

# **GENDER VIOLENCE AND LEISURE IN SPAIN**

## **Looking for new ways in educational research**

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*The aim of this work is to discover how life improvement strategies can be developed for women who have suffered gender-based violence. Discussions from the World Leisure and Recreation Association (WLRA) and other research groups focus on leisure benefits for personal growth and community development. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, leisure emerges as a third generation human right, so that this work intends to strengthen this line of research – from development of a doctoral thesis –, which is going to connect leisure, education, and gender violence. We are trying to advance new ways for reducing the negative effects of violence against women in their daily life. To do this, we take Spanish Law No. 1/2004 on gender violence as reference. This is a social problem that is hindering women and girls' autonomous development and that must be included in the public agenda.*

**Keywords:** education, leisure, gender violence, feminism

### **1. Introduction**

There is significant research that relates free time with gender. Its objective is to analyse the differences in the use of free time, both in number of hours available and type of activities that are carried out. The particularity of violence against women and its consequences such as

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isolation, depression, anxiety, and other negative feelings limit women's opportunities to build a new life model that is more beneficial for their autonomy and development. At the same time, a destructive environment where they live is the main argument for improving women's personal wellbeing and thinking of leisure as a possible field for working. They need to (re)connect with life, to rebuild a social network, to grow stronger, etc., all in order to reconstruct their lives, and, in this process, recreational experiences could be especially positive and help them to rethink life.

We should note that leisure is a time to think about oneself, to reflect about one's tastes and hobbies. So, entertainment can be a positive factor in the reconstruction of personal identity. Most of the time, the feeling of being lost emerges strongly in women who have experienced violence. Abusers have prevented women from accessing several sources of wellbeing, such as enjoying their hobbies, being with friends, even enjoying their work (Bosh & Ferrer, 2002). During their relationship, they have lived their lives mimicked to their attacker always according to their whims, forgetting themselves: the likes of him are the likes of her, what he wants is what she wants, and so on. There are no one's own thoughts and desires, and they are inhibited by fear and guilt. But it is time for breaking patriarchal rules and being the first in one's life: what about women? Who are they? What are their preferences? What do they like doing in life?

## 2. Gender, leisure, and violence against women: opening egalitarian ways in educational research

We recognize and share the importance of multidisciplinary work in the field of violence against women, so that we propose a research project – a doctoral thesis – which is going to connect two areas that may be essential in women's recovery process: education and leisure. The research focus is the social support for abused women with the goal of improving the design and intervention in this field. But what does right mean to social support? What professionals should ensure this support? What social institutions should be involved? What areas of women's life should receive professional help? We are talking about shared responsibility in women's wellbeing, that is, social services professionals (community development, education, medicine, clinical social worker, mental health) who are working in close spheres and, of course, citizen actions.

The great potential of this recognition is the integral attention of violence against women, which allows us to think of new areas for fighting against this phenomenon. According to this idea, we present a committed proposal for the leisure pedagogy field. In the last few decades, different studies and research teams have advised about the connection between leisure

and people's wellbeing. So how could entertainment improve women's wellbeing and help them to overcome violence?

It is obvious that there is not only one way of fighting against gender violence. However, there are many spheres which could help to shed some light and delete gender domination. Different public policies could be designed (Astelarra, 2005) for the purpose of stopping women's mistreatment and supporting them when they decide to end their relationship. This is why we need new and politically committed actions especially when women are conscious of their situation and decide to end a violent relationship.

In this sense, an important challenge for leisure pedagogy is revealing the relationship between gender, violence, and leisure. In this regard, a first step to extend research lines started by authors like Green (1990, 1998) or Henderson (1991, 2006) about leisure – female pairing should be taken. The main goals of the research work – doctoral thesis – that we present in this article are committed to this purpose.

The research focuses on improving knowledge about the role of leisure in the process of violence against women, and, therefore, this work is looking to develop leisure education with gender perspective and strengthening the interdisciplinary nature of social intervention. Thus, in our point of view, it is also important to propose action lines that guide non-discrimination actions for women in the leisure sphere, especially in the case of those who are recovering from a violent relationship.

