



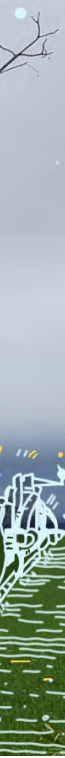
POISON INHERITED TO CHILDREN

V

idal Samuel Ocampo Talavera died when he was seven months old, and he has never had the chance to grow up in the middle of soybean fields like his mother, Sofía Talavera, who was constantly exposed to pesticides. He would have been 14 years old today, but he was born with congenital hydrocephalus in Itapúa, an area where scientific studies confirmed that women who live near fumigated crops have twice the risk of having children with malformations.

To this day, agricultural planes fly low over the soybeans that surround the family house where Sofía lived, spraying the crops. Now, there is a living barrier of scrubby places which is mandatory by environmental law to keep communities away from soybeans, and then, there are plantations, although it is too late. There is not only pollution of the air through the fumigation with small planes, but also of the well from which the family obtained the water for consumption. Without realizing it, the poison gradually accumulated in her body.

Sofía Talavera had high amounts of glyphosate and of other types of pesticides such as phenol, and carbamates in her blood when, at age 16, she gave birth to Vidal Samuel Ocampo Talavera in 2006. After weeks in an incubator, and after months of hospi-



FACTSHEET

CASE: Children with learning problems and malformations due to fumigations in Itapúa (Encarnación)

LOCATION: Edelira, Itapúa

SUBJECT/HUMAN RIGHTS

AFFECTED: 3- Universal Human Rights / 3.1- Health

JUDICIAL/GOVERNMENTAL/

INTERNATIONAL CASE STATUS:

There is only one known case of a soybean producer convicted for a death associated with the use of agrochemicals in the area, but conviction was just a fine. He never set foot in jail.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED:

More than 4,000 families, around 20,000 people who live in a rural area in Edelira, Itapúa district.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Congenital malformations, premature deaths, and diseases are sequelae observed in residents of Edelira, which are exposed to soybean fumigations in the Itapúa department. Fumigation is carried out from airplanes, and it reaches not only plantations, but also humans.

talization, the little boy died when he was seven months old from congenital hydrocephalus as a result of the mother's exposure to these agrochemicals. His death remains unpunished, and will probably remain so since neither the Prosecutor's Office, nor any State institution has shown interest in acting *ex officio*.

Additionally to the constant exposure, two years before her pregnancy, Herman Schelender, a soybean producer, manipulated a fumigator, spraying and polluting a bag that contained meat and noodles in it which were used to prepare a lunch that affected Sofía, her brothers, and her mother, Petrona Villasboa, as proven in court. It was what triggered a series of family tragedies that, after 17 years, continues to affect his brothers, parents, and son.

Sofía lived with her nine siblings in the Pirapey community, 35 kilometers from the center of Edelira, and 145 km from Encarnación. Petrona, Sofía's mother, and Vidal's grandmother, still live there.

"When we suffered that poisoning, they sprayed the poison here fifteen meters from my house when there was a strong wind, and they sprayed everything in our house, everything," the grandmother says, who decided not to shut up, and to confront the soybean producers, and the transnationals.

The death of little Vidal was the second tragedy of the family because in 2003, three years earlier, Silvino Talavera, Sofía's brother, died when he was 11 years old from intoxication with agrochemicals. The boy was drenched with pesticide when he came home with a bag of meat, and noodles that Petrona used to prepare a meal, and which ended up poisoning and sending almost the entire family to the hospital. The boy was coming back from shopping, and received the poison from the fumigator all over his body. At first, the family did not assess the consequences of the criminal recklessness of the soybean entrepreneurs.

The State did not act diligently. Doña Petrona spoke out and insisted that the prosecutor's office open an investigation. She did it for his son, respecting her daughter's decision of not tolerating delay and bureaucracy of the court, and with the intimidation of businessmen, and soybean producers on the death of his grandson.

Doña Petrona recalls that when the family began to feel the ravages of pollution in 2003, several of its members took blood tests, and Sofía tested positive for various types of agrochemicals. Despite the fact that everyone was hospitalized, and Silvino was seriously ill, another soybean producer, Alfredo Laustenlager, fumigated his soybean crops again just 15 meters from the Talavera family home.

"We tested three of my children, and my daughter had three kinds of toxins in her blood. We went to do it in the ex-Lacimet, but not to the whole family because they are very expensive (tests), but we know that we all have poison in our blood," Petrona says.

Since Sofía knew that she was exposed to pesticides during her pregnancy, she took precautions and followed medical treatments. Similarly, it was not surprising when doctors indicated that the fetus had complications.

