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UN experts call on Mexican police to protect women protesters

OHCHR (20.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2IWGZPL> - Ahead of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, UN human rights experts* today called on Mexican authorities to protect, not attack, women who peacefully demonstrate against violence.

“There is nothing more ironic – and outrageous – than the recent sight of police attacking women who were protesting against the violence and death women face every day in Mexico,” the experts said.

They made the call ahead of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, the start of the annual 16 Days campaign that ends on UN Human Rights Day on 10 December.

“Violence absolutely cannot be used to repress women who only want to live a life free of violence for themselves and all women and girls, and who protest against femicide, the most lethal form of violence against women, and demand justice for victims.”

“Now more than ever, it is vital that Mexican authorities respect and protect the right to peaceful assembly, as well as promote it in public discourse” they said. However, they added, during demonstrations the threat of sexual harassment, violence, arrest, and detention that women face daily in public becomes even worse.

The Mexican government at all levels, has an obligation to create an environment where women can fully and safely exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, without fear of reprisal. It must ensure that the force is only used as a last resort and in accordance with the principle of proportionality, that lethal weapons are not used, and that women are not sexually assaulted in future protests.

The experts called for specific steps to fight the machismo culture within the police force, such as strengthening mechanisms of police accountability, but also to fight gender stereotypes in society.

“Above all, there must be accountability for the way police officers treat women protesters and women human rights defenders, who play a crucial role in promoting women’s right to a life free from violence,” they said.

In June, the experts raised with the Mexican government their concern over intimidation and threats against those promoting women's rights, particularly threats against women human rights defenders. They are aware of the authorities and other public institutions' efforts to tackle this pattern of violence in the context of protests and violence against women.

Despite the coronavirus, Mexican women are fighting femicide

With little help from the government, citizens are now relying on grassroots organizing and support to combat gendered violence and discrimination.

By Ann Deslandes

Foreign Policy (20.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3c5ZWI5> - On March 8, International Women's Day, an estimated 100,000 women of all walks of life poured into Mexico City's center. With a small group of male allies taking up the rear, they marched the mile and a half from the Monument to the Mexican Revolution to the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza. The march coincided with other large demonstrations in cities across the country, from Tapachula to Tijuana. The outsized rallies were just the beginning of a landmark 48-hour effort by Mexican women to demonstrate the urgency of the national emergency of femicide and other violence against women in the country.

In 2019, on average, 10 women were killed per day in Mexico, and the figure remained unchanged going into 2020. Moreover, Mexico's near-total impunity for crime (hovering around a 90 percent rate of impunity) is even worse when it comes to femicides—more like 99 percent, according to the National Citizen's Observatory on Femicide. Women are also over-represented in the already high numbers of kidnappings and forced disappearances in Mexico. The last major survey on family violence in Mexico, conducted in 2016, found that for approximately every 100 women aged 15 years and over who have had a partner or husband, 42 of the married women and 59 of the separated, divorced, or widowed women have experienced situations of emotional or economic abuse, or physical or sexual violence during their current or last relationship—a clear indication of women's overall vulnerability to security risks of all kinds.

Following large demonstrations in August and November 2019, which left parts of the center of Mexico City covered in graffiti and broken glass from the smashed windows of government buildings, feminist organizers went into 2020 saying that women would continue to take political action until real policy changes were made. On March 9, following the International Women's Day rallies, tens of thousands of Mexican women went on strike—staying indoors, not going to work, and not buying products—in a coordinated national effort to demonstrate to the country what it would be like if women simply ceased to contribute to society, if they continued to die and disappear. Up to 57 percent of women in the Mexican workforce intended to participate in the daylong strike when surveyed, resulting, by some estimates, in a potential economic loss to the country of \$1.5 billion.

In a somewhat surreal twist of events, within two weeks women were once again being called on to stay away from their workplaces—this time for public health reasons, as part of Mexico's measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, and this time with an amplified risk of violence against women as family incomes are threatened and the majority of the population is required to stay in their homes, potentially trapped with

abusive family members. Advocates for women are determined that the momentum of March 8-9 not be lost as the country faces the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

Layda Negrete, a lawyer and researcher with the World Justice Project and expert on impunity in Mexico, said the events of March 8 and 9 mark a key moment for a political solution to violence against women in Mexico, noting that the numbers in the streets and on strike was “a very clear display of political muscle ... that has really caught the attention of the federal administration.” Against this background, the renewed “political muscle” observed by Negrete is already facing its first test as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread.

