

The Decontextualisation of Gender-Based Violence: Institutional Templates, Differential Legibility, and the Reproduction of Systemic Violence

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Abstract

Background. Gender-based violence (GBV) is conventionally analysed as an outcome that institutions fail to prevent. This review advances a different proposition: that the institutions charged with responding to GBV are themselves sites where the phenomenon is constituted, through a process this paper terms *institutional decontextualisation* — the severing of violent acts from their relational and structural context and their recoding against narrow templates of recognisable victimhood.

Objectives. The review pursues three linked objectives derived from a prior narrative synthesis: (i) to specify how gendered discourses and stereotypes reproduce GBV across judicial, educational, health and media institutions; (ii) to examine how those same discourses condition the visibility of male victims and the institutional response available to them; and (iii) to establish how intersectional axes — race, class, migration status, sexual orientation, age and rurality — modify both dynamics.

Methods. An integrative review was conducted over a semantic retrieval of approximately 138 million records via three structured queries (n = 200), screened at abstract stage against three a priori criteria, yielding 134 sources for extraction and 80 for narrative synthesis. Eight custom extraction dimensions were applied. Load-bearing empirical claims were independently verified against a second bibliographic corpus, and a supplementary hand-search addressed an identified Ibero-American deficit.

Findings. Across all four institutional domains the evidence converges on a common mechanism rather than four separate failures. Stereotypes function not as background bias but as operative filters determining which harms become administratively legible. The same mechanism produces two distinct outputs: for women — and disproportionately for racialised, migrant and low-income women — high-volume harm is processed through templates that discredit any deviation from the "ideal victim"; for men, LGBTIQ+ persons and non-heteronormative arrangements, harm falling outside the template is frequently not processed as harm at all. Three independent systematic reviews converge on masculine identity norms as a structural barrier to help-seeking, while the same evidence base cannot adjudicate the gender symmetry debate. Only 8 of 80 sources were anchored in Latin America, and only 5 employed primarily quantitative designs.

Conclusions. Legislative reform without corresponding transformation of institutional interpretive practice reproduces a persistent normative gap. Recognising male victimisation does not require de-prioritising women; the two claims are consistent because they describe the same mechanism operating on differently positioned populations. The review specifies which institutional design features could be altered without such a trade-off.

Keywords: gender-based violence; institutional violence; gender stereotypes; male victims; intersectionality; anti-gender mobilisation; access to justice.

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence is among the most extensively legislated social problems of the past three decades and among the least successfully redressed. The asymmetry is instructive. Between the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Belém do Pará Convention, the Istanbul Convention and an accompanying dense layer of national statute, the normative architecture is substantially complete. Yet across jurisdictions with materially different legal instruments, the same pattern recurs: conviction rates remain low, complainants describe their institutional encounters as a second injury, and services designed for survivors are reported as inaccessible by the very populations they name. The persistence of this pattern under such heterogeneous legal conditions suggests that the deficit lies not principally in what the law says but in what institutions are able to perceive.

This review takes that suggestion as its point of departure. Its central claim is that the reproduction of GBV within institutions operates through a specifiable process, which it terms *institutional decontextualisation*: the severing of a violent act from the relational, economic and structural context that gives it meaning, followed by its recoding against a narrow institutional template of what a recognisable victim and a recognisable harm look like. Decontextualisation is not a failure of attention. It is a productive operation. It generates the categories through which institutions subsequently act, and in doing so it determines which injuries become actionable and which disappear into the administrative record as absences.

The framing matters because it reorganises a debate that has become unproductively polarised. A substantial literature documents institutional harm to women, and particularly to racialised, migrant and low-income women. A smaller and more recent literature documents the institutional invisibility of male victims. These bodies of work are frequently treated as competitors, as though the recognition of one victim population necessarily came at the expense of the other. The decontextualisation framework suggests why that treatment is mistaken: both outcomes are products of the same filtering operation acting on differently positioned populations. A template narrow enough to discredit a woman who fought back is, by construction, narrow enough to render a battered man illegible. Recognising this does not equalise the two phenomena — the evidence on scale is decisively asymmetric — but it does mean that the institutional reforms indicated by one body of evidence are largely the same reforms indicated by the other.

The review advances three objectives, carried forward from an earlier narrative synthesis and here subjected to a systematic evidence base. The first is to specify the mechanisms through which gendered discourses reproduce violence across judicial, educational, health and media institutions. The second is to examine how those mechanisms condition the recognition of male victims and the adequacy of the institutional response available to them. The third is to establish how intersectional axes modify both dynamics, on the premise — well supported in the evidence reviewed — that neither women nor men constitute homogeneous categories with respect to institutional access.

Three contributions follow. Analytically, the paper converts decontextualisation from a descriptive term into a four-stage mechanism with a specified feedback loop, and grounds each stage in the reviewed evidence. Conceptually, it disambiguates the expression "gender ideology," which circulates in the Spanish- and Portuguese-language literature in at least three mutually incompatible registers and whose conflation produces apparent contradictions that dissolve on inspection. Empirically, it documents a substantial Ibero-American evidence deficit: despite the region's legislative prominence in this field, only a tenth of the synthesised corpus is anchored there.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 From description to mechanism: decontextualisation specified

The term decontextualisation has circulated in the Ibero-American literature on gender violence largely as a critical description — an observation that institutions strip cases of their context. Used this way it identifies a problem without explaining one. The framework advanced here specifies four stages, each of which has a distinct empirical signature in the reviewed corpus, and a feedback loop that accounts for the pattern's stability over time.

Abstraction. The incident is separated from the relational history, economic dependency and structural position that render it intelligible. Córdova-Esparza and colleagues capture this precisely in their ethnography of the Querétaro legal field, where procedural requirements and evidentiary expectations operate as spatial filters that make certain forms of harm legible while rendering psychological and moral violence invisible. What their analysis establishes is that the filtering is constitutive rather than incidental:

the institution does not simply fail to see moral violence, it produces a category of actionable harm from which moral violence is definitionally excluded.

Template matching. The abstracted incident is compared against an institutional model of the recognisable victim. The systematic review by Pereira and colleagues, drawing on twenty-eight empirical studies of judges, prosecutors and jury-eligible participants, establishes that gender stereotypes operate as heuristic frameworks in judicial reasoning and that deviation from the ideal-victim template is consistently associated with increased victim-blaming and reduced case progression. The finding holds across decision-maker types and study designs, which is what distinguishes it from a claim about individual prejudice.

