustainable development. It also emphasizes that each nation has different strategies, perspectives, tools, and models to advance towards this goal. Furthermore, the Agenda commits to the eradication of all forms of violence against women and girls, in both the public and private spheres, including trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse.

In the Cuban context, and in line with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda, the Women's and Family Guidance Centers of the Federation of Cuban Women were created. These are located in all municipalities to work with families showing vulnerabilities of any kind, providing individual guidance and conducting training programs in different disciplines (Castellanos, *et al.*, 2020; Hernández and Paz, 2021). As part of their work, they have increased the quantity and quality of actions in developing awareness within families that promotes equitable and just relationships for all their members.

Building on these premises, the "National Action Plan of the Republic of Cuba for Follow-up to the IV UN Conference on Women" (Republic of Cuba, 1997) was approved in Cuba. Furthermore, by Presidential Decree of March 8, 2021, the "National Program for the Advancement of Women" (PAM) was approved, which emphasizes the need for education, prevention, and social work. Area 5 of this Program is dedicated to legislation and law, providing a regulatory framework and protection systems against all forms of discrimination and violence.

Gender-based violence and the various forms of discrimination occupy a fundamental place in the actions and measures contemplated in the Pro-

gram, in addition to being present transversally in all its objectives. The main purpose of this Program is to strengthen the systematicity in the actions of the Central State Administration Bodies, as well as other institutions, in monitoring all issues related to the integral development of women in society. It also underscores the importance of promoting the design and implementation of public policies with a gender perspective, fostering education in this area in both the family and community environments, and training public sector personnel in accordance with these principles (Castro and Ramos, 2020).

Research carried out by the Gender and Feminism Studies Group of the "Marta Abreu" Central University of Las Villas (UCLV) has made it possible to delve deeper into many of the causes and conditions of violence against women. Within this framework, spaces and figures of Cuban Academia are defined who have fundamentally addressed the issue. The research of Pría *et al.* (2006), Hernández (2011), Proveyer (2014), Proveyer and Romero (2017), Domínguez *et al.* (2018), Cala *et al.* (2018), Peñate *et al.* (2018), González (2018), Ferrer and Prada (2020) stand out.

Attending to the requirements of the Project "Cessation of Violence: Protocols for the Care and Protection of Women and Children in Cuba," initiated in January 2022¹ at UCLV, a process of general review of related literature begins, as well as the exploration of the issue of violence against women in Cuba. Access to the Virtual Library of RedSemplac, which collects 40 research, communication, and journalistic works of heterogeneous scope, confirmed that among the main authors on the subject in Cuba in recent years include: Clotilde Proveyer, Dixie Edith, Sara Mas, and Magela Rodríguez. Other publications offering advances in research on violence against women were also identified: Revista de Ciencias Médicas, UNICEF Advances (Cuba), and also platforms that collect and record statistics on femicides in Cuba, some of which are not officially registered or recognized, but stand out for their social commitment and civic activism.

1. Proyecto internacional entre el Departamento de Derecho de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la UCLV y la Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

In an initial review of contextualizing articles on the issue of violence against women in Cuba, it was detected that most of them are not included in international databases (Paz and Garcés, 2020; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022). With this in mind, the research decision was made to broaden the specialized search criteria to favour a more objective approach to the topic by including known Cuban authors who research it. This allowed for the inclusion of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral theses from Higher Education Centres; as well as Research Centres where it has been addressed. . The search aimed to identify the positioning of the topic of gender-based violence in Cuba, as well as the protocols and services for addressing it, in academically recognized databases.

Method

A systematic review with a mixed-methods approach and descriptive scope was carried out using a procedure for the selection of documents. This was executed on October 30, 2024, through an advanced search in SciELO, Scopus, and PubMed. In all databases, the equation "violence AND (women OR gender OR family) AND (protocols OR mechanisms OR actions) AND (care OR protection)" was applied and limited to the language criteria (Spanish and English).

Specifically, the documents obtained in SciELO, Scopus, and PubMed were downloaded directly into an Endnote x9 database. In SciELO, 27 documents were found, while 6 and 2 were downloaded from Scopus and PubMed, respectively, for a total of 35 articles; a figure that was initially striking due to its scarcity for this type of study. Subsequently, duplicate records were automatically removed from Endnote x9 and then manually, for a total of 8 duplicate articles.