The Brujas del Mar (Sea Witches), a collective that played a key role in calling for the strike, has swung into action to mitigate the increased risks to women that come with a country facing a period of lockdown. The group has established a hotline for women to access psychological help if they are experiencing domestic violence. They are often approached by women in their home state of Veracruz, and from elsewhere in the country, for assistance to find refuge or to report abusers, and they are putting together a network to provide accessible legal advice. The collective is also coordinating a system of food donations for women who work in the informal sector and are likely to be hit the hardest by the economic fallout of quarantines and lockdowns.

In the first month of coronavirus quarantine starting in March, the national network of women’s shelters reported an 80 percent increase in calls seeking help for gender-based violence. Forty-four percent of the calls were from the capital region, where stay-at-home and social distancing measures are scheduled to be in place until May 30. As per some media and activist estimates, 209 women have been killed as stay-at-home measures were announced, with at least 163 of these registered as femicides, or crimes in which the woman was killed because of her gender.

In early May, the president said he did not believe there had been an increase in domestic violence under the stay-at-home measures. In response, a group of feminists shared an open letter on social media that noted the high number of family violence-related calls to 911 per hour during that period—a figure that comes from his own government’s data, which shows calls to report abuse or violence in the home increased overall by 22.7 percent between February and March. Then, the president claimed 90 percent of these calls were false reports.

Women’s shelters remain operational as an essential service while coronavirus measures are in place in Mexico, new government funding has been provisioned, and the federal government says a woman experiencing violence can call the emergency number for a response from police or a variety of hotlines to find a place in a shelter. But Mexico is already grappling with several preexisting conditions that will make an effective response more difficult: funding cuts to shelters that occurred in 2019, a decrease in funding for the Mexican federal government’s department for women’s issues, a systemic underspending of funds allocated to state governments for programs to support women, and near-blanket impunity for criminal violence against women. As the pandemic progresses, it’s clear that Mexican society will still rely on the leadership of citizens, as demonstrated during the protests, to prevent and punish violence against women.

There’s little doubt that structural sexism and impunity are the greatest barriers to justice for victims of femicide, and to bringing the numbers down. Additionally, indigenous women, transgender women, and women with disabilities face compounded discrimination and risk. Women who work in Mexico’s large informal economy are particularly vulnerable to poverty and violence.

Despite the current stay-at-home measures, many of these women must continue to seek a salary, placing them between the precarity of a slowed street economy and the economic pressures of raising a family. These factors are correlated with gendered violence: In a 2018 study, researchers found a link between disruption of employment in the informal economy and violence against women in Mexico City—women already vulnerable to high levels of violence at home find it increases when there are disruptions to their earning income.

Mexico does have a powerful law in place, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, which was passed in 2007. The law provided sweeping measures to "prevent, treat, punish, and eradicate violence against women," defined as including psychological, physical, economic, patrimonial (involving violation of women's property rights), and sexual violence; it also defined femicide as a hate crime targeting women. But as too many cases have demonstrated, the mandate is not enough.

Despite relatively high levels of reporting of family violence to police, women have come to expect little to no response from authorities. "When a woman is experiencing such violence, she has very little recourse," Negrete said. "If she calls the police, they might not come, and even if they do, they have no training in how to respond to family violence. To pursue charges and protection from the violence they must go to the prosecutor's office, who typically fail to do anything about the complaint."

Under the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, "there are no clear proposals different from previous governments at the federal level or the local level," said María de la Luz Estrada, a sociologist and the coordinator of the National Citizen's Observatory on Femicide. In response to the rallies and the strike, the administration said it will not be altering current policy or making new policy to fight femicide and other violence against women. "We see a lot of money being put into things like a national policy against drug cartels, but not to prevent violence against women," Negrete said.

