

Women's shelters: empowerment or disciplining?

Gabriela Moriana Mateo¹

Enviado: 3/11/2022 // Aceptado: 29/03/2023

Abstract. The aim of this paper was to reflect on the institutionalisation of women in shelters from a feminist perspective. To this end, we conducted a documentary review and analysed the regulations governing residential social services in the Valencian Community from the beginning of the democratic era to the present day. Our findings showed that in addition to traditional residential centres for women run by the different female religious orders, where young women were admitted so they could be indoctrinated in Catholic morality, new shelters with clearly feminist approaches and social denunciation were added for battered women. Both models coexisted for practically a decade until the feminist professionals were deposed, giving way to the current bureaucratic welfare model based on the need-resource binomial. Our conclusions include the observation that these shelters have been adjusted to the discourse of power regarding the protection of women to continue institutionalising them, but also that power has appropriated and transformed feminist initiatives to continue disciplining women in traditional sexual roles. This means that these residential social services centres serve patriarchal interests rather than pursuing women's real needs or empowerment.

Key words: women's shelter; institutionalisation; vulnerability; violence against women; disciplinarian actions.

[es] Casas de acogida para mujeres: ¿empoderamiento o disciplinamiento?

Resumen. El objetivo de este trabajo es realizar una reflexión sobre la institucionalización de las mujeres en los centros de acogida desde la perspectiva feminista. Para ello, hemos realizado una revisión documental y analizado la normativa de los servicios sociales residenciales de la Comunidad Valenciana desde el inicio del periodo democrático hasta la actualidad. Respecto a los resultados, cabe señalar que, a los tradicionales centros residenciales para mujeres de las distintas órdenes religiosas femeninas, en los que se ingresaba a las jóvenes para adoctrinarlas en la moral católica, se fueron sumando las nuevas casas de acogida para las mujeres maltratadas, con planteamientos claramente feministas y de denuncia social. Ambos modelos convivieron prácticamente durante una década, hasta que las profesionales feministas fueron depuestas, dando paso al modelo burocrático y asistencialista basado en el binomio necesidad-recurso que perdura hasta la actualidad. Respecto a las conclusiones, cabe destacar que, estos centros de acogida se adaptan al discurso del poder sobre la protección de las mujeres para seguir institucionalizándolas; pero también, que el poder se apropia de las iniciativas feministas y las transforma para seguir disciplinando a las mujeres en los roles sexuales tradicionales, por lo que estos centros residenciales de servicios sociales responden a intereses patriarcales y no a las necesidades reales de las mujeres y a su empoderamiento.

Palabras clave: centro de acogida; institucionalización; vulnerabilidad; violencia contra las mujeres; disciplinamiento.

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. 3. Results. 3.1. Period one: 1978-1990. 3.2. Period two: 1990-2003. 3.3. Period three: 2003 to the present day. 3.3.1. Shelters for social exclusion and violence against women. 3.3.2. Shelters for women suffering from violence since 2012. 4. Conclusions. Bibliographical references.

Como citar: Moriana Mateo, G. (2023). Women's shelters: empowerment or disciplining? *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, 36(2), 343-351.

¹ Institut Universitari d'Estudis de la Dona. Universitat de València
gabriela.moriana@uv.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9453-557X>

1. Introduction

The institutionalisation of highly vulnerable women in residential social services centres has not been extensively analysed in studies examining poverty and social exclusion, which have overlooked the gender perspective (Tortosa, 2001; Brunet, 2009; Damonti, 2014; Moriana, 2014) to focus on family, and more specifically on the male providers in the household economy. However, women are the poorest of the poor due to a patriarchal culture that socialises them in inequality and dependence on males, with the sexual division of work under a sex-gender system that allocates them necessary reproductive tasks and work that they have to do unpaid and alone. As stated by Brunet (2009, p. 14), “from a conceptual and empirical perspective, the structural vulnerability of women is a result of their real domination”.

In theory, there are two types of women’s shelter in the Valencian Community: one group targeted at processes of social exclusion and the other focused on situations involving violence. However, in practice both of these groups institutionalise women subject to processes of social exclusion. This is not always well received by the feminist movement, which demands specific shelters for women who have suffered violence (Ombudsman for the Valencian Community, 2005). Gender violence is known to affect women of all social classes, educational levels and ages (Cantera, 1999; Gil, 2007; Valls et al., 2007; Igareda and Bodelón, 2014; Moriana, 2018). However, as noted by Cid (2007), only a minority of the women who suffer violence turn to these resources. Indeed, the women who use residential social services centres due to suffering violence are all subject to processes of social exclusion of differing degrees and durations, and it is unusual to find women in situations of social exclusion who have not suffered violence (Moriana, 2014; Ombudsman for the Valencian Community, 2017). Residential social services centres only institutionalise women who do not have financial resources, paid employment, housing or someone who can take them in. As stated by Tezanos (1999, p.12), “social exclusion is defined by what is missing”.

