

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

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Mexico: Women who head their own households without male or family support; domestic violence in the Federal District and Guadalajara; whether women who leave abusive partners can obtain housing and temporary employment in the Federal District and Guadalajara; government support services available to female victims of domestic violence in these cities

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Prevalence and Cause of Female-headed Households

According to sociology professor Ana Josefina Cuevas Hernández and PhD candidate Carlos David Solorio Pérez, joint authors of a 2009 article on female-headed households in Colima, Mexico, the number of such households has been steadily growing in Mexico (Cuevas Hernández and Solorio Pérez July-Dec. 2009, 333). From 23.1 percent in 2005 (*ibid.*), the figure rose to 26.6 of urban households and 21.7 percent of rural households in 2008 (UN *n.d.*). In 2010, there were 28,159,373 households of which 6,916,206, or 24.56 percent, were headed by women (Mexico *n.d.a*).

Through interviews with women in the cities of Colima and Villa de Alvarez, in the state of Colima, Cuevas Hernández and Solorio Pérez found that women became the heads of households through "widowhood, separation, divorce, single motherhood and income" (July-Dec. 2009, 334). Geo-Mexico, a blog about the geography and dynamics of Mexico published to support the 2010 book of the same name and authored by Richard Rhoda and Tony Burton (Geo-Mexico *n.d.*), also notes the rising percentage of female-headed households and attributes the phenomenon to such factors as "widowhood, males or females migrating for work, and modernity with more young unmarried females living independently" (*ibid.* 30 Apr. 2011).

The challenge for female heads of households, say Cuevas Hernández and Solorio Pérez, is becoming the sole wage earner when children are still young or becoming widowed at an older age and having little formal schooling or work experience (July-Dec. 2009, 334). They also indicate that there is a stigma to not having a partner that opens the door to sexual harassment (Cuevas Hernández and Solorio Pérez July-Dec. 2009, 335, 337).

In addition, Mexico's [translation] "patriarchal culture" and "sexist stereotypes" of what it means to be "'feminine' and 'masculine'," says a principal researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico's (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM) Institute of Juridical Research (Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas) in correspondence with the Research Directorate, continue to "promote relationships of inequality between women and men" (17 Aug. 2011). A 2009 report for the United Nations' (UN) Universal Periodic Review on the human rights situation in Mexico, which was put together by a number of national and international civil society organizations, including the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer, CLADEM), also says that women in Mexico experience [translation] "high levels of violence and discrimination" at the domestic, work, social, and institutional levels (CLADEM *et al.* 2009, *para.* 20).

However, the Director of Epidemiology and Psychosocial Research at the Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz National Institute of Psychiatry (Instituto Nacional de Psiquiatría Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz) pointed out, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, that there is a stigma attached to women who leave physically abusive partners that makes them reluctant to seek help (Director 16 Aug. 2011). In Mexico City, says the UNAM principal researcher, women who are victims of domestic violence experience [translation] "discrimination and stigmatization" because they are expected to stay in "destructive relationships" or are blamed for the "cycles of violence" (Principal Researcher

17 Aug. 2011). The UNAM principal researcher was also a judge *ad hoc* for the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States in what became known as the "Cotton Fields" case (ibid.), which was brought against Mexico in 2007 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for failing to provide protective measures to three young women whose murdered bodies were found in a cotton field in Juarez despite "full awareness of the existence of a pattern of gender-related violence that had resulted in hundreds of women and girls murdered" (IACHR 16 Nov. 2009, 2).

Domestic Violence

According to the UNAM principal researcher, Mexico lacks the necessary resources to address the problem of domestic violence, and eradicate the [translation] "patriarchal or sexist stereotypes that result in women's subordination (Principal Researcher 17 Aug. 2011). She further adds that [translation]

[d]omestic violence in Mexico continues to be a problem of grave proportions that transcends the private space of victims since the impact on the physical, psychological and sexual health of the whole family has repercussions on the organization, order, common welfare and public funds of society (ibid.).

The researcher identifies the causes of domestic violence in the [translation] "*structural discrimination* that women suffer as a consequence of the historically unequal distribution of social roles" (ibid.). When women step outside of the traditional expectation that [translation] "men rule and women obey," they are [translation] "'taught' to comply with their 'obligations,' even through violence if necessary" (ibid.).

