**Editorial**

**Violence against Women in the Developing World: Mexico and the Migrant Crisis**

Violence against women is a global epidemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime and research suggests that as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by intimate partners (WHO, 2017; The World Bank, 2018). Violence against women and public security are some of the challenges facing Mexico at the moment (OHCHR, 2018). In Mexico, the statistics are grim - 66.1% of girls and women aged 15 or older have experienced gender-based violence at least once in their lives and that 43.5% of women have experienced gender-based violence committed by their partners (Amnesty International, 2018). Femicide is a national problem in Mexico and at least 400 women have been brutally murdered during the last decade in the city of Juárez (Joseph, 2017; WHO, 2012). However, a lack of reliable reporting on violence against women makes it difficult to accurately estimate the extent of this epidemic.

Violence against women appears to be culturally ingrained in Mexico. This can be seen in Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, and Flores-Ortiz´s (2000) research with Mexican immigrants, which showed that women prioritise keeping their marriages intact over their own personal safety, often tolerating partner-abuse because of their belief in the sanctity of marriage and the importance of family. Furthermore, the prevalence of violence against women in Mexico can be viewed as an expression of the country´s current crises of governability, internal security, drug trafficking, as well as the dominant culture of *machismo* in the country (Ertürk, 2006; OHCHR, 2018; Olivera, 2006). The presence of a *machista* culture, in which men exaggerate the violent, authoritarian, aggressive aspects of male identity, can be seen in the socially entrenched gender inequality and sexist, patriarchal structures in Mexico (OHCHR, 2018; Olivera, 2006). The *machista* culture in Mexico relegates women to subordinate roles and women are expected to define themselves in relation to their husbands and domestic responsibilities, denying them an independent existence (Ertürk, 2006). This makes it difficult for them to combat abuse and access support. It also creates an environment where violence against women can flourish. These factors are further compounded by other stressors in the country such as unemployment, poverty, social polarization, and the inability of the government and legal system to effectively respond to violent crime, making Mexico particularly susceptible to high levels of violence against women (Ertürk, 2006; Olivera, 2006).

Indigenous women in Mexico are also likely targets of violence due to the traditional patriarchal gender hierarchies of indigenous communities, ethnic stereotyping and discrimination (Ertürk, 2006). Research indicates that authorities in indigenous communities use customary and social norms to normalize domestic violence, further entrenching the marginalization of indigenous women in Mexico (Mejía Flores, 2006).

In addition, situations of conflict and displacement, such as the current migrant crisis, may exacerbate existing violence against women in the country, placing migrant women at particular risk (WHO, 2017). Migrant women and girls from other parts of Central and Latin America often enter Mexico to seek better opportunities or in transit to the U.S. Violence against women is a risk along the route through Mexico, with the southern border from Guatemala to Mexico being considered particularly volatile (Cuffe, 2018; Ertürk, 2006). Furthermore, the nature of migratory patterns makes migrant women and girls especially vulnerable to exploitation, violence and human trafficking (Ertürk, 2006; OHCHR, 2018). Undocumented migrant women´s vulnerability in Mexico is further compounded by Mexican migration law which prohibits undocumented migrants from accessing State authorities and *The General Population Act* (*Ley General de Población*), which prohibits State authorities from processing any request from a non-citizen who has not demonstrated their legal status in Mexico (Ertürk, 2006).

The migrant caravans, which reports suggest women and girls make up nearly half of, has stirred tensions across the U.S, Mexico and Central America (Cuffe, 2018; Montes, Mazars, Cohen, & McIntyre, 2018). Many of the women and girls in the migrant caravans are escaping violence in their home countries and joined the caravans out of desperation. The migrant caravans have travelled from Honduras to the border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali in Mexico and will continue to try to enter the US in the coming weeks. Unrest at the U.S-Mexico border continues to intensify and the Tijuana mayor has declared the situation a humanitarian crisis (Kinosian & Partlow, 2018). Around 150 migrants attempted to cross into the US illegally via Tijuana on New Year’s Day and were met with tear gas by US Homeland Security (BBC News, 2019). The migrant caravan and tensions over immigration will be one of the many challenges facing Mexico´s new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO).

Eradicating violence against women requires a multi-pronged, complex approach. The most effective ways to reduce violence against women include education programmes aimed at challenging gender norms and roles that reinforce the subordination of women; and initiatives that address the social norms that reinforce the acceptability of violence in society. While the passage of laws prosecuting perpetrators of femicide and other forms of violence against women, are useful and have been implemented in Mexico, it does little to address the *machista* culture, which is responsible for perpetuating gender inequality and the subordination of women (Joseph, 2017). Only once the patriarchal ideological beliefs, entrenched in *machista* culture, are dismantled will Mexico be able to rid itself of violence against women.

Mexico is currently facing epidemic levels of violence against women and an unprecedented migration crisis on its border. AMLO will certainly have his hands full as he embarks on his presidential term.

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