As defined by Foucault (1977), the institutionalisation of women is a device, or *dispositif*, for disciplining women in traditional sexual roles. Therefore, it is a useful instrument for patriarchal power in the historical and ongoing process of constructing the model of a woman that the sex-gender system requires. For Foucault (1977), a *dispositif* is a heterogeneous ensemble that comprises discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions. It is the system of relations that can be established between these heterogeneous components, and it can take the form of an institutional programme or, to the contrary, an element that makes it possible to conceal or justify a practice (García Fanlo, 2011). The foundations of the *dispositif* thus take in the spoken and the unspoken, and are made up of a range of beliefs, rules and rituals that are imposed on people – in our case, on women – in a particular society at a given moment in time.

Dispositifs organise a range of practices to ensure the proper functioning of a larger system of which they form part. To discipline women, in addition to structural, cultural and direct violence (Galtung, 2003), patriarchal power requires *dispositifs* that instil forms of subjectivity and ways of being in the bodies of women: but not any way of being. A *dispositif* produces subjectivity, but not any subjectivity (Foucault, 1977; Agamben, 2011; García Fanlo, 2011). For Foucault (1977), the main function of disciplinary power is to secure conformity of conduct.

Therefore and despite the high economic cost of shelters² and their failure to meet their express objectives or the needs of women subject to processes of social exclusion, they continue to admit women. Institutionalisation removes women who are alone with their children from their social setting, to which they will probably have to return because the time spent in residential facilities is usually brief and always finite. For Subirats et al. (2004), admitting women into shared housing involves an abrupt separation from their most immediate means, detaching them from the two basic drivers of social integration: the productive economy – their relationship with the market, if they have one – and social and community networks.

According to Calle (2004), a majority of women who suffer violence reject residential facilities. In fact, institutionalising women does not usually solve the problems that resulted in their admission: residents themselves report that shelters are of little use and that they would not recommend them to anyone else (Moriana, 2017). Moreover, living in an institution restricts fundamental rights such as privacy and freedom of movement, forcing residents to observe strict rules and timetables and to live alongside other residents and their children who are in equally difficult and complicated situations, whether they like it or not. Living in an institution entails being subject to professional oversight at all times, meaning residents feel like prisoners (Moriana, 2017). Therefore and given the difficulty of life in a residential facility, many women leave and return to their pre-admission circumstances and/or their abusers (Ombudsman for the Valencian Community, 2005 and 2017; Ríos, 2010; La Torre and Roig, 2011; Emakunde, 2012; Moriana, 2014).

This article essentially comprises four sections. The first explains the research methodology, the second sets out the main results, and the third reports the conclusions, which are followed by the bibliographic references cited in the article.

² According to the Report of the Ombudsman for the Valencian Community (2017), 41 euros per day for each woman and each of their children in centres for women in situations of social exclusion and 60 for those who have suffered violence.

2. Methodology

The aim of this article is to examine the institutionalisation of women subject to processes of social exclusion in residential shelters in the Valencian Community from the start of the democratic era to the present day, from a feminist perspective. For this purpose, we performed a document review and analysed all the specific regulations governing residential social services for women in the Valencian Community throughout the democratic era following the approval of the Spanish Constitution in 1978. Foucault's concept of *dispositif* (1977) has facilitated the interpretation of this kind of institutionalisation as a mechanism for disciplining women in traditional sexual roles.

However, feminist methodology aims to both uncover and change previously ignored realities. As such, although the initial aim is to examine the situation, we will later attempt to address it by proposing that institutional support should be provided in the community (except in highly specific circumstances and for a limited period of time), where women considered to need support in their processes of autonomy decide to live. This will ensure that institutional resources cease to serve patriarchal interests and focus instead on the well-being of women.

3. Results

During the democratic era – that is, since the approval of the Spanish Constitution – and based on the specific regulations governing residential social services centres in the Valencian Community, three time periods can be distinguished: from 1978 to 1990; from 1990 to 2003; and from 2003 to the present day, this latter period made up of a first phase for all centres and a second, since 2012, for those targeted at women who have suffered violence.

3.1. Period one: 1978-1990

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 establishes that the autonomous communities may assume powers in respect of social support. In this context, when in 1978 the new chair of the Trust for the Protection of Women (*Patronato de Protección a la Mujer*, the main function of which was to detain young women in residential centres to educate them in Catholicism)³ submitted a draft bill repealing the Law of 20 December 1952 to the Spanish Ministry of Justice⁴, he stated: “as long as I am here, the spirit of Catholic morality will not slip away”. He also said that feminist groups had been consulted prior to the drafting of the law and that the proposal by the Separated Women (*Mujeres Separadas*) association to provide shelter for wives going through separations had been incorporated (El País, 1978).