Differential legibility. Harm matching the template becomes actionable; harm that does not becomes administratively invisible. Saccà and Massidda's analysis of 283 Italian judgments identifies three recurrent interpretive frames — family dispute, jealousy and *raptus* — that reclassify violence as something other than violence, alongside a near-total absence of reference to CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention in the same texts. The two findings are connected: an interpretive frame that relocates violence to the register of private emotion has no occasion to invoke an international instrument on discrimination.

Institutional reinscription. The non-response is recorded as an absence of harm, and that record confirms the template for subsequent cases. This is the stage that explains persistence. De Lira's observation that statistical systems documenting violence against women have no equivalent for violence against men illustrates the mechanism in its purest administrative form: the absence of a data category is subsequently read as the absence of a phenomenon, which in turn justifies not creating the category.

Figure 3 renders the mechanism and its differentiated outputs. The critical feature is the loop: each unrecognised case does not merely fail to be recorded but actively narrows the template, so that institutional learning runs in the direction of decreasing rather than increasing sensitivity.

2.2 Three registers of "gender ideology"

Any review addressing this literature must confront a terminological instability that is not merely semantic. The expression "gender ideology" — *ideología de género*, *ideologia de gênero* — is deployed across the corpus in at least three mutually incompatible registers, and their conflation generates apparent scholarly disagreements that are in fact category errors. Table 1 sets out the distinction.

Table 1. Three registers of "gender ideology" and their implications for evidentiary interpretation.

Register	Referent	Representative sources	Evidentiary status of claims
I. Analytic	Culturally dominant norms and stereotypes that organise social relations hierarchically and reproduce violence	Bodelón (2015) on androcentric judicial practice; Alencar (2019) on CEDAW anti-stereotyping doctrine; Córdova-Esparza et al. (2026) on juridical-patriarchal habitus	Empirical-sociological; testable against institutional data. Dominant register in this corpus.
II. Object of study	The rhetorical construct mobilised by anti-gender movements to delegitimise equality agendas	Kuhar & Zobec (2017); Corredor (2019); Szwed & Zielińska (2017); Garbagnoli (2016); Vaggione (2020)	Empirical-political; documents an organised countermovement, not a property of gender relations.
III. Critique of gender theory	Contestation of gender as an analytic category, from conservative, religious or essentialist positions	Positions analysed within Szwed & Zielińska (2017) and Carbone (2024); present as object rather than voice in this corpus	Philosophical-normative; not adjudicable by the institutional evidence reviewed here.

The distinction has direct consequences for how the evidence should be read. A finding in Register I — that stereotyping shapes judicial credibility assessments — is not contradicted by a finding in Register II — that conservative actors have constructed "gender ideology" as a political enemy. Nor does the second constitute evidence against the first. Kuhar and Zobec establish that the term functions as an *empty*

signifier, deliberately unstable in content so as to accommodate heterogeneous grievances; Korolczuk and Graff show how an anticolonial frame gives the resulting discourse a coherence and mobilising power that its analytic content does not warrant. Vaggione traces its emergence as a Vatican strategy subsequently appropriated across Latin American neoconservative politics.

For the purposes of this review, Register I is operative. Register II is treated as an implementation constraint — an organised political force that conditions whether the interventions the evidence supports can in fact be enacted — and is analysed as such in Section 5.4. Register III falls outside the evidentiary scope of an institutional review and is neither adjudicated nor dismissed here.

2.3 Institutional violence and the normative gap

Institutional violence, as the term is used in this literature, denotes harm produced or permitted by the organisational practices of bodies formally charged with prevention, protection or redress. Bodelón's foundational treatment, developed through two empirical studies of the application of Spain's Organic Law 1/2004, identifies its characteristic signature: low conviction rates, stereotyped conceptualisation of gender violence, and revictimising treatment of complainants — all occurring under a legislative framework widely regarded as advanced.

That combination defines what this review calls the normative gap: the distance between legal text and institutional practice, which is not closed by strengthening the text. The gap appears with remarkable consistency across jurisdictions with divergent legal traditions — Italy, Spain, Brazil, Kosovo, South Africa, Mexico — which is precisely what makes it a structural rather than a national finding. Valerio's reconstruction of the due diligence principle articulates the normative implication: if institutional inaction is itself a rights violation, then the adequacy of a state's response cannot be assessed by reference to its statute book alone.

2.4 Asymmetry of scale, symmetry of mechanism

The most contested question in this field concerns the relationship between violence against women and violence against men. This review adopts a position that is analytically precise and, it argues, well supported: the two phenomena are asymmetric in scale and severity but symmetric in the institutional mechanism that processes them.

The asymmetry is documented. Semahegn and colleagues, in a systematic review and meta-analysis of 52 studies with 33 entering meta-analysis, establish a pooled lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence against women of 55% (95% CI: 52–59%) in low- and lower-middle-income countries, disaggregated as physical 39%, psychological 45% and sexual 20%. No comparable evidence base exists for male victimisation, and the male-victim literature — dominated by small qualitative samples of self-identifying help-seekers — is not designed to generate one.

The symmetry is equally documented, and concerns the filtering operation rather than the harm. The template that discredits a woman departing from the ideal-victim model and the template that renders a male complainant unintelligible are the same template, applied to populations positioned differently with respect to it. Moura's concept of *heteroframing* — the enforcement of the Maria da Penha Law either not at all or only through emulation of heteronormative relationship templates — demonstrates the point with unusual clarity, because it shows a single interpretive apparatus simultaneously excluding non-heterosexual arrangements and constraining the recognition available to heterosexual women.

This position is deliberately distinguished from the gender symmetry thesis, which holds that intimate partner violence is roughly balanced across genders. That thesis is not supported here, and the evidence reviewed cannot adjudicate it: no study in the corpus directly tests the context-and-consequences objection, which holds that comparable rates of discrete physical acts would still mask systematic differences in severity, fear and consequence. What the corpus does establish is narrower and more actionable — that male victimisation is under-recognised by institutions, that the under-recognition has specifiable causes, and that addressing it does not require reallocating resources away from women.

3. Methods

3.1 Design

An integrative review design was adopted. The choice reflects the state of the evidence rather than a methodological preference: the corpus is dominated by qualitative and review-based work, with

heterogeneous outcome constructs and few comparable effect estimates, which makes aggregation inappropriate and interpretive synthesis necessary. The review follows the logic of systematic identification and transparent screening while retaining the capacity to integrate conceptual, doctrinal and empirical contributions – a combination the subject matter requires, since the reproduction of GBV in institutions is documented partly through legal analysis and partly through fieldwork.

