

Spanish experts demand better gender-equality training for the police

November 29 2010



Sexism conditions attitudes in police intervention. Credit: Irene Cuesta/ SINC

According to a new study by the University of Valencia (UV, Spain), "it is necessary to raise the awareness and level of training of the police in the area of violence against women". Researchers analysed the influence of sexism and empathy in more than 400 recently-hired local police.

Sexism conditions [attitudes](#) in police intervention. "As expected, those [police officers](#) who scored as more sexist are those who believe that they should only intervene in cases of gender-based violence when the victim

is willing to press charges", explains Marisol Lila, main author of this study and researcher at the Universidad de Valencia.

The study, published in the latest issue of the *Revista de Psicología Social* was based on a questionnaire given to 409 newly-hired local police officers as they joined the Police Force. They were asked how they would react in different hypothetical situations of violence against women.

In each scenario, the police officers could respond if "they would intervene only if the victim is willing to press charges" or if "they would intervene independent of the victim's intention to press charges," the researcher explains. Of the total number of police officers, who were between 21 and 48 years old, 81.9% were men and 18.1% were women.

"Hostile" and "benevolent" sexism

The experts distinguish between two types of ambivalent sexism: "Hostile" sexism, which considers women to be inferior, and "benevolent" sexism (the most common type), which defines women as weaker and in need of the protection of men.

"One possible explanation for these results between the police officers who show benevolent sexism could be due to a higher tolerance for domestic violence against women because they consider the reason women do not want to press charges is that the aggression 'wasn't that serious', or because 'she really wants to be with him'", the study claims.

"The response of the officer in cases of domestic violence against [women](#) brings with it an implicit message that symbolizes society's condemnation of this type of [violence](#)", suggests the expert.

More information: Marisol Lila, Enrique Gracia y Fernando García.

"Actitudes de la policía ante la intervención en casos de violencia contra la mujer en las relaciones de pareja: influencia del sexismo y la empatía", Revista de Psicología Social, 2010, 25 (3), 313-323.

Provided by FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

Citation: Spanish experts demand better gender-equality training for the police (2010, November 29) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-spanish-experts-demand-gender-equality-police.html>

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