The Statute of Autonomy of the Valencian Community⁵, meanwhile, provided for the autonomous community to have exclusive competence as regards the protection of women. As a result, the services performed by the Trust and its staff (because it did not have its own centres in the Valencian Community; all of them belonged to female religious orders) were transferred to the Regional Government (*Conselleria de Governación*). The trust was being dismantled during this period, but it continued to perform its functions until 1985-86 (Moriana, 2014).

As a result, practically nothing changed in terms of the institutionalisation of women during the early democratic era. Women continued to be admitted with no legal guarantees into the same female religious order facilities⁶ that had taken them in throughout Franco's dictatorship in order to impose sexual discipline and indoctrinate them in the Catholic faith. They acted as a kind of supplementary facility, dedicated to classifying, regenerating and preserving women, with two specific kinds of centre; one for pregnant women and mother-and-child facilities, where women could stay with their children after giving birth, and another for hidden pregnancies, where women left after having given birth and given up their child (Moriana, 2014).

Given the social stigmatisation of single mothers, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the family philosophy remained one of hiding pregnancies that occurred outside wedlock and hence sending women from different social classes to residential centres. Nonetheless, the vast majority were young women and women from marginalised groups: minors (from centres for pregnant minors), Roma women, women with physical, psychological or sensory disabilities, and single mothers. Violence against institutionalised girls, adolescents and women was clear and evident, but it was not a reason for admission to residential facilities (Moriana, 2014).

Modern women's shelters have other precedents in the international context, having been driven by feminist networks and campaigns (Dominelli and MacLeod, 1999). In 1971, Chiswick Women's Aid was co-found-

³ Decree of 6 November 1941 creating the Trust for the Protection of Women.

⁴ Law of 20 December 1952 on the organisation and functions of the Trust for the Protection of Women.

⁵ Basic Law 5/1982 of 1 July on the Statute of Autonomy of the Valencian Community.

⁶ In the province of Alicante: Adoratrices and Oblatas; in Castellón: Oblatas, and in Valencia: Cruzadas Evangélicas, Mercedarias, Adoratrices, Oblatas, Siervas de la Pasión and Auxiliares del Buen Pastor (Moriana, 2014).

ed by members of the feminist movement as the first organised refuge offering shelter from abuse in the United Kingdom. These refuges extended across various countries with clearly feminist organisational structures and goals.

Shelters of this kind arrived a decade later in Spain, with the first two established in Madrid and Pamplona in 1984, followed by refuges in Alicante and Castellón in the Valencian Community, in 1986 and 1987. The public authorities conceived of this resource as a refuge for battered women who did not have their own means and needed to flee the marital home because their physical safety was at risk. But in addition to offering protection, these shelters had a goal of empowering women and of social denunciation. The feminists who fought for the shelters to be established and worked there from the outside contributed a conceptual framework and a new methodology for interventions with abused women that differed markedly from other institutions (Jovaní et al., 1994).

From a feminist conceptual perspective, the violence that women suffered was understood in terms of the political oppression that kept them powerless compared to men. Therefore, the abuse that women suffered was a further consequence of the patriarchal structure (Jovaní et al., 1994). In this context, professional intervention consisted of a process of supporting abused women so they could escape violence, overcome the consequences and achieve an autonomous life. Rules were necessary, as with all institutions. Although attempts were made to minimise them, some rules could not be negotiated and significantly restricted the freedoms of residents, affecting daily timetables, use of space, the schedules of their children, television time and when residents could enter and leave shelters (Ríos, 2010).

3.2. Period two: 1990-2003

The second period started with the Order of 1990⁷ that implemented the Decree⁸ of the same year aimed at establishing the rules and conditions for the organisation of social services in the Valencian Community pursuant to the first Spanish Social Services Act (*Ley de Servicios Sociales*) of 1989⁹. The new democratic legislation rendered it impossible to maintain hidden pregnancies, meaning this system was dismantled. This dismantling process gave rise to sheltered housing, a form of residential facility intended for women whose time at other centres had come to an end but who had not achieved sufficient autonomy to leave the system. The aforementioned Order established the first classification of residential centres for women in the democratic era. This classification distinguished between sheltered housing, emergency refuges and mother-and-child facilities.

According to this regulation, shelters were residential facilities for women and their children who were in situations involving serious social risk and needed urgent temporary protection. Their purpose was to promote personal autonomy, support social and workplace integration, and safeguard physical and psychological well-being and safety. Mother-and-child residential facilities were used for young mothers and their children, pregnant women who decided to give their children up for adoption and, on an exceptional basis, recently born children of mothers who were temporarily or permanently unable to take care of their offspring. Sheltered housing was used for self-sufficient women under a partly self-managed system. The three types of centres provided services covering comprehensive support, accommodation, child support, social activities, cooperation, self-help, psychosocial support and legal advice.

