

# CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO & COVID-19: AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY & DISASTER

**PUERTO RICO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTERS & LESSONS  
LEARNED POST HURRICANE MARIA: ENGAGING YOUTH,  
COMMUNITY, & STATE DURING COVID 19 TO PROTECT  
CHILDREN, LGBTQ+ YOUTH, AND WOMEN**

**WWW.HMARIAINC.WEEBLY.COM**



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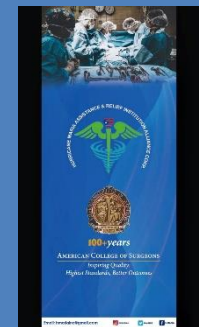
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## WEBINAR SERIES

Children of Puerto Rico and COVID-19:  
At the Crossroads of Poverty and Disaster

Session #5: Strategies and considerations in addressing  
domestic violence and child abuse during a pandemic

Wednesday May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 1:00 - 2:30 PM ET



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# THANK YOU SPONSORS



## SPECIAL THANK YOU TO

- **Columbia University NCDP—Jonathan Sury & Allison Stewart, Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud—Yesenia Delgado, Co-panelists—Alina Potts, & Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz.**
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- **Dr. Waleska Crespo, Universidad Central del Caribe & Dr. Olga Rodriguez & Dr. Martinez Trabal – Ponce Health Sciences University/San Lucas.**
- **Youth Volunteers:**
  - **2019-20: Magdalena Oropeza, Cayetana Lazcano Etchebarne, Patricia Padrinao, Aura Soto, Kinza Awais, James Lopez Olvera, Lisa Cho, Shawn Louis, Brianne Ortiz, Samuel Win, Arianna Aguilar, Bianca Hayles, Miss-Kye Gallon, Asmaa Hamadan, Santos Garcia, Stephanie Johns, Elizabeth Zapata, Maribel Susano, Sema Sarsour, Trevonna Hepburn, Adam Fane, Maria Gomes, Lenora James, Jannkarlos Vargas and Madelin Perez.**
  - **2018-19: Magdalena Oropeza, Cayetana Lazcano, Bernarda Reyes, Claudia Flores-Montesinos, Dayanara Garcia, Dandre East, Tyriek Warren, Inioluwa Femi-Fatukasi, Aura Soto, Patricia Padrinao, Shannon Sciarretta, Lisa Cho, Shawn Louis, Khilolahan Muzaffarova, Kinza Awais and Stephanie Calderon Vasquez**
  - **2017-18: Magdalena Oropeza, Cayetana Lazcano, Geormary Sánchez, Jessica Tiburcio, Melanie Monroy, Nathaly Ramírez, Ayodele Adeyanju, Christina Alicea, Shanisha Forbes, Santos Garcia, Maria Negrete, Froylan Vaquero, & Sabino Vargas**
- **American College of Surgeons OGB & Hurricane Maria Assistance & Relief Institutional Alliance, Inc.**



# HURRICANE MARIA ASSISTANCE RELIEF & INSTITUTIONAL ALLIANCE, INC. (HMARIA)

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- 501c3, not-for-profit corporation **formed for the charitable purpose of aiding persons who are victims of natural disasters.** (HMARIA, Corp. Puerto Rico sister organization)
- Liaisons state institutions, community based organizations, & volunteers to aid humanitarian aid relief efforts.
- HMARIA has successfully created partnerships to help vulnerable populations within post natural disaster situations since 2017.
- Volunteers: American College of Surgeons Surgeon Volunteers, Surgical Residents from Ponce Health Sciences University, Universidad Central del Caribe Medical Students, Puerto Rico & NY Undergraduate Premed & Prelaw students, & local residents.
- Support: Access to free health & surgical care for the uninsured in Puerto Rico (includes immigrants & the homeless), domestic violence, long term mental health support, & retention of doctors & medical students in Puerto Rico--diversity pipeline program.

# GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

- GBV = global crisis
- Describes *any violence rooted in gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.*
- GBV is typically absent from public discussions when addressing crises or natural disasters, yet GBV is compounded/spikes post natural disaster/crises period.
- When intersectionality are added to gender, including race, socioeconomic status, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other factors, the violence women and children experience is exacerbated because of a lack of societal response to the overall violence against women crisis in Puerto Rico.
- Society witnesses a reemergence of obstacles that impede the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups, resulting in an increase of GBV, particularly amongst women, children, and LGBT+ persons.
- What are some of those human rights?



# SELECT HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES, COVID 19, & THE CHILD

## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### **Article 3: *Right to Life***

- Every human being has the inherent *right to life*. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life. Everyone has the *right to life*, liberty, and security of person.

More on *Right to Life* includes:

- **Article 6 Convention on the Rights of the Child:**
  - States Parties recognize that every child has the *inherent right to life*.
  - States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.
- **Article 10 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:**
  - States Parties reaffirm that every human being has the inherent *right to life* & shall take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.
- **Article 4 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights:**
  - Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to *respect for his life and the integrity of his person*. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.



# UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (CONTINUED)

## Article 13: *Right to Freedom of Movement*

- (1) Everyone has the *right to freedom of movement* and residence within the borders of each state; and
- (2) Everyone has the *right to leave* any country, including his own, *and to return* to his country.
- More on *Right to Freedom of Movement*:
  - Article 12 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:
    - 1. Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence.
    - 2. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.
    - 3. The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.
    - 4. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.



# DATA CONSTRAINTS, OBSTACLES, & HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES

## ■ Data Constraints:

- Statistics are essential to grasp the reality of the GBV crisis
- Lack of **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** & a “**sunshine law**” (governing access to public documents and public meetings) making the overall transparency of data extremely difficult to achieve & the attainment of available data an undertaking
- Reliability of data in Puerto Rico historically, troubling, extremely difficult to attain from local government
- **RESULT:** This reality has catapulted a surge in the development of a civilian-led data project that has become a social media phenomenon called **Seguimiento de Casos by Carmen Castello** (Case Follow Up) on [Facebook](#).





# LESSONS LEARNED POST HURRICANE MARIA: ANALYZING THE DECREASE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES HANDLED IN THE SHELTERS

[www.hmariainc.com](http://www.hmariainc.com)

**#1**

**Lack of communication and transportation compounded the inability to report Domestic Violence crimes and made it impossible for victims to arrive to shelters**

**#2**

**Lack of police presence, and when there was police presence, the police stations were understaffed, or at times there was no will on behalf of police officers to prioritize DV crimes, investigate, & arrest aggressors**

**#3**

**Courts were closed for a period of time & when courts re-opened, or some temporary courts were established, they were not, and in some areas, still are not at full functioning capacity, if at all existent in rural areas most devastated by the hurricanes**

**#4**

**Puerto Rico suffered a massive exodus of citizens from the islands to the mainland US resulting in a decrease of the population by approximately 230,000+ US citizens**

\*Dr. Jodie Roure and others working on this project put together this statement on March 5, 2018 in San Juan, PR, Senate Capital Annex Building Meeting.





# HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS WEEK IN PUERTO RICO, COVID 19 IN THE MIDST OF ONGOING EARTHQUAKES

## Preparedness in Puerto Rico

- From GBV perspective: DV shelters, while they use CDC guidelines, were not provided COVID state protocols, PPE materials, or training to prepare properly for COVID19.
- DV shelters when designated an “essential service,” should be provided a seat at the emergency management table, & issued state protocols during natural disasters/crises periods.
- Can DV shelters be expected to “properly,” formally or informally, prepare for hurricane season under COVID19 during ongoing earthquakes given a continued lack of support from governing agencies?

