

# Protection and gender violence: Experience of a group of dual devices users in Córdoba, Argentina

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## Abstract

This article recounts an experience of participant observation within the framework of a doctoral research process on protection policies in gender-based violence. The experience was carried out between May and August 2023 in Córdoba-Argentina, a state institution dedicated to addressing gender-based violence. Observations were developed in workshops aimed at dual device users, a precautionary measure that attempts to end high-risk violence situations. The results reveal difficulties in accessing the measure related to a lack of access to information by those who report violence; obstacles in the placement of an ankle on those reported; continuity of situations of restriction of social participation of users, among others.

**Keywords:** Violence gender; Public policies; Protection; Dual devices; Participant observation.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction, 2. Methodology, 3. Findings, 3.1 Accessibility of the Dual Devices, Personal communication Access: failures to put the anklet on the ankle, 3.3 Access: lack of information, 3.4 Use: restriction of social participation, 3.5 Withdrawal of the devices: ¿What now? 4. Conclusions, 5. Bibliographical references.

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# Protección y violencia de género: experiencia de un grupo de usuarias de dispositivos duales en Córdoba, Argentina

## Resumen

El presente artículo recupera una experiencia de observación participante, en el marco de un proceso de investigación doctoral sobre políticas de protección en violencia por motivos de género. La experiencia se realizó entre mayo y agosto de 2023 en la ciudad de Córdoba-Argentina, en una institución estatal abocada al abordaje de las violencias por motivos de género. Las observaciones se desarrollaron en talleres dirigidos a usuarias de dispositivos duales, una medida cautelar que intenta poner un cese a situaciones de violencia de alto riesgo. Los resultados permiten advertir dificultades en la accesibilidad a la medida relacionados con un deficitario acceso a la información por parte de quienes denuncian violencia; obstáculos en la colocación de tobillera en denunciados; continuidad de situaciones de restricción de la participación social de usuarias, entre otros.

**Palabras clave:** Violencia de género; Políticas públicas; Protección; Dispositivos duales; Observación participante.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, Latin American and Caribbean states have acknowledged the severity of femicidal violence and gender-related violent deaths of women by enacting laws, creating protocols, and establishing specialized institutions. However, despite these advances, femicide remains a persistent reality, with no clear evidence that the phenomenon is decreasing (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2023). In Argentina, of the 252 femicides recorded in 2022, at least 15% of the victims had filed formal complaints, and 24% of the cases involved prior acts of gender-based violence. Regarding protection measures, only 21 victims had effective access to them (Oficina de la Mujer, Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación, 2022).

Given the central role of protection in addressing gender-based violence, this article draws on a participant observation experience conducted as part of an ongoing research project. The study investigates gender violence protection policies developed in Córdoba, Argentina. The project, entitled “The Gender Violence Protection System in the City of Córdoba. Experiences with two electronic protection devices: the Panic Button and the Dual Electronic Monitoring System (2017–2025)”, is funded by a doctoral fellowship funded by the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET). The aim is to explore the experiences surrounding protective measures from the perspective of the various actors involved. Specifically, the study examines the implementation and impact of two precautionary measures: the panic button and the dual electronic monitoring device. The research is framed within an intersectional feminist perspective (Castañeda-Salgado, 2014; Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2019).

Approaching gender-based violence from an intersectional perspective challenges the notion that all women and feminized identities experience and respond to violence in the same way. It recognizes that class, geographic location, racialization, and sexual and gender differences, among other factors, shape how individuals understand and navigate violence (Talpade-Mohanty, 2008). Conducting intersectional feminist research requires an awareness of how multiple axes of oppression intersect in varying contexts, and how the experience of violence differs qualitatively depending on the bodies affected and the situations in which it occurs (Viveros-Vigoya, 2023). This approach seeks to produce partial, situated knowledge capable of forming genuine connections with those engaged in the research process—resisting tendencies toward closure, culturalization, romanticization, or the “rescue” of difference (Soria, 2023).

The present study has been produced within the Field and through the paradigms of Social Work. The discipline not only intervenes in practice but also contributes to the production of knowledge that exposes the contradictions and inequalities generated by the system (Hermida, 2022). View the research experience *in-from-with* Social Work as a space where the boundaries between research and activism become blurred (Biglia, 2006; Osorio-Cabrera *et al.*, 2021; Zavos & Biglia, 2009).