The modern women's shelters of the Valencian Community continued to operate based on the feminist principles that had inspired their creation, with traditional religious orders' centres attempting to move with the times and adjust to the discourse of power regarding the protection of women. This meant the coexistence of two opposing conceptual frameworks in the residential centres of the Valencian Community over almost a decade (Jovaní et al., 1994). If space allowed, admissions due to violence against women (defined as gender violence following the Law of 2004) were made at women's shelters, with the other cases involving social exclusion and underage pregnancy referred to child-and-mother facilities and sheltered housing.

In 1995 and 1996, the feminist professionals who had managed or worked at the modern women's shelters in the Valencian Community since their creation were removed, bringing an end to an awareness-raising and social denunciation model of intervention and shifting to a different welfare model based on the need-resource binomial (Mariana, 2014). According to Ríos (2010), this process reflected a move from an action-based ideology to a bureaucratic approach, in which the public authorities absorbed structures created by the feminist movement to control the way they functioned and use them to serve a different set of political interests.

⁷ Order of 9 April 1990 of the Employment and Social Security Regional Ministry implementing the Decree on Registration, Authorisation and Accreditation of Social Services in the Valencian Community.

⁸ Decree 40/1990 of 26 February of the Valencian Regional Government on Registration, Authorisation and Accreditation of Social Services in the Valencian Community.

⁹ Law 5/1989 of 6 July on Social Services in the Valencian Community.

3.3. Period three: 2003 to the present day

3.3.1. Shelters for social exclusion and violence against women

The first phase in the current period started with the Order of 2003¹⁰, the purpose of which was to implement the Decree of 2002¹¹ that followed the second Spanish Social Services Act (*Ley de Servicios Sociales*) of 1997¹² and applied to all services for supporting women in situations of social risk, whatever their ownership structure (practically all centres being private-public or privately managed public facilities in these times). Specific women's centres were thus structured as a specialist welfare-based social service focused on protecting and promoting autonomy, with the aim of sheltering women in situations involving violence, whether alone or together with their children, in order to provide psychological and social support and the basic means to facilitate their social reintegration. The regulation distinguished between emergency refuges, residential shelters and sheltered housing.

According to this regulation, refuges would admit victims of abuse or social exclusion and their children in cases involving an urgent need for a place of refuge, with a maximum stay of two weeks. Meanwhile, residential shelters would be used for young pregnant women or those with small children, and for women who had suffered abuse or were in situations involving psychosocial risk, with or without offspring. Women in need of protection but with a degree of autonomy that enabled them to live on a partly self-managed basis would be admitted to sheltered housing. The maximum stay in residential shelters and in sheltered housing would be six months, which could be extended to one year depending on the social, family and emotional circumstances of the woman in question. The same regulation guaranteed that individual rooms would be occupied by a single family unit.

These three types of resource provided services involving comprehensive support, accommodation and child support, specialist treatment, social activities, cooperation, self-help, psychosocial support, legal advice, activities for users and their children (depending on their age), social and workplace integration and post-institutional follow-up.

The same Order established the guiding principles for the "female support network": prevention, to avoid situations involving physical and psychological risk, and action on the causes of the problem; integration, procuring full social participation to encourage personal adjustment to the outside world; stimulation, encouraging the development of personal autonomy; and fostering of solidarity, promoting social awareness and participation.

Women who had suffered violence would be admitted via a 24-hour women's centre¹³. In other cases, a proposal would be made upon a report from local social services, made via the women's areas of the regional directorates following the relevant assessment. The above-mentioned regulation excluded circumstances requiring specific treatment other than for abuse or family neglect, such as alcoholism, drug addiction and serious psychiatric disorders, from this procedure.

A 2005 Order¹⁴ introduced changes including new rules on sheltered housing. The new regulation changed the guaranteed single-family use of sheltered housing and established that this approach would be preferentially applied. This meant women being forced to share even their rooms in these facilities. This offers us a sense of the extent to which the rights to privacy of these women and their children were respected at some of the shelters in the Valencian Community.

In 2005, the Ombudsman for the Valencian Community (*Síndic de Greuges de la Comunitat Valenciana*) published a special report for the Valencian regional parliament (*Cortes Valencianas*) entitled *The institutional response to domestic violence against women in the Valencian Community*. This report analysed all the protection facilities that reported to the Regional Ministry for Social Wellbeing. It was commissioned as a result of a case that received media attention in 2002, notable for the lamentable treatment accorded to one user of a refuge facility.

This report provides details regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of women admitted to centres, the reasons for admission and discharge, duration of stay, user assessment of the institutional response and the opinions of associations that work with women who have suffered violence. Women admitted to centres were aged between 18 and 40 years, with a slightly lower proportion of Spanish women compared to foreigners, almost all of whom were non-EU citizens in irregular administrative situations. A majority of users had prima-

¹⁰ Order of 17 February 2003 of the Regional Ministry for Social Wellbeing on conditions and requirement for the authorisation of specialist centres for women in situations of social risk.