Domestic violence in Federal District

According to the Director of Epidemiology and Psychosocial Research, domestic violence in the Federal District continues to be [translation] "a problem" (Director 16 Aug. 2011). Statistics on violence against women for 2006 provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI) show that, in the Federal District, 46.2 percent of married women or women living with a partner have suffered domestic violence in their relationship (Mexico 2008, 7). The report also shows that 25.7 percent of those women have experienced [translation] "extreme violence" (ibid.). Of those who have suffered violence, 51.6 percent required medical attention for conditions such as contusions, bone fractures and permanent disability; and 22.5 percent [translation] "have been tied, choked or asphyxiated, attacked with a knife or penknife or been shot at with a weapon" (ibid., 10).

In a 2010 report on family violence by the Ministry of Social Development (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social) of the Federal District, the Local Public Telephone Service (Servicio Público de Localización Telefónica, LOCATEL) received 1,656 reports of family violence throughout the year, 1,467 of which were against women (Federal District 28 Apr. 2011). In 630 of the cases, the women's husbands committed the violence, and in 469 cases, it was their common-law partner (ibid.). In the first trimester of 2011, LOCATEL received 414 reports of violence against women, 175 of which were committed by their husbands and 113 by their common-law partner (ibid. 17 Mar. 2011). LOCATEL operates a free 24-hour hotline to provide Mexico City residents with information and advice from Federal District government institutions (ibid. n.d.a).

According to the INEGI's 2006 statistics on violence against women, 17.7 percent of the women who suffered domestic violence reported the situation to authorities (Mexico 2008, 11). The report notes that [translation]

[e]motional mistreatment, which does not leave visible physical signs, and economic abuse, are the least reported; perhaps because the victim does not have any guarantees that reporting the offender will stop the violence; on the contrary, it is possible that the intensity of the violence will increase. (ibid.)

Other violence in the Federal District

Media sources report that, in the Federal District, 67 women were killed in the first seven months of 2011 (*El Sol de México* 27 July 2011; *El Universal* 26 July 2011). Mexican newspapers also quote the Attorney General of the Federal District as saying that the women most vulnerable to femicide, the murder of women because they are women, are unmarried women whose main activity is housework and who are between 28 and 40 years old (*El Sol de México* 27 July 2011; *Milenio* 26 July 2011). The Mexican News Agency (Agencia Mexicana de Noticias, NOTIMEX) similarly reports that in 2010, 107 women were murdered in the Federal District and that [translation] "the majority of them were killed while in their homes or work places" (9 Feb. 2011). Between 2000 and 2007, according to an *El Informador* article, the Office of the Attorney General of the Federal District (Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal) reported the disappearance of 4,188 women (14 June 2009).

Domestic violence in Guadalajara

The UNAM principal researcher noted that the States of Jalisco and Guadalajara have the highest rates of violence against women (17 Aug. 2011). INEGI statistics on violence against women in 2006 shows that, in Jalisco, 59.3 percent of married women or women living in a common-law relationship have experienced domestic violence by

their partner, 12.6 percent more than the national average (Mexico 2007, 7). The report also indicates that 27.9 percent of women in Jalisco who have been victims of domestic violence have experienced extreme violence, and 57.6 percent have needed medical attention or surgical procedures as a consequence of the violence (ibid., 10).

Unlike the Federal District, where 17.7 percent of the women who experienced abuse reported the violence to authorities (ibid. 2008, 11), 30.6 percent of the women in Jalisco did so (Mexico 2007, 20). Among the reasons women do not report domestic violence are the lack of follow-up by authorities, mistrust of the justice system, lack of knowledge, failure to prosecute perpetrators or because of the [translation]

[f]ear of how the offender will react, social or family pressures, embarrassment or just because they believe that the violence does not warrant the prosecution of the offender since the idea that the husband has the right to reprimand persists. (ibid.)

The UNAM principal researcher noted that protection orders expire every 72 hours and that victims of domestic violence [translation] "can not afford to extend the orders" every time they do (17 Aug. 2011). For this reason, she argued that their time limit should be extended (Principal Researcher 17 Aug. 2011).

Issues

Employment

Citing data provided by the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the International Labour Organization (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, OIT) notes that 45 percent of the labour force is made up of women, and the percentage increases to 55 percent for women between 25 and 34 years old (OIT 13 Oct. 2010). *El Universal*, a Mexico City-based newspaper, reports that the Secretary of Labour and Social Welfare (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social) indicated that women [translation] "occupy nearly 40 percent of the labour market" in Mexico, an increase of 22 percent over the last 30 years (7 Mar. 2011).