The protocol was specified in advance of retrieval, including the research question, the three search strands, the abstract-stage screening criteria and the eight extraction dimensions. No amendments were made to the screening criteria after retrieval.

3.2 Search strategy

Retrieval was conducted over a semantic index of approximately 138 million academic records. Three structured queries were specified to address distinct facets of the question rather than to maximise overlap, on the reasoning that a single query would over-represent whichever facet is best served by prevailing indexing conventions. This proved to be a material design decision: a unitary query built around the phrase "gender ideology" returns predominantly Register II literature, for reasons set out in Section 2.2, and would have systematically under-retrieved the institutional evidence that constitutes the review's primary object.

Table 2. Search strands, rationale and yield.

Strand	Query	Facet addressed	n
1	Institutional reproduction of gender-based violence through gender stereotypes in judicial, educational and health systems	Mechanisms of institutional reproduction (Objective i)	80
2	Male victims of intimate partner and gender-based violence: invisibility, masculinity norms, help-seeking barriers and access to services	Recognition and institutional response for male victims (Objective ii)	70
3	Anti-gender movements and "gender ideology" discourse in education and public policy, with focus on Latin America and Iberia	Register II discourse as implementation constraint (Section 5.4)	50
—	Supplementary hand-search: Ibero-American anti-gender scholarship	Correction of identified regional deficit (Section 4.1)	9

3.3 Screening

Records were screened at abstract stage against three criteria applied conjunctively. *Thematic focus*: the study was required to address GBV together with an institutional, normative or discursive dimension; studies reporting clinical or epidemiological prevalence with no institutional or discursive component were excluded. *Date and publication type*: publication from 2015 onwards, restricted to peer-reviewed articles, academic chapters, postgraduate theses and institutional reports with an explicit analytic framework. *Language*: English, Spanish or Portuguese, with an explicit instruction that Spanish- and Portuguese-language sources were not to be excluded on language grounds, these being central to the regional corpus of interest.

Of 200 records retrieved, 66 were excluded at this stage — 34 for thematic focus and 32 for date or publication type — leaving 134 sources for extraction. Of these, the 80 with the highest screening scores entered narrative synthesis. Figure 1 summarises the flow. The reduction from 134 to 80 is a processing constraint rather than a methodological judgement and is treated as a limitation in Section 5.5.

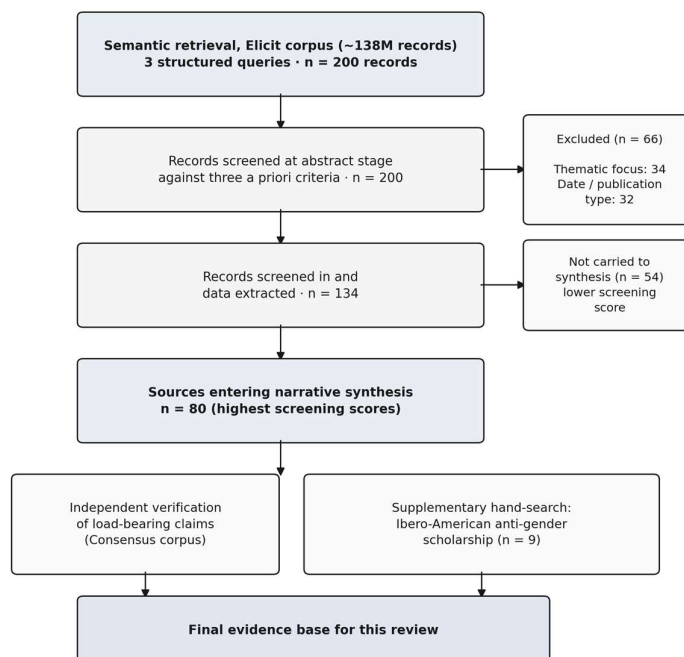


Figure 1. Identification, screening and synthesis flow.

3.4 Extraction dimensions

Eight dimensions were extracted from each source, six with constrained response options and two free-text. The dimensions were derived from the review objectives rather than from a generic template: institutional domain; focal population; treatment of the expression "gender ideology"; methodological design; type of violence documented; intersectional axes engaged substantively; geographic anchoring; and legal instruments invoked. The third dimension warrants comment. It was included specifically to render the terminological problem of Section 2.2 measurable rather than merely asserted, with explicit instruction to code according to actual usage in the text rather than according to the coder's view of correct usage.

3.5 Verification

Because retrieval and extraction were machine-assisted, an independent verification step was applied to claims carrying substantial argumentative weight. Bibliographic records and reported findings for the load-bearing sources — the prevalence estimates, the three systematic reviews of male help-seeking, and the anti-gender scholarship — were checked against a separate academic corpus. Verification confirmed the reported study characteristics and numerical findings in each case checked, including the pooled prevalence estimates and constituent figures reported by Semahegn and colleagues, the study counts and thematic structures of Huntley et al., Kim et al. and McLeod et al., and the empty-signifier analysis in Kuhar and Zobec.

Verification also identified a class of error requiring correction. Automated bibliographic capture mishandled compound Spanish, Portuguese and Lithuanian surnames in several records, truncating or transposing author names. Where the correct form could be established it has been used; where it could not, the source has not been relied upon for any load-bearing claim. Two records lacking identifiable authorship were excluded from citation altogether. This is a general hazard of machine-assisted retrieval in multilingual fields and is noted here as a methodological caution rather than an incidental correction.

3.6 Disclosure and reflexivity

Retrieval, screening and first-pass extraction were machine-assisted; specification, verification, interpretation and synthesis are the author's. The distinction matters for appraisal: the corpus boundaries are a product of the queries and criteria specified in Section 3.2 and 3.3, and a differently specified protocol would produce a different corpus. The review does not claim exhaustiveness. It claims transparency about what was searched, what was excluded and on what grounds.

4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of the corpus

The 80 synthesised sources span 2015–2026, with pronounced concentration after 2020. Three features of the corpus condition every finding that follows and are therefore reported before them.

The evidence base is predominantly interpretive. Thirty-eight sources are systematic, narrative, scoping or integrative reviews; twenty-eight are primary qualitative studies; five are primarily theoretical; and only five deploy primarily quantitative designs with original survey or corpus data. Patterns reported below are frequently consistent across multiple independent syntheses, which is a genuine form of evidential strength, but they are rarely tested under controlled conditions. Claims about mechanism are consequently better supported than claims about magnitude.