¹¹ Decree 91/2002 of 30 May of the Valencian Government on the registration of owners of social action activities and on registration and authorisation to operate of social action services and centres in the Valencian Community.

¹² Law 5/1997 of 25 June regulating the social services system in the Valencian Community.

¹³ A free-of-charge public facility to provide comprehensive care for women who have suffered physical and/or psychological abuse, sexual assault, sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Care is provided by a multidisciplinary team of social workers, psychologists and lawyers via a direct care service or telephone hotline. <https://inclusio.gva.es/es/web/mujer/centres-dona>.

¹⁴ Order of 28 January 2005 of the Regional Ministry for Social Wellbeing amending the Order of 17 February 2003.

ry-level education and were not in paid work, lacking in financial resources or housing. One characteristic common to all of the women was that they were the mothers of two or more small children.

The main causes for women being admitted to centres were abuse and social exclusion related to migration, followed by prostitution, substance abuse and mental health issues. Women were spending an average of four months at centres. They were discharged for the following reasons, from most to least prevalent: voluntary departure; securing of financial autonomy; moving in with family members or friends; and returning to their abuser.

When assessing the institutional care they had received, users above all identified a shortage of care within the centre, activities for children, and housing and financial support. They also referred to the strict timetables, particularly at weekends, and the difficulty of leaving the centre due to a lack of housing, work or financial support, childcare and training. To a lesser extent, they also identified a need for swifter justice and increased opportunities to rectify the administrative situation faced by immigrants.

Representatives of women's associations agreed on the need for a specific long-stay centre (for stays of at least eighteen months) with a psychological recovery programme. They explained that the majority of centres had programmes focusing on domestic tasks (such as cooking and cleaning), developing healthy personal hygiene habits and caring for children, but that no attention was paid to psychological recovery. This meant that anxiety, psychological dependence on abusers and neglect were not eradicated, increasing the risk of returning to the abuser. These representatives also explained that women were highly likely to end up experiencing further anxiety and mistreatment during their time at the centres, meaning that they would sometimes prefer to return to their abusers and their customary circumstances, reasoning that they were more bearable and they would feel less out-of-place. Association representatives considered that in the best-case scenario women would leave centres in the same state that they had been admitted, with no improvement in their situation, while the worst-case scenario would involve destruction of self-esteem and a sense of having lost their last opportunity to live with a reasonable degree of security.

3.3.2. *Shelters for women suffering from violence since 2012*

During the second phase of the current period, the public authorities have distinguished centres for social exclusion from shelters for women suffering from violence¹⁵. The comprehensive legislation on women in the Valencian Community of 2012¹⁶ established a comprehensive social care network for victims of violence. All of the services included in the network were to be free of charge, with the provision of information, care, emergency support, aid and recovery services. The network was made up of outpatient services¹⁷ and residential services, with facilities classified as follows: emergency refuge, comprehensive recovery centre and sheltered housing.

Emergency refuges would be specific short-stay resources offering immediate shelter for women and their children. Comprehensive recovery centres would specialise in caring for women who had suffered violence and minors in need of longer-term temporary accommodation arrangements due to abuse, lack of family support or absence of personal resources. Sheltered housing was intended for women who had suffered violence and were in need of protection but had a level of personal autonomy that would enable them to engage in a normal social existence. These three types of centre were intended to provide accommodation, child support, aid and specialist psychosocial intervention services.

The same law envisaged the implementation of regulations that would govern access, organisation and operation in respect of these centres. However, ten years after the approval of the law, this regulatory development still has not taken place. Nor has there been any regulatory development of the recent Spanish Social Services Act of 2019¹⁸. As a result, the Orders of 2003 and 2005 (with respect to inhabitation of sheltered housing) remain in force except for the new classification of facilities for women who have suffered violence.

The Ombudsman for the Valencian Community published a new report in 2017 entitled *Care and protection for victims of gender violence in the Valencian Community*, which again analysed the range of residential facilities for cases of exclusion and of violence. This study provides further information on the sociodemographic characteristics of institutionalised women, their assessment of the institutional response, and details of their stay, departure and perception of those managing the resources.

The residents were women aged under 35 years, with a higher proportion of foreigners than Spanish women. They had low levels of education, employment and financial resources, and the majority were caring for children.

Those using the facilities reported feeling that they received insufficient help in seeking employment and housing. They rated their experience of cohabiting with the other residents as *average* and identified their priorities when leaving facilities as securing employment and housing.

¹⁵ <https://inclusio.gva.es/es/web/mujer/servicis-socials-done-risc-exclusio-social>. <https://inclusio.gva.es/es/web/mujer/servicis-socials-atencio-dones-victimes-de-violencia-de-genero>.