The remaining 27 articles were subjected to an exclusion process based on the reading of titles and abstracts, according to the following criteria:

1) documents that do not address gender-based violence; and 2) research not conducted in Cuba; after which 10 documents on non-gender-related violence and 7 investigations conducted outside the Cuban context were excluded.

Initially, a third exclusion criterion was to be implemented, related to those scientific articles that did not refer to services, protocols, mechanisms, or actions to address gender-based violence; and whose scope was limited to the diagnosis of the phenomenon in various areas of Cuban reality. However, the scarcity of references to this type of action in the scientific articles indexed in the analysed databases led to the expansion of the search to include documents that also focused on the diagnosis of the regularities of gender-based violence in Cuba. It is worth noting that, initially, it was expected to analyse documents from the last five years, but the small volume of articles that met this range led to the elimination of this requirement, leaving the time period for the review undetermined.

The interpretation of the results was carried out through qualitative thematic analysis on the description of the types of research and their contributions regarding the diagnosis and confrontation of gender-based violence in Cuba. Quantitative frequency analyses were included within these. The triangulation of information was obtained by comparing the qualitative and quantitative data between the analysed studies, and by discussing the results according to the analysis of other empirical studies that confirm their credibility.

Results

Of the 35 documents identified in the databases, 10 articles on gender-based violence in Cuba were selected for review, focusing on the diagnosis of gender-based violence in the region and actions to address it. Table 1 illustrates the indicators used for an initial general analysis of the

2. An important article handled was: "Articulation and linkage of the response to violence against women and children in the AL and Hispanic Caribbean region" from 2019, from which indicators and concepts can be extracted that theoretically and methodologically guide the research work. Similarly, the Rapporteur ship on the Rights of Women of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

articles. Table 2 shows methodological aspects of the articles, important for the development of content analysis.

General description of the analysed scientific production

A frequency table (Table 1) was used for the processing of the data from the analyzed research. The following indicators were used: years of publication, language of publication, number of publications per journal, type of gender-based violence exerted, geographical context, and number of participants in the study. For its part, Table 2 shows the methodological aspects taken into account in carrying out the content analysis of the studies to identify their contributions to the diagnosis and confrontation of gender-based violence in Cuba.

The data collected in Table 1 demonstrate that studies on gender-based violence in Cuba have begun to position themselves discreetly in international databases in the last decade, since 2013. The frequency of publication has fluctuated between 1 and 2 studies per year (2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, and 2021), with 2013, 2016, 2019, and 2021 standing out with two articles each. The predominant language is Spanish, with only two articles in English.

Regarding the journals with the highest number of publications, MEDISAN, *Revista Cubana de Medicina General Integral*, and *Revista Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina* stand out, with two publications in each case.

As for the type of gender-based violence studied, the majority of the research refers to the various types of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic, with a predominance of references to physical and psychological violence. One study dedicated to physical violence (Díaz and Fernández, 2014) and one on obstetric violence (García *et al.*, 2013) stand out; both from the medical context.

Regarding the national geographical context in which the research was carried out, the largest

number of studies is visible in the eastern zone of Cuba, in regions such as Santiago de Cuba (3), Holguín (1), or the municipality of Moa (1). In areas such as Pinar del Río, Havana, and Santa Clara, one investigation is recorded in each case, while two theoretical articles referring to the national scenario are recorded (Alemán and Páez, 2021; Hernández, 2019).

Regarding the number of participants, in studies that used population samples for the analysis of gender-based violence and actions to address it using various scientific research methods, it is important to note that the majority of the samples are less than 50 people (5); while two articles were found that used between 50 and 100 participants, one that exceeded 100, and two theoretical articles in which this type of analysis was not carried out and, therefore, there were no participants in the research.