The male-victim and female-victim literatures are differently distributed across institutions. Panel (a) of Figure 2 shows the distribution. Women-focused sources predominate in the educational domain (11 against 6) and in media and digital platforms (5 against 2). Men-focused sources predominate in the community and family domain (17 against 8) and are marginally more numerous in health (15 against 11). The judicial domain is the most densely covered overall and the most evenly divided (19 and 17). This distribution is itself a finding rather than a sampling artefact: it indicates that male victimisation is studied principally where informal support operates, and studied least where institutional prevention is designed.

Ibero-American anchoring is thin. Only 8 of 80 sources are anchored in Latin America and the Caribbean, against 16 in Europe and 23 with no geographic anchor at all. Panel (b) of Figure 2 displays the distribution. Given that the region has produced some of the most consequential legislation in this field — the Maria da Penha Law, the Belém do Pará Convention, a dense body of constitutional jurisprudence — this deficit is striking, and it is not plausibly explained by an absence of scholarship. It more likely reflects the indexing and language conventions of the international corpora over which retrieval operates. The supplementary hand-search reported in Table 2 was undertaken in response.

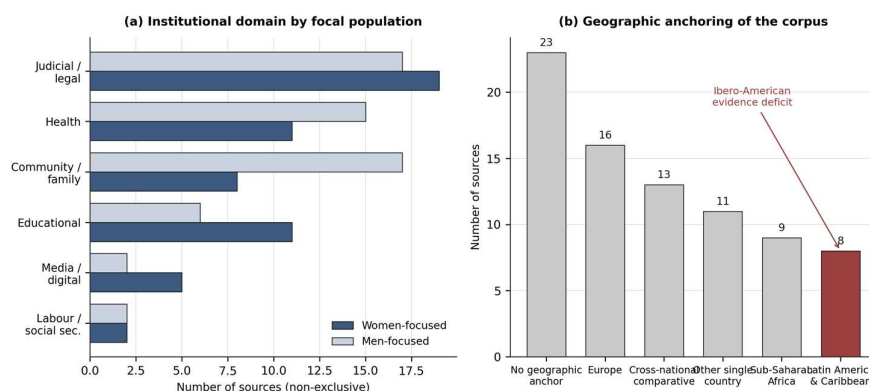


Figure 2. Composition of the synthesised corpus (n = 80). Domain and population categories are non-exclusive; sources addressing multiple domains are counted in each.

4.2 Judicial and legal institutions

The judicial domain is the most densely documented and the one where the operative character of stereotyping is most firmly established. The central finding across independent analyses is that stereotypes do not accompany legal process as ambient bias but function within it as decision heuristics.

Alencar's doctrinal analysis of CEDAW Committee jurisprudence establishes the normative baseline, showing through General Recommendations 28, 33 and 35 that stereotyping in the justice system constitutes discrimination under international law rather than merely producing it. Pereira and colleagues supply the empirical counterpart across twenty-eight studies of judges, prosecutors and mock jurors, finding that deviation from the ideal-victim stereotype is consistently associated with increased victim-blaming and reduced case progression across decision-maker types and study designs.

National analyses converge. Sabadell and Muniz identify what they term juridical patriarchy in Brazilian State Court rulings, in which revictimisation of rape complainants is enacted through the court's own reasoning rather than despite it. Tafarelo and De Mello document the use of a complainant's marital status as a differentiating factor in the adjudication of sexual violence — a finding of particular importance

because it shows the template operating on a variable with no evidentiary relevance to the offence. Bodelón reaches parallel conclusions for Spain under Organic Law 1/2004, and Némec for Kosovo, where conceptual ignorance, relativisation and victim-blaming are identified as structural components of the response by police, prosecutors and judges. Tshoane and colleagues connect these interpretive failures to corruption and institutional inefficiency in South African policing and adjudication, linking them to a culture of impunity.

Two contributions extend the analysis beyond the identification of bias. Moura's study of protective order enforcement in Belo Horizonte introduces *heterojustice* to describe a system oriented to maintaining the traditional heterosexual family as norm, within which the Maria da Penha Law is either not enforced or enforced only through heteroframing. Giordano and Zottola demonstrate through analysis of separate opinions in European Court of Human Rights GBV cases from 2012 to 2024 that dissenting judicial voices can reproduce harmful narratives through argumentative and rhetorical choice, establishing that the phenomenon is not confined to courts of first instance or to jurisdictions with weak rule-of-law indicators.

Villacampa's analysis of restorative justice in Spanish gender violence cases supplies the point at which the judicial evidence bears directly on the review's second objective: the predominant judicial framing presumes the man as aggressor and the woman as victim, with the consequence that protection available to men victimised by partners is structurally constrained. This is the template operating in its exclusionary rather than its discrediting mode.

4.3 Educational institutions

Educational institutions appear in the corpus in two distinct capacities: as workplaces and communities in which GBV occurs and is concealed, and as the principal site of prevention and therefore the principal target of organised resistance.

On the first, the structural features identified as facilitating GBV in higher education are strikingly consistent. O'Connor and colleagues identify three: male-dominant hierarchy, neoliberal managerialist ethos, and gender-incompetent leadership, arguing that these same features inhibit response by recasting GBV as an individual problem and encouraging informal coping. Grignoli and colleagues link the pattern to academic capitalism in comparative analysis of Italian and Polish universities. Pilinkaitė Sotirovič and colleagues, drawing on 39 interviews across fifteen European countries, advance the strongest version of the claim: universities actively benefit from *network silence*, a system compounded of self-silencing, silencing by others and institutional not-hearing, sustained by shared leadership beliefs about reputational protection. Gardiner and Finn show that the silencing extends to senior women attempting to implement policy, whose efforts carry risks at the level of both personal identity and social tie.

The Latin American evidence is comparatively sparse but pointed. Laz-Figueroa and colleagues find GBV in Ecuadorian higher education to be frequent but underreported owing to cultural normalisation and institutional mistrust, with formal regulatory frameworks in place and poorly implemented — the normative gap in its educational form. Vázquez Ramos and colleagues document structural gender violence in Mexican higher education through practices that are discriminatory precisely because they are subtle and normalised, and Guarderas Albuja's Quito study shows how the very construction of GBV as a social problem carries historically specific silences. Jesus and Eggert identify sexist institutional violence at Brazilian federal universities operating along gendered, racialised and occupational hierarchies simultaneously.