¹⁶ Comprehensive Law 7/2012 of 23 November on violence against women in the Valencian Community.

¹⁷ Permanent telephone hotline service. Public information offices for victims of criminal offences and women's centres.

¹⁸ Law 3/2019 of 18 February on inclusive social services in the Valencian Community.

Based on the data provided by the Regional Ministry for Social Wellbeing for the 2017 Ombudsman's report, the short duration of women's stays at centres (excluding emergency refuges) shows that many left because they found it difficult or awkward to live with restricted timetables, strict measures and conflicts in terms of their cohabitation with other residents. The data also indicate that residents did not adjust to the institutions, with sudden departures together with friends and/or family members, precarious departures and even some (more than a few, without specifying the amount) resuming relationships with their abuser.

Those responsible for the facilities raised three significant issues in this respect. First, women were not receiving proper explanations regarding the type of facility they were entering prior to their admission. Second, residents found it difficult to abide by the rules and regulations of the centres and were frightened that administrative measures might be taken regarding custody of their children. Third, women occasionally requested admission to "teach the abuser a lesson" while knowing that they were going to return to them, because they had not made a clear decision to separate and/or had social or family networks that could take them in or support them in the medium term. However, those responsible for the facilities also stated that these institutionalised women perceived their situation to be highly unjust, given that they were locked up while their abusers were at home living a normal life. But they also noted the difficulties users faced in managing to make an autonomous departure from centres on their own, with children but without housing or employment, given the precarious nature of paid work and/or the temporary nature of their access to benefits.

The Ombudsman's report concluded by noting certain topics for discussion, such as the adequacy of these resources for all women and the difference between centres for gender violence and those for social exclusion. The studies performed and meetings held had revealed similar sociodemographic data for both types of centre in terms of the women they were admitting: low levels of education, lack of financial resources (financial dependence), absence of family network and mainly accompanied by minors. But the professionals also noted that a high percentage of the women admitted to centres for social exclusion had suffered gender violence.

4. Conclusions

We carried out a chronological review based on secondary data and the regulations governing residential social services centres for women in the Valencian Community from the start of the democratic era to the present day, observing how these social resources have been adjusted to the discourse of power in terms of the protection of women to continue institutionalising them. Moreover, political powers have appropriated the aid initiative conceived by women and transformed it so that the modern shelters created by the feminist movement to empower women have become controlled by interests that are very different from the original ones (Ríos, 2010), combining with other residential centres to continue disciplining women in traditional sexual roles.

Institutionalising women in order to discipline them in traditional sexual roles is a patriarchal and class-based *dispositif* aimed at the most vulnerable women. However, although these women have been and remain the main users, institutionalisation has acted and continues to act as a real or symbolic threat for all those who challenge the patriarchal system. As stated by Cáceres and Arancibia (2017, p. 88), it comprises "an open prison, which defines an inside and an outside of society, a space for locking up women who are at fault for not being able to manage their fragility; or a reform facility for those who fail to or could fail to comply with their duties".

However, despite the confinement and violence inherent to this shelter *dispositif*, it has never managed to force obedience and an uncritical response from all women. Women who have been admitted, mainly forcibly, have rebelled against the internal disciplining. Although some have had no choice other than to put up with the facilities, the voluntary departures provide evidence of a critical response from women to this institution and its patriarchal commands.

The shelter *dispositif* uses the strategy of women dominating other women and ensures that subordinates contribute to their own domination. One of the mechanisms of symbolic violence is not clearly distinguishing or being unaware of these practices, and therefore being "accomplices in the domination that is visited on them" (Bourdieu, 1994). In this regard, throughout the period subject to analysis, two groups of women (religious/professionals and users) coexisted in the institution, in the private sphere, with rules, monitoring and violence present to a greater or lesser degree depending on the particular time, imposed from outside by patriarchal power.

Currently, and inevitably in a democracy in which women have secured legal equality, the discourse of protection of Catholic morality has been replaced, giving way to that of protection from vulnerability and violence against women. The currently applicable regulation establishes that women's shelters are intended to protect their physical and psychological safety, with a key pillar being prevention through avoiding situations of physical and psychological risk and acting on the causes of the problem. However, as noted by Delgado (2002), what is apparently a protective measure in fact entails placing women in a situation of re-victimisation and restricting their rights, rather than the rights of the abusers who should be facing the consequences and assuming responsibility for their acts. When addressing the issue of why women are institutionalised, as if they

had to pay for a crime when they are in fact its victims, Cáceres and Arancibia (2017, p.101) explain that the answer lies in “the position they occupy within the gender system, which, in order to be reproduced, requires the political exclusion of women”.

Many women experience their institutionalisation in shelters as a punishment (Calle, 2004; Ombudsman for the Valencian Community, 2017). In fact, some women find living at shelters more difficult than putting up with precariousness and violence in the home (Ombudsman for the Valencian Community, 2005; Moriana, 2014). The institution hence also has a dissuasive effect and therefore operates in the interest of the sex-gender system.