To advance these general goals, it is necessary to have a consistent methodological design with the principles that are behind this doctoral project. In this sense and looking for coherence and reliability, we hope for a contextual, open, and multidimensional way of investigating in order to deepen the study of processes and realities among leisure and violence against women. It is not just to describe the dynamics emerging around these concepts, but to search for deeper understanding of the process from which women build, in a *dialogic* process, the reality that surrounds them. It is revealing the role and potential of leisure in women's lives for recovery after suffering gender violence, this is, analysing reality «in its entirety, with all of its elements working together» (Tójar, 2006: 151). We try to understand reality as a system of interactions from which the subjects and communities create and recreate the world they live in, considering that the participation process is undemocratic and certain groups are outside of the dominant discourse. There is no doubt that human behaviour cannot be understood without taking into account the meanings that each subject gives to their actions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and without politicizing their speech, allowing us to observe power structures that are implicated with it.

Research is a *dialogic* process for understanding not just a way to learn more and enhance the world we are part of, but also a way to generate new knowledge, to rethink the reality and to motivate social change. Only in this way can we move towards a more just,

democratic, and egalitarian society. Therefore, research should be connected with an ideological position, that is, apart from knowing the reality, and our work should also contribute to the emancipation of individuals.

In this sense, we cannot deny the rich relationship between feminism and qualitative research. The emergence of subjectivity as a source of knowledge, and the choice of ideographic methods that highlight the centrality of the subject in the whole process, is a way of giving diversity to the scientific discourse and including the voice of certain groups that are situated outside the power system, despite the fact they are influenced by it. In other words, researching is a way of uncovering the hidden relationships between discourse and power (Van Dijk, 2009).

If we consider the importance of subjectivity as a source of knowledge, the skills and tools to capture this knowledge must be consistent with such principles. The choice of instruments for collecting information is not a minor issue, so that we cannot assert the importance of speech/dialogue on scientific knowledge and, at the same time, opt for a more quantitative design.

The alternatives are determined by internal and external factors to the research process itself. Therefore, the use of different techniques is a good procedure for obtaining truthful information and more consistency in research. The research process highlights the need to adopt a multifaceted approach that has the diverse and complex nature of reality that is part of the study we have conducted. Thus, the use of different data collection techniques, as described previously, is essential when we want to build a complete picture about the «problem» of research, away from positions that excessively simplify univocal scientific discourse and compromise their reliability. The question is how to ensure the unwavering strength and consistency of the main arguments which are derived from the study and for this the commitment to triangulation as a heuristic tool seems essential.

The use of different techniques in both the collection and the interpretation of the phenomenon under discussion is an indispensable source of enriched research praxis, while increasing the reliability of the research. Undoubtedly, the combination of different techniques provides the possibility of finding similarities and differences of a significant nature so that they can be used both as a criterion and guarantee of the effectiveness of the research. Each selected technique encourages a deeper understanding of the research problem in order to discover new elements of reality and analysis. Each one contributes to the holistic perspective of our investigation and relates the information supplied by different analytical lenses. In short, triangulation is articulated as a control mechanism to verify and enrich the research findings.

The specifics of the group in which we are focusing, abused women, justify the choice of ideographic methods for a deeper understanding, so that we shall consider qualitative design as a methodology that generates confidence among women and gives prominence to their

voice. Our close position to qualitative knowledge is because it put emphasis on studying the reality from an *insider* perspective, trying to grasp the significance that the person/group gives to its activity, considering these as pieces integrated into a complex system (Ruiz Olabuenaga, 2006). From this perspective, the phenomenon is analysed as a whole and not as an isolated and independent element of a political and sociocultural context in which it occurs.

In this sense, the context of our research is the autonomous community of Galicia, without forgetting the possibility of considering other communities in the Spanish territory as comparative alternatives. For its part, the study population will consist of groups of women who have suffered gender violence, and we are going to contact them through different entities which are working in this area, such as shelters, women's associations... All of these institutions could act as mediators in a process that would be unfeasible in other way. And, also, we are going to consider the perspective of professionals who are working in this sphere, because they know best the cycle of gender violence and the possibility of out of it, that is, they have a capacity to intervene directly with women through different programs and activities. In addition, professionals can be the nexus of coordination with other services and professionals in the community, enabling interdisciplinary and coordinated work. Through the voice of both groups, women and professionals, we want to achieve a comprehensive knowledge about the phenomenon we are analysing.

In summary, the generality that describes each of the techniques will be taking shape as the investigation continues its course, bearing in mind the circumstances in which the study takes place. It is, in short, a rigorous proposal, while also open and flexible, so that we can perceive and respond to any potential difficulties that may arise in any scientific research.