Description of methodological aspects of the studies for the analysis of confronting gender-based violence in Cuba

A content analysis of the studies was carried out to identify fundamental elements for the diagnosis and confrontation of gender-based violence in Cuba. Table 2 shows the methodological aspects that were taken into account for this analysis. The authors and year of publication, the objectives of the study, the context in which it was carried out, the research design, and the results obtained were considered. In this last category, it was mainly observed whether the articles offer only a diagnosis of gender-based violence or provide specific mechanisms, services, or actions from a given context to confront it.

For each of the aspects, what was described in the research was taken into account, and a large part of the information was taken verbatim. In cases where literal data were not found, the authors elaborated on the aspects according to what was explicitly stated in the studies. It is important to mention that the authors of the ten analyzed studies do not repeat, with the exception of one author: Yuliuva Hernández García, with two inves-

Table 1

Indicators for a first general analysis of the articles

Indicators		Frequency
Years of publication	2013	2
	2014	1
	2016	2
	2017	1
	2019	2
	2021	2
Language of publication	English	2
	Spanish	8
Number of publications per journal	MEDISAN	2
	Revista Cubana Salud Pública	1
	Encuentros	1
	MEDICC Rev	1
	Revista Cubana de Medicina General Integral	2
	Revista Estudios Feministas	1
	Revista Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina	2
Type of GBV exercised	General ³	8
	Física	1
	Obstétrica	1
Geographical context (national, by province, municipality)	Nacional	2
	Pinar del Río	1
	La Habana	1
	Santa Clara	1
	Holguín	1
	Santiago de Cuba	3
	Moa	1
Number of participants in the study	Less than 50	5
	Between 50 and 100	2
	More than 100	1
	No participants Sin participantes ⁴	2

3. General violence is used to refer to studies that address gender-based violence in all its forms: physical, psychological, sexual and economic.

4. The option without participants was included for theoretical studies.

tigations, both on the situation of gender-based violence in the province of Moa (Hernández and Delgado, 2016; Hernández, 2019).

Table 2 shows the recurrence of research objectives such as “characterize” in the studies focused solely on the diagnosis of gender-based violence (5). The five studies that propose solutions have broader objectives such as analyze (Hernández and Delgado, 2016; Hernández, 2019) or reflect (Aleman and Pérez, 2021). Regarding research designs, mixed designs predominate, with qualitative and quantitative research techniques, highlighting the use of surveys, interviews, and observation; mainly in studies carried out in the context of the National Health System.

Regarding the settings from which the research was carried out, studies from the health field prevail (6). Of these, some focus on victims of gender-based violence (Díaz and Fernández, 2014; García *et al.*, 2013; Hierrezuelo *et al.*, 2021), while others analyze health professionals and their preparation to confront this phenomenon (Guevara *et al.*, 2017; Torralbas and Calcerrada, 2016) and even the violence to which female workers are subjected (Arce *et al.*, 2013). The remaining four articles are very varied, presenting specific studies from diverse approaches such as legal, sociological, or communication.

A fundamental element for the present research is the results of the analyzed studies and the existence or not of mechanisms, actions, or diagnoses for confronting gender-based violence. In this sense, of the five studies that mention some suggestions for this, only one presents a proposal of argued actions to counteract this reality, in this case from local television (Miranda *et al.*, 2019).

Discussion

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data carried out in this research demonstrates a set of existing realities in Cuba regarding gender-based violence that coincide with many of the studies consulted, the vast majority not published in specialized academic journals (Paz *et al.*,

2022). In this sense, a primary limitation demonstrated in the systematic review was the scarce production of articles positioned in international databases that address the issue of gender; this shows that the studies carried out by Academia are insufficient, in contrast to publications that are socialized in other alternative media such as the Virtual Library of RedSemlac. This is consistent with the study provided by Cossio and Ramos (2020), who state that:

Of the research, 53% were from Spain, 33% from Peru, and 14% from other Latin American countries such as Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Cuba; with the largest number of investigations found in the years 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019 (p. 6).

Their study confirms how Latin America has a very limited scientific production on gender-based violence against women and girls; within which Cuba occupies one of the lowest positions with barely 2% in the last 20 years (Cossio and Ramos, 2020).

This contributes to the low visibility of gender-based violence in the academic circuit, and therefore, internationally. If the severity of the cases of violence described in the articles is taken into account, it is evident that there is a deficiency in the periodicity of articles associated with gender-based violence in Cuba.