## Context of the experience

The participant observation occurred between May and August 2023 at the Women's Secretariat (*Secretaría de la Mujer*) of the Province of Córdoba. Researchers conducted it during therapeutic group meetings for users of dual electronic monitoring systems (hereinafter, DD). DDs are a protective measure against gender-based violence that the Province of Córdoba introduced in 2016, becoming the first province in the country to do so (Redacción La Voz, 2016). The provincial judiciary grants these electronic devices when other protective measures—primarily restraining orders and panic buttons—have proven insufficient. Consequently, they are ordered by the courts in cases deemed high risk, generally involving individuals who have repeatedly sought protection from the State.

In 2021, the Women's Secretariat began offering therapeutic group sessions for DD users to *provide tools to safeguard their integrity and promote proper device use throughout the measure*<sup>1</sup>. Through participant observation, the researchers aimed to explore users' experiences with the DD, specifically their interactions with the judicial system and the police, as both institutions are key to accessing and using these devices. Attended ten weekly meetings, each lasting approximately two hours, with around eight women actively participating. This analysis draws on field notes taken during these sessions and situates itself within the broader research process initiated in 2021. Participants joined the group through judicial referral. To protect anonymity, the researchers identify participants by letters.

Next, describe some characteristics of the protection policies against gender-based violence in Argentina and the Province of Córdoba. Then describe the DD monitoring area, the support group, and the experience there. Finally, will present reflections that emerged from the observation process.

## Protection Policies in Argentina

**Gender-based violence (hereinafter GBV)** is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between genders. The democratic transition in Latin America at the beginning of the 1980s led to the consolidation of a notion of substantive equality that demands an active role from States in protecting the rights of specific groups, including women and dissident groups (Abramovich, 2010). Within the international legal framework, protection involves the adoption of plural, immediate, and varied measures; due diligence in the implementation of simple, swift, and accessible precautionary remedies; and respect for the procedural guarantees of the parties involved, among other aspects (*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, 2017).

<sup>1</sup> Textual quotation from the Internal Protocol of Action of the Dual Devices Follow-up Area of the Women's Protection Brigade of the Women's Secretariat of the Province of Córdoba. This document is unpublished.

In Argentina, the passing in 2009 of Law 26485 of “Protección Integral para Prevenir, Sancionar y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres” (Ley 26485 de 2009) marked a turning point in legislation by expanding the notion of violence – its modalities and spheres – and addressing many of the demands made by women’s movements and feminist organizations. Law 26485 of 2009<sup>2</sup> Defines violence against women as follows:

Violence against women is understood as any conduct, action, or omission, whether direct or indirect, occurring in both the public and private spheres, which, based on unequal power relations, affects their life, freedom, dignity, physical, psychological, sexual, economic, or patrimonial integrity, as well as their safety. That includes violence perpetrated by the State or its agents. This law considers any conduct, action, or omission to be indirect violence. (Art. 4)

The obligation to issue legal measures compelling aggressors to cease harassment, intimidation, threats, or any actions that endanger the lives or integrity of women, or damage their property is established both by the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) and by Law 26485 (Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales y Sociales [INECIP], 2020). Judicial precautionary measures are the State’s primary remedy and include restriction orders on approach and communication, exclusion from the home, victim reintegration into the home, and seizure of weapons. Judicial authorities’ issue these following the filing of a complaint and a subsequent risk assessment. In Argentina, specific laws regulate these measures. Article 26 of law 26485 of 2009 lists nine. However, judicial authorities may impose any measure they consider appropriate and adequate to protect individuals in gender-based violence situations (Ramos-Mesa, 2021).

International literature highlights high non-compliance rates with such measures, limited consequences for aggressors (Cattaneo *et al.*, 2016), and the lack of systematic records of violations (Caballé-Pérez *et al.*, 2020). Continuity of violence after the issuance of protection measures is also documented (Logan & Walker, 2009; Logan *et al.*, 2006; Logan *et al.*, 2007), alongside re-victimizing practices by state institutions (Mele, 2009). Furthermore, some research suggests that these measures are effective for moderate-risk situations but less so for high-risk cases (Herrera & Amor, 2017; Koppa & Messing, 2019; Strand, 2012), and that they reduce physical violence but not other forms of harassment or mistreatment (Herrera & Amor, 2017).