### 3. Leisure studies and its connection with gender studies

The concept of leisure that we assume in this work is close to the position of *World Leisure and Recreation Association* (WLRA) and other researcher lines, which defend leisure as a third generation human right. Leisure is an experience close to happiness and has important benefits on personal wellbeing (Kleiber, 1999, 2002) and quality of life, i.e., leisure is more than free time despite the fact that sometimes they are used as synonyms.

The need for experiences that break the daily routines is evident in all societies. Throughout history, people in diverse places and cultures have enjoyed games and looked for fun to forget the harshness of life and discover themselves again. However, the growing importance of leisure in our lives is related to the changes introduced by the industrial revolution and the scientific-technological paradigm in the experience and organization of time (San Salvador,

2009). Undoubtedly, the increase of free time was one of the largest workers' gains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Besides, this situation promoted intense debates that forced to rethink the role of leisure in our social lives.

In the late nineteenth century, Paul Lafargue (2010) defended the right to laziness as a question related to workers' struggle and time to rest after endless days at the factory. This revolutionary French man considered leisure as the *balm of human anguish*, especially in the case of the working class. Gradually, the union's demands gained ground and established substantial changes in the organization of social time. This opened the possibility to dream of leisure time. The great significance was analysed by Joffre Dumazedier, in the second half of the last century, in his book *Révolution Culturelle du Temps Libre*. Thus, began the academic reflection on leisure as a pillar of modern society, creating new ways to conceptualize it.

Dumazedier (1988) considered the achievement of free time as a cultural revolution which had the peculiarity of being an underground, deep, and peaceful progression. This success introduced important changes in the production model of contemporary economies, in the lifestyle of individuals and communities, and in social values.

The revolution of free time brought new formulations about leisure and laid the foundations for claiming it as a third generation human right. But we cannot forget that leisure might not be a positive experience. The fact is that leisure is not always good in itself, and even certain experiences can be harmful, so it is important to define what kind of leisure we are thinking about when we talk about it as a human right. This gives us an opportunity for reflecting about the way to make leisure effective against other practices that cannot be considered as leisure at all, which emerge within a consumer society.

The complexity of leisure as a polysemic concept calls for reflection that brings us closer to the humanistic positions we advocate, contrary to simple consumerism which does not assess non-material experience. In order to approach this situation, we need to refer back to the first paragraph where we start by saying that leisure and free time are not synonymous. Thus, although time is an element without which we cannot explain leisure (Cuenca, 2000), leisure cannot be reduced only to time dimension. Equating leisure and free time is a limited view, but, on the other hand, we need free time as a first step for leisure.

Especially in recent decades, the evolution of leisure studies takes us away from positions that understand leisure as a residual and undesirable sphere of human life. Some views equate leisure and an idle life, charging with negativity all leisure practices that are only aimed as the result of post labour deserved rest. In this sense, the main function of leisure in people's lives is to ensure a break from the working time, revitalizing worker's capabilities for productive development. In this case, we find a connection between access to leisure and participation in the labour market, thinking of leisure as a reward for labour services.

Both perspectives on leisure, as idleness or reward, are expressions that limit the potential of a time that has much to contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Furthermore, when we talk about leisure as a reward one question comes to mind: what happens to all those who do not participate in the labour market? Fortunately, this discourse has been overcome and as stated by Setién «leisure came to be considered as an element of social and individual welfare, an essential component to improved quality of life» (2002: 210).

Leisure as a human sphere related to human development implies the recognition of its contributions and benefits to people's lives. So that, leisure must be defended as a right that no one should be excluded from. In this sense, the World Leisure and Recreation Association (WLRA) and other research lines have shown that leisure contributes positively to people's life when it becomes a liberating experience and moves away from consumerism. That is, when discovering ourselves and they reflect about questions like: who am I? What do I like doing? What are my lifelong-values? What is leisure for me?

This positive perception of leisure was a major shift from previous positions and helped to raise the social value of a time full of opportunities. The International Letter of Leisure Education (*Carta Internacional de WLRA para la Educación del Tiempo Libre*, n.d.) written by the WLRA defines free time like a first step to live leisure, as a basic human right whose assurance is a responsibility of public authorities, as we can read in this passage of the letter: «Free time is a fundamental human right, such as education, work and health, and no one should be deprived of this right for reasons of gender, sexual orientation, age, race, religion, creed, health status, physical handicap or economic status» (International Letter of Leisure Education, article 2.4).