A recent government service measure known as Women's Justice Centers was starting to work until budget cuts hit. "The woman would arrive, and they would have a social worker, a psychologist, and child care provided; they would also have a legal branch to it, so they could prosecute cases that were suitable for prosecution," Negrete said. Similar service responses are successful elsewhere in the world, but most of the centers have struggled to maintain the full suite of services since López Obrador cut the public security budget, resulting in a loss of nearly 80 percent of funding. Most of the centers are still operational at reduced hours and must do a lot more with a lot less as needs for their services rise under coronavirus conditions.

The mass demonstrations of early March were largely initiated through online media, and campaigning for gender justice in Mexico continues via those networks while the country remains in lockdown. Young women at the country's largest public university who have been protesting against sexual assault and rape on campus over the last several months hacked the intranet of the Department of Political and Social Science, which had scheduled virtual classes. The Organized Women of the Department of Political and Social Sciences collective then published a communique accusing department administration of punishing women professors for supporting students who speak out against gender violence, and they disabled the intranet's functions so that grades could not be assigned and classes could not be scheduled.

Other examples of online campaigning include a virtual vigil for Ana Paola, a 13-year-old victim of femicide in her home after stay-at-home measures began, and a virtual protest, coordinated with other countries in Latin America, held on May 9, the day before Mother's Day, with the purpose of posting material en masse to social media networks, depicting the dangers being faced by women in the home under coronavirus measures.

The massive support for a social transformation of gender relations in Mexico, evidenced by the protests of early 2020, continues despite the quarantine, and there are clear budget and policy decisions that Mexican authorities can take in order to respond right now. For women at risk in their homes, there need to be clearer, better-funded avenues to support women and children fleeing violence, enabled by community support. Mexican women do reach out for help—if they are asked to stay in their homes to stop the spread of a dangerously contagious virus, authorities must ensure they are not exposing them to greater vulnerability.

The grisly deaths of a woman and a girl shock Mexico and test its president

The murders of Ingrid Escamilla, 25, and Fátima Aldrighett, 7, are forcing a reckoning in a country that has wrestled with violence against women. The president's response has been harshly criticized.

By Kirk Semple and Paulina Villegas

The New York Times (19.02.2020) - <https://nyti.ms/32qYqgu> - The gruesome murders this month of a woman and a girl in Mexico have shocked the nation, triggering a groundswell of outrage punctuated by near-daily street protests, unbridled fury on social media and growing demands for incisive government action against gender-based violence.

The woman, Ingrid Escamilla, 25, was stabbed, skinned and disemboweled, and the girl, Fátima Cecilia Aldrighett, 7, was abducted from school, her body later found wrapped in a plastic bag. The outcry over their deaths is forcing a reckoning in a country that has long wrestled with violence against women, analysts and activists say.

It is also amounting to a major leadership test for President Andrés Manuel López Obrador — and critics, who have called his response at turns anemic, insensitive and condescending, say he is falling far short.

Xóchitl Rodríguez, a member of Feminasty, a feminist activist collective, said she has been deeply disappointed by the response of Mr. López Obrador, who campaigned as a transformative figure who would defend marginalized populations.

“He was supposed to represent a change and it turns out that he is not,” she said. “The fact that you wake up in the morning and your president cannot reassure you on what specific actions he is taking to deal with the issue, is outrageous.”

In 2019, the Mexican government recorded 1,006 incidents of femicide, the crime of killing women or girls because of their gender — a 10 percent increase from 2018. The overall number of women who die violently in Mexico has also increased, rising to 10 killings per day in 2019 from seven per day in 2017, according to the Mexico office of U.N. Women.

“Women are demanding a shift of paradigm and nothing less,” said Estefanía Vela, executive director of Intersecta, a Mexico City-based group that promotes gender equality. “These are not only hashtags. These are students protesting at the universities, and mothers demanding justice for their daughters.”

But Mr. López Obrador has seemed to struggle with how to respond to the issue.

Speaking at one of his regular morning news conference last week, the president bristled at journalists' questions about femicide, and tried to bring the conversation back to his announcement that the government had recovered more than \$100 million in criminal assets and would be channeling it into poor communities.

"Look, I don't want the topic to be only femicide," he said. "This issue has been manipulated a lot in the media."

And on Monday, when asked about Fátima's death, he sought to blame femicides on what he called the "neoliberal policies" of his predecessors.

