

RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

ELLA Area: Governance

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ELLA

Evidence and lessons
from Latin America

REGIONAL EVIDENCE PAPERS

Beyond Domestic Violence Laws in Latin America: Challenges for Protection Services for Survivors



Fundar, Centre of Analysis and Research
Mexico

ELLA REGIONAL EVIDENCE PAPERS

Regional Evidence Papers are an output of the ELLA Programme. They contain an overview of regional evidence, as well as original data collection and analysis, on a particular research topic. A pair of Regional Evidence Papers are produced on each topic, one focused on Latin America and one on Africa, using a common research question and design. This Regional Evidence Paper is paired with a sister paper whose title is *Beyond Domestic Violence Laws: Women's Experiences and Perceptions of Protection Services in Ghana*, authored by the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA), University of Ghana. Based on this two [regional papers](#), a Comparative Evidence Paper is constructed, comparing the experiences of the two regions, in order to support inter-regional lesson-learning. All publications can be found in the ELLA programme [website](#).

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ABOUT THE ELLA PROGRAMME

ELLA is a south-south knowledge and exchange programme that mixes research, exchange and learning to inspire development policies and practices that are grounded in evidence about what works in varied country contexts. The programme has been designed and is coordinated by [Practical Action Consulting \(PAC\) Latin America](#), in line with the objectives agreed with the funder, the [UK Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#), UK Aid. The [Institute for Development Studies \(IDS\)](#), [Sussex University, UK](#), supports on research design, methods and outputs. To learn more about ELLA go to our [website](#), where you can also browse our other publications on [Gender](#) and other [ELLA development issues](#).

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SUMMARY

The feminist and human rights movements in the Latin America Region have made public the discussion of violence against women as a social and multifaceted problem embedded in the private, public and collective spheres. Violence against women perpetuates gender gaps, highlighting the vulnerable situation of exclusion women face. In response, Latin American countries have put in place a variety of legislative and institutional mechanisms inspired by the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem Do Para Convention), the first binding regional treaty that proposes a liberal and individualistic approach to dealing with violence against women, and establishes a variety of measures that states should adopt to prevent, protect and sanction this phenomenon.

Despite these legalistic advances, responses to address domestic violence vary among the countries. A review of the literature finds that the influence of the neoliberal agenda, which focuses on population targeting in contrast to the universal Welfare State approach, has had a strong influence on policy responses in several of the countries. The issue is no longer one of social justice in a broad sense, but one reduced to the application of a discrete legal instrument which defines violence against women as an individual abuse of human rights. Criminalization and mediation strategies seem to be the two most common approaches to address domestic violence. These reflect a tendency to individualize a societal problem, thus limiting the space for a proper gender analysis of the issue.

In this context of limited participation of the state in the public arena, a different trend however emerged in the late 2000s with a second wave of reforms that enacted comprehensive laws acknowledging different forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. Mechanisms to prevent, protect and sanction domestic violence were created. Mexico's General Law on Women's Access to Free Life (2007), for example, is a legal instrument unique in Latin America in its emphasis on strong inter-institutional coordination. Moreover, the law proposes a protection model for survivors of domestic violence which is presented as an integral part of the law's strategy to tackle domestic violence. This legislation is implemented through a network of non-profit shelters, supported by public funds, as well as shelters run by the state.

This study uses a series of in-depth interviews with survivors of domestic violence living in a Mexico City shelter, as well as with its staff, to analyse how survivors experience protection services. Although it only covers one shelter and thus constitutes only a partial analysis, it represents an innovative effort to understand a protection model from the perspective of the survivors. We look at the trajectory of survivors from the moment they decided to seek help from the institutions, to the period at the shelter itself, and finally the period after which they have left the shelter. We find that the public services have various deficiencies in terms of how their design is translated into practice. Indeed we find crucial failures in state institutions that have adopted the protection model, often resulting in a further victimization of survivors of domestic violence. Effective access to health services is still plagued by racism, misogyny, as well as the authoritarian habits of the medical staff (Herrera, 2013). Strategies to sensitize staff on gender and human rights, including women's right to live free from violence, should be protected and guaranteed and integrated in protection (shelter) services. Attention to survivors of domestic violence should be removed from the criminal justice system, since it would appear to victimize women who are looking for help and does not respond to their protection needs. A creative effort should be made to come up with an institutional set up that genuinely decriminalises attention to survivors. Shelters should be thought of in a more flexible manner so that they could be more open to the outside and not demand that women suspend their lives, nor that of their sons and daughters, during their stay at the shelter. These spaces should also come up with creative ways to work with the community in order to promote a culture of prevention of violence against the women.

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GLOSSARY

CAER	Centro de Atención Externa de Refugio <i>Centre of External Attention of Shelters</i>
CAVI	Centro de Atención a la Violencia Intrafamiliar <i>Center of Attention to Intrafamilial Violence</i>
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina <i>Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean</i>
CONAVIM	Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia Contra las Mujeres <i>National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women</i>
DIF	Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia <i>National System for Comprehensive Family Development</i>
ENDIREH	Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares <i>National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships</i>
IAHR Commission	Inter-American Human Rights Commission
IAHR Court	Inter-American Human Rights Court
IMEF	Instancias de Mujeres en las Entidades Federativas <i>Women's Instances at the Federal Entities</i>
INMUJERES	Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres <i>National Women's Institute</i>
RNR	Red Nacional de Refugios <i>National Network of Shelters</i>

INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty-five years, there has been growing recognition from international agencies, scholars, and civil society organizations that domestic violence is a public issue that needs attention from policy makers and society. According to a World Health Organization report in 2014, at least one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime at the hands of an intimate partner. In the Latin America region, the feminist movement and human rights organizations have contributed to theoretical discussions on the definition of violence against women, and to the inclusion of domestic violence in the public agenda as a policy issue. These debates have influenced the methodologies and approaches to deal with this phenomenon at the state level and also in society.

One of the responses at policy level, common across the world and in Latin America, is the enactment of domestic violence laws that draw on international and regional agreements to combat violence against women. According to Giridhar (2012), 32 Latin American countries have adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem do Para) and 29 of these countries have harmonized their domestic frameworks with human rights standards. This has resulted in the passing of bills, national plans or programmes to address domestic violence. Although violence against women is conceived of as a social problem, in line with the feminist point of view, and is referred to as such in the different international, regional and even national normative instruments, the legalistic approach derived from the human rights framework dissolves a social problem into an individualistic issue, a matter of rights to defend and to be defended, and no longer a question of broader social justice or social welfare.

Legal frameworks focus on defining the scope of state intervention in addressing domestic violence in terms of the criminalisation of the aggressor and the promotion of conciliation measures, while others focus their attention on providing treatment services for women who have survived domestic violence. This second wave of reforms began in 2007 in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as well as in Mexico. In the following years, Colombia and Guatemala (2008), Argentina and Costa Rica (2009), El Salvador (2010), Nicaragua (2012), the Dominican Republic, and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2013) adopted comprehensive domestic violence legislation. Ground breaking is Mexico's Law against Women's Violence, a unique law that offers a typology of different types of violence against women, including domestic violence. Besides defining domestic violence, the law also recognizes other forms of violence against women such as violence in the workplace or the school; violence in the community; violence within public/state institutions and femicide as the most extreme form of violence¹. More important, the Law includes a care component for women who survive violence, and makes reference to shelters as a specific mechanism to tackle domestic violence against women. Shelters offer an opportunity for women to understand and deal with the social nature of the violence they face, beyond their personal/individual histories.

Most studies about domestic violence in the Mexican context, including the original multidisciplinary research by Heise 1998), focus on the causes of the violence, and therefore focus on the aggressor, at the family level or the societal level. Herrera (2013), Agoff (2013), and Castro and Riquer (2012) have written extensively about the different circumstances that lead to violence in Mexico. Herrera (2009 and 2014) and Gutiérrez (2013) make valuable contributions to public responses to domestic violence, mainly focused on the health sector and the role of public servants in attending women that seek help. These studies contribute to an understanding of the complex nature of domestic violence and the possible state responses, but the victims of domestic violence are central in only a few. The studies in which women have been interviewed, mainly concentrate on the period of the violence itself (Castro

¹ Articles 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18 and 20

and Agoff, 2008 and Urbina, 2008). Some are being produced in countries where protection services are an integral part of a strategy to address violence against women, as in Chile (SERNAM 2012; Marchant 2014). Because many women who live domestic violence are socially isolated by their aggressors (El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah, Folleno & Frye, 2001), the step to look for assistance is a big one.

This Regional Evidence Paper (REP) seeks to fill a gap in the literature on state responses to violence against women, understood as a social rather than just an individual problem. Through the focus on the perceptions of protection services of women that went to the shelter, we try to identify the obstacles and limitations of the state's responses to address the impact of domestic violence for women. According to Herrera (2006), state actors can either play a role of facilitator - by assisting a survivor of domestic violence to receive protection services, or as an obstructer, through a further victimization of the women, a style of attention more akin to assistentialism, or simply through denying violence ever happened. In this document we therefore analyse the way in which the institutional framework in Latin America provided by the state is either overcoming or indeed creating these obstacles.

The research question that is central throughout the research therefore is: What are the problems for the implementation of a comprehensive model to address domestic violence? The study focuses on Mexico as a specific case that may have lessons for other countries.

We seek to develop this question by analysing women's experience of protection services in a Mexico City shelter that has a comprehensive approach to addressing domestic violence. The shelter is part of a network of shelters across Mexico that are publicly funded but run by civil society (non-profit) organizations. Thus, we look at the trajectory from the moment the survivor decided to seek help from the institutions, to the period at the shelter itself, and finally the period after which they have left the shelter. The research focuses on the factors driving or inhibiting protection experienced by the women during this entire process of searching for help. Our hypothesis is that protection services for women who survive domestic violence are limited by three kinds of problems in the moment of implementation. A first type of obstacle has to do with the barriers women face when trying to access health services. The second type of problem is the double victimization women experience as their cases go through the justice system. And the third obstacle has to do with the confidentiality of the shelters. These obstacles are not inherent in the model of attention per se, but have more to do with institutional constraints that arise in bringing the model into practice.