Leisure as a human right implies a political reflection and also opens new ways in research related to the practical effect of leisure in real life, because we know that the formal recognition of a right does not automatically imply its practical use. We cannot forget that not everybody has access to leisure in equal conditions and, in the same way, leisure transforming capability requires educational intervention and being conscious of the inequalities in this field. So that, in this context, leisure pedagogy emerges as a basic tool to equate opportunities (Cuenca, 1999, 2004).

Among other reasons, the imbalance between considering leisure as a right and its experience in practice is the result of low sensitivity and commitment to eradicate certain factors that can minimize the real possibilities to enjoy the benefits of leisure.

It is important to remember that understanding leisure as a human experience means taking into account its subjective dimension, with all the heterogeneity involved. We shall consider that all experiences take place in a social context that allows or inhibits it (*idem*, 2000). While the enjoyment of rewarding experiences is a skill that all people have, the opportuni-

ties to leverage this ability positively are not the same for each of us. In other words, people and cultures around the world do have recreational capabilities, even when the circumstances that surround them are difficult.

The opportunities of enjoying leisure are limited by certain factors as – for instance – ethnicity, social class or sexual orientation. In this sense, gender is a crucial category in the organization and personal experience of leisure. We must consider the words of Green (1990) who reminds us that regardless of social status or ethnicity, the subordinate position of women as a subordinate group, limits their ability to have leisure experiences. Thus, inequality in access to leisure for women and men is rooted in the sexual division of society. In the same way, different studies have shown inequalities between women and men in this area. For instance, data from the *Time Use Survey 2002-2003*<sup>1</sup> shows the imbalances in their personal and social organization of time. In other words, the distribution of time is non-democratic in our societies.

If we analyse the world of leisure from a gender perspective we find that, in general, women are at a disadvantage when it comes to enjoying personal free time. A review of previous survey data for 2009-2010 leaves no doubt about this. Each day, women spend on average two hours longer than men doing household tasks. In addition, men have more free time because they don't usually have as many tasks related to care and family welfare in egalitarian conditions as women, and so, women have less free time due to their increased workload. Women have to be jugglers (Durán, 2007) trying to balance their presence in two areas, the productive sphere (labour market) and reproductive sphere (family). On the other hand, *androcentrism* creates an uneven valuation of leisure options according to its recognition as female or male by society. Certain practices associated with the male domain are overvalued while those traditionally associated with the «female» world are undervalued. This situation is found in the social prestige that accompanies the two, as well as budgets and resources allocated by different governments.

Similarly, the principles that govern the ethics of care have an impact on women's personal experience of leisure. Female socialization linked to care and family wellbeing means that women have difficulties for thinking of themselves as subjects with a right to leisure. They usually put their own interests in second place and give priority to others, especially when they have children.

Furthermore, men are more involved in outdoor activities and for longer, especially sports, hobbies, and computer science which can be related to leisure. This research shows that

<sup>1</sup> This survey was conducted by the National Statistics Institute of Spain, and this trend continues in a new edition for the years 2009-2010.

women face obstacles to enjoy gaming experiences and there are different factors which have an influence on this situation: non-democratic organization of social time, unequal distribution of care work, dependant sexist education, etc.

Women's lack of time is directly connected to the unequal distribution of resources (Cobo, 1995). So that time is a valued resource, but its distribution is affected by social power imbalances between individuals and groups. In this situation, an analysis of leisure time from a gender perspective shows us its masculine bias.

In this situation, it is necessary to vindicate gender mainstreaming in an attempt to illuminate dark areas in which inequalities exist between women and men. It is not possible to maintain difficulties that limit access to leisure for half of humanity and, at the same time, affirm it as a universal right. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine the relationship between gender and leisure through a critical study for understanding its mutual influences. That is, revealing how the sexualisation of society can be a hindrance for living full leisure experiences. So we need to question the social model, opening opportunities for a society where there are non-gender inequalities.

Related to this last idea, it is important to take into account that a country's legislation will affect actions that can be designed and carried out. Thus, a legal framework can support or not support proposals to eliminate violence against women as well as contribute positively to improve their quality of life through leisure.