Another reality that became visible in the present study is the prevalence of research carried out within the context of the National Health System, many of them descriptive in nature and remaining at the diagnostic level. Montenegro *et al.* (2021) refer to a similar trend, demonstrating in their study that policies related to health care were the subject of research more frequently; while also warning about the need to build a more robust theoretical corpus that allows for discussion on approaches and models for the analysis of public policies.

This issue is essential, as investigations limited to the diagnosis of gender-based violence do not

Table 2

Aspectos metodológicos empleados en el análisis de contenido

Authors (year) ⁵	Objectives of the study	Context of the study	Research design	Results
Alemán y Páez (2021)	"Reflecting on the comprehensive protection of victims of gender violence in the couple and ex-partner in the contexts of Cuba and Spain".	Legal	Theoretical legal, comparative legal, exegetical-analytical and sociological legal methods, in order to develop a theoretical, normative and axiological approach.	Actions are offered to confront violence: For example, "the specificity of violence exercised against women as a product of structural inequality, requires an adequate penal treatment in terms of criminal classification, the configuration of the principle of equality, and the denunciation and renunciation of the victim; as well as the timely intervention of social agencies that contribute to the eradication of institutional violence."
Arce <i>et al.</i> (2013)	To study the impact of the main biopsychosocial risk factors of violence on female student workers.	Labor and educational (Health System).	Descriptive and cross-sectional study	It remains only in diagnostics
Díaz y Fernández (2014)	To characterize more rigorously the clinical and epidemiological aspects of physical gender-based violence.	Health System	Descriptive and cross-sectional study	It remains only in diagnostics
García <i>et al.</i> (2013)	To understand the representations and practices related to childbirth and describe women's experience.	(women patients)	Qualitative research techniques were used: interviews and participant observation. The speeches were analyzed according to Grounded Theory.	It remains only in diagnostics
Authors (year)	Objectives of the study	Context of the study	Research design	Results
Guevara <i>et al.</i> (2017)	"To characterize the preparation on gender violence of the Basic Health Teams belonging to the Basic Work Group number 3 of the "XX Anniversary" Polyclinic in Santa Clara".	Health System (medical personnel)	Mixed research approach, a predominantly quantitative concurrent design was used to carry out a study with a descriptive scope.	It remains only in diagnostics.
Hernández (2019)	Theoretical and methodological analysis of studies on gender-based violence against women in Cuba.	Academic	Theoretical and methodological basis of decolonial feminism, and its special interrelation with the Epistemologies of the South.	Actions are offered to confront violence:
Hernández y Delgado (2016)	To analyze the role of local governments in addressing the problem of gender violence in Moa.	Community	Theoretical and methodological triangulation for the analysis of the data collected in the fieldwork, within the qualitative approach to social research.	Ex. "There are possible transformation alternatives, both for academia and for political practice. In one of them are placed, precisely, the Epistemologies of the South with their procedures and principles; as well as the application of non-extractivist research and theorization methodologies, which can offer us other readings, analysis and processes of change."

5. The articles are arranged in alphabetical order of the first surname, according to the reference standards of the American Psychological Association 7th edition.

Table 2 Continuación

Authors (year)	Objectives of the study	Context of the study	Research design	Results
Hierrezuelo <i>et al.</i> (2021)	"Characterizing women who suffer domestic violence".	Health system (patients of a polyclinic).	"Descriptive and cross-sectional study".	It remains only in diagnostics.
Miranda <i>et al.</i> (2019)	"To argue a proposal of educational-communicative and promotional actions that support the process of making audiovisual programs from the pre-production, production and post-production stages, in terms of violence against women".	Television	The research is empirical-qualitative.	Actions are offered to confront violence: Ex. "It was determined that in order to achieve an effective preparation or training of those who produce audiovisual works from the television medium on violence against women, the following educommunicative actions should be taken into account in the pre-production, production or post-production stages (...)"
Torralbas y Calcerrada (2016)	To show the current limitations of primary health care professionals in understanding and addressing violence against women in heterosexual couples.	Health system (professionals)	Descriptive study with a mixed research approach.	Actions are offered to confront violence: Ex. Because the phenomenon of domestic violence against women is complex, specialized multidisciplinary services involving doctors, psychologists, nurses, professional lawyers, police and social workers trained in gender violence are needed to deal with specific cases of violence against women.

offer solutions to the problem, despite showing some factors associated with the phenomenon that are consistently found in all studies, such as the prevalence of physical and psychological violence, and the identification of partners and ex-partners as the main perpetrators of gender-based violence against women (Rivero *et al.*, 2024).