Research on judicial protection measures in Argentina has primarily focused on restraining orders, likely due to their widespread use (Ramos-Mesa, 2021). These studies reveal a lack of

<sup>2</sup> The authors keep the official name of the law in Spanish (Ley 26485 de 2009, de Protección Integral para Prevenir, Sancionar y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres), and the researchers translated its content into English to ensure clarity and accessibility. All translations of legal texts are approximate and intended to convey the general meaning.

effectiveness and comprehensiveness of such measures. Major obstacles include the individual responsibility placed on women complainants to file complaints and notify judicial resolutions, limited knowledge of preventive measures and their scope among complainants, repeated non-compliance, lengthy legal processes, and insufficient protection measures for children shared with the accused when measures are issued only about women (Defensoría General de la Nación, 2018; Guatrochi & Torres, 2020; Hasanbegovic, 2018; INECIP, 2020; Vicente & Voria, 2016).

In the last nine years, the authorities have added two electronic devices to the protection measures: the panic button and the Dual Electronic Monitoring System (hereinafter DD). Though differing in characteristics, both seek to guarantee the prohibition of contact established by restraining orders. Panic buttons are individual protection devices that come in various formats, such as key rings, pendants, bracelets, or cell phones, and include applications installed on mobile phones (either personal or provided by municipalities). They generally operate across major operating systems and use 4G technology. Activation is performed by the person experiencing violence, triggering a police response to their location. On the other hand, Dual Electronic Monitoring Systems (DD) operate via GPS and radio frequency (RF) technology. The system uses two tracking units that resemble cell phones: authorities give one to the person experiencing violence and the other to the aggressor, who also wears an anklet connected to the tracking unit. These devices recognize each other and establish judicially mandated exclusion zones with pre-set perimeters, which trigger different actions when breached (Sin Violencias de Género, 2022).

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At the national level, some researchers explore the subjectivities of people who receive panic buttons and DDs. These studies reveal users' feelings of control and surveillance, insecurity, responsibility for their safety, ongoing restrictions on social participation, traumatic experiences when activating DD, fatigue due to the short battery life of panic buttons and stress caused by the possibility of accidental activation (Bacci *et al.*, 2022; Calvo, 2024; Chiocca *et al.*, 2024; Defensoría del Pueblo de Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 2020; Moriconi, 2022; Torres & Paz-Ruiz, 2022). Additionally, users report feelings of invasion and disagreement stemming from the perception that the burden of compliance rests on their bodies—since they must wear the devices—while the accused often fails to comply with judicially mandated treatments (Lambrecht, 2023). There are also reports of strategies employed by defendants to avoid notification of measures, which delay enforcement (Chiocca *et al.*, 2024). Among the factors hindering proper application of protection measures are lack of resources and training among judicial and other institutions, procedural delays that postpone responses to urgent complaints, judicial operators' lack of sensitivity, entrenched cultural and social barriers, gender stereotypes, and patriarchal social structures, insufficient inter-institutional coordination between State agencies (such as police, social services, and judiciary), and limited resources for comprehensive support services including safe shelters, psychological assistance, and legal counseling (Calvo, 2024).

## The case of the province of Córdoba

In the province of Córdoba, since the enactment of Family Violence Law (Law 9283 of 2006), several advances have been made in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, mainly in family violence. In 2016, through Law 10352 of 2016, the province adhered to Law 26485 of 2009, whereby the State committed to addressing the different types and modalities in which violence against women manifests itself. The province has seen an exponential growth in GBV complaints. In 2020 alone, 56,537 complaints were filed for family and gender-based violence (Centro de Estudios y Proyectos Judiciales, 2020). That same year, 55,607 protection measures were issued, among which 2,679 corresponded to panic buttons (BAP) and 128 to Dual Electronic Monitoring Systems (DDs) (Centro de Estudios y Proyectos Judiciales, 2020). Most complaints and protective measures occur in the provincial capital. Despite the increasing number of complaints and precautionary measures, Córdoba is among the five provinces with the highest number of femicides in 2022 (Oficina de la Mujer, Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación, 2022).

The agencies responsible for implementing the provincial legislation have changed over time. Currently, the Secretariat of Women's Affairs (Secretaría de la Mujer) is in charge. The Secretariat operates in the Polo Integral de la Mujer building, inaugurated in 2016. With the creation of the Polo, a new management model was introduced, integrating single space services for people experiencing violence, complaint filing, and distribution of protection devices, among other actions. According to its founding decree, the Polo addresses: violence against women, family violence, crimes against sexual integrity, and human trafficking (Decreto Provincial 174 de 2016).

