

This series looks at the work of EPES in Chile.

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EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

Rising government hostility and its violation of the basic rights of immigrants who traverse the continent to reach Chile, seeking a more dignified life, has prompted EPES to develop strategies to ensure immigrants' right to health.

On March 30, EPES presented the findings from a study it conducted on immigration public policy and access to health services in particular, in the municipality of El Bosque.

Discrimination, racism and xenophobia in government official discourse regarding immigrants in Chile are the main barriers identified by the report. These attitudes permeate the communications media, as well as public health centers, which fail to understand immigration as a social process.

The report found that interrelated social determinants of health affect immigrants' access to public health services and their very health. It brings into greater focus the specific structural inequalities that impact immigrant health, and that of the Haitian immigrant community in particular.

Drawing from interviews with experts, health professionals and staff, the study highlights some alarming testimony, such as the following:

"When immigrants come to public health facilities for treatment of work-related injuries (amputations, broken bones, falls from great heights), the circumstances of their accidents are never reported because most have noncontract employment."

EPES findings were confirmed during the pandemic when the government announced that undocumented immigrants could not receive COVID-19 vaccinations. The policy announcement brought a storm of criticism down upon the government. In this context, EPES developed materials in Spanish, and in Creole for Haitian immigrants, to assure immigrants that everyone has the right to be vaccinated, as an urgent public health measure. EPES' informational flyers explain the procedure and where to go in El Bosque for vaccinations.

(Center) Informational flyers were distributed by EPES explaining the procedure and where immigrants go in El Bosque for vaccinations. Materials were in Spanish, and in Creole for Haitian immigrants. (Far Right) EPES launched a report on findings from a study it conducted on immigration policy and access to health services.



In January, Fundación EPES provided emergency relief to the Haitian community in El Bosque. In the photo María Stella Toro and Sonia Covarrubias deliver the boxes of food, diapers and hygiene supplies in the context of the Covid pandemic.

The government's anti-immigrant stance has been most clearly visible since mid April when it began the first massive raids and deportations of immigrants, mainly Venezuelans. Two years ago, Chile's president decried the situation in that country, encouraging Venezuelans to journey south, but when thousands began to arrive, the government did an about-face, denying refugee and visa claims. The arbitrary expulsion of people without due process guarantees spurred a broad network of civil society solidarity in Chile. On April 24, 331 organizations, EPES among them, conveyed a request for protection from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ON THE RISE DURING PANDEMIC

In August 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, police arrested a young woman of the southern city of Osorno for being on the street during quarantine, an infringement of lockdown rules. Police ignored her insistence that she had left the house in order to escape physical abuse in her home. The next day, the court ruled in her favor, calling the arrest illegal, after verifying bruises on her body inflicted by her partner.

The episode illustrates the danger many women in Chile have faced during obligatory confinement, a plan meant to protect people from the spread of infection but that has made women more vulnerable to aggressors in their own homes. In fact, calls to a police hotline rose dramatically during the initial months of lockdown, peaking in May–June 2020 with 314% more calls than the year before. More alarming, 151 cases of attempted femicides were reported during 2020, a 38% increase and the highest number in 8 years.

With these disturbing facts in mind, EPES is strengthening its gender-based violence prevention program. In the coming months, a series of workshops, some online and others in person with safety precautions, will be held to better equip health monitors to respond to violence against women in their neighborhoods, and to integrate the concepts of corporal autonomy and sexual and reproductive rights.

From April through July EPES health promotion groups are preparing material for the annual national “machismo kills” campaign later in the year. In addition, conversations on community violence prevention will be held at EPES’ Concepcion offices.

At the local level, the program will employ online mechanisms to reinforce support networks women can turn to. It also seeks to denormalize day-to-day expressions of violence against women, that have come to be accepted as a way of life. A key element will be the deconstruction of lessons of gender subordination.

EPES JOINS ELCA CAMPAIGN AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. GBV is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. It disproportionately affects women and girls. (UNHCR-UN Refugee Agency)

On December 10, 2020, International Human Rights Day, EPES joined the ELCA’s “16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence,” a campaign launched in Latin America and the Caribbean. During these 16 days, more than 20 activities led by churches, faith-based organizations and ELCA synods addressed issues such as the increase of violence during the pandemic, women of the bible, women and girls in migration, theological training, and leadership formation with a gender justice perspective.