"The child was born by caesarean section. He went into the incubator first for four days and then for two weeks, he cried and cried while his little head grew," she recalls. Although hydrocephalus can be due to genetic predisposition, it is also caused by environmental influences during development of the fetus, such as from exposure to pesticides.

The little boy was hospitalized for several months at the Hospital Materno Infantil de San Lorenzo [San Lorenzo Maternal, and Child Hospital], and underwent two operations in which doctors tried to treat the excessive accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid inside the skull. It was in vain. He died on September 11, 2006. "I had a lot of high blood pressure. He was not going to live," she lamented.

The death of her first child was not the only thing that Sofía Talavera suffered. She was left with consequences of the poisoning, and had to follow a fertility regimen to be able to conceive again. In 2019, she gave birth. Vidal's brother has traces of pesticides in his blood, and the baby undergoes medical treatment that seeks to guarantee a better quality of life.

Although the death of Vidal Samuel went unpunished, that of his uncle, Silvino, is the first case with a conviction for a death associated with the use of agrochemicals.

Petrona declared, and stood firm in her fight to demand justice for her son. When it seemed that those responsible were going to be punished, the tragedy of his grandson returned to mourn the family.

Nine months before the birth of Vidal, in July 2005, the soybean producers Schelender and Laustenlager were sentenced to two years in prison, aailable sentence accused of "disproportionately using pesticides in soybean crops" which caused the death of the child Silvino Talavera according to the Court. They were also ordered to pay a compensation of G. 50 million. However, they never set foot in jail, and were not prosecuted for the death of Sofía's son. History repeats travesties.

SENAVE, Servicio Nacional de Calidad y Sanidad Vegetal y de Semillas [National Plant and Seed Quality and Health Service], is the body in charge of authorizing and controlling the marketing, and usage of fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, and other related products according to Law No. 3742/08.

The regulations establish the obligatory nature of a protection stripe of 200 meters between the fumigation area and any human establishment in the cases of aerial spraying. In land spraying, it must be 100 meters according to articles 70, and 71.

It is also an obligation that an inspection of the area must be made before spraying to check that there are neither people, animals, nor courses that could be affected. The law even provides penalties and fines for offenders.

Petrona, and everyone in Edelira know that these provisions are scarcely observed in practice. His soybean producers neighbors adapted to the regulations after she brought them to justice. Pollution is still constant, and if there are no complaints, neither





SENAVE, nor MADES, Ministerio del Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible [Ministry of the Environment, and Sustainable Development], take action on the matter, she lamented.

"I know many creatures who came out like this, with hydrocephalus, or without a leg. There are many animals that are born with malformations, and it is because of the soybean producers' poison, but families do not speak because they are afraid. For example, I do not fear the owners of the crops and of the transnational companies, and I have suffered death threats. Anyway, I'm just not afraid to speak up, and report things," Doña Petrona states emphatically.

The cases of Vidal Samuel and his uncle, Silvino, are not isolated. The teacher, and pediatrician of the Hospital Regional de Encarnación [Regional Hospital of Encarnación], Stela Benítez Leite, noticed an increase in the births of children with congenital deformities in this public hospital, headquarter in the Itapúa department. She devoted herself to studying the possible causes, and confirmed a connection between the pathologies and pesticides.

34.61% of children born at the Hospital de Itapúa [Itapua Hospital] with congenital malformations between March, 2006 and

February, 2007 were the children of mothers who lived less than one kilometer from the fumigated fields. These are data from research led by Benítez Leite that concluded that living near fumigated fields represented twice the risk of having children with malformations during that period compared to women who did not live nearby. The paper was published August 2009 in *Revista Chilena de Pediatría* [Chilean Journal of Pediatrics].

Similarly, Stela Benítez's research was not limited to Encarnación and Itapúa since she led other studies related to the subject. One of them, published in 2017, revealed genetic damage in children exposed to agrochemicals. In this last study, damage was detected in the genetic material analyzed in 43 children from a population surrounded by soybean crops in Canindeyú, which was compared with that of 41 children from a community that was neither exposed to pesticides, nor near monoculture fields.

Congenital malformations can also yield other damages, and they are not only in the field of health. For example, it is estimated that children and adolescents with these pathologies could have school difficulties. Along these lines, studies on the consequences of agrochemicals in monoculture areas continue in Paraguay.

In Alto Paraná, a team of research teachers analyzes the relationship between learning problems and congenital malformations associated with the use of pesticides, a study that will soon be published.

Every new research that comes to light reconfirms that the death and illnesses are not accidents. Vidal and Silvino died from the greed of producers who refused to comply with the regulations on the use of pesticides, and from living in a country in which the State does not guarantee the rights of its people, which does not impose fines, and does not show a modicum of interest in the protection of the population.