Because of the comprehensive nature of the services provided at the shelters in Mexico, a central feature of the Mexican protection model, we build a case study based on observation and interviews with women at the shelter Espacio Mujeres (Women Space) in Mexico City. The article considers socioeconomic factors in the women's lives, including the role of the family and the institutional challenges they face before they arrive at the shelter, during their period at the shelter and after they leave the shelter. Through this approach we are able to track the trajectories of their search for protection and what needs were fulfilled by the attention model, and reflect on the role of the state in enabling protection services as one response to address domestic violence. The regional overview furthermore allows us to evaluate the implications of a model in which shelters play a key role, vis a vis other models in the region.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Despite 20 years of activism against violence against women, and several studies reflecting on the different factors that cause the violence, the topic is still presenting challenges for activists and academics. Heise (1998) successfully proposed an integrated model to explain violence against women as a multifaceted phenomenon which takes into

account different levels of causation, from individual to structural. This approach requires the integration of different disciplines such as psychology, anthropology and sociology, as well as conceptual theories such as feminism. This integrated ecological framework has been used to analyse different sorts of abuse, such as child abuse and domestic violence, and violence against women in a more general form. Since 2003 it has been adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO), which has developed its own ecological framework in order to tease out the risk factors at each level (WHO 2015) and their interactions, as well as to “identify and cluster intervention strategies”. In 2011, the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (CONAVIM) in Mexico also designed an ecological framework for a strategy to enhance women’s security in cities. All these frameworks share the notion of embedded levels of causality.

In our study this ecological framework is used to explain the ways in which women can find protection from the different risk factors that might cause them violence in their household. In the ecological model, the individual level encompasses the socio-demographic characteristics of the women, as well as a few elements of their personal history. The second level refers to the nature of the relationships the individuals have with friends and family. The third level is the social settings in which the individuals find themselves, such as school, work, and the neighbourhoods they live in, and how they establish and maintain their social relations. Public institutions also belong to this level. The final level focuses on broader societal factors such as culture which creates a tolerance or abhorrence to domestic violence.

During the analysis, we review the ways in which protection services respond to the factors that cause violence against women in Latin America, and to what extent the comprehensive approach adopted in the protection model of the Mexican law is being implemented. Throughout the research we use the social ecology framework developed by Heise as a tool for analysis, because it explains domestic violence as a multifactorial phenomenon which allows us to study the protection needs and experiences of victims of domestic violence at different stages. However, a comprehensive approach could have some limitations at the implementation stage. An individual’s ability to reach out to protection services might depend on the extent to which a cultural tolerance towards domestic violence is shared by friends and family. In a similar way, there are public institutions created to respond to only a narrow mandate and purpose, for instance security institutions such as the police, where a gender perspective is usually sorely lacking. In addition, the implementation of a comprehensive approach requires that the social agents involved receive appropriate training (Herrera 2010).

Figure 1: Integrated, ecological model (elaboration of model of Heise, 1998)

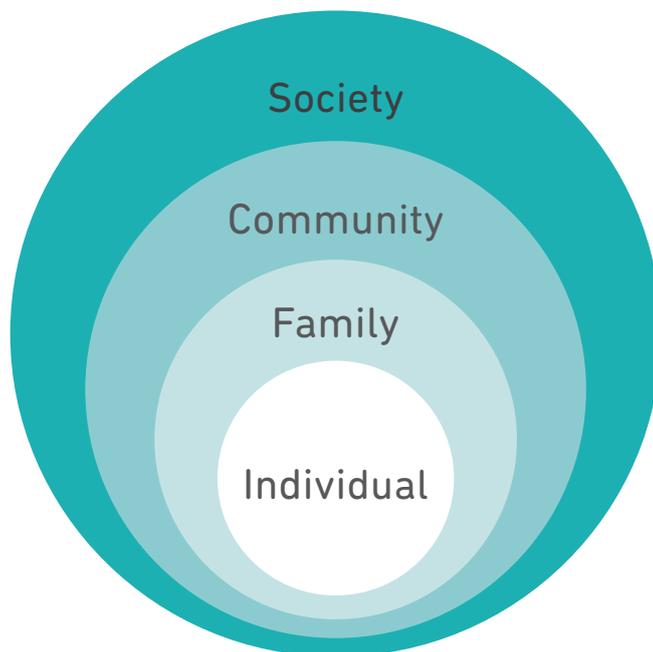




Photo 1: [Woman in Huasteca Potosina](#)

Credit: Marcos Guevara

METHODOLOGY

The data for this Regional Evidence Paper comes from both primary and secondary sources. Concerning the latter, we looked at peer reviewed articles in academic journals, reports from national and international agencies, civil society organisations and donors that work on domestic violence or related themes. The review of the literature forms the basis for presenting the major academic and policy debates of state responses to domestic violence in Latin America.

State responses to address domestic violence are included as part of a larger discussion on domestic violence, gender-based violence and violence against women, together with their historical and political background. The goal of this exercise is to identify the main policy responses to domestic violence in Latin America, within their common legislative framework, the Belem do Para Convention. This enables the researchers to place the Mexican case in its larger regional context as a country adopting a unique law that refers to violence against women, establishes institutional coordination, and provides a protection model that combines basic and specialised services provided by shelters using a comprehensive approach.

The case study was based on interviews with women at one shelter. The decision to interview women at a shelter was furthermore made because it was considered by the researchers to be the best option for women to talk openly about their experiences with protection services and assess the model's comprehensive approach to addressing violence. Interviews with women prior to or after their stay at the shelter could have provided interesting results, but because of security issues, we decided not to interview women outside the shelter². Although interviews with survivors of domestic violence are not unique (Herrera 2009, Agoff 2013), this approach has not been applied before to women living in a shelter in Mexico. According to the researchers, giving voice to these women as the desired beneficiaries of the Mexican strategy to address domestic violence is vital to answer the research question.

In line with our hypotheses, the interviews concentrate on the type of violence the women experienced and the role of family and institutions in their help-seeking trajectories. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and although focus group interviews could have brought forward relevant trends identified by all women, individual interviews were preferred for confidentiality reasons. Also, because of our interest in individual histories and trajectories, one-on-one interviews were considered the most effective method.

Because of the relative small n of our case study, the interviews with the staff helped to place the interviews with the current users of the shelter in a broader context. We conducted eight interviews with the coordinator, social worker, statistician, administrator, lawyer, nurse, child psychologist, adult psychologist working at the shelter, and two with the Director and social worker at the Centre for External Attention of Shelters (CAER) respectively. Although the interviews with the staff cannot be seen as an alternative to the unique experiences of the survivors of domestic violence, they do enable the researchers to identify larger sociodemographic trends about shelter users, and to get a grasp on the relationship between the shelters and other state actors and institutions that play a role in providing protection. The experience of the staff working in the shelter shed light on identifying which parts of the women's experiences were specific to a particular woman or were more general.

An example is the role of the lawyer in the shelter in supporting women to put a complaint against their aggressor. The perspectives given by the lawyer regarding the attitude of public officers working at the Police or the Centro de Atención a la Violencia Intrafamiliar (Centre of Attention to Intra-family Violence – CAVI) towards women that seek protection provided interesting insights (Annex 2). The information given by the interviews with the staff could be said to describe in a more accurate way what the secondary literature has defined as institutional violence, and help researchers as well as the reader to understand the different pathways women choose. The interviews furthermore contribute to a better understanding of the way in which staff put into practice the model, to what extent their understanding of protection services is in line with the definition of protection as described in the law, and the way the shelter is being managed.

The request to include one of the male researchers of Fundar in the interview with the Director was denied, since any contact with men is avoided at the shelter. In speaking with both shelter staff and survivors of domestic violence, we observed the ethical principles of informed consent, the right to withdraw, confidentiality as well as anonymity. The principle of anonymity is extremely important in this particular study because of the implications for the safety of the participants. In describing the shelter therefore, we do not discuss its location. To guarantee the safety of the survivors, we also refrained from interviewing their family members. Finally, all the names used in this report (of the shelter, the staff and the survivors) are pseudonyms. Given also that the participants could experience some psychological distress recounting their experiences of domestic violence, we ensured that each participant understood the risks and benefits of participation as well as the fact that they could withdraw from participation in the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. None of the approached interviewees, survivors or staff, refused to participate.

² Although two interviews were conducted with former shelter users, they have not been used. The REP covers only Latin America and these interviews would be used only if they provide additional insight. Since the research team in Ghana only conducted one interview with a former user of a shelter, it would have created an asymmetric and therefore incomparable set of results.

Shelters are designed as safe and confidential places for any women who have suffered from domestic violence, to enable them to recover from the impacts of the violence in a place where the aggressor cannot find them. Therefore, creating a rapport with shelters involves a long process of building a trustful relationship with the staff and the women, and it is important to be aware that this can influence the course of the research. In Mexico, shelters are either: private and operated by civil society organisations (CSOs) or public. In both cases, the state is responsible for allocating budgets that ensure the shelter's operation. However, a key difference between a private and a public shelter has to do with the approach regarding human rights and gender. In private shelters, specialised personnel provide basic services as well as additional support to strengthen women's autonomy and integrity. In contrast, public shelters mostly focus on the supply of basic services (not necessarily complemented by additional support) by personnel lacking any additional training on gender or human rights.

Given this context, we took the strategic decision to select one shelter that meets the following criteria: i) its mode of operation is in line with the definition regarding operation described in the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence; ii) it is run by a CSO; iii) it has adopted the Model for Shelters developed by the National Women's Institute (Instituto Nacional de Mujeres – INMUJERES) and iv) it was geographically accessible to the researchers. Espacio Mujeres (Women Space – the name of the shelter) meets these criteria. Furthermore, Espacio Mujeres meets high security standards that ensure women's protection and also has successfully fulfilled the administrative requirements of the National Network of Refuges (Red Nacional de Refugios – RNR). Another key aspect of our choice had to do with its location in Mexico City, the capital of Mexico. Analysing a shelter in the capital increases the likelihood of a more diverse population, and because of its geographical proximity, it was the best option to build a long-term rapport with. The capital furthermore implies a shelter that operates under certain characteristics such as an accessible place for women and staff. This will help us to compare aspects that could be shared with our partner in Ghana whose shelter is located in Accra.³

Because of the time required to create a rapport with the shelter, which has a maximum of seven women and their children at any one time, the interviews were conducted with six of the seven current residents of the shelter. On the one hand, the small number of respondents to base our observations on is a limitation of the research; on the other hand, the small n gave the researchers the opportunity to invest more time and energy on each interview. Since the goal of the interviews was to gain a profound understanding of the experiences of the women during their help-seeking trajectories, we consider this thorough approach an important feature of the research.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The prevalence of violence against women has received special attention in the literature on violence against women, generating an important volume of writing that attempts to measure the phenomenon either at global level, such as the studies from the UN agencies (WHO, 2014; UN Statistical Commission, 2009); regional level, like the studies from the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) for the Latin America region; and at national and sub-national levels. These studies assess the nature of violence principally through surveys and the review of administrative records, although there are difficulties when they try to turn the data into useful indicators (Frías & Hurtado 2010; CEPAL 2014; MESECVI 2012).