One of the areas within the Women's Secretariat is the Protection Brigade, created in 2016, the same year the Polo was inaugurated. The Brigade focuses on psychosocial support and safeguarding the physical and psychological integrity of people in high-risk gender-based violence situations, responding to demands from across the province. It operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and comprises professionals in social work and psychology. The team's interventions usually occur in the context of electronic device activation, attempted femicide, and severe acts of violence requiring medical hospitalization, among others.

In 2021, institutional changes prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and growing concerns among professionals about electronic devices led the Brigade to create a sub-area called the "Dual Device Monitoring Area". At that time, this team consisted of three professionals. It was responsible for tracking the number of active DDs in the province, conducting interviews during device delivery, following up on anklet placement, and coordinating with the Comprehensive

Center for Men<sup>3</sup>, maintaining communication with users of the devices, and organizing support groups for them<sup>4</sup>

In one of these support groups, held in 2023, the research team carried out the participant observation that forms the basis of this article.

## 2. Methodology

I started my doctoral research in 2021, framing this fieldwork experience within a qualitative methodology. This approach uses analytical and explanatory methods that adapt flexibly to the social context where researchers generate the data. It focuses on real, situated practices and is grounded in an interactive process between the researcher and the participants (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2006). Since the research explores protection experiences in the context of gender-based violence, it draws on the interpretive paradigm (Hurtado, 2006; Valles, 2003) and incorporates contributions from feminist phenomenology (Missaggia, 2015; Suárez-Tomé & Maffia, 2021; Vasterling, 2020).

The research team conducted the fieldwork in two main stages. The first, conducted between 2022 and 2023, consisted of semi-structured interviews with 23 state agents from the judicial, legal, and police systems involved in issuing DDs and BAPs. The second stage, ongoing since 2023, involves interviews with women who are users of DDs and BAPs. Participant observation was not initially defined as a technique but emerged organically from the research process. Specifically, during the first stage, following the suggestion of an interviewed professional, the opportunity to carry out participant observation within the therapeutic support groups organized by the Secretariat for Women's Affairs for DD users came up.

The participant observation analyzed here, conceived as an intervention-research experience, occurred between May and August 2023. Observation is a privileged technique for building rapport, as it fosters openness and trust among participants, allowing them to share their worldviews (Vergara, 2014). For this analysis, I conducted a content analysis of the field notebook created during the observation.

Additionally, formal interviews and informal conversations with professionals from the Secretariat for Women's Affairs—specifically those involved in the Follow-up Area that coordinates the therapeutic groups—are incorporated, as their narratives are essential for contextualizing the group's experience.

<sup>3</sup> **The Comprehensive Center for Men** is a provincial facility that provides psychological assistance to men reported for acts of gender-based violence. It operates under the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of the Province of Córdoba.

<sup>4</sup> Based on the Internal Protocol for Action of the Dual Device Monitoring Area, Protection Brigade, Women's Secretariat of the Province of Córdoba. This document is not publicly available.

## Description of the experience

According to the protocol developed by the staff of the Follow-up Area, professionals design the therapeutic groups as spaces to work on protection and safety measures. These sessions address various aspects related to gender-based violence and personal security. The document outlines an intervention strategy focused on support, containment, and psychological reparation for women using the devices. One of the general objectives of the groups is to reduce the impact of the dual device on the individual, intra-family, and social daily lives of those who use it, while also fostering tools for the effective use and appropriation of the device as a comprehensive protection measure for the duration of its application.

At the time of the participant observation, the Dual Device Follow-up team consisted of three professionals—two psychologists and one social worker. The team always held the workshops in the same office in the Secretariat's courtyard. This location is informally called “The Cube” due to its square shape and central position in the courtyard. Previously used as a workspace for police personnel, visitors often associate it with the police because they pick up or return panic buttons and inquire about electronic devices. This characteristic led to frequent interruptions during the workshops by people carrying out those tasks. The physical space is white, with matching white chairs and a long table. The only break in the monochrome is a banner that reads “Polo Integral de la Mujer”.