Mexican society, he said, "fell into a decline, it was a process of progressive degradation that had to do with the neoliberal model."

Amid the escalating violence and facing a lack of what they consider effective government response, a feminist protest movement has gained momentum in the past year and become more violent, with some protesters smashing windows of police stations and spraying graffiti on monuments.

The deaths of Fátima and Ms. Escamilla, both in the past two weeks, have injected even greater urgency into the debate surrounding gender violence and machismo and have intensified the demands for a more effective government response.

The killing of Ms. Escamilla, whose body was found on Feb. 9, was so ghoulish it managed to transcend the daily drumbeat of bloodshed and shock the nation. A man, found covered in blood and said to be her domestic partner, was arrested and confessed to the crime, the authorities said.

Adding to the outrage was the fact that photos of Ms. Escamilla's mutilated body were leaked to tabloids, which published the images on their front pages.

On Feb. 11, Fátima went missing after she was led away from her primary school by an unidentified woman — an abduction that was captured by security cameras. The discovery of the girl's body over the weekend, wrapped in a plastic bag and dumped next to a construction site on the outskirts of the capital, added to the rising anger.

Last Friday, protesters, most of them women, spray-painted "Femicide State" and "Not One More" on the facade and main doorway of the National Palace in Mexico.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the mayor of Mexico City, said Wednesday night on Twitter that suspects in the killing of Fátima had been detained in the State of Mexico. Several days ago, the mayor said prosecutors would seek the maximum sentence against Ms. Escamilla's killer and called femicide "an absolutely condemnable crime."

"Justice must be done," Ms. Sheinbaum said.

In the lower house of the Mexican Congress on Tuesday, lawmakers approved a reform to the penal code that would increase the maximum prison sentence for a femicide conviction to 65 years from 60 years. The measure has been sent to the Senate for a vote.

Also on Tuesday, a coalition of representatives from several political parties issued a declaration condemning gender-based violence and demanding that all levels of government strengthen the fight against it.

"This is a national crisis," Ana Patricia Peralta, a representative from Morena, Mr. López Obrador's party, said in a speech on Tuesday. "What else needs to happen for us to accept that violence against women in our country is an epidemic that has extended to all social strata?"

A senator from the National Action Party, Josefina Vázquez Mota, filed a proposal in the Senate to create a special commission that would monitor the prosecution of femicides against minors.

But Mr. López Obrador has been seen as dismissive. To the women who spray-painted calls for change on the National Palace, for example, he said "I ask feminists, with all due respect, not to paint the doors, the walls. We are working so that there are no femicides."

His attitude was met with scorn by critics, particularly women's rights activists.

"If trashing monuments makes authorities look at us and listen to our demands, then we will continue to do so," said Beatriz Belmont, a student in economics and international relations at ITAM, a Mexico City university, and a member of the Fourth Wave, a feminist student collective.

She called the president's responses to the crisis "unacceptable and unfitting for someone who should be acting as a national leader."

"It seems like he is closing his eyes before a reality that is not only sitting in front of him but is slapping him in the face," Ms. Belmont said.

On Wednesday morning, however, Mr. López Obrador seemed more receptive to the protesters' demands, applauding the congressional vote in favor of harsher prison terms and attributing it in part to societal pressure. He even drew a parallel between the protesters and leaders of the Mexican Revolution.

"That is why the participation of citizens is important," he said. "If there hadn't been a Revolution, we wouldn't have the 1917 Constitution."

Mexican diplomacy has gone feminist

Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration has boldly reoriented its foreign policy toward gender equality.

By Lyric Thompson

Foreign Policy (14.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/38Cpyv1> - Last week, Mexico became the first global south country—and only the third country worldwide—to launch an explicitly feminist foreign policy. With this new policy platform, the government is setting a new global standard and, in its own words, "breaking glass ceilings."

"The government of Mexico is feminist, and our foreign policy should be, too," said Foreign Secretary Marcelo Luis Ebrard Casaubón. Starting now, the new policy mandates that gender equality be core to all aspects of Mexican foreign policy.

The first feminist foreign policy was debuted by Sweden in 2014, to "giggles" and suspicion at the time, according to then-Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom. Canada became the second, with its Feminist International Assistance Policy, in 2017, followed by announcements by Mexico, France, and Luxembourg that such policies were under

development. And last week, Mexico publicly rolled out its new policy guidance as all of Mexico's ambassadors and heads of mission were gathered in Mexico City for their annual training and policy updates.