According to INEGI, the unemployment rate among women has increased from 4.75 percent in June 2010 to 5.69 percent in June 2011, whereas for men it went from 5.23 percent to 5.26 percent in the same period (*El Universal* 21 July 2011). However, the OIT maintains that women are working [translation] "in sectors characterized by low-wages, long hours and informal jobs" (qtd. in *El Universal* 7 Mar. 2011). In a report on social indicators determining quality of life for Mexico, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that women work an average 4 hours and 21 minutes longer per day than men in unpaid work time (OECD 12 Apr. 2011). Likewise, CEPAL noted that, in 2008, women in urban areas earned 61.8 percent of the salary of men and also that poverty rates were higher in female-headed households (31.3 percent) than in male-headed ones (28.6 percent) (UN n.d.). A representative from Manpower Mexico, a employment agency based in Mexico with branches in Central America (Manpower 2010), explains that women face a [translation] "glass ceiling" that accounts for the "difference between salaries and benefits and labour possibilities among women and men in an economy dominated by men" (qtd. in *El Universal* 21 July 2011).

With regard to the rural areas of Mexico, EFE News Service reports the Peasant and Popular Organizations Central Union (Central de Organizaciones Campesinas y Populares, COCyP) as stating that police estimates indicate that "[a] little more than 1 million people work in the illegal drug trade, including 'around 200,000' women" (EFE 31 Oct. 2009). According to the COCyP, the women's participation in the illegal drug trade is the result of "gender inequality and the lack of opportunities to find legal employment" (ibid.). Women in rural areas see their participation in drug manufacturing and trafficking as an "alternative" to the failure of the government's assistance programs for alleviating poverty in the countryside (ibid.).

Employment in the Federal District

According to the UNAM principal researcher, women who have experienced domestic violence often find it difficult to obtain employment because they lack educational qualifications (Principal Researcher 17 Aug. 2011). For women who decide to relocate, informal employment is more likely and as a result, they lack employment benefits and labour stability, which, in turn, affects their health and safety (ibid.).

The INEGI indicates that in 2010, the unemployment rate for women in the Federal District was 2.6 percent (109,120 women out of a labour force of 4,173,981 people) (Mexico n.d.c).

Employment in Guadalajara

NOTIMEX reports that the Municipal Institute for Women in Guadalajara (Instituto Municipal de las Mujeres en Guadalajara, InMujeres Guadalajara) has been holding a job fair for women every year since 2008 (NOTIMEX 10 July 2011). The General Director of InMujeres Guadalajara is quoted as saying that in 2010, 1,904 job vacancies were offered to 2,449 applicants, of which 1,612 were women (ibid.). For the 2011 job fair, job vacancies will be offered in technical, operational and administrative areas with an average salary of \$3,500 pesos per month (ibid.), or C\$281 (XE 23 Aug. 2011)

In the INEGI's statistics for Jalisco, the unemployment rate for women in 2010 was about 1.6 percent (51,415 unemployed women out of a labour force of 3,180,823 people) (Mexico n.d.b).

Housing in the Federal District

Both the UNAM principal researcher and the Director of Epidemiology and Psychosocial Research said that the relocation of women who head their own households in the Federal District is [translation] "not easy" (Principal Researcher 17 Aug. 2011; Director 16 Aug. 2011). According to the UNAM principal researcher, the cost of rent in the Federal District is [translation] "extremely high for someone without an income or with limited resources while some places emphasize that children are not allowed" (Principal Researcher 17 Aug. 2011).

Housing in Guadalajara

However, a 2009 report by the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres) states that affordable housing is decreasing in both Guadalajara and Zapopan (Mexico 2009, 10). The report describes neighbourhoods, especially those in the eastern and southern parts of Guadalajara, as [translation] "spaces of misery, implacable segregation and ecological disaster" (Mexico 2009, 10).

El Informador, a Guadalajara-based newspaper, reports that a study to determine the precursors of different forms of violence in Guadalajara, which was undertaken by researchers from local educational institutions, found that the [translation] "sprawling growth of the city [...] does not provide all the basic infrastructure services such as education, health and leisure" (*El Informador* 2 Sept. 2010). The coordinator of the research project said that the city's growing violence is symptomatic of the lack of employment opportunities and adequate schooling (*ibid.*).

Government Services

The Associated Press (AP) reports that the Executive Director of UN Women recognized the creation of institutions in Mexico dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence, as well as the work of local courts in defending the rights of women (6 July 2011).

However, according to the Director of Epidemiology and Psychosocial Research, even though there are important programs in the area of health, there is still [translation] "an insufficient knowledge among health professionals of legislation and available institutions to prevent, identify and treat family violence" (Director 16 Aug. 2011). She also states that [translation] "in the majority of public and private health care services, there are no specific programs to address this problem" (*ibid.*). The Director further adds that given Mexico's culture, women feel [translation] "embarrassed" when they try to seek assistance because they [translation] "worry that they are going to be judged by the health professionals" (*ibid.*). Women tend to hide their problem [translation] "out of fear of possible retaliation by the offender ... against them or their children" (*ibid.*).