The group sessions were facilitated by one professional from the team—not as a matter of design, but due to the workload and the limited number of staff members. The main themes addressed in the group included care and self-care, awareness of fear and risk, and the construction of autonomy. Through participant observation, I could engage systematically in the activities proposed during the workshops and, more importantly, connect with the interests, concerns, and emotions of the group participants (Hermitte, 2002). My corporeality was part of the process, modifying the space not just by observing, but—as Vergara (2014) suggests—by experiencing it through all dimensions of embodiment: subjectivity, intersubjectivity, the social inscribed in the body, physical characteristics, and the senses. I brought a field notebook to each weekly meeting, which I kept close to take notes. However, note-taking was conditioned by what I perceived at the moment. For instance, in situations where a participant cried or expressed frustration with public policy (whether actions of the Secretariat, the police, or the court), I chose not to write. Taking notes at such moments would represent a disruptive intrusion, and I knew I had never entirely ceased to be part of the institution. As a social worker with prior experience at the Secretariat, I was not in the same position as the professionals counselling the group or the women participating. However, being seen as part of the institution was easier and more appropriate. When I refrained from note-taking, I recorded voice memos via WhatsApp upon leaving the site, capturing my reflections on what had just occurred. I later transcribed these voice memos and my field notebook into an electronic document, creating a digitized record of the

participant observation. From this document, I retrieve field notes to reflect on the implementation of public protection policies.

### **“Who are the participants?”**

On the first day of the meeting, I noted several things. One of them was "my presentation". Surprisingly, when I mentioned researching the dual devices (DD), the women expressed concern. They started asking questions about how many devices there were in Córdoba, when authorities started giving them out, and so on. I had not expected such interest from them about my research, not only because I inferred that the academic system in their lives was very distant, but mainly because, in my professional experience, conducting interviews with people who reported gender violence.<sup>5</sup> I noticed that women rarely asked what researchers did with that information. I am referring to a habit of testimonial repetition they face, where the confusing and tiring process faced by those who turn to the State to file complaints and seek protection leaves no room for questions about the interventions made regarding their lives.

Regarding the points in common, all the participants are cisgender women; they have children under their care (exclusively), as a result of their relationship with the people they reported and for whom they requested access to the dual protection system. Most of them, except one, can also be characterized as belonging to economically disadvantaged sectors; they have not completed secondary education, and their jobs are mostly informal or irregular, often described as temporary or casual work. In general, they also live-in geographic areas considered at risk, some of them in settlements or informal neighborhoods. That coincides with international studies that show that most women who request these measures have children with the denounced person (Mele, 2006; Shannon *et al.*, 2007; Zoellner *et al.*, 2000) and that they are usually one of the main reasons for requesting an order. Regarding the socioeconomic conditions of device users, a review of research revealed that approximately 50% of women are financially dependent on their partners (Russell, 2012).

From the first therapeutic group, tiredness is the word that appears in the mouths of the clients when they are arranged along the white table and asked how they are doing. They say it with their mouths, and I see it in their bodies. Some slump on their chairs or sigh as they retell the same thing. I relate this feeling to what state agents expressed during the first half of 2023 in the interviews. Police personnel, lawyers working in judicial units or prosecutors' offices, social workers, and psychologists from technical teams of the executive and judicial branches insisted that people with access to DD have a lot of wear and tear. For example, I transcribed the testimony of a professional:

<sup>5</sup> I refer to my professional experience in the Verification Unit of the Secretariat for Women in the province of Córdoba between 2017 and 2021. The Verification Unit comprises interdisciplinary technical teams of psychologists and social workers specializing in risk assessment. It acts at the request of the Family and Gender Violence Court to assess the reported incidents and diagnose the situation.

The tears they have are very significant. They are people who have already used other measures, some of them. They have denounced many times, and the DUL is happening today. However, these women have had to denounce several times to be given a dual, because you do not get it so easily. I mean because of the costs involved, because there are not so many, because of the number of reports they have made, because of what it implies to go to make a report, because of the wait, eh, then. After all, they already have the button. So, the strain is enormous (Professional from the Polo de la Mujer, personal interview, April 26, 2023).