Institutionalised women are subject to interventions at residential centres because they are perceived, as stated by Cáceres and Arancibia (2017, p. 84), “as women who are unable to manage their own fragility in response to gender violence”. According to Ríos (2010), it is paradoxical to talk of the social reintegration of women who have suffered abuse, since obviously it is not the women but their partners who have committed criminal offences, and it is the partners who should therefore be subject to measures so that they can be reintegrated into society.

For Marchant and Soto (2011, p. 114), shelters also act as a political *dispositif* that facilitates the management of the social impact of violence on the population, because by locking women away the problem is made invisible: the “victim disappears” from the social space. This means that rather than representing a place for protection and support, shelters relegate women to a private space to which they are directed when deciding to leave their home due to violence – in other words, attempting to escape their historical position of passivity and submission.

Women are institutionalised by means of the elements listed by Foucault (1977): discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions, with the maintaining of disciplinary and control mechanisms that are inherent to classical institutions. In fact, another express guiding principle of shelters is the development of personal autonomy. As stated by Calle (2004), this raises the paradox of working to increase personal autonomy from a space where multiple aspects of daily life are necessarily regulated.

Taking into account the statements of Foucault (1977) regarding the transition between disciplinary society and society of control, the institutionalisation of women carries an implication of imprisonment at the same time as establishing moral and psychological control over women’s attitudes and conduct, subverting any sense that social harm is being repaired or justice served. Women subject to processes of social exclusion are hence forced to give up their autonomy in order to receive support.

According to Roig and La Torre (2011), a particularly serious issue is the impact of disciplining and control on the relationship between women and their children, especially when children are a little older and see how their mothers are required to submit to professional opinions and power, with the potential consequence of a loss of maternal authority (Moriana, 2017).

The current regulation is also contradictory in establishing an aim for centres to provide their users with the means to live an independent life that enables them to achieve social reintegration and integrate into their environment. When women are admitted to shelters, they are actually displaced from their environment, alone with their children, and in some cases even moved outside their towns or cities to places where nobody knows anything about them.

Additionally and in relation to the foregoing, another basic and fundamental aim that appears in the regulations governing these kinds of facility is to support the social and workplace engagement and integration of women. The idea is that users should find paid work and achieve financial independence, though this is always subject to their not abandoning their maternal duties or failing to look after their children, because the main implicit aim is for them to be good, responsible mothers. A majority of these women are taking sole responsibility for minors, and this makes it hard if not impossible for them to undergo training or reconcile productive and reproductive work (children get ill, schools do not cover full-time working hours or long holiday periods). In addition to bearing family burdens alone, it is very difficult for these women to secure paid work due to lack of education, the fact that many of them are immigrants in irregular administrative situations and the demands of the job market. Even if they do secure employment, their jobs tend to be precarious and sporadic, part of the hidden economy, unstable, low-paid and without employment rights.

This makes it difficult to achieve any of the goals that drive the admission of women to shelters, meaning they are merely being provided with a private space that subjects them to control, particularly regarding their motherhood. Given the exorbitant financial cost and the poor outcomes of this type of institutionalisation, the simple conclusion is that it persists and evolves because it functions as a *dispositif* for disciplining women in traditional sexual roles, acting to serve the sex-gender system.

It only remains to emphasise the suffering, pain, injustice and violence involved in institutionalising the most vulnerable women in shelters. This makes it necessary to examine the real needs of vulnerable women and develop alternative protection, support and accompaniment approaches in the community, involving the women themselves, the professionals who intervene, those responsible at technical and/or political levels, and other associations and stakeholders. This process of reversal, ensuring that institutional support ceases to serve patriarchal interests and focuses on the real wellbeing and empowerment of women, must be started sooner rather than later.