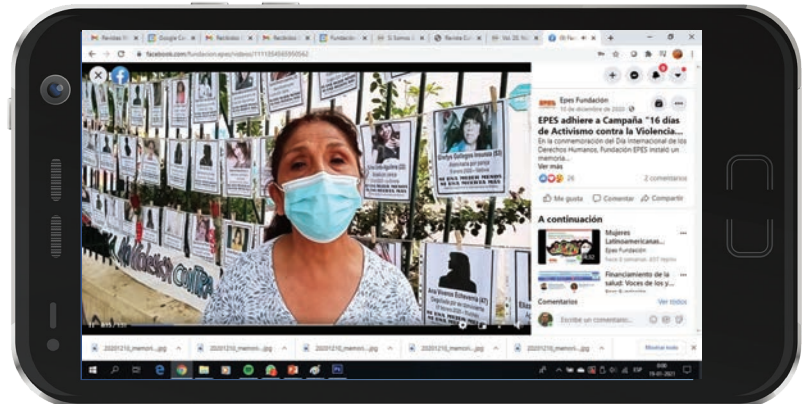
At EPES’ Santiago offices, a memorial was installed to pay tribute to victims of femicide, women murdered in 2020 in Chile by their intimate partners or family members, as well as women who were forcibly disappeared, extrajudicially executed, tortured and subjected to sexual violence by agents of the state during the military dictatorship. Many neighbors stopped by to look at the photos,



At EPES’ Santiago offices, a memorial was installed to pay tribute to women victims of violence.

A special effort will be made to encourage the participation of younger women, who have been active in neighborhood support activities—such as community kitchens—during the pandemic.

To shape public opinion and public policy, EPES continues to engage in national and local networks. This includes participation on the Health Ministry’s Gender and Health Consultation Board to monitor government commitments to protect against gender violence and defend sexual and reproductive rights.



talk to the staff and, in some cases, seek help for experiences of gender-based violence in their families.

María Eugenia Calvin, EPES director of planning, denounced that, “violence against women spills over from the private domain to political regimes all over the world that employ it to silence and domesticate women.”

GBV is sustained by cultures that produce and reproduce inequality. The consequence for women is economic discrimination that limits employment and does not recognize reproductive and caretaking work carried out by women. Moreover, the legislative framework not only fails to protect but also infringes on equality and prevents access to justice by demanding that gender-based violence be sanctionable only in repeat offenses.



Clown therapist, Claudia Bau Ortega

LAUGHTER AS TOOL TO BUILD TRUST

On April 14 and 21 EPES held two self-care sessions for community violence prevention promoters of the Newen Domo group and a new group in formation, with 13 women participating. Conducted on Zoom by clown therapist Claudia Bau Ortega, it employed laughter and humor to create a friendly space conducive to exploring emotions.

Self-care is a therapeutic technique that aims to help people pay attention to and work through feelings that have arisen since the start of the pandemic, greatly affecting women's emotional lives. Laughter and humor are tools that help create a climate of trust for reflection and recognition on personal and collective levels. A primary objective was to understand that laughter can have a positive effect on our health, including socioemotional, psychomotor, and cognitive dimensions, with the capacity to change the way we relate to our environment, to others and ourselves.

The workshop had three specific goals:

- Create an apt space for learning emotional and empathetic listening and other emotional skills to improve quality of life.
- Recover play as a tool for personal and collective self-awareness.
- Learn how to work better as a team.

With long periods in quarantine and the rising incidence of domestic violence, there is a great need for spaces of emotional containment for women. The workshop was helpful to the women individually and collectively.

TAP INTO NATURE'S HEALING POWERS

EPES community garden enthusiasts learned how to tap into nature's healing powers at a two-day workshop in late April and early May.

Conducted on Zoom with live transmission on EPES' YouTube channel, the workshop combined theory and practice to teach about plants' history and healing properties, with an eye to reclaiming ancient collective knowledge and gaining new appreciation for diverse uses of herbal remedies.

Workshop facilitator Sara Baeza, a phytotherapist certified in Oriental Medicine, explained the process of harvesting and drying plants. She demonstrated how to extract health-promoting agents by infusion and decoction, as well as how to prepare oil for massages. From their homes, women from the Auca community garden group followed her instructions to boil herbal and plant material for medicinal use.

Participants learned the healing properties of plants such as nasturtium, lemon balm, basil, and calendula—all of which grow in their community garden.

At their 2021 planning meeting, the gardeners agreed that after harvesting the summer vegetable crops, they would postpone fall planting due to the strict quarantine imposed in the Santiago Metropolitan Region. In the meantime, they will maintain the garden and plant mainly medicinal plants during this southern hemisphere fall season, with April and May set aside for training.

The workshop was organized as part of the Nutrition, Justice and Health Project coordinated by EPES staff Susana Jiles Castillo and Paulina Rojas Pizarro.

NURTURING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS OF SANTIAGO

In the midst of the severe economic and social impacts arising from the pandemic, more than ever, there is a great need to promote home and community vegetable gardens. Urban farming not only mitigates hunger, but also helps create a sense of community, spaces of solidarity and soothes mental health. With this in mind, the Coalition for Quality and Sustainable Nutrition, of which EPES is a leader, has been active during the health crisis. The Coalition brings together officials from



(Above) Workshop facilitator Sara Baeza explains on Zoom how to prepare oil for massages. (Left) Conducted on Zoom with live transmission on EPES' YouTube channel, the workshop combined theory and practice to teach about plants' history and healing properties.

the health, education and environment departments of the Municipality of El Bosque, as well as organizations, neighbors and the EPES Foundation.