The Mexican policy is already setting the tone for other countries that want to follow suit as they grapple with how best to take on the most pressing issues facing the world today: violence and war, climate change, and structural and social inequality.

But what exactly is a "feminist" foreign policy?

Following more than a year of global consultation and research on the world's handful of existing feminist foreign policies, the International Center for Research on Women has established a working definition for government policy that "prioritizes gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocates significant resources to achieve that vision and seeks through its implementation to disrupt patriarchal and male-dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defense and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups and movements."

By our measure, the Mexican government has laid out a foundation for what is emerging as a global gold standard. "Mexico is determined to move forward a progressive foreign policy," said Cristopher Ballinas Valdés, the director-general for human rights and democracy at the Mexican foreign ministry, "with a main focus on promoting human rights, equality, and women's rights. The feminist foreign policy is based on five principles that rule all foreign-policy activities."

Those five principles include: conducting all aspects of foreign policy with the intent to advance gender equality and a feminist agenda; achieving gender parity at all levels of staff in the foreign ministry; combatting all forms of gender-based violence, including within the ministry; making equality visible; and practicing intersectional feminism, which is to say, an approach that values not only women's rights but also other intersecting social, economic, and environmental justice issues.

The government of Mexico has opted for a very broad vision for what its policy would achieve—not simply the advancement of women, but also the fulfilment of rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (the Mexican foreign ministry participated in Mexico City's pride march for the first time last year) and the advancement of broader social and economic justice initiatives. Quoting work by the International Center for Research on Women, the policy explicitly obligates Mexican leadership to advance "issues that others are not prioritizing," including sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as climate change.

Given the prevalence of gender-based violence and femicide in Mexico, the new policy marks a welcome change of pace. With the policy, according to Ballinas Valdés, "Mexico will pay justice to a long overdue agenda on women's and girls' rights." This is the first time such an overt women's rights agenda has been advanced in Mexican foreign policy, and officials inside the ministry have indicated that the establishment of a gender-balanced cabinet in President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration went a long way toward enabling such change.

Mexico's feminist foreign policy commits to an ambitious number of immediate actions across all five areas of engagement, stipulating precise timelines by which they are to be achieved. Trainings, workshops, working groups, and manuals are to be developed and deployed within the first year. By 2024, the government is aiming for full employment parity, equal pay, and the application of a gender lens to every foreign-policy position,

resolution, and mandate. This is a tall order—and one that will undoubtedly encounter resistance.

But if past is prologue, Mexico seems positioned to excel. The new policy's antecedents have already been shaping Mexico's behavior internally and on the world stage. Case in point, Mexico took a clear leadership position at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25) held last month in Spain, where the government promoted gender equality as a nonnegotiable component of any agreement on climate change.

"[Mexico is] simply one of the few countries that comes to the table with gender equality and human rights as a red line," said conference attendee Bridget Burns, a climate activist and the executive director of the Women's Environment and Development Organization. "Many other actors say it's a priority for them, but Mexico showed real strength in not letting these principles become bargaining chips in a process that often dwindles issues down to the lowest common denominator."

The lowest common denominator appeared to be the likely outcome of COP25 at one point, as countries worked together to exclude activists from the negotiations and even locked a number of activists and indigenous women out of in the cold. But Mexican negotiators made sure feminist climate activists had a seat at the table and led a process that ultimately developed a Gender Action Plan, one of the only tangible outcomes in a conference that otherwise "fell short" of meaningful progress on climate initiatives.

"Having witnessed Mexico championing human rights and gender equality in the context of the U.N. climate negotiations, it's exciting to see the launch of this feminist foreign policy, principled on an intersectional feminist approach," Burns said. "We know that to be truly 'feminist,' foreign policy must understand gender equality in the context of all issues, from environment and trade, to peace and economy. We look forward to seeing Mexico put these words into action, and to serving as inspiration for other governments, particularly given their leadership in the upcoming Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum."