The journey women undertake through the judicial, executive, and police systems to report situations of violence is often prolonged and may involve repeated complaints against the same aggressor. However, there are also cases in which women experience similar forms of violence with different perpetrators, which leads them to repeatedly engage with the reporting system and endure its procedures—such as navigating hallways, waiting rooms, and official notifications. It is necessary to take into account that the fact that women who access DD have already denounced the same person before evidences failures in the Judicial Branch. In the terms provided by Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention Belém do Pará (1994) on the adoption of measures to stop violence, the guarantee of non-repetition and the obligation to provide adequate support services for victims are repeatedly breached (INECIP, 2020). Some DD users I interviewed after the observation showed me folders full of complaints, notifications, professional reports, protocols, etc. They did this as proof of their plight and to locate themselves in time and space. Systematic gender violence and the reporting system to which they have access, among other things, are disorienting.

When accessing DD, with the body full of previous experiences around the reporting and protection system, diverse fears and expectations arise. As an example:

C says she is exhausted. She cries as soon as she starts talking. She says that she got a panic button 10 years ago due to the violence exerted by her partner at the time. C filed a complaint after he tried to kill her. She clarifies that she does not trust the tools of justice because she remembers that when she pressed the button, the police arrived late. Now she says that since she has no other choice, she hopes that with the dual system, she will not be killed. About the experience of violence, she says, “I buried it in tears and now I relive it.” (C, Personal communication, Field note, May 30, 2023).

The testimony of the DD user shows how previous denunciations went and what happened—and did not happen—with them, and how previous experiences influence the feelings and decisions of those who denounce again. If making a complaint is to learn the institutional mechanics, as Ahmed (2022) suggests, these users rehearse an engineering of these mechanics, since most of them had a long itinerary before they got a DD. In that round of women with whom I was a part every Wednesday, the paperwork in the form of complaints, notifications, court summons, and protocols was present in some way.

Where in the body is this carried? How much does it weigh? One of the users commented at one point that she filed 50 complaints; the rest of those present made approximately 10 to 12. Filing a complaint involves talking repeatedly with different people in different offices. Hence, the weight of the complaints is not only given by the number of formal complaints, but also by all the testimonies involved in the itinerary, which has a beginning but whose end is uncertain (Ahmed, 2022).

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Accessibility of the Dual Devices

During the therapeutic groups, I was able to observe some tensions that complicate access to the dual devices. Based on what has emerged in the research, I understand accessibility includes several dimensions: access, use, monitoring, activation, and removal of the devices. Below, I systematize three of these dimensions, focusing on those that stood out the most during the group sessions and resonated with the concerns expressed by state agents in the interviews I conducted in 2023, supported by excerpts from some of them.

#### 3.2 Access: failures to put the anklet on the ankle

As introduced earlier, the dual device system (DD) consists of three components: the complainant receives a tracker, and the person denounced is fitted with an electronic anklet and given a tracker. In one of the therapeutic group sessions, at the end of the meeting, a user asked to speak privately with the professional coordinating the group. Tired and frustrated, she shared that despite carrying the device herself—literally in her fanny pack—she felt unsafe because the person she had denounced was not wearing the anklet. Below are excerpts from two field notes documenting this:

P explained that the reported person does not have the anklet because the police “failed to catch him”. She elaborated that she has had a dual device for about a year, and her ex-partner had tried three times to violate the protective measure. He tried to tear off the anklet with pliers during the last attempt. The police managed to restrain him and took him to a neuropsychiatric hospital. However, upon his release, the police “forgot” to complete the necessary steps to place the anklet on him. P expressed that what angers her most is that she had explicitly begged the police not to forget to put the anklet on. Since then, the defendant has been hanging around her house daily. When the professional suggested notifying the police, P said she could not call them daily because “the criminals would come after me” (P, Personal communication, field note, June 7, 2023)

In another session, reflecting on her experience with the dual system, R said, “When they called me to give it to me, I thought: justice exists. But when I arrived and found out they did not have him because they could not find him... uff” (R, Personal communication, field note, August 15, 2023).

This situation, in which the complainant must be vigilant and remind the police to perform their protective role, reveals how those who report violence become conduits of information, tasked with keeping the process moving. The constant need to explain and re-explain underscores how procedures can become part of the problem (Ahmed, 2022). This difficulty in fitting the ankle on the person denounced has also surfaced repeatedly in interviews with state agents. Many highlight the growing challenges the police face when locating the reported person after issuing precautionary measures. Professionals from the Women's Secretariat especially emphasized this concern:

What worries us most today are the dual devices. Generally, men do not wear anklets. So, they are given a monitored device, but it makes no sense. That is very concerning because of the monthly cost of maintaining these devices – millions and millions of pesos. That is a problem. Many women hand over the device to their partners, but with arrest warrants out, police cannot find them even after raids... (Professional from the Women's Secretariat, personal communication, April 23, 2023).