# RECOMMENDATIONS, PRACTICES, & KEY TAKE-AWAY



**YOUTH MATTER.  
THEY MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE.**

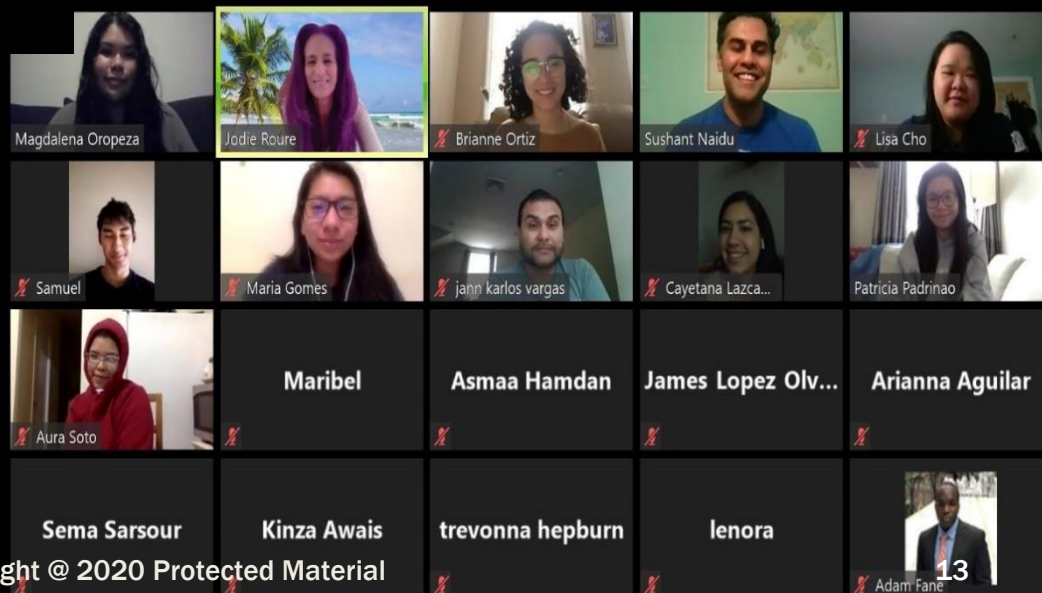
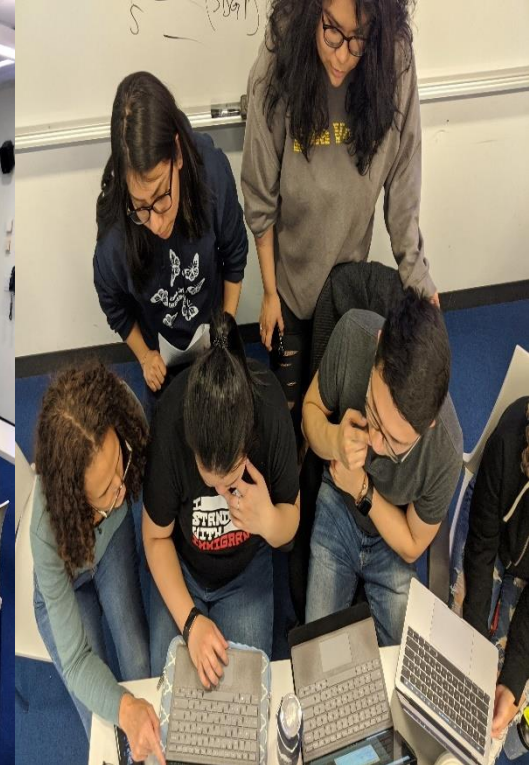