#### **4. The importance of leisure in a legal framework about gender equality: mechanisms to assist abused women**

Consequences of gender inequality give rise to imbalances in women's and men's life. Women are entering the public space but not with the same conditions as men. Since the establishment of democracy in Spain we have been generating equality through the formal legislative framework but this is not enough to promote equality in daily life. Equality of right needs to be transformed into equality in practice. In order to lighten this situation it is necessary to implement other policies that generate social change in favour of the fight against inequality and/or exclusion because of gender.

The main goal for public policies must be that women and men have the same rights, obligations, and opportunities in all parts of their lives. This can only be possible if we reorganize the social model in order to stop the traditional and patriarchal model which has governed society and is still doing so. We have to fight for involvement within society, regardless of sex or any other social factors that prevent the full participation of people.

Equality of opportunity will never be achieved if we do not focus on the social, educational, ideological, economic, and political factors playing against women, hindering their own development and welfare. All these resources – economic, cultural, emotional, educational – are going to have an influence in the way of experiencing entertainment. The options for spending free time and leisure; the emotional burden of care for others; the social stereotypes about their abilities, interests and attitudes; harassment and violence... So that it is important to consider social environments that are playing against equality in women's lives if we analyse society from a comparative perspective of gender.

The public policy of equality must provide the same standard of living for all people, regardless of their sex. At the same time, women should fight for these aspects which are especially important for them in order to have a more dignified life. In this sense, politics of equality, that have been developing since the eighties in Spain, have some conceptual basis (Sánchez Bello, 2006) to defend that policies are not an invention in the vacuum but an important and historic process of the women's movement for defending solutions to inequalities they are suffering in their daily lives.

According to this idea, an historical overview in relation to equality between women and men confronts us with the need to demand new and committed actions, because we haven't yet finished, especially in the field of violence against women. Thus, in the twenty first century we have not been able to eradicate violence that women are systemically suffering from because of their subordinate position. It is true that in recent years there has been greater commitment from public authorities to place violence against women on the political agenda, and develop initiatives with the aim of eradicating its presence. As well as certain cultural patterns, the field of customs is still full of prejudices and stereotypes which are hindering achievement of genuine equality between women and men. It is important to remember, according to Izquierdo «the foundation of patriarchy and sexism is violence, and it is most visible because women are battered» (2006: 174). In fact, the Spain data from the Institute for Women and the Observatory of Violence leaves no doubt about the magnitude of a social problem that limits, if not eliminates, female development. In Spain between 1999 and 2010, 765 women were murdered by their partners or former intimate partners, and these data are only the tip of an iceberg that hides much more than we can see.

Until recently, violence against women was not a punishable act, even though it was considered reprehensible. Therefore, it is no wonder that it is a very relevant issue in the public sphere. In Spain, the process of sensitization, awareness, and commitment in the struggle against gender violence led to the birth of the Spanish Organic Law No. 1/2004, of December 28th, on Integral Protection Measures against Gender Violence. Obviously, before this law, different initiatives were developed with the intention to prevent and avoid violence, but,

undoubtedly, the adoption of this document was a great milestone in its overall impact in the field of public policies.

In this sense, the purpose of the Act, as we can read in the preliminary title, is to act against violence as a manifestation of discrimination. This law provides comprehensive protection measures which aim to prevent, punish and eradicate such violence and assist victims, at the same time, it maintains a view of gender violence as a structural phenomenon, that is, any act of physical violence and psychological abuse including sexual freedom, threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Also, guiding principles are exposed in article 2, some of which are shown as follows: i) strengthen measures to prevent public awareness, giving government effective tools in education, social services, health, advertising and media; ii) reinforcing the objectives required to achieve the minimum of the social services law information, care, emergency, support and comprehensive recovery and establish a system for more effective coordination of existing services at a municipal and regional level; iii) promoting collaboration and participation of organizations, associations and from civil society organizations who work against gender violence; and iv) promoting the collective expertise of professionals involved in information processing, attention and protection to victims.

Of course, for murdered women there is no possible way back, but for those who decide to end the violence before it ends their lives, there could be a new chance. For them, there is time and opportunity to rebuild their life away from violence, although the process is not easy and they cannot do it alone. The marks of violence are not the only scars, there are also other negative consequences for their psychological development; there are also attacks on self-esteem, deteriorating social networks that sometimes condemn women to isolation and limited autonomy. As we see, we are facing a complex process for which there is no easy way out and where women's loneliness is a death sentence. What happens when a woman decides to end the violence and restart her life? What are the main difficulties they have to overcome? What is the recovery process? In short, what support do they have and/or should have?