In January (summertime in Chile) the Coalition ushered in 2021 with a seed exchange, giving out 104 packets of 12 kinds of vegetable seeds, for people to grow and eventually transplant to community gardens at three locations in the Los Sauces sector of El Bosque: a public health clinic, a school, and a neighborhood council.

After the seed exchange, the Coalition held a Soil Preparation Workshop, transmitted on EPES' YouTube channel. Next, in early April, came the production of a video with step-by-step explanation of how to prepare and transplant seedlings.

The Coalition also produced printed materials on composting and correct handling of foods that have been widely viewed on social networks.



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EPES was created in 1982 to promote health with dignity for the poor through empowerment, mobilization and collective action. It began as a program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) and maintains close ties nationally and internationally with the Lutheran church and is an ELCA Global Mission supported ministry. EPES became an independent, non-profit Chilean foundation in 2002.

SUPPORT EPES

To contribute to EPES, make a tax-deductible donation online at www.actionforhealth.org, or mail your contribution to:

Action for Health in the Americas

c/o Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

4 Northcrest Drive

Clifton Park, NY 12065-2744 USA

Make checks payable to: "Action for Health in the Americas" (AHA) a non-profit North American partner of EPES.

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During this critical time, your generous donations will keep EPES' work going to support women and families and to fight for justice and equity in health.

TO DONATE: Mail your check in the enclosed remittance envelope, or donate online at: www.actionforhealth.org

A year after Covid-19 appeared in Chile, the pandemic continues to expose systemic health, economic and social disparities, as well as political incompetence.

On March 18, exactly a year since the first strict lockdown, tough measures were reinstated to halt a new outbreak, when Covid infection rates soared to over 7000 new cases a day. Chile's situation alarmed the rest of Latin America because it boasts one of the highest PCR testing rates and ranks fifth worldwide in vaccinations administered per 100 inhabitants.

What went wrong? Although people widely comply with mandatory face mask requirements, contact tracing is largely absent. Also, during Chile's summer months of January and February, the government allowed malls, movie theaters and gyms to reopen, and authorized more than 4 million summer vacation permits, with people traveling about the country.

The Covid-19 emergency has tragically proven the accuracy of EPES' guiding concept of social determinants of health. A study conducted in Santiago (published in *Science*, April 27, 2021) found a relation between socioeconomic conditions and vulnerability to the virus. It found that, in 2020, the highest coronavirus daily mortality rate of 4.4 deaths per 10,000 population was in San Ramón, where the Llaleta Health Group is located. Across town, in affluent Vitacura, mortality peaked at less than half that rate, with 1.6 deaths each week.

From a social-determinants focus, living conditions and economics are intertwined with our health. The pandemic has caused great hardship for many. In mid 2020, unemployment in Chile reached its highest level in 10 years, closing the year with 10.3% jobless. Women have been most affected, with 11% unemployed, compared to 9.8% of men, in the first quarter of 2021.

Pervasive joblessness means that many families struggle to meet their basic needs. In the absence of government relief, Chile's congress and senate approved a mechanism to allow

Sonia García, health promoter from the Llaleta community health team, has twenty family members who have had coronavirus. In 2020, her sister died and a few months later she lost a brother to the virus. Her son recovered from Covid-19, but continues to have migraine headaches that prevent him from leading a normal life.



"Hospitals collapsed in poor neighborhoods like ours, while the wealthy go to private hospitals where they receive quality and timely health care. Poor families leave their relatives in the hospital corridors and days later they are notified that their loved one has died, with no chance to say goodbye. Working-class people are dying from the pandemic. Could it be because we have poor nutrition?"



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UPDATE ON COVID-19 IN CHILE

people to dip into 10% of their accumulated pension funds, normally only accessible upon retirement. Two subsequent votes, the most recent on April 22, enabled people to access another 10% of their pension funds. It should be noted that the AFP system yields very low retirement funds for a great number of people, and spurred a national movement that advocates a more equitable, public pension system.

The pandemic has strongly impacted Chile politically in other ways. Since its onset a year ago, Chile has lived in a declared state of emergency, with nightly curfews, under the pretext of curtailing the spread of the pandemic. Yet police patrols arrest people outside during curfew and have raided community kitchens, suggesting that government has declared war on the people as much as on the virus.

EPES's four decades of experience in creating strategies that address the root causes of community health issues is being tested in a way it has never been before. And we will step up to that challenge.



Angélica Arredondo, of the David Werner Health Group, spent much of 2020 on medical leave due to stress. Despite personal challenges, she has been actively involved in actions of solidarity, such as the community kitchen that she coordinated (shown above).

"This has been a painful year. Confinement aggravated my father's Alzheimer's, a coworker is seriously ill from Covid-19, and several neighbors have died because treatment was suspended for their chronic illnesses, which are not a priority, since the public health system collapsed with Covid patients. Those who are dying are poor people like us."