³ ELLA programme's note: As mentioned earlier, this Regional Evidence Paper is paired with a sister paper whose title is "Beyond Domestic Violence Laws: Women's Experiences and Perceptions of Protection Services in Ghana". Authored by the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA), University of Ghana in Accra.

Domestic violence, gender violence and human rights in Latin America

In Mexico, the leading statistical resource to measure domestic violence, the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (ENDIREH) indicates that in 2011, 47 out of 100 women had suffered some kind of violence in the household. This could either include emotional violence (43.1%), economic violence (24.5%), physical violence (14.0%) or sexual violence (7.3%). In Ecuador and Uruguay, two other countries that conducted similar large-scale surveys, 48.7% and 45.4% of all women respectively had suffered from violence from their partner or ex-partner. A dominant trend in the three countries is the predominance of emotional violence.

Even if countries monitor the prevalence of domestic violence, the adoption of different methodologies which try to include a variety of socio-cultural elements as well as different definitions of violence makes the precise measurement of this phenomenon, and therefore its comparability, difficult (Alm eras 2004; Castro y Casique, 2012). As Castro says, even if surveys consider violence against women as a social phenomenon, and not just an individual issue experienced by some women, it is difficult to link independent variables (socio-demographic conditions, gender roles and household dynamics, among others) with dependent variables (that measure violence more directly). It is also difficult to separate out the category "violence against women from the intimate partner" from the more general category "violence against women". The tendency is to return to more individual explanations of violence, due to the specific characteristics of women and their partner at given moments of their lives, and this misses the possibility of explaining violence as more of a social phenomenon, with dynamics and expressions which may change depending on individual characteristics but which share factors that are common to all (2012: 18).

A first issue when studying violence against women is the scope of the very concept of violence. Is domestic violence the same as family violence? What is the relationship between domestic violence and gender violence?

Structural violence against women looks at how the entire social order contributes to the oppression of women, and how this dynamic is constantly reproduced over time. The structural nature of violence is also systemic: women are at a disadvantage in terms of the material conditions of life, but are also at a disadvantage in the wider arenas of ideology, norms, traditions, language, religion, science, philosophy, how humour and eroticism are expressed, indeed in all forms of knowledge and expression that exist in a society. Understood in this way, structural violence against women refers to the domination of women in every spheres of social life and is at the origin of all the diverse forms of violence, including physical, sexual, emotional and patriarchal violence. But such an inclusive concept of violence presents difficulties. Where does masculine domination end and violence as such begin? Is it possible to identify the point where mistreatment turns into abuse? When should abuse be called violence?

The majority of the legal definitions of violence refer to harm that is caused, contrary to the health definition of violence that is much broader and refers to the intention, independently of the result. In most legal definitions, then, harm is considered independently of sex or gender. Women, as well as children and husbands or men can be the victims of violence. The General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence, in its article 6 on psychological, physical and sexual violence, is specific on violence against women. For example, it defines psychological violence as "[...] any action or omission that harms the psychological integrity [of women], and that consists of: negligence, abandonment, repeated carelessness, jealousy, insults, humiliations, slights, marginalisation, indifference, infidelity, destructive comparisons, rejection, restriction to autonomy, and threats, which imply for the victim depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and even suicide".

Although these definitions of the different types of violence are included in a law that aims to eradicate and sanction violence against women, they can apply as well to children and men since the harm caused does not, ultimately, depend on the sex or gender of the victim. The violence referred to in these definitions in the law is not therefore gender based violence in the sense that these are not forms of violence whose causes are embedded in the sexual or gender identity of the victim.

These questions regarding the definition of violence, as well as what precisely constitutes gender violence and violence against women, are very polemical in the different studies. On the one hand, the family violence approach argues that intimate partner violence must be studied in the broader framework of the other forms of violence that exist inside the family, and it identifies potential aggressors and victims, independently of gender, as equal. The approach, developed in the 1970s to study domestic violence in the US, supports the theory that violence is transmitted from generation to generation. It hangs on the idea that there is a kind of gender “reciprocity” in intimate partner violence, in other words that violence is exercised by men on women but also by women on men. This view clashes with the feminist focus on violence against women. From the feminist point of view, intimate partner violence against women must be studied as a phenomenon related



Photo 2: [Fist](#)
Credit: Marcos Guevara

to other forms of violence against women, such as the violence they suffer in the streets, at work, at school, and in their affective relations. It is not something that can be put into the same bag as other forms of family violence.

This very interesting debate on intimate partner violence against women has been systematised by Anderson (1997) who shows that these approaches are not incompatible nor mutually exclusive, but that they do clearly reflect different agendas. One seeks to identify the determinants of all forms of family violence as the basis for formulating policies and programmes to eradicate it, whereas the other focuses on violence against women as if it were a stand-alone problem.

But is violence against women the same as gender violence? Are they synonymous concepts or are they different? The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) states that “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN, 1993).

This definition focuses on women as victims, but some studies (Ward, 2002; 2004) show that gender based violence can be directed to men. The change here consists in focusing on the purpose of the violence and not on the sex of the victims. Gender violence is a form of violence exercised on the basis of culturally conditioned differentiations between men and women which it aims to strengthen restore or impose. In theory, such violence can be exercised both by men and women, and victims can also be both men and women. Therefore, in this line of reasoning, not all violence against women is necessarily gender based violence, even if it comes from their intimate partner. Johnson (1995) further proposed that we should differentiate between situational violence and patriarchal terrorism, depending on whether the intention to control women in traditional gender roles is explicit or not.

These theoretical discussions are still open and important to keep in mind since they influence, explicitly or not, the type of methodologies used to investigate violence against women, and especially how surveys and other studies are conducted to measure and analyse intimate partner violence. They also influence the way domestic violence is discussed in public arenas as a policy issue, at international as well as national levels.

Domestic Violence as a policy issue in Latin America

The process for making domestic violence a relevant policy public issue in the Latin America Region has been strongly influenced by the activism of feminist and human rights organizations arguing that violence against women is not

a private and domestic issue but a political, social and human rights problem that should be publicly discussed and addressed (Sagot 2008; Muñoz 2010).

Feminist movements in Latin America have been characterized by a shared agenda, strongly influenced by the indignation about the widespread violence against women in society and the persistent gender inequality on the continent. Starting in the 1980s, feminists throughout the region joined forces in several regional conferences, identified a common approach and, thanks to the emergence of non-governmental organizations, furthermore found the adequate institutional channels to connect their demands and gain political relevance. Also, women in disadvantageous conditions were able to organise themselves, since both development agencies as well as government programmes to specifically assist the poor and marginalized groups included many women (Barrig 1998). Lemaitre (2014) has argued that the feminist movement in Latin America in this period was largely inspired by the radical feminism common in the Anglo-Saxon world and its emphasis on the relationship between sexual harassment, violence and power relations; as well as the proposition that masculine domination is paramount in relations between men and women, a state of affairs based on fear, and often expressed in intra-family violence, as described by MacKinnon (1983). These unequal power relations between men and women formed the basis for the public outcry of feminists in Latin America.

At the global scale, acknowledgement of domestic violence as a social problem began to gain ground in the public agenda, which also implied that the state should have an important role in addressing the violence (Rioseco Ortega 2005; Bosch Fiol & Ferrer Pérez 2000). Nevertheless, in the context of a region that has long been characterised by authoritarian states and persistent poverty, the role of the state in dealing with domestic violence has been a very polemical issue among feminists, since the state was considered by radical feminists as the principal proponent of the patriarchal system, of which the building blocks are the power of the few, men's domination over women, and violence. (Lemaitre 2014; Conavim 2009)⁴.

In contrast to feminist movements in the North in the last part of the last century, dominated by intellectuals, the Latin American movement consisted mainly of middle-class and poor women who sought to fulfill their basic rights, fighting against structural and institutionalised forms of inequality and poverty. The literature on domestic violence in the region is closely connected to the issue of poverty and a lack of full 'citizenship' for women, notably indigenous women (Frías 2008, CEPAL 2014; Rioseco Ortega 2005). As a consequence, both the literature and the activist politics of the feminists dealing with violence in Latin America is closely related to the political and economic conditions of women's lives, and strongly embedded in larger discussions about structural inequalities between men and women as the main cause of violence against women. These debates were appropriated by international organizations whose discourse about discrimination against women was firmly articulated with broader issues of poverty, exclusion and violence against women.

In 1992, the Committee of the CEDAW adopted General Recommendation 19, which defines gender-based violence as violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or that affects women disproportionately, and declares it to be "a form of discrimination against women that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men".

During the 1980s the inequalities between men and women have provided the broader framework for thinking about violence against women and putting the issue on the public agenda, and this is reflected in the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979.

⁴For radical feminists, therefore, the state can never be an interlocutor, as it represents the embodiment of the patriarchal system they were fighting against. These radical feminists focused their actions instead on the provision of psychological assistance to victims. For liberal feminists on the other hand, it was crucial to find a solution within the state structures in order to actively fight patriarchy from the inside, especially in the field of justice. For them, a reform of the judicial system was needed so that it would incorporate the gender perspective in all stages of the judicial process, and include all forms of violence against women in the Penal Code (CONAVIM 2009).

After the end of the dictatorships and the return of democracy in many of the Latin American countries in the beginning of the 1990s, new governments became committed to undertake reforms which formally acknowledged political liberties and human rights, and this in turn led to legislative reforms in the field of domestic violence (Carosio 2014). Supported by the international community's focus on the rights of women, feminist movements all over the world started to call upon the state's responsibility to fulfill human rights, especially to socially excluded groups, which included many women. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Vienna 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development⁵ (Cairo 1994), and the Fourth World Conference of Women (Beijing, 1995) represent milestones for feminist groups all over the world. They provided the framework necessary to turn principles into concrete instruments with which to push the governments to put an end to discrimination against women. These important discussions also paved the way for an international political consensus on states' obligations to prevent, punish and eradicate every form of violence against women, including those which occur in armed conflicts, other public spaces but also those occurring in private spaces (Sullivan 1994).