On prevention, Villardón-Gallego and colleagues provide the most systematically evaluated evidence, identifying four characteristics shared by effective early interventions: curricular integration, active participation by students and community, grounding in scientific evidence, and contextual adaptation. Sammut and colleagues find, for pre-qualifying health care students, that interactive strategies outperform didactic ones and longer courses outperform shorter. These findings matter for Section 5.4, because the interventions the evidence supports are precisely those that organised anti-gender mobilisation targets.

4.4 Health institutions

Health institutions occupy a dual position that the corpus documents separately: as sites where violence is perpetrated through institutional practice, and as first responders inadequately equipped for the role.

Obstetric and gynaecological violence is the most precisely documented form of health-institution-perpetrated harm. Perrotte and colleagues establish through global review that it is rooted in patriarchal gender stereotyping and exacerbated by professional-patient power asymmetry, ranging from absence of informed consent to physical harm, with lasting effects on subsequent health-seeking. Simić's legal

analysis argues that such violence persists in Serbia because control over women's bodies remains institutionalised notwithstanding international commitment. O'Connell and Zampas analyse the Inter-American Court's ruling in *IV v. Bolivia*, where stereotyping in the provision of contraceptive information and sterilisation was held to strip women of decisional authority — a case of particular value because it establishes judicially that stereotyping in clinical settings is a rights violation rather than a quality-of-care deficiency.

On response capacity, Mbah and colleagues identify One Stop Centres as a promising comprehensive model while documenting persistent shortcomings in low- and middle-income settings: limited trained providers, focus restricted to sexual violence, staff turnover, insufficient documentation and cultural interference. Bekebayeva finds across 26 sources that effective professional education is multidimensional, interactive and institutionally integrated, and documents in Kazakhstan the characteristic combination of high prevalence with low disclosure and fragmented training. Del Risco Sánchez and colleagues, in an umbrella review of 24 systematic reviews, find screening in at-risk populations combined with education, counselling and advocacy to show the most promising results. Hegarty and colleagues set out the Australian model — universal education, antenatal enquiry, first-line supportive care, referral for advocacy — while emphasising that Indigenous women are disproportionately affected and that cultural safety and anti-racist practice are preconditions rather than refinements.

Nelson and colleagues extend the analysis to the health workforce itself in a scoping review of 226 studies, finding that women experience more non-physical violence including verbal abuse, sexual harassment and bullying, while men experience more physical violence, with age, experience, professional status, organisational hierarchy and minority status all interacting with gender. The finding is significant for this review because it shows differential exposure by gender within a single institutional setting — the same environment producing different harm profiles for differently positioned occupants.

The health domain also supplies the corpus's most detailed quantitative evidence on institutional GBV against a minority population. Lanham and colleagues, through 74 structured interviews in El Salvador, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Haiti, report that 82.9% of transgender women participants experienced GBV in healthcare settings, 85.1% in educational settings and 80.0% from police, with emotional abuse most common in every context and health workers according lower priority, providing substandard care, attributing blame and denying services.

4.5 Media and digital platforms

Media occupy an ambivalent position: they reproduce symbolic violence, amplify harassment, and serve as a site of counter-mobilisation, and the corpus documents all three without resolving their relative weight.

Belmonte and Negri provide the strongest empirical contribution, analysing more than 16,000 Italian newspaper articles from 2017 to 2019 and demonstrating how press framing reinforces stereotypes that sustain relations of material and symbolic domination. The finding gains force from its pairing with Saccà and Massidda's analysis of Italian judgments from the same research programme: the interpretive frames identified in the press and in the courts are recognisably the same frames, which is direct evidence that decontextualisation is not confined within institutional boundaries but circulates between them. Rocha and Beraldo's analysis of the construction of the feminine in Brazilian advertising, and Amezcua Bautista and colleagues' study of graphic humour and gender stereotypes on social platforms, extend the finding to the Ibero-American context and identify the same ambivalence — platforms functioning simultaneously as sites of reproduction and of resistance.

Duche-Pérez and colleagues, reviewing GBV on social media during the COVID-19 period, find that platforms perpetuate and amplify inequalities present offline while also enabling connection and empowerment. Parro Carrero and colleagues report that at least three in ten vocational training students in Extremadura have experienced online harassment and that girls are the most frequent observers of such violence, positioning digital literacy as an educational rather than a purely regulatory question.

4.6 Male victims: recognition, help-seeking and institutional response

Twenty-four sources address men's experiences as victims. The convergence across this literature is its most notable property: three independent systematic reviews, using different databases, appraisal instruments and synthesis methods, identify substantially the same barrier architecture.

Huntley and colleagues, synthesising twelve qualitative studies published between 2006 and 2017, organise findings into two phases — barriers to help-seeking (fear of disclosure, challenge to masculinity, commitment to relationship, diminished confidence, invisibility of services) and experiences of intervention

(initial contact, confidentiality, appropriate and inappropriate professional approaches). Kim and colleagues, reviewing 23 studies under the Joanna Briggs Institute method, identify an overarching theme of being stuck in a loop and finding ways to move on, with gender-biased perspectives on domestic violence, personal fears and familial factors as the principal impediments. McLeod and colleagues, narrowing 15,547 records to 16 empirical studies, rank cultural stigma around masculinity, fear of disclosure and negative experiences with criminal justice and support systems as the highest drivers of disparate experience. Table 3 sets out the correspondence.

Table 3. Barrier architecture for male victims: convergence across three independent systematic reviews.

Barrier level	Huntley et al. (2019), 12 studies	Kim et al. (2023), 23 studies	McLeod et al. (2023), 16 studies
Identity / internal	Challenge to masculinity; diminished confidence	Personal fears	Cultural stigma around masculinity constructions
Disclosure	Fear of disclosure	Gender-biased perspectives of domestic violence	Fear of disclosure
Relational	Commitment to the relationship	Familial factors	—
Institutional	Invisibility and perception of services; inappropriate professional approaches	Need for men-specific assessment; reform of social and legal-justice processes	Negative experiences with criminal justice and support system responses

Primary studies specify the institutional dimension further. Hine and colleagues find, through interviews with call handlers at a UK service, that stereotypes and expectations of men constitute a superordinate theme affecting every other aspect of provision. Taylor and colleagues, surveying 147 UK men, identify *stigmatised gender* as the superordinate theme with sub-themes of discreditation, exclusion and isolation. Machado and colleagues, interviewing ten Portuguese men who had sought formal help, find that participants struggled to achieve the social status of victim — a formulation that names the template-matching stage of the mechanism precisely.