# ENGAGING YOUTH IN RESEARCH BASED WEBSITE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- **Engagement of Youth** in the conversation of how to involve the public & support vulnerable groups during times of crisis is beneficial, as seen from a research project website [www.hmariainc.weebly.com](http://www.hmariainc.weebly.com)
- The creation of research based websites is one way to create a public social platform to enhance communication & sharing of information between the survivors, the community, & the state during times of crisis.
  - Example: Humanitarian Efforts and Relief Operation or HERO Project, engages local CBOs, liaisons local CBOs with US continental & global organizations & institutions, in an effort to garnish specific types of support reflective of the needs of local vulnerable groups.
- Currently, volunteer youth in both Puerto Rico & New York are working on HERO
  - Youth are tasked in integrated teams based on human rights issues: Domestic Violence, Mental Health, ACS Operation Giving Back Puerto Rico (free access to surgical care for the uninsured), & Immigration (asylum for DV victims).
  - Volunteer youth from John Jay College, Columbia Law School, & UPR Natural Sciences Campus are paired with local CBOs & institutional entities.
- Link research website to experiential learning experiences on the ground for students or create cyber experiential learning experiences & mentoring projects to espouse awareness & social consciousness during COVID19.









## Our Mission

The Hurricane Maria Assistance Relief & Institutional Alliance, Inc. (HMARIA, Inc.), is a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit corporation formed for the charitable purpose of aiding persons who are victims of natural disasters.

HMARIA, Inc. and its Puerto Rico sister organization HMARIA, Corp., work to liaison state institutions, community based organizations, and volunteers to aid humanitarian relief projects. HMARIA has successfully created partnerships to help vulnerable populations within post natural disaster situations since 2017.

HMARIA volunteers include, but are not limited to, surgeon volunteers of the American College of Surgeon, surgical residents, medical students, premed students, prelaw students, undergraduate students, and local residents. Currently, we work to support issues including access to free health and surgical care for the uninsured (including immigrants and the homeless), domestic violence, and long term mental health support.

Please review our current projects below for more information or if you wish to participate, and to make a tax deductible contribution to any of these efforts, please press the DONATE button below.

**Donate now**



## Declaración de la Misión

La Alianza Institucional y de Asistencia de Huracán María, Inc. (HMARIA, Inc.), es una corporación sin fines de lucro 501(c)(3) formada con el propósito caritativo de ayudar a las personas que son víctimas de desastres naturales.

HMARIA, Inc. y su organización hermana en Puerto Rico HMARIA, Corp., trabajan para coordinar con instituciones estatales, organizaciones comunitarias y voluntarios para ayudar con proyectos humanitarios. HMARIA ha creado asociaciones para ayudar poblaciones vulnerables en situaciones después de desastres naturales desde 2017.

Los voluntarios de HMARIA incluyen, entre otros, cirujanos voluntarios del Colegio Americano de Cirujanos, residentes de cirugía, estudiantes de medicina, estudiantes de premedicina, estudiantes de pre abogacía, estudiantes de leyes y residentes locales. Trabajamos para apoyar problemas que incluyen el acceso a atención médica y quirúrgica gratuita para personas sin seguro (incluyendo inmigrantes y personas sin hogar), violencia doméstica y apoyo de salud mental a largo plazo.

Revise nuestros proyectos para obtener más información o si desea participar, y para hacer una contribución deducible de impuestos a cualquiera de estos esfuerzos, presione el botón DONAR a continuación.

## Humanitarian Aid Projects



### Operation Giving Back Puerto Rico American College of Surgeons

[Operation Giving Back \(OGB\)](#), is a volunteerism initiative of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), which offers its first domestic surgical volunteer initiatives in Puerto Rico. ACS OGB-Puerto Rico provides free elective surgeries to the uninsured in Puerto Rico. Get involved, find out if you qualify, or make a tax deductible donation to support this effort.

[TO LEARN MORE CLICK HERE](#)

### Gender Based Violence Project

Natural disasters can destroy domestic violence shelters and draw the attention of local law enforcement agencies away from gender based violence issues. HMARIA works with local partners to support domestic violence survivors. Please help us work to eradicate gender based violence.

United Nations Sustainability Goal 5.2 states, "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation."