The new legitimacy of human rights at the international level, the end of dictatorships and authoritarian political regimes in many countries of Latin America, and the renewal of political and economic liberalism, began to frame the debate in terms of human rights for women. Falquet sustains that "these institutions [international institutions], led by the United Nations organisations, provided moral legitimacy to the women's and feminist movements, under the 'consensual' development flag' (2008: 49) of liberal globalisation.

Since neoliberal politics imply reduced state intervention, in effect the substitution of the welfare state for a minimal state based on decentralization and population targeting instead of universalization and centralization, public action to tackle violence against women as a specific vulnerable group fits well this view of what the state should do, as García Otero shows for Colombia (2012).

For the Latin America region, there is no study of the relationship between the neoliberal state and the policy of criminalisation of domestic violence, but the judicialisation of politics has been described and analysed by several authors (Sieder, Schjolden, Angell, 2011) as an extensive phenomenon since the 1990s. For the USA, Wacquant argues that at the end of the 20th century, "the neoliberal state strengthened and redistributed its surveillance, judicial and prison system to stop disorders caused by the diffusion of social insecurity based on class, and to stage an ostentatious discourse of 'law-and-order' to confirm the authority of a government that seeks legitimacy for having dismissed its obligations of social and economic protection" (2014: 190).

What is important here is that although violence against women is conceived as a social problem from the feminist point of view, and is referred to as such in the different international, regional and even national normative instruments, making a social problem something that can be resolved by legal means is only a partial and incomplete answer, since a problem that is social is reduced to a problem that is individual, a matter of individual rights to be defended, and no longer a broader question of social justice or social welfare.

In 1994, the adoption of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem Do Para Convention) by a large majority of Latin American states, and subsequent legislative reforms, shows that the focus is no longer on equality issues, which would imply more comprehensive social policies and measures, but only on gender-based violence against women in the context of a liberal and individualistic approach centred on human rights. Moreover, these new legal reforms rely largely on the judiciary or the police, who are less sympathetic to victims' claims even if they are responsible for providing assistance to abused women (Fries 2008). The Inter-American Court found that the investigations made for the Cotton Field Case "were prejudiced by gender-based stereotyping to the extent that public officials adopted stereotypical attitudes and blamed the victims themselves, as

⁵ The program of Action agreed upon during the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was a milestone in that reproductive health and rights, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality, were recognized as cornerstones of population and development programmes (UNFPA, 2015).

well as their relatives, for their fate”.⁶ Instead of protecting and guaranteeing women’s rights, gender bias in institutions re-victimize women through institutional violence which in the end represents the main obstacle for women to get access to justice (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2005; Inter American Commission on Human Rights 2011; Tiroch, 2010).

State responses to address domestic violence

Over the last two decades, Latin American countries have implemented several kinds of responses to the high numbers of domestic violence cases, and citizens have seen major advances in public interventions to tackle domestic violence. The continent has followed a shared human rights based framework with the adoption of the Belem do Para Convention in 1994. This Convention establishes a variety of measures to prevent, protect, address and sanction violence against women, which are adjudicated to the state. Articles 8 and 9 determine that the state must adopt a very large range of legislative, administrative and institutional programmes to combat violence against women. The approach taken in the Belem do Para Convention reflects the position of third wave of feminism which considers that “the personal is political” and opens the whole of social and private life to state intervention, independently of the types of states that exist in the countries. This position pays insufficient attention to power relations between state and society, and especially social groups in vulnerable situations, and ignores the fact that the law is also an instrument of the state to maintain and reproduce a given social order based on race, class and gender differences. In the case of justice institutions, several studies (Fries, 2008; Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2005; Inter American Commission on Human Rights, 2011; Tiroch, 2010) showed that these state authorities are “prejudiced by gender-based stereotyping to the extent that public officials adopted stereotypical attitudes and blamed the victims themselves, as well as their relatives, for their fate”.⁷ Again, instead of protecting and guaranteeing women’s rights, gender bias in institutions re-victimize women through institutional violence which in the end represents the main obstacle for women to get access to justice.

In the Latin America region, there are no studies that have identified trends regarding the way domestic violence is conceptualised and addressed. There are only partial studies, focused on a specific country, and on specific state policies to address domestic violence against women. The criminalisation of domestic violence is the most common response of state authorities, pushed and relayed by international legislation, jurisprudence and institutions.

But the criminalisation of domestic violence is a major point of contradiction and discussion between academics, policy-makers and activist groups. The supporters of the criminalisation of domestic violence consider it an essential step because of the symbolic value of ‘punishment’. The imprisonment of aggressors is considered to be the most efficient way for the state to protect women. The main opponents of this position see it as an instrument by the ruling class to maintain its power, block the emancipation of women and also victimize women who suffer violence (Alvarez 2003)⁸. Among the countries that have included domestic violence in their criminal codes, to different extents, are Mexico, Panama, Uruguay, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Brazil (CONAVIM 2009a).

Another legal mechanism that has been implemented by some Latin American states consists of treating domestic violence through systems of alternative justice. These include ‘community-based mediation or arbitration projects to new specialized or fast-track courts, all aimed at increasing access to justice, especially for the low income population’ (Macauley 2005: 212). An example is the specialized women’s police stations (JECrims) in Brazil, in which ‘the principles of speed, informality, self-representation, oral argumentation and direct plaintiff/defendant interaction with the judge’ are central (2005: 218). It was found that the bulk of domestic violence cases brought

⁶ Inter-American Court of Human Rights Case of González et al. (“Cotton Field”) v. Mexico Judgment of November 16, 2009.

⁷ Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (2007) Access to Justice for Women Victims of Violence in the Americas. OEA/Ser.L/V/II.

⁸ All over Latin America, differences prevail in the legislative system concerning the judicial powers that can be involved if a case is being presented by a victim. In most countries, cases should be presented to family courts, while victims also have the opportunity to take their case to a criminal court. However, In Mexico for example, a complaint can only be proceeded through the criminal justice system⁷.

forward by women were considered 'minor' offences which could be resolved through conciliation. A major critique is that such a system decriminalises and normalizes violence, by suggesting that even the strongest forms of aggression conducted by one party can be resolved by conciliation. Another problem is the inclusion of the police as the first port of call for women victims: 30% of the cases do not get past the police station, and the extent of the violence is often toned down in official reports. The major critique by feminists of this more informal 'second track' in the judicialization of domestic violence, normally treated in lower-level courts, is that it does not take into account the gendered nature of domestic violence and fails to protect women from the full extent of the aggressions they suffer. Although the JECrims made domestic violence more visible by moving the conciliation process into the public arena, they have turned crime into an act of simple delinquency such as a 'traffic fine (2005: 221)'.

The methods of conciliation and mediation are another critical point of discussion. In the legislative frameworks of Argentina, El Salvador, Mexico and Nicaragua, the use of conciliation and mediation methods is explicitly excluded, whereas conciliation in other countries remains part of the set of possible state responses to domestic violence. Again according to Macauley (2005), in countries such as Chile, Colombia and Peru, conciliation strategies are strongly related to the influence of the Catholic Church and the consideration that family unity must be protected over and above the integrity of women. An evaluation of such conciliation measures in Colombia revealed them to be insufficient because the interventions did not tackle the question of the vulnerability of women in relation to state institutions, or the profound power inequalities between the sexes (Duque & Peña 2004). In Chile, the law of Intra-family Violence is conceived from a human rights and family perspective (Araujo et al. 2000), and does not include a gender-based approach, but in 2008 the Chilean State finally promoted special courts to prosecute intra-family violence crimes, and also created a division to protect victims of intra-family crimes (Larrain 2008). Until then conciliation through the Family Court was the main procedure to claim any abuse from family members.

In terms of the provision of protection services, the Belém Do Pará Convention obliges states to create mechanisms to provide direct, free and specialised assistance to victimized women. These services should include legal support, emergency phone lines, psychological support and health care. As an example of this strategy to improve the treatment of victims, countries implemented protocols to train healthcare personnel to detect violence against women and provide the right type of support (Rioseco Ortega 2005; Castillo & Prado 2010).

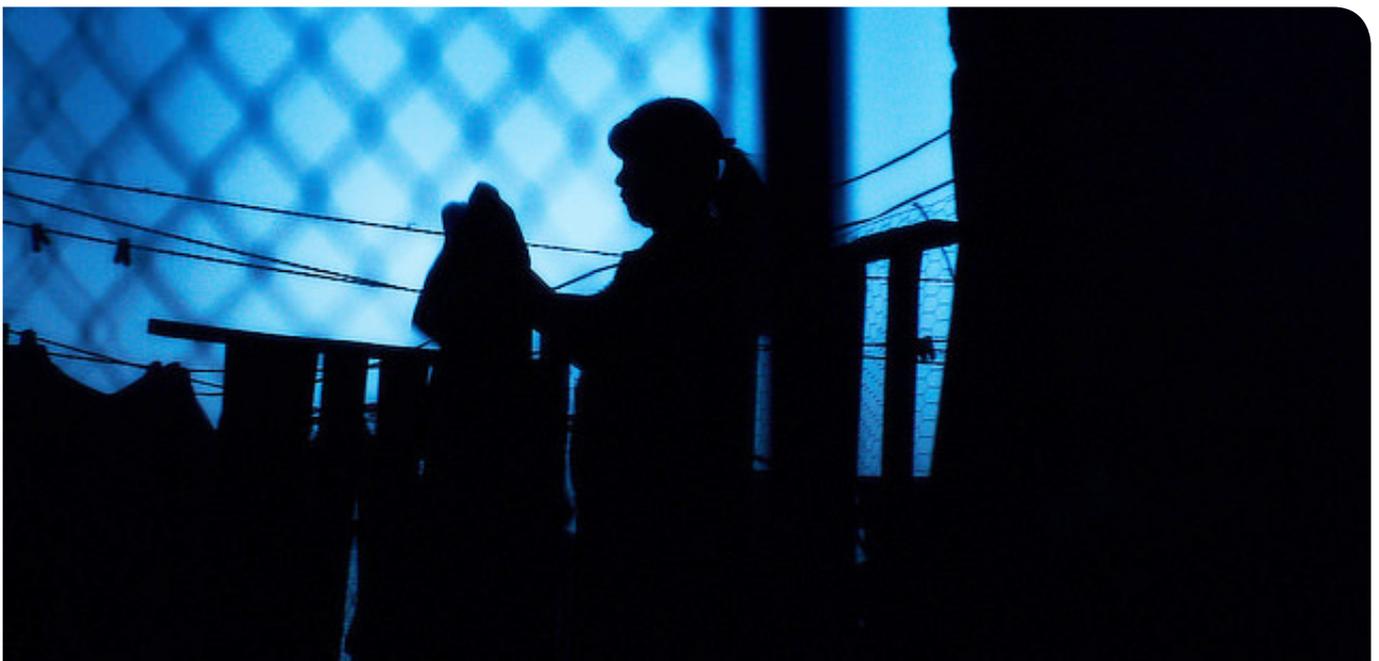


Photo 3: [Woman hanging clothes out to dry in Mexico](#)

Credit: Marcos Guevara

Although Mexico for a long time had no formal legislation in the field of violence against women at all, it was together with Venezuela one of the first countries to adopt an ecological approach to address domestic violence in its legislation. This means that Mexico developed a comprehensive strategy to tackle domestic violence in which different institutions and mechanisms are put in place and expected to coordinate with each other, with a focus on measures in the fields of prevention, protection, attention and sanction.