Cross-cultural consistency is substantial but not uniform. Park and colleagues document six themes among eleven Korean men; Zhang reviews 23 articles on Chinese male victims, examining shifts in gender norms after reform and opening-up alongside limited professional capacity in social work organisations; Waila and colleagues find in Kenya that both men and women recognise the need for gender-inclusive response, with informal reporting preferred and men's help-seeking treated as social taboo. Two studies resist any simple reading. Brooks and colleagues surface men who reframe victim status in ways that sustain their own control, and who situate their accounts within histories of violence against the women who used violence and the intergenerational effects of colonisation. Rowlands finds that male victims in Johannesburg were significantly likely to use social workers as formal support while still in abusive relationships — directly contradicting the assumption that men do not seek help, and indicating that the barrier is at least partly a property of service design rather than of masculinity as such.

On the service side, Pisano and colleagues identify two systemic challenges through interviews with thirteen experienced providers: structural issues of multi-agency coordination, funding and practitioner impact; and gender stereotypes that simultaneously impede male victims' help-seeking and distort the treatment of female perpetrators. Ike and colleagues, reviewing ten studies on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic men in the UK, add religio-cultural factors and victimisation by service providers to the standard barrier model, with persistent recourse to informal support and limited culturally adapted provision.

4.7 Intersectional axes

Approximately half the corpus engages at least one axis beyond gender substantively, and roughly a third addresses multiple axes. The distribution of intersectional attention is markedly uneven, and the unevenness is itself a finding: race and class are consistently addressed in the literature on women, while the male-victim literature remains largely inattentive to intersectionality beyond occasional reference to sexual orientation or ethnicity. Table 4 summarises the evidence by axis.

Table 4. Intersectional axes: mechanism, evidence and institutional locus.

Axis	Documented mechanism	Principal evidence	Institutional locus
Race / ethnicity	Institutional racism compounds template mismatch; cultural competence deficits in frontline services	Hulley et al. (2022), metasynthesis of 47 qualitative studies; Hegarty et al. (2022) on Indigenous women; Sousa & Azevedo (2024); De Moraes Falcão & De Araujo Neves (2022)	Judicial; health; frontline services
Migration status	Access to support conditioned on immigration status, trapping women in abusive relationships	Hulley et al. (2022) on No Recourse to Public Funds and the Domestic Violence Rule	Judicial; welfare administration
Class / poverty	Economic barriers compound institutional inadequacy; differential capacity to sustain a claim	Baikady et al. (2023), 14 countries; Landa-Blanco & Mejía Sánchez (2025) on LMIC contexts	All domains
Sexual orientation / gender identity	Legal frameworks structurally exclude same-sex arrangements; documentation weaponised against trans identities	Calton et al. (2016); O'Neal & Parry (2015); Lanham et al. (2019); Moura (2025) on heteroframing	Judicial; health; police
Age	Differential vulnerability by seniority and life stage; provision not adapted to older survivors	Strid & Hearn (2025), UniSAFE survey; Zamora Rodríguez et al. (2024)	Educational; health
Rurality	Distance from provision compounds stigma in small communities	Landa-Blanco & Mejía Sánchez (2025); De Lira (2020)	Health; community

Three theoretically developed treatments deserve separate note. Krieger argues for a gender-transformative intersectional science that rejects biological essentialism in favour of embodied integration, situating institutional findings within an ecosocial account of population health. Hattery contends that obscuring the similarities between gender-based and racialised violence, together with the de-centring of Black feminist voices, has stalled progress in reducing GBV. Moura's heteroframing analysis demonstrates that a single interpretive apparatus can simultaneously exclude non-heterosexual arrangements from protection and constrain the recognition available within heterosexual ones.

4.8 Crisis as amplifier

The corpus consistently identifies crisis conditions as intensifying existing mechanisms rather than generating new ones. John and colleagues document that emergencies involving quarantine increase GBV while gender norms simultaneously placed women on the pandemic front line and excluded them from designing the response. Ruiz Pérez and Pastor-Moreno analyse Spanish containment measures, identifying both obstacles — closure of support services — and opportunities in remote provision. López Hernández and Rubio Amores document the Ecuadorian increase in domestic violence, and Lorente Acosta the Spanish case. Kolyada and colleagues extend the argument to armed conflict in Ukraine, showing how war deepens economic and social dependence and complicates access to help.

Havronska and colleagues report a counterintuitive quantitative finding across seven countries: a negative relationship between GBV rates and economic development, gender equality and social norm development, alongside a positive relationship between gender development indicators and domestic violence rates. The authors interpret the latter as backlash violence accompanying gains in gender development. The finding is reported here because it bears directly on Section 5.4, but it rests on a single correlational study and should not be read as establishing a causal relationship.

5. Discussion

5.1 One mechanism, two outputs

The principal analytic finding of this review is that the four institutional domains examined do not exhibit four separate failures. They exhibit one mechanism operating under different local conditions. The evidence for this claim is the convergence of independently derived concepts on a single operation: juridical-patriarchal habitus in the Mexican legal field, juridical patriarchalism in Brazilian appellate reasoning, heterojustice in the enforcement of the Maria da Penha Law, network silence in European universities, the family dispute and *raptus* frames in Italian judgments, and stigmatised gender in the accounts of British men seeking help. These were developed by different researchers, in different languages, working on different institutions, without reference to one another. They describe the same thing: an institutional filter that determines in advance what will count as harm.

Figure 3 sets out the mechanism and its two characteristic outputs. The distinction between them is not one of severity but of processing mode. For women, and disproportionately for racialised, migrant and low-income women, harm is processed — at high volume — through a template that discredits any departure from an idealised victim profile. The complainant enters the institution and is measured against a model she cannot fully satisfy, with the consequence documented by Pereira and colleagues: reduced case progression as a function of stereotype mismatch. For men, LGBTIQ+ persons and non-heteronormative arrangements, harm frequently falls outside the template altogether and is therefore not processed as harm. Machado and colleagues capture the difference exactly in reporting that their participants struggled to achieve the social status of victim: the difficulty was not that their claims were disbelieved but that no category existed in which to lodge them.