The importance of Law No. 1/2004 is the recognition of fundamental rights for women who have suffered gender violence in the context of a relationship. Thus, this legal document affirms the right to information, legal aid, labour rights and social security benefits, economic rights, and the right to comprehensive social support. At the same time, the law reminds us about the role of public authorities, professional workers and the community to fight against this social problem. From this law, we can deduce the commitment to promote multidisciplinary and comprehensive actions and initiatives to stop violence, something essential if we are looking for real progress. To get a clearer picture, we reproduce the article of the law as follows:

Women victims of gender violence are entitled to social care services, emergency support and acceptance of full recovery. The organization of these services by the Autonomous Communities and local governments will respond to the principles of continuing care, urgent action, multidisciplinary expertise and professional services. (Spanish Organic Law No. 1/2004, art. 19.1)

To summarize the above, this law is a legal text which states that gender violence is not a private matter and the law is interested in promoting important advances in the prevention and treatment of a phenomenon that manifests itself as the most brutal symbol of inequality in contemporary society.

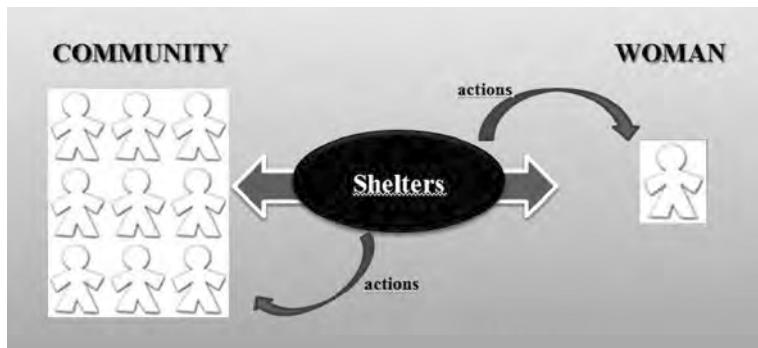
Spanish framework enables development of proposals for action against gender based violence in the leisure field. In this regard, leisure experiences can be a good way to exercise autonomy and make decisions that gradually will be extended to other areas of life. It is important not to forget that feeling capable is a critical first step for starting a new life. However, to make it possible, it is necessary to design interventions that should be committed to certain principles: increasing autonomy, improving self-esteem, and preparation for taking decisions.

In this sense, talking about violence against women in our research work, we focus on shelters and intervention programs that are developed inside these institutions. Thus, shelters – as resources of protection for women – need to consider leisure as a key area for working and being committed with coordinated work with other community services. At the same time, this could be positive for opening foster houses, because they often remain too focused on themselves. It is undeniable that shelters need security measures but these cannot be a justification for converting them into jails. Of course, it is important for women to have time off to break with the past and start to think about their future with time to relax and privacy, but this not should mean doing it apart from the community. It is important not to feel lonely; they need a social network for supporting themselves to overcome difficulties, especially at this moment. Being alone for a period of time could be a part of the process but the recovery program designed in a foster house should consider the period of transition for returning to normal life and this means taking into account the community and its role in the recovery process.

Advancing the ideas behind this thesis, it is important to question and refocus the recovery model that shelters are developing nowadays, and also promote changes that may suppose a substantial improvement in this process for women. Thus, it is important to highlight the role that leisure pedagogy might play to promote real social rights and not simply legal recognition.

In Figure 1, we collect the flow of actions taken by shelters. These initiatives should provide individual needs through women-specific programs but without forgetting the important role of the community and its services in the recovery process.

FIGURE 1  
Flow of actions taken from shelters



In relation to this last idea, it is important to answer certain research questions that allow us to give leisure new meanings in the context of gender violence. The search for answers will advance the thesis we are creating, and, at the same time, it will open new horizons from which to work in favour of women and against violence.

## 5. Conclusions

The complexity of the violence against women requires actions from different dimensions, even the field of leisure education. Paying attention to what happens when women decide to start a new life without violence implies wonder about their wellbeing. In this sense, leisure experiences could contribute positively to increase levels of women's quality of life, as well as their autonomy.

We search for answers that will help strengthen the right to social support for abused women, so that, in this article we have presented some fundamental ideas that are behind the project of research that we are developing in our university. It is important to continue research lines that relate the concepts of gender and leisure looking for new alternatives that bring us closer to more just, egalitarian, and democratic societies.

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