A specific intervention that has managed to incorporate this ecological approach can be found in the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence enacted in Mexico in 2007. The law presents domestic violence as a form of violence resulting from the predominance of a machista culture in Mexico which has permeated the interactions between women and men at the individual, community and societal levels.

That is why the law establishes a set of measures aiming to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women; promote women's human rights; transform the unequal and violent conditions in which women are living; and coordinate state responses at the federal, local and municipal levels (Martínez Vergara 2007; Pérez Contreras & de Montserrat 2008). The combination of interventions - at the individual, relationship, community and societal level - is expected to reduce more effectively the risk levels that leave women in a vulnerable situation that might lead them to have to face a gender-based violent situation. Today, ten countries in Latin America and the Caribbean⁹ have implemented a similarly comprehensive legislation (ECLAC 2014).

The Mexican case

The Mexican case is interesting in several ways. First, it has a unique law that makes reference to different types of violence against women, and domestic violence is considered one of the spheres where violence takes place. Besides defining domestic violence, the law also recognises other forms of violence against women, such as violence in the workplace or the school, violence in the community, violence in public/state institutions, and femicide as the most extreme form of violence¹⁰.

Secondly it is unique in how it proposes to coordinate different institutions to prevent, protect, attend and sanction violence against women. And finally, the law includes a protection component for women who survive violence, with a reference to shelters as a specific mechanism to do so. The protection component is the only mechanism dealing directly with women which seeks to ensure they understand the social nature of the violence, beyond their personal/individual histories.

⁹ This second wave of reforms began in 2007 in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Mexico. In the following years, Colombia and Guatemala (2008), Argentina and Costa Rica (2009), El Salvador (2010), Nicaragua (2012), and the Dominican Republic and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2013) adopted comprehensive legislation.

¹⁰ Articles 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18 y 20

Thus the Model of Protection for women who survive domestic violence is an essential part of the law. It encompasses a set of comprehensive and specialised services provided to women survivors, their children, and perpetrators, in order to address in a comprehensive way the impact of the violence. Moreover, these services must be provided in accordance with a coordinated national policy, guiding principles of human rights, and the so-called Comprehensive Programme to address violence against women¹¹. It envisions the participation of three main branches of the government: the Public Health System (article 46), the National Women's Office (article 48) and the Special Prosecutor's Office also known as CAVI (article 47), at the federal, local and municipal levels. These institutions are mandated to provide immediate and basic protection as first and second levels of protection that are key to prevent violence becoming more extreme. In the specific case of the Public Health System, whenever a case of domestic or sexual violence is detected, the personnel is obliged to bring it to attention in accordance to a mandatory protocol NOM 046 which includes specific standards that medical personnel should follow for the treatment of women who have survived domestic violence¹².

Another crucial institution of the protection model corresponds to shelters. These are included in the third level of protection services and provide a set of specialised and comprehensive services to attend women who have survived extreme forms of domestic violence. Based on this conceptualization, the shelters' main objective is the satisfaction of women's basic needs such as a confidential, temporary and free of charge space where they can feel safety from the aggressor. Psychological, educational, medical, legal and social work services are mandated to be provided to women and their children by specialized personnel (Sotelo Olivares & Lopez Blas 2011). In Mexico there are 72 shelters of which 34 belong to civil society organisations, 4 to private welfare institutions and 34 are public institutions. Of this total, 44 shelters were articulated in a National Network of Shelters (RNR), a civil society organisation established in 2004 to "provide security, protection and specialized services to women and their children who live at risk of family violence, and to share best practices in approaches to care."¹³

CASE STUDY

The model of protection developed in the Mexican law is designed to provide women who have survived domestic violence a set of services. The women at the shelter have experienced extreme violence and were forced to leave their households to escape from the cycle of violence they were caught in and protect themselves. The shelters are protection spaces conceived to cater for their basic needs (food, clothes, medical care), as well as to prepare them to understand their situation and the nature of the social violence that they are facing in their private/family life.

The shelter where we conducted the current research, Espacio Mujeres, has adopted the Model for Shelters developed by the National Women's Institute (INMUJERES) which establishes minimum standards for the services that shelters have to provide for survivors of domestic violence. It is funded by the national government and belongs to the National Network of Shelters. This guarantees that the space meets high security standards ensuring women's protection, as well as the requirements to provide gender-based comprehensive services.

¹⁰ Article 15 of the Reglamento

¹¹ NOM 046 published in the Official Gazette on April 16, 2009.

¹² Access to information request before the Inmujeres No. 0610400012915.

The shelter

Espacio Mujeres operates two types of protection services. One is the Centre for External Attention (ECA) which provides a space where victims of domestic violence are received before they enter the shelter. Here, the social worker interviews each survivor personally in order to determine their needs, inform them about the functioning of the shelter, and let them decide whether or not they accept the shelter's specific rules. The ECA also offers a post-shelter recovery service that allows women and their children to continue the process of legal, psychological and medical support once they have completed the stay.

When women accept, and sign their voluntary internship, they are immediately transferred with their children, if they have any, to the shelter. In order to guarantee their security, the shelter abides by a few principles and measures such as the secrecy of its location, a 24 hour security and camera system, a closed space where survivors are not able to receive any visits from anybody and can only be in touch with their relatives through weekly phone calls, and an agreement to stay for three months. The shelter has the capacity to receive seven women and their children and provides services to meet their basic needs such as accommodation, food, clothing, and housing. Besides this, specialized services are provided to support other needs such as medical and psychological services in order to manage the immediate impacts of the violence, and also legal services aiming to protect the integrity of the women and their children but also to punish the aggressor. Finally, a variety of workshops and activities focusing on strengthening their self-esteem and development as individuals are also provided as part of a strategy to prepare the women for the future.

The services provided at the shelter

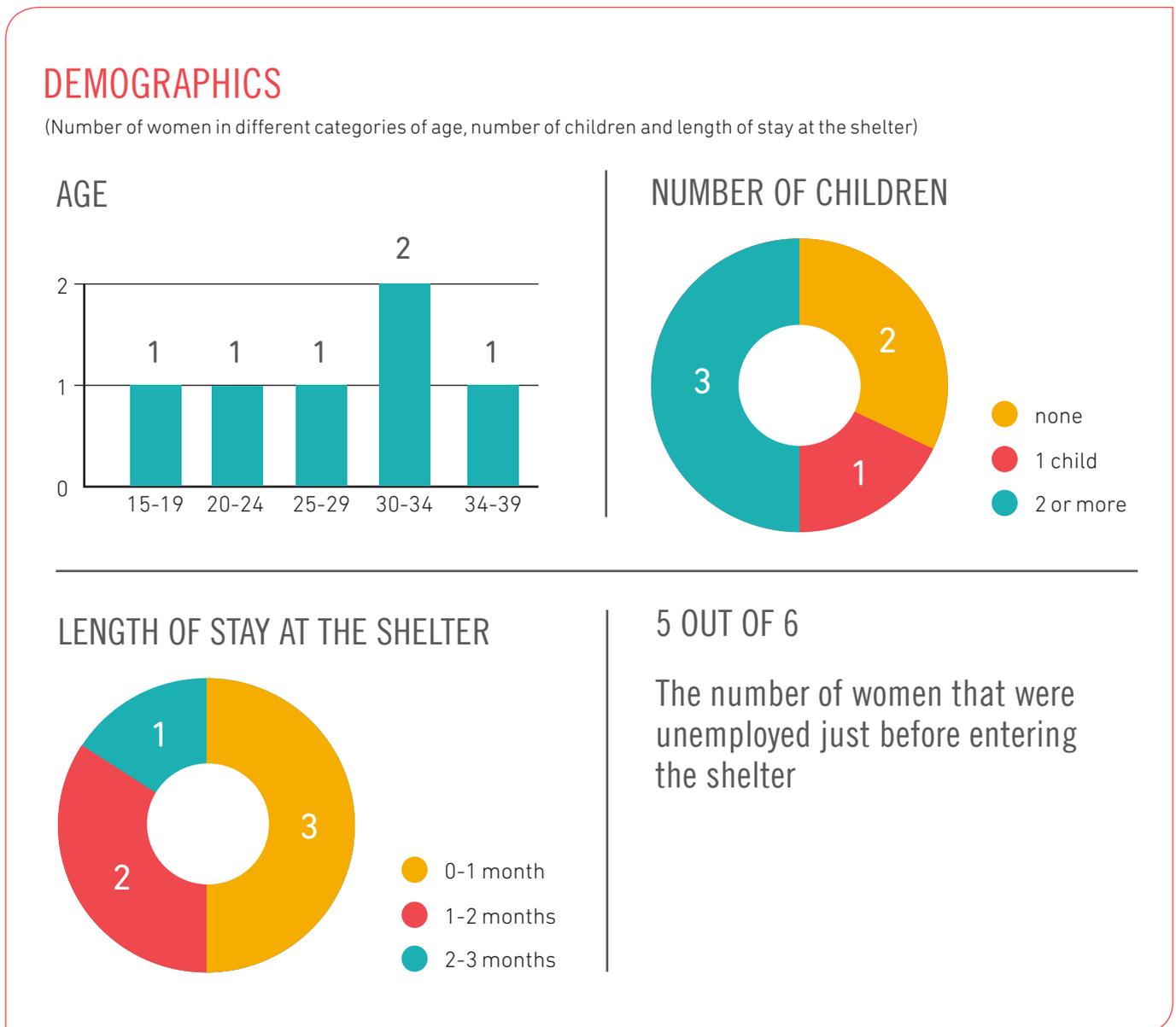
Women and their children receive attention in five different specialized areas. It is worth noting that all the staff are female in order to avoid the women feeling re-victimized or having to re-live a traumatic experience.