International literature has previously noted obstacles in notifying the reported person about protective measures (Kaci, 1994; Keilitz *et al.*, 1997; Logan *et al.*, 2005; McFarlane *et al.*, 2004), but so far, no studies have specifically addressed the particular challenges of fitting anklets in cases of gender-based violence.

### 3.3 Access: lack of information

In another therapeutic group session, participants again raised the issue of the police failing to locate the reported persons. Two of the women shared that they first learned about the placement of the ankle not through formal communication from the judiciary or police, but through the alert sound of their tracker. That means that the risk zone alarm was triggered. It is important to highlight that, by hearing their devices, these women became aware of two critical facts: that the person they reported was wearing the ankle and was physically close to them. The dual device emits a sound when the complainant and the reported person are less than 1,500 meters apart. In this context, it is crucial to remember that international and regional human rights frameworks oblige States to exercise due diligence in adopting protection measures and ensuring their effective implementation (Spotlight Initiative in Argentina, 2021). Due diligence demands proper investigation, since failures often prevent or hinder protection for victims (INECIP, 2020). Moreover, the State must provide timely and accurate information to complainants regarding developments in their cases. The absence of such communication fails to protect and generates discomfort, distrust, and disbelief in the legal and police systems.

### 3.4 Use: restriction of social participation

National and local policies promote dual devices (DD) as a promise to prevent revictimization, by guaranteeing that denounced persons can carry on with their daily lives as normally as possible, while placing the burden of control on the bodies of the denounced persons. One example state:

[DD]...contributes to the reduction of revictimization, since through this tool the provincial States exclusively assume the burden involved in the effective exercise of protection, unlike what happens with the panic button, which requires permanent attention and activation of the alert by the person in a situation of violence. (Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Nación de Argentina, 2023).

Feminist narratives echo this perspective and emphasize the difference between the DD and the panic button, insisting that the latter demands concrete responsibility from users, since they must actively wear and activate it themselves (Carbajal, 2021; Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género [ELA], 2019; Figueroa & Rovetto, 2020). However, I want to highlight how DD does not guarantee that users can carry out their daily lives without changes or restrictions, even if they comply fully with the device requirements. Fieldwork and observation in the therapeutic groups allowed me to identify two main factors that restrict users' social participation: one directly linked to the denounced person and another to their family.

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V begins to cry as she explains she does not know how to resolve her housing situation. Her ex-partner – for whom she has a DD – and his family live across the street from the house she occupied before filing complaints and obtaining the DD. Crying, V says, "I want to go back to my house, but when the measure ends, that will not be possible – not only because of him, but also because of his family". (V, Personal communication, Field note, June 14, 2023)

When C takes the floor, she cries and repeats, "They changed my life" many times. She refers to her habits, outings, preferences, and the constant alert around her device. C enjoys going to a park, but has been advised not to go there anymore. Her device often beeps in that area, and because of this, she has stopped going to work and other activities she once enjoyed. She and her daughter used to attend church, but they stopped going there following police advice due to DD alerts in that area. She insists she is tired of constantly changing her routines. (C, Personal communication, Field note, May 30, 2023)

R explains how she now organizes her activities: "To take my son to soccer changed how I used to do things. Even though he is in prison, I do not want to cross paths with his family because I know they could harm me and my family at his orders. So take a cab to drop [my son] off, and then pick him up using a different route – I take a long detour." R's experience with the family of her aggressor resonated with the other women, who shared similar situations. They all agree they feel at risk because they live close to the accused's family. (R, Personal communication, Field note, June 7, 2023)

These testimonies show that restrictions on daily life do not end with the defendant's arrest; comprehensive policies are needed to guarantee protection. The first two accounts reveal how these restrictions persist despite physical separation from the aggressor, while the third highlights the additional risk posed by the aggressor's family.

### 3.5 Withdrawal of the devices: ¿What now?

At the end of the ten therapeutic group sessions, some participants learned that the authorities would withdraw their dual devices, mainly because they had imprisoned the reported individuals. Participants reacted differently to removing the DD, but many shared a familiar feeling of not having enough information.

