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Mexico: Protection available to women victims of domestic violence in the state of Veracruz (2005 - January 2008)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

State laws regarding domestic violence in Veracruz are noted within the following legislation. Within the state Civil Code (*Codigo Civil para el Estado de Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave*), article 141, subsection XVIII stipulates acts of domestic violence as a cause for divorce (Veracruz 15 Sept. 1932). As well, article 254 ter, which was added to the Civil Code on 8 September 1998, states that [translation] "family members must avoid behaviours that cause domestic violence," including physical and emotional acts that affect a family member's physical or psychological integrity (ibid.).

The state's Penal Code (*Codigo Penal para el Estado Libre y Soberano de Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave*) also contains provisions related to domestic violence, including article 182 (which defines the crime of rape, including marital rape) and article 233 (which defines domestic violence as repeated physical and emotional abuse of a family member) (Veracruz 7 Nov. 2003). Individuals convicted of rape under article 182 face between 6 and 15 years in prison and a fine of up to 300 days' salary (ibid.). Under article 233, those convicted of domestic violence face between 2 and 6 years in prison (ibid.).

The state's domestic violence law (*Ley de Asistencia y Prevencion de la Violencia Familiar en el Estado de Veracruz*) enacted on 8 September 1998 defines domestic violence and provides for the establishment of government bodies and mechanisms to help prevent domestic violence and to assist victims (Veracruz 8 Sept. 1998). Mechanisms outlined in the law include specialized psychotherapeutic assistance (ibid., Art. 14), training and awareness programs for personnel who deal with domestic violence cases (ibid., Art. 15), and the use of conciliation presided over by a judge for certain cases (ibid., Arts. 17-20).

Regarding government protection efforts, women victims of violence in Veracruz state can access government-run services such as those offered at the Centre for the Assistance of Crime Victims (Centro de Atencion a Victimas de Delitos, CAVD) (Veracruz n.d.a) and through the 075 women's line for telephone assistance (ibid. n.d.b). The Veracruz Institute for Women (Instituto Veracruzano de las Mujeres), which began work in April 2007 (ibid. 2007), also coordinates a number of programs aimed at assisting women victims of domestic violence (ibid. 19 July 2007). A municipal branch of the National Network of Family Development Agencies (Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, DIF) operates a city shelter in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz (ibid. 2006). As well, the Office for the Assistance of Women, Vulnerable Groups and Victims (Direccion de Atencion a Mujeres, Grupos Vulnerables y Victimas) of the Veracruz State Commission for Human Rights (Comision Estatal de Derechos Humanos Veracruz) offers various support services for women (Veracruz n.d.c).

According to the Veracruz state government website, the Office of the Attorney General of the State of Veracruz (Procuraduria General de Justicia del Estado de Veracruz, PGJEV) runs the CAVD, offering free and confidential legal, psychological and social support services to crime victims and their families (Veracruz n.d.a). In addition to these services, CAVD administers public prevention programs to address domestic violence, among other social concerns (ibid.). There also exists Specialized Agencies for Sexual Crimes and Family Protection (Agencia Especializadas en Delitos Sexuales y Proteccion de la Familia) which operate with support from the state Public Prosecutor's offices (Ministerio Publico) to provide assistance to female victims of violence in more remote areas of the state (Veracruz n.d.d.).

The 075 Women's line offers specialized assistance for women on various issues, including domestic violence, by providing, among other things, health, psychological and legal services (Veracruz n.d.b.). During the period from 16 April to 10 September 2007, the line received 127 calls from women seeking assistance (ibid. 2007, 57).

In a July 2007 press release, the Veracruz Institute for Women noted a number of projects it was undertaking, including the following: gender violence training for public prosecutors and municipal authorities; a media campaign to combat violence against women; the introduction of service of a female lawyer who travels to various municipalities to offer legal assistance for domestic violence cases; the creation of a citizen's support network for women affected by gender violence; improvements to the 075 Women's line; the creation of a community centre/shelter "Sembradores" for women and their children facing emergency violent situations;

improvements to services offered by the shelter Casa Refugio Ziwakaitzintli; and improvements to the Coatzacoalcos shelter (Veracruz 19 July 2007).

The DIF municipal shelter in Coatzacoalcos is a member of the National Network of Shelters (Red Nacional de Refugios) and is intended to provide a safe space for women and their children fleeing domestic and sexual violence (Veracruz 2006). While the shelter is open to all women who are victims of domestic violence, it reportedly provides special assistance to women who head families by supporting their efforts to maintain or find employment (*ibid.*). In this context, the shelter promotes training and awareness opportunities on topics such as women's rights (*ibid.*).

The goal of the Office for the Assistance of Women, Vulnerable Groups and Victims is to respond to intervention requests filed by women and other vulnerable members of society (Veracruz n.d.c). These requests can be filed in person or by other means of communication (*ibid.*). The Directorate carries out this mission by providing assistance, such as legal counselling and humanitarian aid, and by initiating inquiries to assess intervention requests from women, vulnerable groups and victims (*ibid.*).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC) [Mexico City], *Criterios* [Merida], Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Isis Internacional, *La Jornada* [Mexico City], Mujeres Hoy, Orizaba en Red, *Notiver* [Veracruz], *El Universal* [Mexico City], World News Connection/Dialog.

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