[TO LEARN MORE CLICK HERE](#)



### Mental Health Project

HMARIA works with local organizations to provide mental health support to communities affected by the ongoing earthquakes in Puerto Rico. Working with Iniciativa Comunitaria, a local 501(c)(3) partner, we are working to finance the development of a 12-month mental health plan which will employ local mental health professionals. Please make a tax deductible donate to this cause.

[TO LEARN MORE CLICK HERE](#)





# ENGAGING YOUTH IN RESEARCH BASED WEBSITE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES (CONTINUED)

**Platform Utility for Children & Families:** Use research website platform to attack & attempt to resolve issues of parental abuse in homes during COVID19 confinement.

- Example: Globally, many parents express concern or report about the inability to “home school” their child during COVID19 quarantine for varied reason
- **SELECT FACTORS/SAMPLE:**
  - Complaint Sample: Teachers increase student workload
  - Frustration increases in the home, stress triggers escalated violence toward child, in part due to a lack of resources available to support families with school aged children (i.e. special needs services absent)
  - Increasing result: Parents/loved ones are frustrated & children pay the price
  - **Proposed Solution:** Find/develop tools to support parents & provide technology which allows for Cyber Engagement & support to both child & family members involved in “home schooling” during COVID19.
  - **Note: Technology developed must be accompanied by an energy free sustainable model – what happens when there is no electricity? Supplies? Provide families with activities that do not require electricity & consider confinement restrictions regarding resources in child assessment.**





# SELECT WAYS TO SUPPORT PUERTO RICO & GBV SURVIVORS

## ■ Inclusive Policy Decisions:

- “[D]ecisions and policies are better with a gender perspective... [since] gender-blind decisions and policies ... usually fail.” It is crucial that decision-makers around the world responding to a crisis, work to implement a gender perspective in their response in order to “achieve better outcomes for everyone.” The question of what that looks like is not complicated. -- UN Women Deputy Executive Director Åsa Regnér:
- Executive Orders must be written clearly, include why persons are being isolated, & how they should proceed with the isolation.
- Intersectionality Factors of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender, language, immigration status, age, etc., render women, children, & LGBT+ persons to a lesser class status. produce a lesser class citizenship.
- Society must ***understand how to practice acts of solidarity in everyday interactions that can assist us all***, as it is especially important to be aware of & center the most vulnerable members of our communities –especially women, children, & LGBT+ persons.



# INSTITUTIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## ■ Hurricanes/Earthquakes/COVID19

- Give Domestic Violence Shelter Directors a seat at the Emergency Management Table.
- IMPLEMENT a coordinated protocol to evacuate domestic violence survivor victims from shelters during natural disasters/pandemic crises, if necessary.
- Need for the development of proper safety protocols on how to handle domestic violence survivors once they are relocated to general refugee shelters, especially during COVID19.
- To make the emergency response more effective, include the development of effective means & resources to train and assist the PRPD on re-conceptualizing gender-based violence.
  - Police officers need to: 1) learn how to conduct victim interviews; 2) understand the specific vulnerability of domestic violence shelters during a natural disaster; and 3) have a plan during natural disasters to provide increased protections and surveillance of domestic violence shelters.
  - Domestic violence shelter directors suggest that domestic violence counselors be certified to take pictures of domestic violence survivors at shelters. Bruises, wounds, and injuries often become visible and disappear during the time the victim is in the domestic violence shelter. For prosecutorial purposes, the certification of staff at the domestic violence shelters would enable them to take photos and properly gather evidence. This is an effective and inexpensive recommendation that could be easily implemented with the cooperation of the local authorities.

# GRACIAS/THANK YOU

**Puerto Rico finds itself in a reemergence of the barriers that impede the protection of the basic human rights principles, with particular attention to the women, children, and LGBT+ persons. Together, we can remedy these issues.**

**Please see forthcoming related article in**  
*Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*

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