That forum marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, watershed agreements outlining women's human rights. It also marks the first major multilateral test of Mexico's new foreign policy. Mexico and France, which has also recently announced but not yet released a feminist foreign policy, will be co-hosting a "champions only" progressive, multilateral space, where heads of state from progressive countries will gather to make commitments to the next generation of women's rights issues.

The path forward will not be an easy one. Retrogressive foreign policies, including that of the United States, have instilled little trust in some governments to advance and protect the women's rights standards laid out 25 years ago. But if Mexico's level of ambition and the growing number of countries turning their eyes on their own foreign policies are signs of what is to come, the momentum may be just enough to carry this movement forward.

"It's very encouraging to see," said Kristina Lunz, a co-founder of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, "that with Mexico the first global south country presented a feminist foreign policy. In international circles, there still tends to be this biased perception that industrial countries such as Germany would be leading on topics of social justice and equality—but especially when it comes to feminism in foreign policy, Germany and others can learn lots from Mexico."

Decree bans marriage for children under 18, eliminates exceptions

Some states previously allowed girls as young as 14 to marry

Mexico News Daily (05.06.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2EV3XkW> - A decree published on Tuesday by the federal government banned marriage for children under 18 in 31 out of 32 states.

The decree annulled certain laws that allowed local authorities and families to provide exceptions or consent for child marriages.

Exceptions to the ban can still be granted in Baja California.

The National System for Protection of Children and Adolescents (Sipinna) celebrated the decree, saying it will help protect the rights of children.

"This will help promote a cultural change to eradicate forced marriages," read a statement by the organization.

Since its creation in 2015, Sipinna has been advocating for a ban on child marriage, making alliances with international and national civil society organizations.

As of 2016, marriage was legal for boys as young as 16 and girls as young as 14 in 24 states. In some of the 18 states where child marriage was banned, the law contained provisions for families or local authorities to grant exceptions.

Almost 1.3 million child marriages take place in Mexico every year, making it one of the 10 countries with the highest number of cases. According to Save the Children, one in every five Mexican women get married before their 18th birthday, 73% of whom do not finish school. Child marriages also put women and girls at higher risks of physical and sexual violence.

But pressure has been mounting to ban child marriage in recent years. In March, the Supreme Court upheld a ban on the practice in Aguascalientes from a challenge to its constitutionality. On May 1, the Chamber of Deputies approved a measure to ban child marriage at the federal level with near unanimity.

Making a noise about machismo in Mexico

"Machismo has to die," chanted protesters as they walked through the centre of Mexico City last month.

By Katy Watson

BBC (20.05.2016) - <http://bbc.in/1TrfXux> - Thousands of people came out onto the streets to say enough was enough.

The macho culture is all pervasive in Mexico and many of those at the march think its emphasis on male pride is a contributing factor in the high rates of violence against women that Mexico is experiencing.

It is estimated that [nine out of 10 women](#) (link in Spanish) have been subjected to sexual violence, whether on the streets or at home.

'Tired of the violence'

"I'm here because I'm tired of the violence against women in Mexico," said Ana Carlota Velazquez, a student.

"I'm tired of living it and hearing it happen to my friends, in the streets, on public transport, in university and at work."

The women were joined by thousands of men. Many were carrying placards.

"I need feminism too", read one. Another read: "Because she's my sister, my girlfriend, my wife."

Femicide

"We want to stay alive," other protesters shouted.

The extreme end of gender violence is femicide, the intentional murder of a woman because she is a woman.

It is a particular problem in Mexico. According to the country's National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (CONAVIM), on average [six women die a violent death each day](#) (link in Spanish) in Mexico.

Accurate figures are hard to come by. States differ in the way they collect data and in how honest they are with the figures.

Even CONAVIM admitted getting accurate data was a challenge.

This is made harder by the fact that it is hard to prove that a murder was committed because gender alone. As a result, femicides are massively under-reported.

In a country where up to 99% of crimes go unsolved, many victims' families often do not go to authorities for help because they believe it will not change anything.

Murdered in Mexico State

Ciudad Juarez used to be known as the most violent city in Mexico, a city where hundreds of women went missing.

But Ecatepec, part of poor Mexico State on the edge of the capital, has now surpassed the reputation Ciudad Juarez once had.