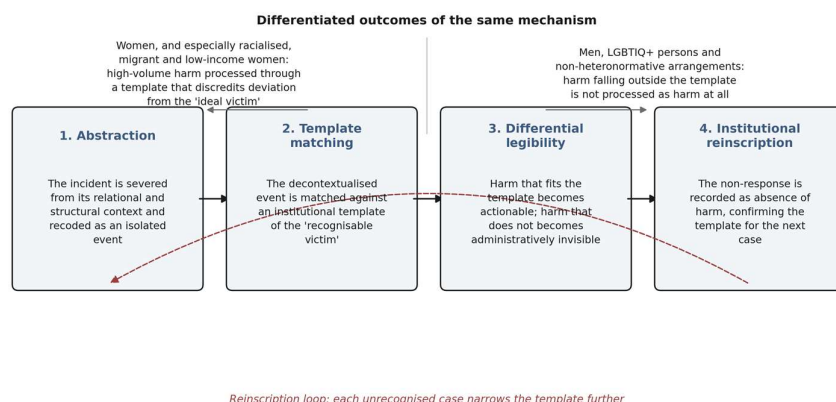


Figure 3. The decontextualisation mechanism and its differentiated institutional outputs.

The reinscription loop explains why the pattern is stable under legislative reform. When harm outside the template is not recorded, the resulting data confirm the template's adequacy. De Lira's observation about the absence of statistical categories for violence against men in the Pernambuco *sertão* is the clearest instance, but the same logic operates on the other output: a case that fails to progress because the complainant deviated from the ideal-victim model is recorded as a case that lacked merit, not as a case the institution could not perceive. Institutional learning therefore runs toward narrowing rather than widening sensitivity, which is why the normative gap persists across jurisdictions that have repeatedly strengthened their statutes.

5.2 Why the two claims are consistent

This review's second objective concerns male victims, and the finding requires careful statement because the surrounding debate is prone to two symmetrical errors.

The first error infers from the reality of male victimisation that GBV is not gendered. The evidence does not support this. Semahegn and colleagues establish a pooled lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence against women of 55% in low- and lower-middle-income settings, and no comparable evidence base exists on the other side. More importantly, the male-victim literature is not designed to generate one: it is dominated by small qualitative samples of self-identifying help-seekers, which can establish that a phenomenon exists and identify its mechanisms but cannot estimate its prevalence relative to another population. The context-and-consequences objection — that comparable rates of discrete physical acts

would still mask systematic differences in severity, fear and consequence — is not directly tested by any study in this corpus, and this review therefore neither confirms nor refutes it.

The second error infers from the severity of violence against women that male victimisation should not be institutionally addressed, on the assumption that recognition is zero-sum. The evidence does not support this either, and the mechanism analysis explains why. The institutional features that render services unfit for male victims are, with considerable specificity, the same features that harm women: reliance on a narrow victim template, absence of multi-agency coordination, inadequate practitioner training, and the treatment of GBV as a matter of individual pathology rather than institutional design. Pisano and colleagues make the point directly in finding that the stereotypes impeding male victims' help-seeking simultaneously distort the treatment of female perpetrators — one deficiency, two casualties. Rowlands's finding that South African men did use social workers, contrary to the expectation that men do not talk, points the same way: where provision was designed to be reachable, it was reached.

The practical implication is that a reform agenda derived from the male-victim evidence and a reform agenda derived from the evidence on women converge on most of their content. Both require widening the range of harm an institution can perceive; both require training that addresses interpretive practice rather than procedural compliance; both require multi-agency coordination. Where they diverge — in the design of specific services and the framing of outreach — the divergence concerns provision rather than principle, and does not require reallocation away from the population bearing the greater burden.

5.3 The normative gap and the limits of legal reform

The seed analysis from which this review's objectives derive grounded its argument in international instruments, and the systematic evidence substantially vindicates that emphasis while sharpening its implications. Table 5 maps the principal instruments against the institutional deficits documented here.

Table 5. International instruments and the corresponding institutional deficits documented in the corpus.

Instrument and provision	Obligation	Corresponding documented deficit
CEDAW, Art. 5	Modify sociocultural patterns of conduct to eliminate prejudice and practices premised on the inferiority or superiority of either sex	Stereotyping as operative heuristic in judicial reasoning (Pereira et al., 2026; Alencar, 2019); invisibility of male victims within institutional templates (Huntley et al., 2019)
CEDAW, Art. 10	Eliminate stereotyped conceptions at all levels of education	Structural GBV in higher education (O'Connor et al., 2021; Vázquez Ramos et al., 2021); network silence (Pilinkaitė Sotirovič et al., 2024)
CEDAW, Art. 11 / ICESCR, Art. 11	Equality in employment; adequate standard of living	Gendered workplace violence in the health workforce (Nelson et al., 2024); occupational hierarchies in universities (Jesus & Eggert, 2026)
CEDAW, Art. 15	Equality before the law	Normative gap between statute and judicial culture across Italy, Spain, Brazil, Kosovo and South Africa
ICESCR, Art. 12	Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health	Obstetric and gynaecological violence (Perrotte et al., 2020; Simić, 2025); stigma-related barriers to men's mental health provision (Landa-Blanco & Mejía Sánchez, 2025)
ICCPR, Art. 2	Rights guaranteed without distinction of any kind, including sex	Absence of statistical categories and services for male victims (Mphatheni & Mlamlala, 2022; Moore, 2021)
Belém do Pará, Art. 9	Particular account of women vulnerable by reason of race,	Compounded barriers for racialised and migrant women (Hulley et al., 2022); trans

Instrument and provision	Obligation	Corresponding documented deficit
	ethnicity, migrant status or other conditions	women's institutional GBV (Lanham et al., 2019)

The mapping supports a conclusion that is stronger than the familiar call for implementation. If institutional inaction constitutes a rights violation in its own right, as Valerio argues through the due diligence principle, then a state whose statutes are exemplary and whose institutions cannot perceive the harms those statutes name is not partially compliant. It is non-compliant in a manner that the ratification record renders invisible — which is itself an instance of the reinscription loop operating at the level of international monitoring.

This has a methodological corollary for compliance assessment. Saccà and Massidda's finding of near-total absence of CEDAW and Istanbul Convention references across 283 Italian judgments suggests a usable indicator: the frequency with which domestic courts invoke international anti-stereotyping standards in reasoning, as distinct from the state's formal ratification status. On the evidence reviewed here, the two are only weakly related.

5.4 Organised resistance as an implementation constraint

The interventions this evidence supports — curricular integration of prevention programming, professional training in interpretive practice, comprehensive sexuality education — are precisely the interventions that organised anti-gender mobilisation targets. This is not incidental, and it is the reason Register II literature was retained in the review despite belonging to a different analytic order than the rest.