R commented that she was woken up from her nap by a phone call informing her that the dual device would be removed. Shortly after, someone came to her house to tell her the man was in custody, so her device was taken away. R says she has doubts about the aggressor's conviction and was told that the counselor would contact her, but that never happened. (R, Personal communication, Field note, August 8, 2023).

Another concern expressed by the users is the lack of action taken with those who have perpetrated violence against them. When this topic came up, they all agreed that their aggressors had not received treatment or sustained instances dedicated to addressing masculinist violence.

C says she has begun to 'live again', resumed activities, and is looking for alternatives. However, she feels it is unfair and is somewhat afraid that the dual device will be removed since the aggressor has not changed or undergone any treatment. (C, Personal communication, Field note, July 26, 2023).

However, some express hope that access to the DD itself, the placement of an anklet, and the constant monitoring of the defendant's life might encourage behavioral change, as reflected in many women's intentions to file complaints (Ortolanis *et al.*, 2009). It is important to note that there are no official records tracking compliance or non-compliance with precautionary measures in general, nor data regarding whether reported persons have access to mechanisms to deal with sexist violence in Córdoba. The users' experiences regarding the men reported reveal a lack of comprehensive public policies, where measures continue to focus primarily on women's bodies. Given that precautionary measures are time-limited, priority should be placed on engagement and support processes for those who are reported (Arduino, 2021).

## 4. Conclusions

As stated at the beginning, this experience is part of a broader doctoral research process. Approaching the experiences of dual device users allowed for a closer engagement ahead of the individual interviews. It provided support for the central issues surrounding the protection of people experiencing gender-based violence who turn to the State for support.

The observational experience underscores the urgent need to listen to the voices of women involved in judicialized conflicts to create heterogeneous responses tailored to the risks assessed. That entails an epistemological and ethical stance that challenges unidirectional knowledge production and promotes broad access to justice. It calls for analyzing the access to and use of protection mechanisms based on the testimonies of both the victim-survivors and the public policy makers. This position questions binary understandings of the effectiveness of precautionary measures—understandings that seek to determine whether they "work" or not. What interests, instead, is to open up space for questioning the singularity of each situation involving violence and protection.

In terms of accessibility, the difficulties in locating the accused individuals in order to fit them with the anklet echo findings from previous research on the challenges involved in notifying precautionary measures (INECIP, 2020). People often resolve these challenges through diligence, whereby the users of such measures must ensure that the measure is issued, enforced, and even removed or modified (Malacalza, 2020). Additionally, the everyday practices of users reveal continued restrictions in their social participation, mirroring findings from other local research on electronic surveillance devices (Moriconi, 2022; Torres & Paz-Ruiz, 2022). These insights challenge the idea that panic buttons place responsibility solely on the user while dual devices do not. Instead, both types of devices impact users' everyday lives, generating a range of bodily sensations and burdens. Moreover, practices that violate users' right to information—whether related to fitting the anklet on the accused or removing the dual device—contribute to a deepened sense of vulnerability and lack of protection among complainants.

The therapeutic groups I observed functioned as important spaces for sharing and listening to testimonies. This exchange supported participants in repositioning themselves subjectively and marked a break from the fixed identity of "victim" often imposed by legal discourse and the practices it informs (Colanzi, 2016). Users valued the opportunity to listen to others facing similar experiences, noting that it helped them feel less alone. The regular meetings with professionals also allowed participants to ask questions, clarify aspects of the legal process, learn about supportive programs, and circulate their complaints. The act of circulating the complaint becomes reparative. The women's circle represents a space for reconfiguring the complaints they carry on their bodies into testimonies, and at the same time, it is a rehearsal of collective complaint. In this sense, collective complaint does not erase individual history but assembles fragments of a shared, collective story (Ahmed, 2022). There is a clear need to provide settings that specifically address

incorporating electronic surveillance devices into users' everyday lives. Comprehensive risk assessments are often inadequate, and follow-up procedures are generally nonexistent. Still, we must ask whether this type of practice, in the absence of other support systems, simply places yet another burden on the bodies of those who denounce violence. Attending a weekly meeting for three months becomes another task that interrupts the daily lives of women, most of whom are mothers with sole caregiving responsibilities. For this reason, it is critical to continue questioning the demanding practices imposed on those who have already taken the step to file a complaint and claim their right to protection.

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## **Authors' contributions**

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## **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest in the writing or publication of this article.

## **Ethical implications**

The author has no ethical implications to declare in the writing and publication of this article.

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