- **Social work support:** the social worker is the first point of contact when women come to the shelter. During the first interview on arrival, the social worker prioritizes the services the survivor will need at the shelter; she follows up on the survivor during her stay and prepares her exit, identifying or re-activating networks of support in order to facilitate the re-integration of the women in society after they leave the shelter.
- **Psychological support:** this area consists of a child psychologist and one for adults. The therapies are both individual or in group sessions and focus on reducing any further deterioration of the emotional stress caused by the violence. The objectives of the sessions are to provide a space in which the women can put into words the crisis incidents they have lived through in order to start their recovery process, to develop their decision-making abilities and sense of autonomy in planning for their future.
- **Legal support:** the lawyer assesses and accompanies the women to ensure any legal process is correctly followed through. She explains to the women what their rights are, and assists them in their administrative, family, civil and/or penal cases in order to settle their new situation from a legal point of view. This includes the steps needed to achieve legal separation from their aggressive ex-partner, or child custody and child support.
- **Nursery and medical support:** the shelter at Espacio Mujeres does not have a doctor on the premises, but there are nurses responsible for taking them to the medical centre if needed. The shelter also has a 24-hour nursery if there are women with small children.
- **Workshops:** to develop skills that will help the women get a job when they leave the shelter or to learn income generating activities, such as cooking, growing and taking care of plants, and different sort of craftworks. There is also tutoring for the children to make up for lost school time, as well as the opportunity for them to develop further their abilities and interests.

The staff: numbers, education and any specific training they underwent

Espacio Mujeres works with a staff of 16 persons. apart from the specialists in the five areas mentioned above, the operation of the shelter is in the hands of a Director and two coordinators (one for the shelter, one for the ECA), assisted by an administrative officer and security officers. The staff working at the shelter are young (around thirty years old), with adequate professional skills, all university graduates, and if for some of them it is their first formal work experience, they have all received special training in gender and violence against women and have done internships in specialized institutions that deal with violence against women and/or women’s human rights. They have also been trained in how the law protects the rights of women survivors to a life free from violence, and the implications this has for their daily activities in the shelter.

Figure 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of interviewed women



Women's experiences and perceptions of the protection services

On the basis of the analysis of the interviews with the women, several factors were identified as relevant to explain women's perceptions of the protection services provided in the shelter.

Women's trajectories up to the moment they sought protection services were analysed in order to understand what they had to go through to leave the violent situation they were in as well as identify the factors that enabled or complicated their help seeking efforts.

Specifically we looked at:

- the **type of violence** women experienced when they decided to leave their situation;
- the **family support or hostility** they could count on;
- the **institutional support or hostility** they experienced, and
- their **inclusion or exclusion** from broader social networks.

By focusing on the women's own subjective experiences, the case study sheds some light on the impacts of a comprehensive approach to tackle domestic violence, not as an individual but as a social problem.

Forms of violence and the decision to leave the cycle of violence

All the women at the shelter had experienced several forms of violence such as emotional violence, reflected in serious forms of control by their partner over their activities, such as who they are talking to, the places they can go, insults and humiliations; and physical violence, reflected in all sorts of injuries from beatings, to being thrown out onto the street. We were not told explicitly in the interviews about sexual violence, although the staff told us that it is also a violence that every woman at the shelter had suffered and some of their children too.

In four out of six cases, the women left their situation because of a special event of violence. Fanny reported that "it was only when he became very aggressive that I asked for help from my mom, but I never told her about the violence". Alma mentions that "one night it was the final straw. He put me on the streets and I decided not to go back". Mariana relates that she "had two miscarriages caused by the beatings he gave me. The last time he hit me was on a Sunday but in this case my neighbour helped me because he had hit me very badly and I was still recovering from the miscarriage". María José relates that "one night he beat me up and I left the house running without shoes. I brought my little daughter with me, my clothes were full of dirt because it was raining and where I lived there was a lot of mud. I was running and some people I don't know helped me and told me there is a shelter in Ciudad Hidalgo. 'We are taking you there', they said".

The other two cases however, show that it is not necessarily a special event of violence that is decisive for leaving. The case of Adriana is illustrative. "The day I left I was not angry with my partner. So when I left I asked myself: 'why would I leave if he didn't hit me?' And I said: 'no, it is better I stay'", but I knew the situation was wrong".

The case of Laura is very different since because she decided to leave her because the school noticed the behaviour of her children and exhorted her to take action before the school would have to report her. "I was living a situation of violence at home, against my children and against me, and for many years. We suffered from starvation, we had only one daily meal, there were insults, beatings and he threw me out of the house continuously. Because I did not have anywhere to go, I endured the violence and one of my sons, the middle one, was reflecting this at school. The

kid was not performing well, he isolated himself, he cried and he didn't eat. So the school called me to ask me what was happening, if we were having problems".

As Laura explicitly says, she stayed with her aggressor because she had nowhere else to go. Having another place to stay is the first problem these women have to solve when they decide to leave the cycle of violence and their aggressor. That is why shelters are so important; they provide a safe and trusting space for women.

The role of family and institutional support or hostility

From the experiences these women relate, it can be observed that the trajectories to get access to protection services are quite different. It might be quick and safe, or long and violent, or with many variations in length and security/safety. To explain these variations it is necessary to look at the commonalities in every trajectory and look especially at their different interactions in terms of the support or hostility they experienced from family, formal institutions and society at large (the extent to which they felt included or excluded).

In Mexico, specialized and comprehensive protection services for women who suffer violence can be accessed in four different ways, as established in the law's Model of Protection:

- Directly, by calling the phone line of the National Network of Shelters where someone will briefly interview the victim, evaluate the extent of the risk she is living, and identify the appropriate shelter based on availability and distance
- Indirectly, by transfer from the special attorney for domestic violence (CAVI) when a woman has decided to report there the situation of violence and the aggressor
- Also indirectly, as a result of the victim receiving counseling from a special health unit that belongs to the Public Health Sector, and
- Again indirectly, by transfer from the National Women's Institute (INMUJERES).

The women who arrived directly (three of the six) have benefited from the support of their family in several ways. Fanny could count on the assistance of her mother, who looked after her older kids during the vacations so that they didn't have to witness or suffer the consequences of the cycle of violence at home. The person who Fanny could talk to about her situation of violence was her sister-in-law. She had already noted the violence at an earlier stage and had tried to intervene, basically to tell Fanny that she didn't have to put up with such violence and that she knew of a safe place where she could stay and recover. As a matter of fact, her sister-in-law helped her decide to leave the violent situation. Adriana and Mariana also received support from their families at the time they left their aggressor. Adriana says that she always felt supported by her family and they knew of her situation since she first reported her husband to the police. Although she went back to him, she still could count on them. In fact, when she left her house for the second time and arrived at her family's house, her mother had already investigated about a place where she could go and she consequently brought her to the shelter. The case of Mariana is very interesting because she is an orphan and she did not have good relations with her siblings. Mariana was first assisted by her neighbour who helped her to leave her house, gave her hospitality for a night, gave her money and clothes, and told her that she should go and see her brothers who would help her. The neighbour accompanied her to the bus station so she could go to her brothers' house. Later on, her family helped her to look for a safe place for her to stay because she was at a high risk if she stayed with them because of her partner's activities (drug trafficking). In the end, they brought her to the shelter.



Photo 4: [Woman in public transport](#)
Credit: Júbilo Haku

The stories of these three women show that family support was a key factor for them when they decided to leave their violent situation and their aggressor, and arrive at the protection services in a relatively quick and safe way. However, this also shows that without family support, these women would probably not have reached the shelter by themselves due to their confidential nature.

The other women we interviewed could not count on family support, for different reasons depending on their personal histories. What appears to be the case is that their search for protection was much more difficult, and the domestic violence was followed by institutional violence. This form of violence is produced by “public servants at any level of government who act in a discriminatory manner or intend to delay or obstruct the enjoyment and exercise of women’s rights”¹⁴.

When she decided to leave her partner, Alma was able to arrive at the shelter thanks to a friend who accompanied her to INMUJERES, from where she was then transferred to the shelter. At an earlier stage she had already been to the police to report her aggressive partner. At that moment, they refused to write a report; the police officers told her instead that she could stay at the police station for the night and then go back to her house. “Sometimes police officers don’t listen to you. For me, that is why many women do not report, because they are afraid”. This lack of attention from the police is not casual and isolated since Alma tried a second time to get assistance from the police when she had been thrown out of her house by her aggressor and a police patrol was passing by. She stopped them and explained her situation but the police told her that she better not do anything. “In a while, another patrol will come so you can talk and fix the problems with your husband. Why go all the way to the police station to report? It will be a waste of time and it will not solve anything. It will take months, years”. The police refused to accept her report, and even when her aggressor, enraged, left the house to find her, they did not arrest him and did not do anything.

¹⁴ Article 18 of the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free from Violence.

On the next day, she talked to her friend and went to INMUJERES. There, she was well attended. They fed her, gave her information and she was interviewed by a psychologist. She was evaluated and at the end of the day she was transferred to the shelter. "I didn't know anything about shelters but I felt comfortable because of the way they attended me".

María José lived another kind of story, of particular violence. She is also a quite lonely woman, like Ana, with no family relations since her father died: her mother and sisters live in the USA, and she has no family members living near her. This absence of family relations and family support put her in a more vulnerable situation to confront her aggressor and access the protection services.

Her experience of seeking protection was a terrible ordeal, where she lived from one form of violence to another. She first went to ask for help at the INMUJERES of Ciudad Hidalgo (in the Federal State of Michoacán), where she lives. After she went running from her aggressor and her mother-in-law, who had just beaten her, she was brought to the public shelter (casa CAVI) by passers-by who found her in the streets. The female police officer at the shelter told her that she and her little daughter had to wait. "She left me waiting outside for an hour while it was raining. But the man who brought me to the shelter insisted to the police officer that she should be taken to the shelter. I didn't have shoes and my daughter didn't have clothes". But the police officer repeated that she had to wait for the authorization of the director of the shelter. Finally, after continued insistence from the passer-by, they received her.