Bibliographical references

- Agamben, G. (2011). Qué es un dispositivo? *Sociológica*, 26 (73), 249-264.
- Bourdieu, P. (1994). Una suave violencia. *El País*.
- Brunet, I. (2009). Pobreza y exclusión social desde la perspectiva de género. *Revista Internacional de Organizaciones (RIO)*, 3, 13-27. <https://doi.org/10.17345/rio3>
- Cáceres, G. y Arancibia, L. (2017). Violencia de Género: El Dispositivo Casas de Acogida en el Estado neoliberal chileno. *Revista El Faro*, 25, 82-105.
- Calle, S. (2004). Consideraciones sobre la victimización secundaria en la atención social a las víctimas de la violencia de género. *Portularia*, 4, 61-66.
- Cantera, L. (1999). Te pego porque te quiero. La violencia en la pareja. Publicaciones Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Cid, A. P. (2007). Las casas de acogida para mujeres maltratadas como respuesta a un problema de salud pública. *Feminismo/s*, 10, 69-77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14198/fem.2007.10.05>
- Damonti, P. (2014). Una mirada de género a la exclusión social. *VII Informe sobre exclusión social y desarrollo social en España*. Fundación Foessa, 1-37.
- Deleuze, G. (1990). ¿Qué es un dispositivo?, en Deleuze et al. (1990). *Michel Foucault, filósofo*. Gedisa, 155-163.
- Delgado, A. (2002). Alternativas para combatir la violencia doméstica Ponencia en la Mesa redonda sobre violencia de género, presentada en el IV Congreso de Escuelas de Trabajo Social. *Alternativas. Cuadernos de trabajo social*, 10, 167-173. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14198/ALTERN2002.10.11>
- Dominelli, L. y Mcleod, E. (1999). Trabajo Social Feminista. *Feminismos: Cátedra*.
- El País (30 de abril de 1978). *Desaparece el Patronato de Protección a la mujer: El País*, Recuperado de: https://elpais.com/diario/1978/04/30/ultima/262735201_850215.html
- Emakunde (2012). Mujeres víctimas de violencia de género: vivencias y demandas. Gobierno Vasco.
- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) (2020). El estado de la pobreza seguimiento del indicador de pobreza y exclusión social en España 2008-2019
- Foucault, M. (1977). Vigilar y castigar. Nacimiento de la prisión. Siglo XXI.
- Fundación Adeco (2020). 9º Informe un empleo contra la violencia.
- Galtung, J. (2003). Tras la violencia, 3R: reconstrucción, reconciliación, resolución. Afrontando los efectos visibles e invisibles de la guerra y la violencia. *Bakeaz/Gernika Gogoratzuz*.
- García Fanlo, L. (2011). ¿Qué es un dispositivo?: Foucault, Deleuze, Agamben. *A parte Rey Revista de Filosofía*, 74, 1-8.
- Gil, J. M. (2007). Los diferentes rostros de la violencia de género. Editorial DYKINSON.
- Igarela, N. y Bodelón, E. (2014). “Las violencias sexuales en las universidades: cuando lo que no se denuncia no existe. *Revista Española de Investigación Criminológica*, 12, 1-27.
- Jovaní, E.; Martínez, P.; Segarra, T. y Tormo, Mª J. (1994). Mujeres maltratadas, mujeres mal tratadas (una experiencia de trabajo), *Asparkia: Investigación Feminista*, 4, 9-18.
- La Torre, E. y Roig, A. (2011). Los recursos de acogida temporal para mujeres sobrevivientes a situaciones de violencia machista intrafamiliar. *Revista Crítica Penal y Poder*, 1, 88-116.
- Marchant, J. P. y Soto, E. (2011). Reparación psicosocial en mujeres víctimas de violencia de pareja: cómo se trabaja en las casas de acogida chilena (Memoria para optar al título de psicólogo). Recuperado de: <https://repositorio.uchile.cl/bitstream/handle/2250/113960/cs39-marchantj1002.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Ministerio de Justicia (1941 y 1942). Memorias del Patronato de Protección a la Mujer.
- Moriana, G. (2014). Entre la exclusión y violencia. Las mujeres institucionalizadas en los centros de protección de mujeres de la Comunidad Valenciana (Tesis doctoral inédita) Disponible en: <http://roderic.uv.es/handle/10550/35219>.
- Moriana, G. (2017). Cuando la protección es control. Las viviendas tuteladas de la Comunidad Valenciana desde el punto de vista de sus usuarias, en *TS Nova*, N° 14, 39-50.
- Moriana, G. (2018). Práctica de aula con estudiantes de Postgrado, en Santamarian, B. (Coord.). *Mujeres y Universidad (sin cifras), La violencia invisible*. Neòpatria, 167-187.
- Ríos, P. (2010). Violencia de género y pensamiento profesional: una investigación sobre la práctica del trabajo social. *Trabajo Social Global*, 1 (2), 131-148.
- Síndic de Greuges de la Comunitat Valenciana (2005). La respuesta institucional a la violencia contra la mujer en las relaciones de pareja en la Comunidad Valenciana, Informe especial a las Cortes Valencianas.
- Síndic de Greuges (2017). Informe del Síndic de Greuges sobre la atención y protección a las mujeres víctimas de violencia de género en la Comunitat Valenciana.
- Subirats, J. et al. (2004). Pobreza y exclusión social. Un análisis de la realidad española y europea, Barcelona: Colección de estudios sociales, Fundació La Caixa, 16.
- Tezanos, J. F. (1999). Tendencias en desigualdad y exclusión social. *Sistemas*.
- Tortosa, J. M. (coord.) (2001). Pobreza y perspectiva de género. *Icaria*.
- Valls, R. (Dirección) (2008). Violencia de género en las universidades españolas. Instituto de la Mujer.