However, research developed from other settings such as legal, communicational, or academic was found, which evidences the variety of studies on the subject, considering that many of the suggestions for addressing and confronting gender-based violence refer to the importance of intersectoriality.

On the subject of variety, it can be added that in addition to the classic types of violence such as physical, psychological, economic, or

sexual, a study on obstetric violence in Cuba is included, a reality that is beginning to be studied in the national context.

Regarding the proposal of solutions to counteract the increasing gender-based violence in the country, an important limitation is the lack of depth in the construction of a logical course of action for its confrontation and the poor articulation of mechanisms and protocols between various institutions capable of relating diverse disciplines of knowledge to address it. This represents one of the prerogatives that, from a theoretical point of view, specialists point to as a strategy to combat the phenomenon.

However, the analyzed studies that do offer defined actions do so from a general point of view, through scarce recommendations and

not from comprehensive mechanisms capable of generating substantial changes. Only one of the consulted articles presents the argumentation of a complete proposal of actions to counteract gender-based violence, from the perspective of audiovisual communication on a local television station (Miranda *et al.*, 2019).

It is considered that one of the main limitations of this research lies in the reduced number of databases for the identification of the approach to and confrontation of gender-based violence in Cuba. Expanding the number of these would contribute to the identification of other explanatory studies of the phenomenon and, therefore, to the identification of other approaches to the issue. This limitation also becomes a recommendation for future studies.

Likewise, the results obtained are evidence that exhaustive statistics on the increase of this phenomenon in the country are not visible, there is a lack of interdisciplinary action and joint confrontations, and there is poor community involvement in coping strategies.

The lack of visibility of the problem at both national and international levels has contributed to alienation regarding the issue, which is masked in the idiosyncrasy, justified by the machista culture, and reinforced by patriarchal and heteronormative practices that limit people's rights. As a result, they are assumed to be isolated events, ignoring the structural nature of their causes. This agrees with the assessment of Bosch and Ferrer (2012), who insist on the naturalization of gender-based violence based on historically accepted and new myths that, socially assimilated, stand as cultural justifications for impunity.

(...) myths about gender-based violence are defined as stereotypical beliefs about said violence, which are generally false, but which are widely and persistently held. These myths have been studied by classifying them into different categories

(myths about marginality, myths about abusers, myths about battered women). To these, and within the framework of new forms of sexism, would be added what has been called "neomyths," among which would be those that minimize the importance of the problem or, even going a step further, those that deny its existence (Bosch and Ferrer, 2012, p. 548).

In conclusion, the research carried out provides from theory a brief overview regarding what has been investigated and published in terms of gender-based violence in Cuba, taking into account its fundamental authors. In addition, it proposes a critical and integrating analysis of some of the limitations for its study from academia in the region. The identified considerations and recommendations become a direct precedent for the foundation of future research, as well as its scope.

Similarly, for the improvement of the processes of diagnosis and confrontation of gender-based violence in Cuba from a grounded, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive perspective; and an incentive for its socialization and visibility at the national and international levels as an essential tool to promote the sensitivity and awareness of the different social actors involved and the related authorities. Also, to generate progress in the articulation of legal spaces with public policies through protocols and action mechanisms, services, and care spaces that promote citizen security and an efficient and effective response capable of protecting the rights of women and girls; and with them, those of the entire Cuban population.

Author Contributions

Melissa Margarita Enríquez Roche: conceptualization, methodology, analysis, project development, initial writing, final writing.

Mely del Rosario Gonzáles Aróstegui: conceptualization, methodology, analysis, project development, initial writing.

Ginley Durán Castellón: methodology, analysis, project development, initial writing, final writing.

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