At the shelter, where she stayed for three days, she was not attended adequately. Employees of the shelter told her "It's Thursday and you can't stay here because we don't have any food for you". There were no diapers for her daughter. "The only thing I could use as a diaper was a plastic bag that I had to wash every day. There was no toilet paper. I asked the police officers for some toilet paper but they didn't give me any. The director of the shelter, Licenciada (Lawyer) Heidi, gave me 20 pesos and told me to go back to my husband and beg him on my knees for forgiveness".

María José decided to report her aggressor at the special attorney office for domestic violence (CAVI), and to try to get her children back. At the CAVI, she had an interview and a psychological examination, but the psychologist at the CAVI commented her situation. Even her neighbours and her husband knew about the things she had told the psychologist. So when she went back to her house, the violence from her husband intensified and he took her children away from her.

She reported to the special attorney (CAVI) that her husband had hit her again and that her kids had been taken from her. Still the CAVI did not do anything and instead they told her they were going to take her children away from her. "And I said why? I'm neither a prostitute nor a sneaky person. I haven't done anything wrong. My only crime is that I have a husband and a mother-in-law who beat me. This is not a crime. This is not a reason to take my children away from me. They told me I'm crazy. And they sent me to Zitacuaro for more psychological examinations."

María José was separated from her two daughters for three months and was never assigned a public defender. "I've been to the DIF (System of Integral Development for the Family) and to INMUJERES and they were just telling me that he is in his right because he is the father, and I was saying: yes but he doesn't support me, he insults me, him and his mother, they hit me. But they didn't listen to me". Nothing was done against her husband. He was not even held at the police station. He was told to go and María José was threatened once again to be put in jail.

María José never benefited from restrictive orders that could protect her and her children from the domestic violence. So she reported a second time, this time at INMUJERES. But again she was not attended to, while a staff member "had become friends with my husband". In consequence, she decided to register a complaint against INMUJERES in Ciudad Hidalgo where she was supposed to be attended. "I went to complain that the institution was not attending me. They were sending me back to my aggressor. I reported him and my mother-in-law because they were beating me and threw me out of the house".

In the end in Morelia, where she made her complaint, INMUJERES finally attended her and her children and finally transferred them to the shelter in Mexico City.

Laura also lived through several episodes of institutional violence. After the school had put pressure on her to do something about her situation for herself and her children, she went to INMUJERES who then took her to the special attorney for domestic violence (CAVI). At the CAVI, the officers refused to take responsibility. They told her that it was INMUJERES that should have taken up her case because they also dispose of shelters: "they let me wait for a long time. I arrived at 3 or 4 in the afternoon and I only left there at 10 o'clock in the evening. They didn't want to attend me. They wanted to make it clear to me that the shelter was the worst thing on earth. They told me that in the shelter people have to get up at five o'clock in the morning, have to shower with cold water and they separate the children based on their ages. This made me hesitate". The officers from the CAVI insisted Laura report her aggressor, even though she did not want to. They were telling her that it was her obligation to do so. Since she insisted that she did not want to report, they told her to go home and come back the next day. But both the persons that accompanied her from INMUJERES told her "we are not leaving this place before they receive you. They will have to do so." These facts were confirmed by the lawyer who is working at the shelter. In the interview, she mentioned that "the law has to be disseminated. In order to be implemented, it is necessary that the authorities from the CAVI and the judges acknowledge it." Among the main obstacles that the lawyer identified when she accompanied victims to report the aggressor, is the lack of sensitivity on gender issues and the judgments that are made based on stereotypes of the supposed roles of men and women. She mentioned that "It is very common that (the authorities) blame the women, that they are responsible for causing the situation of violence. They made comments such as 'Mrs. why were you dressing like that?' Do you have to spend two hours with them for them to understand it was not the woman's fault?"

These three women who lack family support were not able to obtain public protection services quickly because they had to rely on a tortuous institutional path (INMUJERES and CAVI). What comes out from their experience is that this way to access protection services, instead of being made easier, with persons who assist them, leads to another form of violence, in this case institutional violence. Public officers do not apply the law and in this way they present an obstacle for women to access justice and protection services. In other words, the lack of empathy from many public officers in state institutions generates another form of violence against women who seek protection services.

The role of social inclusion/exclusion

Another important factor in women's experiences of seeking protection is the extent to which they feel socially included or excluded. Just as family support is a key factor for women to access protection services, so the existence or not of supportive social networks. Women that have quite strong social networks, consisting of friends, colleagues at work or people who have a certain social status, are more likely to access protection services without being victimized by the institutions.

Social isolation from family has been linked to violence against women by several studies on the causes of violence (Heise, 1998: 275), and it also appears to be an important factor in influencing their trajectory in searching protection. In general terms, the women at the shelter have very few interactions with friends and neighbours, little interaction with relatives and almost no participation in public activities. Two extreme cases help to explain how this question of social inclusion/exclusion matters: the case of María José on the one hand, and the case of Adriana on the other.

María José has no relatives, nor friends around her. Her trajectory shows that she depends largely on circumstances and the people she meets. For instance, she was able to arrive at the shelter at Ciudad Hidalgo because of the passer-by who found her and was moved to see her little daughter running in the rain. They were barefoot so the stranger brought them there. She didn't know that such a place existed and she didn't know anybody who knew and could have told her. At home, she does not have any support, and she suffers violence not only from her partner but also from her mother-in-law. The second time she received some help was when her employers helped her when she was at the special attorney for domestic violence trying to get her children back. Finally, she decided to complain in

Morelia about the abuses of INMUJERES in Ciudad Hidalgo, thanks to information from a neighbour who told her that in Morelia there was another institution where she might be attended. The experience of María José shows that the support she could count on during her search for protection services and that led her to the shelter was extremely unstable, dependent on circumstances, on external factors. In other words, María José's search for protection from violence was fully dependent on her good fortune.

On the other hand, the experience of Adriana in seeking protection services is totally different. From the moment she told her family about the violence she was experiencing from her partner, which corresponds to the moment she reported him, her family supported her. She told us that "my sisters always told me that even if I decided to move back in with him, they would still continue to support me. It would not matter how many times I would leave, because they knew that one day I would not go back there, that I would realize that the situation I was living in was not good. And on the day I told my mom, she said to me that she had already investigated and that she would bring me to [the shelter]" Having the support of her family, and once she had made her decision to leave her partner, Adriana was able to reach the protection services quite quickly and without suffering the discrimination, distortions and misinterpretations of the public officers working at the protection services at the first level of the model.

Another dimension of this social inclusion/exclusion issue in the lives of the women at the shelter has to do with whether they are employed or not. Five out of the six women did not work or were not engaged in any kind of activities that would connect them with other people in a broader sphere than the family or the community. Several women even quit working when they started living with their partner. Fanny was selling bleach in her neighbourhood to acquaintances (in the informal sector) and stopped working when she started living with her partner. Adriana related that her partner asked her to quit working because he would provide for her. The only woman who continued working is Mariana. She was working as an independent seller and repairer of mobile phones, although it is very probable that those activities also happened in the informal sector, since her partner was involved in illegal activities.

The fact that the women are socially excluded is an important factor in explaining why they face so many barriers to access the health care and protection services they need (Fajardo-Dolci, 2015). All the women at the shelter shared the characteristic of being isolated, or having been isolated by their partner from their previous social networks, such as their friends or their work. In some cases, they even isolated themselves from their own families because of the shame and vulnerability they felt. The more isolated they are, the more vulnerable is their situation, and the more difficult their experience of seeking protection.

Women's Perception of Protection

What is the perception of protection of these women who are seeking ending the violence? How does their experience of protection services impact on their perception of what is a life free of violence?

Independently of their specific situation and experiences, women highly value their stay at the shelter because it offers them the safety and confidentiality they need to preserve their lives and their personal integrity. All of them suffer from complex traumas as a result of the extreme violence they suffered and their most urgent need during the first weeks at the shelter is simply to have access to a safe place. The shelter provides them with the possibility to sleep, to rest, and to eat five times a day as well as accessing all the medical attention that their condition requires.

The perceptions of protection of the women are in a large part defined by their needs as they evolve in accordance with their particular recovery process. The general trends are that, first, their physical condition requires medical attention, while at a later stage they are more in need of psychological support. This means that for women at the

shelter, protection predominantly means the preservation of their physical and emotional integrity. Only at a later stage, legal support and educational services are valued as being important, from the moment when they start to think about their future plans.

Fanny makes explicit her need to be “assertive”, to be “emotionally stable” (Adriana) in order to be able to say “no”, “no more”, when they will be confronted with their ex-partner, for instance when they will have to deal with legal matters to obtain custody and child support. A fact that is important in terms of their future protection is that while being at the shelter, the women relate that they start to lose their fear. In the words of Alma, “here they helped me to get over my fear, to be fine with myself, because I was very down, very subdued. I was not laughing and now I know how to take care of myself”. Adriana mentioned: “Now I am trying to socialize again, to talk with my room-mates, I am proving that I can have friends. I can do what I want, they do not have to tell me what to do and I will not be submissive anymore or always admit that he is right to avoid his beatings. Like not talking. Because that is what they want. They want you not to talk, not to give your opinion. And here I learned to value myself and to socialize once again. I hope I will be the same as before. I hope to become the same as I used to be six years ago”. Another perception of protection is expressed by two other women in the sense that at the shelter they are building their true personality. In the words of Mariana: “here I am expressing my true me, proving that I am strong, that I can keep on going and that there are things that one can change”.

For all the women, a next step to take is to ensure they are able to make a living and get a job. They understand that this is part of what protection is all about, although each woman evaluates it differently. For a woman like María José, getting a job is the most important thing to do, in order to be able to provide for her four children. She especially emphasizes her need to resolve her material situation over her own well-being.



Photo 5: [Woman in glasses](#)

Credit: Marcos Guevara

The psychological attention the women receive is key for them, to make them able to visualize the fact they were living violence, to be conscious of this violence and to identify how they had been suffering it. Furthermore, it enables them to learn what they can do to stop the cycle of violence, based on their particular experience. The psychological attention uses a rights-based approach that consists of 'educating' women in their rights as women, and especially their right to live a life free of violence.

The experiences of the women at the shelter have a significant and deep impact on their perception of protection and on what a life free from violence really means. It is impressive to notice in the interviews the change they underwent, for example in how they described how they look at themselves as women and at their lives. Their experience at the shelter goes through three different stages: adaptation, empowerment and confidence, which results in giving them tools and resources to be able to go on with their lives in a different way. It gives them a sort of new education based on their rights and provides them with knowledge about the deconstruction of violence as something normal in the daily life, about what it means to be a woman in Mexico and about what kind of woman they want to be. At the end of this process of realization and empowerment, true change towards a life free from violence becomes possible. Making this change happen is not easy at all, but, as the coordinator of the shelter says, "it can be done walking together".