Government services in the Federal District

The Institute for Women in the Federal District (Instituto de las Mujeres del Distrito Federal, InMujeres DF), which includes Mexico City, offers the Insurance Against Violence (Seguro contra la Violencia), which grants \$1,537 [C\$122 (XE 24 Aug. 2011a)] monthly to women victims of family violence for one year, as well as the Program for Social Reintegration for women victims of [translation] "extreme violence" (Programa de Reintegración Social), which offers, among other services, counselling services, support for the acquisition of a house, scholarships, medical services, and employment training (Federal District n.d.d). NOTIMEX reports that since 2008, 4,000 insurances have been issued through the Insurance Against Violence, and 80 percent of beneficiaries are no longer living with their [translation] "abuser" (14 Aug. 2011).

The Network of Family Development Agencies for the Federal District (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia del Distrito Federal, DIF-DF) offers mediation services for couples going through divorce, child custody and child support arrangements to help them avoid legal conflicts (Federal District n.d.b).

The Unit for Citizens' Assistance (Unidad de Atención Ciudadana, UNAC) offers counselling, medical services, family planning, rehabilitation, social reintegration and material and economic assistance to vulnerable persons, including victims of violence (Federal District n.d.c). The affected person must show proof of address to receive these services (*ibid.*).

The Ministry of Health for the Federal District (Secretaría de Salud del Distrito Federal) has health units called Gender Violence Prevention and Assistance Services (Servicios de Prevención y Atención de la Violencia de Género, SEPAVIGE) that provide psychological services, detection and treatment activities, and health promotion and education, among others (Federal District Feb. 2009). However, the UNAM principal researcher pointed out that health services are only accessible if the person has a voter's card (credencial de elector) and documentation that shows his or her address (Principal Researcher 17 Aug. 2011). She also pointed out that although basic health services are offered for free by the Federal District, [translation] "certain highly expensive surgical procedures and medicines are

not covered by the basic health insurance" (ibid.).

Government services in Guadalajara

The Network of Family Development Agencies of Guadalajara (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia Guadalajara, DIF Guadalajara) provides the following programs:

- Comprehensive Care Centre for Family Violence (Centro de Atención Integral a la Violencia Familiar, CAIVI) offers psychological consultation, medical services and orientation, among others (Guadalajara [n.d.a](#));
- Comprehensive Care for Families in Intrafamilial Violence Situations (Atención Integral a Familias en Situación de Violencia Intrafamiliar) offers psychological therapy, social work and legal aid (ibid. [n.d.b](#));
- Centre for Integrated Assistance for Male Generators of Violence (Centro de Apoyo Integral a Hombres Generadores de Violencia) offers psychotherapy to men who instigate violence to help them recognize, manage and find alternatives to the circumstances that lead to the violence (ibid. [n.d.c](#)); and
- Women Entrepreneurs (Mujeres Emprendedoras) offers training in tourism to women in [translation] "situation of vulnerability," so they can achieve economic independence (ibid. [n.d.d](#)).

The Institute for Women in Jalisco (Instituto Jalisciense de las Mujeres, IJM) provides the following programs:

- Women's Centre for Information and Orientation (Centro de Información y Orientación sobre la Mujer) offers information on institutional programs that benefit women (Jalisco [n.d.a](#)). The budget for 2008 was \$273,306 (ibid.), or C\$21,746 (XE 24 Aug. 2011b).
- In-Person Legal Assistance (Asesoría Jurídica Presencial) offers legal services for women victims of gender-based violence (Jalisco [n.d.b](#)). The budget for 2009 was \$2,021,095 (ibid.), or C\$160,809 (XE 24 Aug. 2011c).
- Integrated Support Centres for Women (Centros Integrales de Apoyo a las Mujeres) offer assistance and training (Jalisco [n.d.c](#)). The budget for 2009 was \$2,016,717 (ibid.), or C\$160,381 (XE 24 Aug. 2011d).
- Women's Phone Line (Línea Mujer) offers a telephone service for women that provides legal services and psychological and other information (Jalisco [n.d.d](#)).
- Prevention and Assistance of Violence against Women (Prevención y Atención a la Violencia contra las Mujeres) offers services to prevent, treat and eradicate violence against women (Jalisco [n.d.e](#)). The budget for 2009 was \$18,957,000 (ibid.), or C\$1,507,806 (XE 24 Aug. 2011e).

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International, Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos Jalisco, Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Salud Integral para la Mujer, United Nations Refworld, United Nations Women.

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