Irinea Buendia lives in Mexico State, not far from Ecatepec. She says her daughter Mariana was killed by her husband.

He had a history of violence and had threatened to kill her. But when Mariana was found hanged in the marital home, her death was recorded as a suicide.

"The first thing they say is 'what did you daughter do for him to treat her like that? What did she do to make him kill her?'," Ms Buendia tells me.

"But men don't own women. Just because there's a problem in a relationship or in a marriage doesn't mean that murder is the answer."

Therapy - is it hard to be a man?

On the other side of Mexico state, a workshop is trying to tackle the root of the problem.

A group of men - and two women - are sitting in a classroom, with a psychologist at the whiteboard.

"Is it hard to be a man?" he asks the class.

There is a real mix of responses from the participants. One breaks down as he tries to explain his point of view.

Another says no, if you know how to behave decently, it should not be hard at all.

One of the participants, Alberto Trinidad Martinez Nava, was sentenced to 28 years in prison for raping and killing two women.

He is now free and says his attitude has changed.

"It was all about me," he says. "Machismo - it was just me, me, me. I belittled women. I had that bad attitude that women would be under my control but I know that not to be true now."

'Violence is accepted'

"If we only focus on the victim, the perpetrator will continue to be violent in new relationships," says Marisol Zarco Reyes, a psychologist at Mexico State Council for Women.

"Sadly, perpetrators of domestic violence are born seducers so they finish one relationship and move on to the next so we saw the need to focus on them, too."

"Getting them to admit they are the perpetrators of violence is half the process," says Ms Zarco.

"Unfortunately in our society, violence is accepted. They are taught that violence is the way to keep power."

The issue of gender violence is a worldwide problem but Ms Zarco says there is a cultural problem particular to Mexico, too.

"Machismo is a hegemonic model of masculinity in Mexico," she says.

"The man who shouts, who has to hit people to show his power. Yes, there's machismo in Mexico."

'Ongoing struggle'

The workshop is part of a bigger initiative called Mexico State for a Life without Violence, which supports women who are vulnerable to domestic abuse.

According to a victims' agency run by the government, 90% of victims of sexual violence are women.

And for women like Ms Buendia, the struggle against the culture of violence goes on.

After five years of campaigning, the Mexican Supreme Court last year ordered her daughter's death to be re-investigated from a gender perspective.

It is a move that Ms Buendia thinks could be hugely significant for many other cases that have also not been investigated as femicides.

These are small steps in a country where a lack of resources - and many say a lack of will - have meant crimes against women have gone unpunished.

But they are progress nonetheless.

Study finds sex trafficking and child marriages linked

By Sebastien Malo

Reuters (11.05.2017) - <http://tmsnrt.rs/2q8HXJH> - Girls being trafficked for sex in northern Mexico often have been forced into exploitation as under-age child brides by their husbands, a study showed on Thursday.

Three out of four girls trafficked in the region were married at a young age, mostly before age 16, according to Mexican and U.S. researchers in a yet-unpublished study.

Human trafficking is believed to be the fastest-growing criminal industry in Mexico, and three-quarters of its victims are sexually exploited women and girls, according to Women United Against Trafficking, an activist group.

Under a 2012 anti-trafficking law, those convicted of the crime can spend up to 30 years in prison.

Nevertheless, nearly 380,000 people are believed to be enslaved in Mexico, according to the 2016 Global Slavery Index published by rights group Walk Free Foundation.

The researchers interviewed 603 women working in the sex industry in the Mexican cities of Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, both along the border with the United States.

Most said they had been trafficked as under-age brides, often by their husbands, said Jay Silverman, the study's lead author and a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Diego.

In about half the cases, the brides were pregnant, so healthcare workers could play a critical role in thwarting sex trafficking, the researchers said.

"Within being provided pregnancy-related care, there's the opportunity of interviewing that girl to understand her situation," Silverman told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"We can support and assist those girls to reduce the likelihood that they will become trafficked," he said.

Under a 2014 law, the minimum age for marriage in Mexico is 18 but girls can marry at age 14 and boys at age 16 with parental consent.

The researchers include members of the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission, a joint effort launched in 2000 by the two nations' governments to improve health and quality of life along the border.

They also came from Mexican economic institutions, and one was a medical doctor.