Kuhar and Zobec document how anti-gender activism across Europe interferes with the educational process in public schools, and argue from European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence that parental rights to educate children according to religious and moral conviction do not extend to preventing schools from addressing gender-related topics, provided these are conveyed objectively, critically and pluralistically. Corredor traces the transnational organisation of the countermovement. Garbagnoli analyses the term's emergence as a Vatican rhetorical device developed to delegitimise feminist and LGBTQ scholarship; Vaggione documents its subsequent appropriation across Latin American neoconservative politics; Korolczuk and Graff identify the anticolonial frame that supplies its mobilising power. In the Ibero-American context specifically, Rezende and Elias analyse its deployment in Brazilian and Uruguayan legislative debate, Carbone examines the coalition assembled around it in Brazilian education policy, and Bernárdez-Rodal and colleagues document its use in Spanish electoral communication.

Two implications follow. The first is analytic: the existence of an organised movement contesting the term "gender ideology" is not evidence bearing on whether gendered institutional violence occurs. Conflating the two — the error Table 1 is designed to prevent — allows a political dispute to be mistaken for a scientific one. The second is practical and less comfortable. The prevention evidence base identifies contextual adaptation and community participation as conditions of effectiveness, but the evidence cannot establish whether gender-transformative programming can sustain impact within actively contested institutional environments, or whether it requires a permissive political setting to scale. This is a genuine and consequential gap: it means the field can specify what works without being able to specify where it will continue working.

It is worth recording that the corpus contains one finding pointing in an uncomfortable direction on this question. Havronska and colleagues report a positive association between gender development indicators and domestic violence rates across seven countries, which they interpret as backlash. A single correlational study cannot support a causal reading, and measurement artefacts — improved reporting infrastructure raising recorded rates — offer at least as plausible an explanation. It is reported here because a review that suppressed it would be less useful than one that flags it as a question requiring proper design.

5.5 Limitations

Five limitations bear on the interpretation of these findings.

Corpus construction. The 80 synthesised sources were selected from 134 by screening score, a processing constraint rather than a methodological criterion. Fifty-four extracted sources did not enter synthesis, and their exclusion was not on substantive grounds. Retrieval was semantic rather than exhaustive, and a differently specified set of queries would produce a different corpus.

Regional imbalance. Only 8 of 80 sources are anchored in Latin America and the Caribbean. Given that the review's objectives derive from an Ibero-American analysis and that the region's legal instruments figure centrally in the argument, this is a material constraint. A supplementary hand-search partially addressed it for the anti-gender literature, but the institutional evidence remains disproportionately European and Anglophone, and inferences to Latin American institutional practice should be treated as hypotheses.

Evidential structure. Thirty-eight sources are reviews and only five deploy primarily quantitative designs. Findings about mechanism rest on convergence across independent qualitative syntheses, which is a real but limited form of corroboration; findings about magnitude are correspondingly weak. Where reviews share primary studies, apparent convergence may overstate independence.

Machine-assisted retrieval. Screening and first-pass extraction were machine-assisted. Verification confirmed the load-bearing claims checked but could not check all. Bibliographic capture demonstrably mishandled compound Hispanic, Lusophone and Baltic surnames, and two records lacked identifiable authorship and were excluded from citation. Any residual error of this class would be systematic rather than random, and would fall disproportionately on non-Anglophone scholarship — the same literature the regional imbalance already under-represents.

Unresolved substantive question. The review maps rather than adjudicates the gender symmetry debate. Readers seeking a determination on the relative prevalence or severity of male and female victimisation will not find one here, and should treat any source that offers one on the basis of this evidence base with caution.

6. Conclusions

First. Gendered discourses reproduce violence within institutions through a specifiable four-stage mechanism — abstraction, template matching, differential legibility and reinscription — rather than through diffuse cultural bias. The evidence for the mechanism is the convergence of independently developed concepts across jurisdictions, languages and institutional domains on a single filtering operation. This is a stronger claim than the observation that institutions are biased, and it carries a different remedy: what requires alteration is the range of harm an institution is constructed to perceive, which is a matter of interpretive practice, professional formation and data architecture rather than of statutory text. The reinscription loop explains why repeated legislative strengthening has not closed the normative gap, and why it should not be expected to.

Second. Gender stereotypes render male victims institutionally invisible, and the finding is robust: three independent systematic reviews converge on the same barrier architecture across identity, disclosure, relational and institutional levels, corroborated by primary studies in the United Kingdom, Portugal, South Korea, China, Kenya and South Africa. The invisibility is not a natural consequence of male reticence. Rowlands's South African evidence, in which men did use formal support where provision was reachable, indicates that a substantial component is a property of service design. This is consistent with, and not in competition with, the finding that women — and particularly racialised, migrant and low-income women — bear the greater burden of GBV and face compounded institutional barriers. Both follow from the same template; neither requires denying the other.

Third. Intersectional position determines institutional access more finely than gender alone. Institutional racism and immigration law condition whether a claim can be lodged at all; legal frameworks structurally exclude non-heteronormative arrangements; documentation processes are weaponised against trans identities; and economic position governs the capacity to sustain a claim through to resolution. The corpus also reveals an asymmetry in scholarly attention: intersectional analysis is well developed in the literature on women and largely absent from the literature on men, which is a research gap rather than a substantive finding about male victims.

Three implications for policy follow, stated at the level of specificity the evidence supports. Compliance assessment under CEDAW and the Belém do Pará Convention should incorporate indicators of interpretive practice — such as the invocation of anti-stereotyping standards in domestic judicial reasoning — rather than relying on ratification and statutory adequacy. Professional training in the judicial, health and educational sectors should target the template-matching stage specifically, since training that improves procedural compliance without altering what practitioners can perceive addresses the wrong stage of the mechanism. And administrative data architecture should be treated as a substantive intervention rather than a reporting formality: where no category exists to record a harm, the resulting absence will be read as evidence that the harm does not occur.

The wider claim of this review is methodological. A field that treats violence against women and violence against men as competing accounts will continue to produce two literatures that cannot inform one another, each vulnerable to the objection that it neglects the other's subject. Treating them instead as differentiated outputs of a common institutional mechanism preserves the evidence on asymmetry of scale — which is not in serious doubt — while making the reform agenda cumulative rather than zero-sum. On the evidence assembled here, that reframing costs nothing analytically and gains a great deal practically.

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