MAIN FINDINGS: DISCUSSION

Very little work exists in the Latin America region on how survivors experience protection services such as shelters. Recently, a situational analysis of how shelters have become part of public policy in addressing domestic violence in Mexico (Toledo and Lachenal, 2015) was carried out. It systematizes the main characteristics of the shelters, how they are funded and the challenges they face in dealing with the impacts of violence on women.

Based on what does exist, it is possible to argue that the shelters are an essential part of the Model for Protection established in the General Law. This includes different levels of attention provided by the special attorney office (CAVI) and the public health sector, regulated by the NOM 046, according to which women who suffer from domestic violence must be attended and protected. They also have the right to be informed of the different ways a violent situation can be dealt with, and that shelters exist as a third level of specialized services. Our study shows that in not a single case the violence lived by the interviewed women was being detected by the health sector, even in an extreme case of miscarriage when the survivor had been sent back to her home in a semi-unconscious state. And none of the women who tried to access the protection services through the justice system (police and special attorney) obtained protection.

In Mexico, the universalization of the right to health allows, legally speaking, all women to access the health sector, and the NOM 046 determines the obligation on the part of the health sector to detect and attend the women who could be victims of violence. Why are women not using the health services, even when they are not in good health? Is it because the different health services (hospitals, care centres, among others) are geographically too distant for the women? Is it because attention procedures are too complex (depending on what kind of beneficiary of health services she is) and too long? Or is it because women do not think of their domestic violence issues as a health problem that can be attended by health staff? All those factors represent barriers to access health services (Fajardo-Dolci 2015). As Herrera mentioned in her different studies (2009; 2013), women who wish to receive medical attention confront racism, misogyny and other forms of discrimination. In other words, gaining access to public health services often means having to survive institutional violence which is a form of violence produced directly by public servants who

discriminate against women and obstruct the exercise of women's rights. According to Herrera (2013), state actors can either play a role as a facilitator, by assisting a survivor of DV to receive protection services, or as an obstructor, through a further victimization of the women, or through denying the violence.

The route that consists of reporting or seeking protection from the police or the special attorney for domestic violence appears to have a negative impact on the women looking for help. Re-victimisation appears to be the main problem in the attention given by the justice system in its mandate to attend victims (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2005; Inter American Commission on Human Rights, 2011; Tiroch, 2010).

Public officers commonly apply gender stereotypes that reveal a lack of understanding of the meaning and the impacts of domestic violence on the victims, as well as a lack of understanding of the different dimensions of inequality (economic inequality and poverty, as well as gender inequality, including the expectation that women should take care of the house and the children) the women face. We should also ask if the institutions whose mandate consists of punishing aggressors are adequate to attend victims (Herrera 2010). It could be questioned whether criminalization, as applied in various Latin American countries, is the right answer to deal with domestic violence. At the same time, the regional overview showed that mediation and conciliation strategies also have their problems since they focus on the family and not on the women as victims.

Once in the shelter, the overall experience of the women was positive. They felt that the services at the shelter covered their most essential needs (medical, psychological and legal support). They also felt very positive about the staff working at the shelter and the attention they gave them. They are taking advantage of all the tools (legal, psychological and training for work) the shelter provides, although this does not mean that these would be sufficient for them to definitively leave the cycle of violence. The protection services provided by the shelter help them achieve some changes at a personal level. Most importantly, the comprehensive approach adopted by the system in dealing with violence allowed women to understand that they were not responsible for the violence they had experienced and that it is part of a more complex social phenomenon. This allowed them to plan a future based on an understanding that domestic violence is part of other forms of violence that they will face in their lives. Nevertheless, the confidentiality of the shelters, which implies that the women and their children have to leave their house and their support network for three months, and the impossibility for them to say where they are or to receive visits, has been mentioned by the survivors as an important factor to take into account when they have to decide whether to go to the shelter. The rigidity of the shelter model as it exists in Mexico should be questioned (SERNAM 2012).

Even if the protection services provided in shelters benefit women, they are operating in a context in which the protection of victims of domestic violence is not being taken seriously by the state. Women who got access to the shelter directly were able to do so thanks to the intervention of a relative, close friend or a well-meaning acquaintance. From a social point of view, the fact that these isolated women had to depend on the will of someone else seems to indicate that in general women do not have any information on the existence of the protection services provided by public institutions and/or the shelters. In a context where social protection is not guaranteed by the state, and where the health and justice institutions are failing to provide adequate protection services, domestic violence is mostly being addressed through the provision of specialized protection services. This helps survivors recover from the impacts of the violence, but puts the shelters under pressure to fill the gaps left by the health and justice systems. The fact is that survivors often have no other option but to go to the shelter.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The comprehensive approach adopted by the Mexican state to address domestic violence as a form of social violence rather than one that is embedded in the individual should fulfill survivors' needs more adequately than other approaches, but the interviews conducted for this study show that the implementation of the model has several failures related mostly to the poor capacity and will of public institutions to really put the model into practice. To move forward it is vital that social protection for women be enhanced as part of a broader goal of reducing inequities and gender gaps in both the economic and social spheres, and to get public institutions on board. It will take time.

As for the health sector, it has to seriously address access problems such as racism, misogyny as well as the authoritarian habits of the medical staff. Adopting strategies to sensitise public servants about gender and human rights, and thus acknowledge women as citizens with rights, including the right to live free from violence, has to be a priority. Health sector workers and students of medicine should also be included. Civil society organisations that operate shelters and have experience dealing with the impacts of violence could help state institutions develop a more holistic understanding of domestic violence as a social issue and not a woman-only individual one.

Assistance to survivors of domestic violence should be removed from the criminal justice system, since it appears that it victimizes women who are looking for help and does not respond to their protection needs. A creative effort should also be made to think of an institution capable of genuinely attending to the survivors' needs, an institution that would move beyond the existing mechanisms and criminal procedures, making greater use of restraint orders, for example, as a method of intervention earlier on. This mechanism is key to avoid any escalation in the violence. It is also vital to provide information and orientation to the women as soon as possible so that they take decisions before the situation becomes more dangerous.

The information and education the shelters offer to women are what women most value. But the emphasis on the isolation of women in the shelters to protect their personal integrity and allow them a safe space in which to recover may not be the best solution. Shelters should be thought of in a more flexible manner. Ways should be found to make them more open to the outside so that women do not have to, in effect, suspend their lives, and that of their sons and daughters, while they are at the shelter. Shelters should come up with creative ways to work with the community on the prevention of violence against women in general. The problem with the confidentiality the model requires is that it does not help to break the taboo of domestic violence, but instead mystifies it even more, as if it were somehow a private and even secret matter that women are ashamed to talk about. Finally, the specialized services offered by the protection model in Mexico should rather be conceived as basic services to benefit a larger number of women. Civil society organisations working with survivors of any type of gender-based violence are better equipped to understand violence as a social problem. The establishment of strategic partnerships between the state (providing funding) and CSOs (supporting women who survived violence) could be crucial to provide protection services that really meet women's needs and at the same time provide them with the tools to identify violence earlier, in both public and private spaces.

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ANNEX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Demographics

- Age:
- Marital Status:
- Length of time in relationship:
- Religion:
- Number of children if any:
- Ages of children:
- Location of children:

1. How long have you been here?
2. What brought you here? (Probe types of violence)
3. Did you go somewhere else before (probe family, friends, church/mosque, the police, UAVI, the Justice Centre for Women etc)? For each, probe
 - when was it
 - why they went there
 - what was the response
 - how satisfied they were with the type of response they got from there
 - time lag between first place of recourse and second/third/fourth
 - why the move to the next place (probe personal decision: counselling from others and who, escalation of problem etc)
4. Why did you eventually come to the shelter?
 - probe if they knew of it before and how they found out about the shelter. If they knew, why they didn't choose it as first option. If it was because of dissatisfaction with other options
5. What do you do during the day at this shelter?
 - probe group versus individual activities,
 - probe how much choice/freedom they have in what they do during the day,
 - probe what they do with their free time if they have any)?
6. Describe the attitude of staff towards you
 - probe negative or positive

7. What kinds of services have you been provided here?
 - probe differences between you and other women, and why
8. To what extent have you found each of these services useful? (then versus now for ex shelter respondents)
9. What other kinds of services would you like?
10. What is the impact of living in the shelter for you as a person?
 - Probe physical, emotional, sexual feelings
 - Probe changes in visions and aspirations
11. What is the impact of your decision of coming to the shelter on your relationships?
 - probe friends and family's reactions (hostility versus support)?
 - children for those who have them
12. What do you think will happen when you leave the shelter?
13. When do you hope to get out of the shelter?
14. What kinds of things do you think need to be in place for you to feel ready to leave?
 - probe sense of control or otherwise about these
15. If anybody else was in your situation, what would you tell her to do and why?
16. Thank you very much for time, is there anything you want to ask us?

ANNEX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SHELTER STAFF

General Background

- Age
- Sex
- Training
- Position and role in the shelter

Role and position

1. How long have you been involved in DV work?
2. What is the training that you have?
3. What is your assessment of the DV law?
 - Probe negative, positive, and shortcomings
 - What do you think is protection? Why do women need to be protected? What kind of support? What do you think the future should look like?

Process of seeking protection services

4. What process does a victim/survivor go through in order to get protection when facing an event of domestic violence?
5. From your experience, do you know/are you aware of any obstacles that victims have faced when seeking for protection?

Shelter management and challenges

6. Kindly mention some challenges you have faced in your day to day work
7. From your experience, what impact does the shelter have in addressing domestic violence? Probe personal role, and satisfaction with the impact.
8. What are the protocols that you follow in your work?

Trends

9. Have you observed any particular trends in the use of the shelter by women?
 - Probe particular time when women are coming
 - Probe particular types of violence suffered by women
 - Probe social, economic characteristics

Shelter and characteristics of women who are there

10. Number of staff? Capacity to receive women? Time of existence? Type of violence most detected? Age of women? Status of women?
11. Has the running of the shelter changed in any way since the time it is established? If yes, could you explain?
12. How is it funded? Is it adequate? Can it be improved?
13. What services are provided in the shelter for victims?
14. How do you think the women in the shelter perceive the services provided?
15. How do you think the work can be improved?
16. Is there anything else you want to share with/ask us?